

RECONSIDERING REGIONALISM: THE ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS OF SARAH

ORNE JEWETT, KATE CHOPIN, AND WILLA CATHER

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This study identifies environmentalist themes in the fiction and nonfiction of Sarah Orne Jewett, Kate Chopin, and Willa Cather and argues that these ideals are interdependent upon the authors' humanistic objectives. Focusing on these three authors' overlapping interest in topics such as women's rights, environmental health, and Native American history, this dissertation calls attention to the presence of a frequently unexplored but distinct, traceable feminist environmental ethic in American women's regional writing. This set of beliefs involves a critique of the threats posed by a patriarchal society to both the environment and its human inhabitants, particularly the women, and thus can be classified as proto-ecofeminist. Moreover, the authors' shared emphasis on the benefits of local environmental knowledge and stewardship demonstrates vital characteristics of the bioregionalist perspective, a modern form of environmental activism that promotes sustainability at a local level and mutually beneficial relationships among human and nonhuman inhabitants of a naturally defined region. Thus, the study ultimately defines a particular form of women's literary activism that emerged in the last decades of the nineteenth century and argues for these authors' continued theoretical relevance to a twenty-first-century audience increasingly invested in understanding and resolving a global environmental predicament.

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By

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INTRODUCTION

When the narrator of Sarah Orne Jewett's 1896 novel *The Country of the Pointed Firs* bids farewell to the declining coastal community that has been her summer home, she does so with such descriptive poignancy in the book's final chapter, suggestively titled "The Backward View," that she seems to be saying goodbye not simply to Dunnet Landing and her curious cast of friends there, but also to a particular way of life. Stricken by the emptiness of her room at Mrs. Almira Todd's house, she muses: "So we die before our eyes; so we see some chapters of our lives come to their natural end" (485).¹ With this grave reflection, Jewett's anonymous metropolitan narrator might as easily be referring to a chapter in American history, as her statement echoes the anxiety and wistfulness that many Americans felt as they took stock of the vast changes to the socioeconomic and cultural makeup of the United States occurring in the decades after the Civil War. As the country burgeoned into a center of industry and technology, saw distant regions connected through improved transportation systems, and witnessed swift population growth and movement out of remote places like Dunnet Landing and into urban centers, regional writers of the era struggled to preserve snippets of the nation's history that were in danger of being forgotten while they also attempted to shape the course of the country's future. Inevitably, tensions arise between these authors' insistence, during the country's shift toward an increasingly international modernity, upon the importance of regional cultures and their simultaneous disparagement of local societies' close-mindedness.

This dissertation traces one vital intellectual trend among the many literary responses to this tumultuous period of American prosperity. It focuses on regionalism, a dominant literary mode during this era that I do not treat as a fixed category, but rather as a fluid term for prose texts whose authors exhibit a concentrated interest in place-specific qualities and issues, even

though these authors might have also produced works that resist regional classification. Specifically, this dissertation identifies the shared tendency among three female writers from different regions of the United States to employ feminist and cultural themes to suggest not only the need for increased human rights among the inhabitants of their primarily rural settings, but also the dangers of a dominance-based philosophy of existence, ultimately promoting lifestyles based on cautious consideration of ecosystems, rather than on competition with nature. I find that inherent to these authors' recognition of the problems associated with capitalist systems that perpetuate the subjugation of women and racial minorities (such as plantation society) are also warnings about the environmental effects of unchecked post-bellum industrialization and economic growth—warnings that might be categorized as proto-ecofeminist. Indeed, these authors' attention to environmental change surfaces primarily in texts that also encourage greater independence for women and, to a lesser extent, racial minorities such as Native Americans and African Americans. This conceptual orientation aligns these turn-of-the-century authors with reformists of the late twentieth century who identified and challenged connections between human abuse and environmental abuse that are supported by patriarchal systems under which both nonhuman nature and women are treated as objects intended for men's use and control.²

Of course, Sarah Orne Jewett, Kate Chopin, and Willa Cather were writing well before science could provide a full (though ever-changing) portrait of a planet at risk due to human activity, and to characterize any one of them as an environmental activist in today's sense of the term would be an overstatement. These authors' environmental warnings stem largely from their appreciation for nonurban landscapes and their reluctance to sanction changes to certain places to which they felt emotionally connected, sentiments that reflect a growing pessimism about the state of American civilization at the end of the nineteenth century and a corresponding mounting

respect for the wilderness, which had become a valued emblem of the country's formative pioneer past.³ In addition to being personal, these authors' interests are also primarily anthropocentric, their intermittent advocacy of resource management more indicative of conservationist philosophy than more radical modern environmentalist thought. Nevertheless, almost a century before the threat of global climate change and the embarrassment of ocean garbage vortexes became a part of the national debate, these women took note of what was occurring in their surroundings and recognized that rapid environmental change posed problems for its plant, animal, and human inhabitants. Focusing on specific regions of the United States, they called attention to these threats and suggested that the natural world was in need of greater attention for various reasons, including the spiritual and aesthetic bounties it offered, but mostly because of its role in meeting the practical needs of humans. Chopin, for example, describes the erosion likely caused by the clear-cutting of Southern forests, Jewett laments the death of salmon in Northeastern rivers tainted by industrial pollutants, and Cather promotes careful management of the Midwest's agricultural resources. In addition to raising these alerts, these authors all at times characterize the natural world as a particularly valuable resource to women aspiring to escape the confines of a patriarchal rural society. Indeed, their environmental warnings are interwoven with their egalitarian visions, which they advanced through such icons of American fiction as Edna Pontellier, Almira Todd, and *Á*ntonia Shimerda, helping us trace the origins of a distinctly feminist literary environmental ethos in the United States.

Fully understanding the complexities of this interconnectedness between landscape, shifting gender roles, intercultural empathy, and the female imagination requires information from a variety of disciplines. Thus, in examining how a distinctive set of environmental ethics informs the writing of Chopin, Jewett, and Cather I draw on the theoretical perspectives of

feminist studies, cultural history, evolutionary psychology, and environmentalism. Furthermore, the literary critics who have suggested women regionalists' relevancy to a twenty-first-century audience have illuminated this project in myriad invaluable ways, but particularly in regard to my evaluations of feminist, historical, social, and cultural themes.⁴ Nevertheless, I find that scholarship devoted to the complex task of evaluating the modern-day implications of women's regional writing, including the seminal and most comprehensive study by Judith Fetterly and Marjorie Pryse, has tended to disregard or downplay the preservationist ideologies that underlie these more dominant themes. Furthermore, those literary critics who have called attention to environmentalist themes in women regionalists' writing have generally done so on an individual-author basis, establishing the theoretical foundation for—as well as the need for—a more encompassing analysis of how these writers' environmental objectives intersect across regions and in lieu of different social positions and experiences.⁵ This dissertation seeks to fulfill that critical need by providing new insight into the work of these three American regionalists whose apprehensions about social inequality have long been discussed by critics, but whose attention to the environment has often been overlooked in favor of gender- and race-based analyses or examined primarily in terms of an individual author's literary output. My research makes an original contribution by helping chronicle the rise of a new kind of environmental awareness that is different from that of the Transcendentalist and Romantic epoch earlier in the century, and I demonstrate the ways in which this awareness helps set the stage for important developments in environmentalism and women's rights in the twentieth century. Indeed, I find that these women regionalists' egalitarian and environmental goals prefigure modern reformist movements such as bioregionalism and ecofeminism; thus, my objective is to affirm the interconnectivity of these women's interests in gender, heritage, and environment and highlight the progressiveness of their

often-overlooked preservationist messages. In doing so, my work also helps clarify the theoretical relationships between feminism, environmentalism, and artistic representation—relationships that are more unpredictable and possibly vexed than might be expected because of the paradox generated by competing progressive and preservationist impulses in works by Jewett, Chopin, and Cather.

Certainly, the progressive humanistic and environmentalist impulses in their fiction frequently intersect with the conservative proclivity for preserving regional characteristics. These authors' allegiance to the local, however, should not be mistaken for provincialism, as their efforts to record regional characteristics must be attributed, to an extent, to their awareness of and apprehensions about globalization. Indeed, according to Thomas Peyser, [T]he very idea of modern [...] nationalism is unthinkable without a highly developed sense of internationalism; only when an acute consciousness of different cultures has arisen will one feel impelled to catalogue or cultivate those traits that allegedly distinguish one's own national culture from all the others.⁶ Thus, although these writers turned their attention to specific regions of the United States during this period of regional and global economic integration, this compulsion can only be fully understood in its historical context as a response to globalization that included unease about U.S. imperialism. By giving voice to the lonely New England spinster, the emancipated Creole slave struggling to find her place in Louisiana, or the immigrant farm family on the Plains, these writers espouse an inclusive morality that indicates their cosmopolitanism. Indeed, as they were recording cultural distinctions these authors simultaneously promoted acceptance across cultures by writing for a national audience. Although some of their characters might not demonstrate such an inclusive worldview, these regionalists invite readers to consider different cultural voices—voices like that of the Cajun housewife who, both in the late nineteenth century

and today, might have previously been a stranger to the reader. As Tom Lutz argues, The hallmark of [...] later regional writing [...] is its attention to both local and more global concerns, most often achieved through a careful balancing of different groups' perspectives. These diverse points of view are often integrated, he notes, through the trope of the urban visitor who narrates or introduces a story, as in *The Country of the Pointed Firs* and *My Ántonia*.⁷ Ultimately, the cosmopolitan initiatives of Jewett, Chopin, and Cather also reveal themselves in ecologically minded prose. That is, the authors' attention to how people interact with each other and their natural surroundings, which is prominent in texts that promote this cosmopolitan need for intercultural inclusivity, bespeaks an awareness of the interdependence of humans across regions and among cultures that enhances their environmental insight.

My study focuses primarily on texts published from about 1890 to the mid-1920s; however, to understand the environmental interests of these female regionalists, we must revisit Transcendentalism and acknowledge its impact on both regional writing and on the history of American environmentalist thought, thereby also gaining a greater understanding of the reasons for women regionalists' departures from this intellectual tradition. Hence, in my first chapter, 'To look at nature by the light of the sun': Contrasting Expressions of Environmentalist Rhetoric in *Rural Hours* and *Walden*, I establish a theoretical background for my characterization of Chopin, Jewett, and Cather as proto-ecofeminist and proto-bioregionalist writers by analyzing the stylistic and ideological differences between Susan Fenimore Cooper's nature diary *Rural Hours* (1850) and Henry David Thoreau's seminal *Walden* (1854). In their shared attention to and reverence for the rural Northeast, Cooper and Thoreau often overlap thematically, and both offer extensive records of their evaluations of nature's resiliency, Native American traditions, and farming practices—three key topics that are inextricably linked to the

environmentalist themes in each book. Despite these authors' shared interests, however, they produce two stylistically distinct nature diaries. Indeed, Cooper remains more externally focused on her rural surroundings, while Thoreau engages in more personal reflection, which suggests that mid-nineteenth-century men and women understood rurality differently because of varying sociohistorical experiences. Furthermore, this divergence helps explain the prominence of practicality-based environmentalist messages in *Rural Hours*, as well as the works of later women regionalists. Ultimately, I find Cooper's subjugation of herself to the natural world in *Rural Hours* to be symptomatic of the effects of patriarchal influence; ironically, however, it is because of this traditionally oppressive social framework that Cooper's work is more progressive in its move toward ecological understanding than is Thoreau's. That is, I maintain that Cooper's outward-directed focus on the ever-changing natural world around her, rather than on her own interior states, emotional responses, and thought processes, allows her to identify behavior patterns and biological connections among species across regions and even continents. Furthermore, Cooper's vast knowledge of the cultural and ecological history of her New York setting aligns her, in many ways, with Chopin and Jewett, whose bioregionalist interests are the focus of my second chapter.

In *Women across the Water: The Healing Hermitage in Select Bioregionalist Works*, I demonstrate that Chopin and Jewett both at times rely on an unusual motif—the female hermit separated from a rural society by water—as a means of advancing an environmental ethic that promotes a mutually beneficial relationship between the individual and nature distanced from potentially environmentally destructive enterprises that promote inequalities among genders and races. Furthermore, I argue that Jewett and Chopin, in their profound sense of place and its cultural history, and in their sensitivity toward the sustainability of its inhabitants, primarily the

women, help pioneer a bioregionalist perspective, a mindset based on such characteristics that is viewed by some modern theorists as a model for helping curb current environmental devastation.⁸ Ultimately, the historical and ideological gap between Transcendentalism and ecofeminism, by way of bioregionalism, is bridged via these authors' interest in the independent female recluse, a fictional emblem of transforming environmental sensibilities. I examine four turn-of-the-century works, Chopin's novel *At Fault* (1890) and her story *Beyond the Bayou* (1891) and Jewett's novel *The Country of the Pointed Firs* and her story *The Queen's Twin* (1899), which privilege the female experience as it is unique to a specific American locale and relative to its cultural history, and thereby emphasize the inextricable bond in these women's writing between identity and place. Jewett and Chopin create these figures, all of whom might be classified as hermits, in order to critique society and address how patriarchal systems pose environmental threats, and the characters' relationships to their landscapes reveal that these authors were embracing a bioregional perspective to help them advance proto-ecofeminist ideas.

My third chapter, *Feminists of the Middle Border: Garland, Cather, and the Female Land Ethic*, explores the environmental ethics of self-sufficient rural women in Willa Cather's prairie trilogy novels, *O Pioneers!* (1913), *The Song of the Lark* (1915), and *My Ántonia* (1918), and addresses why female characters situated in similar environments fail to thrive in the works of Hamlin Garland. Using Cather's heroines as points of contrast, I argue that in his tendency to portray female characters who exhibit little autonomy and respect for their natural environments, Garland offers a less progressive but no less historically valuable form of feminist literature that provides insight into how late-century intellectual movements such as Darwinism, feminism, and literary realism shaped reformist fiction in various ways. Although this chapter focuses primarily on Garland's particular form of feminism and its limitations, I will also make

the argument for Cather as a writer ahead of her time in her environmental concerns as they apply to agrarianism; illuminate ways in which depictions of landscapes, and the characters within them, are shaped by these authors' genders; and demonstrate that institutionalized patriarchal beliefs are at least partly accountable for the contradictory depictions of farm wives in the fiction of Cather and Garland. Several of their most influential works, including Garland's short story collection *Main-Travelled Roads* (1891), and two of Cather's prairie trilogy novels, *O Pioneers!* and *My Ántonia*, center on the difficulties of Midwestern farm women's lives and, more specifically, how rural women of the late-nineteenth-century grappled with the hardships of farming and their desire for greater autonomy. Cumulatively, these works highlight the authors' shared awareness of the limitations imposed by an agricultural lifestyle and promote increased opportunities for rural women and marital equality—distinctly feminist objectives. Despite these overlapping interests, however, the farmer's daughter of Garland's stories is generally reduced to a stereotypically wretched figure, broken down by farm work and in dire need of a male rescuer. She sometimes rises above her squalid circumstances through marriage, but she never achieves the autonomy of two of Cather's most enduring heroines, Alexandra Bergson and Ántonia Shimerda. Even when Garland's female farmer leaves rural America to court success in the city, as she does in *Rose of Dutcher's Coolly* (1895), she is more successful at fulfilling the domestic ideal than she is at discovering new avenues for women's self-sufficiency. When we compare the experiences of Rose Dutcher to those of Thea Kronborg, the heroine of Cather's *The Song of the Lark*, we see an even more distinct departure in the authors' appraisals of how a woman's relationship to a particular landscape might influence her future, particularly her artistic life. In short, in this chapter I examine Garland's reluctance to grant his some of his most well-known female characters a fully developed land ethic akin to that depicted by Cather and demonstrate

how this literary tactic results in a reductive rhetorical pattern that undermines his promotion of women's rights.

Social reform continues to be a prominent theme in my fourth chapter, *Resisting the Commodification of Cultures: Native American Geographies in the Works of Jewett, Chopin, and Cather*, in which I examine the presence in all three authors' works of nostalgic references to Native Americans and their lifestyles as well as their strategic use of symbolically significant Native American characters, relics, and ruins. In particular, I call attention to how landscapes that are directly, at times, associated with a Native American past—Chopin's Pine Woods, Jewett's Maine forests, and Cather's Southwestern cliff cities, for example—are central to the feminist themes in their relevant works, which include Jewett's *The Country of the Pointed Firs* and rarely discussed sketch *The White Rose Road* (1889); Chopin's novel *At Fault* and short story *Loka* (1892); and Cather's early story *The Enchanted Bluff* (1909) and novel *The Professor's House* (1925). Using the almost fantastical setting and events of the World's Columbian Exposition of 1893 as an intellectual and historical backdrop, I argue that these authors refused to participate in the sort of commodification of cultures in which fair planners engaged to help them highlight the innovativeness of technological and industrial displays via their juxtaposition with exhibits that depicted more savage lifestyles.

Although Native American lifestyles have also long been romanticized in American literature as representing a more simple mode of existence, the women of this study make these references with motives that are traceable to their shared sense of environmental ethics and cultural empathy—goals that pose ideological conundrums. Indeed, all three authors grapple with how to honor an American past (one that includes, in their works, a Native American past) without resorting to a simplistic romantic nostalgia, and how to address contemporary issues

without supporting the industrialism, consumerism, and bureaucracy that was becoming emblematic of the nation's future. Furthermore, analyzing Zitkala-Ša's semiautobiographical stories and nonfiction in this chapter helps pinpoint additional problems associated with these Anglo women's idealization of and identification with Native American history. While Native Americans frequently appear only as figures of legend or in the peripheries of these women's works, especially in Jewett's and Cather's, Zitkala-Ša chronicles their involvement, both willing and unwilling, in the nation's transformation into a global industrial power. I therefore turn to her writing for a more culturally inclusive perspective—and an additional female perspective—on the same primary issues shaping these Anglo women's fiction: equality and environment.

Ultimately, throughout this dissertation I seek to uncover a burgeoning ethics-based attitude toward the changing American landscape that is so deeply enmeshed in writing about other issues such as gender, race, and the economy that it often goes unnoticed in turn-of-the-century women's works. For example, Jewett's environmental warnings, which are specific to New England, often closely accompany messages about female self-sufficiency, while Chopin tends to observe the destruction of Louisiana forests in works that are more outwardly focused on intercultural relations and post-bellum economic change. Cather, in turn, issues the most explicitly environmentally minded arguments while moving away, during the prosperous 1920s, from depicting Southwestern pueblos as sites of primarily female self-discovery toward characterizing such places as spiritual antidotes to the consumerism influencing all Americans, men and women alike. Hence, because the works discussed in this dissertation address writers' representations of various U.S. landscapes, my argument necessarily calls for consideration of regional distinctions, including differing political and social notions. Indeed, I have made a conscientious effort not to be reductive in my appraisals of these authors' attitudes toward

prominent late-century issues, or to imagine ideological similarities where there are none. Moreover, the intellectual patterns I do identify are designed to be broadly suggestive of American women's attitudes during this era rather than definitive. That is, I recognize the analytical limitations of focusing primarily on the regionalist work of a handful of educated Anglo women; nevertheless, I find their writing, particularly because of its interest in place, to be an indispensable starting point for exploring the depths of women's environmental consciousness in the United States. Indeed, in reconsidering the regionalism of writers like Jewett, Chopin, and Cather we may discover that Americans' sense of environmental responsibility has a longer and more complex history than we had ever imagined, and that this history is inextricably linked to the egalitarian visions that have been and will continue to be instrumental in the formation of American identity, particularly as we participate in a global community's effort to reverse the effects of environmental degradation.

Notes

¹ References to *The Country of the Pointed Firs* are to the version included in *Sarah Orne Jewett: Novels and Stories* (New York: Library of America, 1996).

² I refer here to the most basic conceptualization of ecofeminism as it emerged in the 1970s. It has, since then, evolved into a diverse and dynamic philosophy that is internally divisive. Some ecofeminists' ideas have been closely associated with deep ecology, a movement that promotes humans' spiritual connection with and empathy for nonhuman nature, and others have adopted a more sociocentric view according to which humanity's relation to the nonhuman is always socially mediated and considerations of human welfare and equity inflect (if not govern) the adjudication of environmental questions, as Lawrence Buell explains in *The Future of Environmental Criticism* (111). I see in the writing of Chopin, Jewett, and Cather elements of both modern arguments; therefore, when I use the classification proto-ecofeminist I do so in reference to their early promotion of both nonhuman nature's spiritual value, as well as their acknowledgement of its interconnectivity to social structures, particularly to women's positions in the United States around the end of the nineteenth century.

³ Roderick Frazier Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind*, 144-45.

⁴ Of particular value to this study were Judith Fetterly and Marjorie Pryse's *Writing Out of Place: Regionalism, Women, and American Literary Culture* (Urbana: U of Illinois P, 2003); *The Green Breast of the New World: Landscape, Gender, and American Fiction* (Athens: U of Georgia P, 1996); Tina Gianquitto's "*Good Observers of Nature*": *American Women and the Scientific Study of the Natural World, 1820-1885* (Athens: U of Georgia P, 2007); Bert Bender's *Evolution and 'the Sex Problem': American Narratives during the Eclipse of Darwinism*.

(Kent, OH: Kent State UP, 2004); David Harrell's *From Mesa Verde to The Professor's House* (Albuquerque: U of NM P, 1992); Paul Outka's *Race and Nature from Transcendentalism to the Harlem Renaissance* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008); Susan Rosowski's *Birthing a Nation: Gender, Creativity, and the West in American Literature* (Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1999); Josephine Donovan's Jewett criticism, especially *Jewett on Race, Class, Ethnicity, and Imperialism: A Reply to Her Critics*; Marjorie Pryse's article *Sex, Class, and Category Crisis*: Reading Jewett's Transitivity; and the work of number culturally thoughtful Chopin scholars, including Maureen Anderson, David Russell, and Robin Warren.

⁵Cather studies have drawn much interest from ecocritics in the last decade, and the collected works in *Willa Cather's Ecological Imagination*, ed. Susan J. Rosowski (Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 2003) were of particular interest to this dissertation, especially those by Cheryl Glotfelty and Ann Moseley, and articles by Susan Rosowski and Mary Ryder offered additional vital insights into Cather's appraisals of nature. Although environmental themes have remained largely unexplored until this point in regard to Chopin, Kelly Richardson's examination of the ecological spirit in Jewett and Marcia Littenberg's interest in Jewett's bioregional qualities were particularly influential to the development of my own ecocritical stance. Additionally, Rochelle Johnson's extensive scholarly work on Susan Fenimore Cooper brought depth to my understanding of this author and her environmental insights.

⁶ Peyser, *Utopia & Cosmopolis*, 17.

⁷ Lutz, *Cosmopolitan Vistas*, 30-31.

⁸ See, for example, Kirkpatrick Sale's *Dwellers in the Land: The Bioregional Vision* (Athens: U of Georgia P, 2000) and Gary Snyder's *The Practice of the Wild* (San Francisco: North Point, 1990), 25-44.

CHAPTER 1

TO “LOOK AT NATURE BY THE LIGHT OF THE SUN”: CONTRASTING EXPRESSIONS OF ENVIRONMENTALIST RHETORIC IN *RURAL HOURS* AND *WALDEN*

One likes to trace these links, connecting lands and races, so far apart, reminding us, as they do, that the earth is the common home of all.

Susan Fenimore Cooper, *Rural Hours*

In the brief preface to her 1850 nature diary *Rural Hours*, Susan Fenimore Cooper downplays the importance of her reportage on the season-to-season changes in the landscape surrounding her home in Cooperstown, New York. She describes her “trifling observations” of these “trifling incidents” as the type of material that might be “afterward remembered with pleasure by the fireside, and gladly shared, perhaps, with one’s friends.”¹ Cooper’s preface suggests humility and even abashedness as she goes on to express her hope that any pleasure gleaned by the book’s readers might be worth the “reluctance with which it was printed” (3). These rhetorical gestures simultaneously indicate her awareness of the limited expectations for women writers at the time and alert readers to the novelty of the project, to the emergence of a “new woman’s public voice,”² as *Rural Hours* would make Cooper, the daughter of James Fenimore Cooper, the first published American woman nature writer and, more than a century later, one of the most important nature writers in American literary history.³ *Rural Hours*, also well-received by the mid- to late-nineteenth-century public, continues to receive increased and deserved scholarly recognition, in particular because of its similarities to and publication four years before *Walden*, the book often considered the first important example of American nature writing.⁴ Even as he uses Henry David Thoreau’s *Walden* as a basis for understanding the “environmental imagination,” Lawrence Buell praises Cooper’s work and acknowledges that

[i]t was Cooper, not Thoreau, who among all antebellum writers wrote the most comprehensive short treatise on the history of environmental consciousness in world cultures from ancient times to the present. ⁵

Although *Rural Hours*, consulted by Thoreau for its information on loons,⁶ should be as prominent as *Walden* in discussions of American environmental literature because Cooper's call for conservation is both more direct and more soundly rooted in ecological theory, to debate the merits of one text over another is an undertaking of little value, as both offer historically significant accounts of rural life in the Northeastern United States and perspectives on humans' relationships to and effects upon the natural world that continue to influence modern thought.⁷ Similarly, aligning the texts according to their likenesses, an act sometimes performed in an effort to elevate Cooper's literary and environmentalist reputation, is counterproductive, as it downplays the innovativeness of *Rural Hours*, as well as its stylistic and philosophical distinctions from *Walden*. However, to examine the dissimilar ways in which Cooper and Thoreau express their reverence for nature and their interest in several overlapping topics—nature's resiliency, Native American traditions, and farming practices, in particular, all of which are inextricably linked to the environmentalist themes in each book—yields more productive results. Indeed, in considering such topics, Cooper remains more externally focused on her surroundings, which results in the emergence of a realistic, practicality-based conservationist message in *Rural Hours*, while Thoreau is more attuned to personal reflection, which accounts for the mostly private, hypermetaphorical celebration of nature in *Walden*. Nevertheless, despite their rhetorical differences, both texts ultimately promote environmental awareness. Cooper, however, because of gender-role expectations, aligns her innovative nature diary with the widely read genre of women's domestic fiction of the mid-nineteenth century, both through its initial

anonymous publication and title—*Rural Hours: By A Lady*—and through her dismissive preface, which, as Vera Norwood has noted, allows Cooper to preserve female propriety and to maintain the social codes bounding [her] voice.⁸ Textual distinctions such as this one suggest that mid-nineteenth-century men and women understood and wrote about rurality differently because of varying sociohistorical experiences. Hence, I do not seek to minimize Thoreau's undeniable contributions to environmentalism, but rather to suggest the importance to gender and literary studies of acknowledging the stylistic distinctions between *Walden* and *Rural Hours*.

Indeed, Cooper's 1850 work is historically important not only as an early example of American nature writing, but also as a starting point in identifying the noticeable differences in environmental thinking between men and women—the sort of analysis ecofeminist critic Patrick Murphy calls for in response to feminist critics' recent efforts to uncover Dorothy Wordsworth's influence on her brother William's poetry by studying her own writing. What is needed now, Murphy suggests, is criticism that can evaluate the differences between their writings in terms of ecological criteria, analyzing the implications of Dorothy's willingness to record rather than order nature and to efface the speaker of the text as a domineering, central observer.⁹ This same sort of criticism can be profitably applied to *Rural Hours*, which Buell has described as the nineteenth-century American literary season book that comes closest to rivaling Thoreau, [...] a calendar of natural and cultural history observations that reveals a Dorothy Wordsworth-like keenness of environmental perception.¹⁰ Indeed, I believe the keenness of observations and unassuming mode of expression that are central to *Rural Hours*, and that are made even more clear when the book is compared to *Walden*, reveal how gender shaped these authors' expressions of environmental concerns. By studying Cooper's and Thoreau's different approaches to addressing specific issues that are inherent to the development of broader

arguments about our responsibility to nature, we gain a better sense of the conceptual framework within which these authors were writing, and can acknowledge, as Karen J. Warren urges, that the socially constructed *lens* through which one perceives reality differs according to gender, among other factors.¹¹ In doing so, I see Cooper's constant subjugation of herself to the natural world in her writing as symptomatic of the effects of patriarchal influence; ironically, however, it is because of this traditionally oppressive sociological framework that Cooper's writing is ultimately more pragmatic in its move toward ecological understanding than is Thoreau's.

Indeed, Cooper's adherence to the domestic literary tradition prevents her from focusing primarily on the individual's experience in nature and encourages her to concentrate instead, as Norwood has noted, on the American landscape's new image as home, an artistic trend traceable to the growing nationalistic pride of the early nineteenth century.¹² As most critics of Cooper's work have noticed, *Rural Hours* stresses the need for its readers to become educated, as she had, about the flora and fauna surrounding their rural homes, thereby extending expectations of domestic knowledge beyond the walls of the home to include the outdoors. Norwood, for example, sees in Cooper's work a reconciliation of the reading public's appetite for domestic novels with American writers' development of a narrative about the native American landscape as, uniquely, their home.¹³ Richard M. Magee has also noted an overlap in genres—the domestic/sentimental and the natural history/environmental—in *Rural Hours* and characterizes this convergence as a sub-genre that he calls sentimental ecology.¹⁴ And Nina Baym identifies the purpose of *Rural Hours* as an attempt to model country life as a constant intellectual, civilized, rational pleasure and therefore to show ladies a

rational, civilized way of being ladylike and thereby demonstrate their class by reconstituting their rustic surroundings through a combination of literary and scientific knowledge.¹⁵

I also see in Cooper's fusion of genres a conscious attempt to stretch the expectations of women's writing beyond the boundaries imposed by the domestic or sentimental novel and its characteristic focus on the struggles of its heroine. As its narrator, Cooper eschews the role of heroine in *Rural Hours*, which I will demonstrate is unlike *Walden* in that its primary concern is the natural world and its ecological and historical interconnections, rather than the experience of the individual therein. Where my analysis departs from these previous studies, however, is in its emphasis on the importance of recognizing gender's role in the development of Cooper's environmental ideal, which innovatively envisions an environmentally sustainable America based on practical conservation efforts. In subjugating herself to the outside world and examining her expanded household from the perspective of female overseer, Cooper recognizes the fragile interconnectivity of living things and the necessity for Americans to adopt a utilitarian environmental ethos, a mindset traceable through the works of later prominent women writers, such as Sarah Orne Jewett, Kate Chopin, and Willa Cather, who also depicted a rural America that was rich with opportunities for women's moral, professional, and intellectual development.

Indeed, Cooper's work is of special interest to understanding these regional writers because, as Buell has noted, hers is the first major work of American literary bioregionalism, a vein developed more fully in works by [...] mid- to late-century natural historians [...] but more particularly by those writers within the much better known and related local color or regional realist movement who had strong interests in natural history.¹⁶ As Warren has explained,

Bioregionalism centralizes the importance of place in environmental ethics, and to establish such a position means one must know the natural and human history of a place, and learn and

develop a region's human and ecological possibilities in a sustainable manner over time.¹⁷ This is precisely the sort of holistic thinking Cooper advocates in *Rural Hours*, and many turn-of-the-century American writers would follow suit during the rise of the regional realist movement in their efforts to reconcile the often-problematic promotion of social progress with the need for enhanced environmental sensibilities. Cooper, like these later writers, privileged literal description, writing that exposed rather than veiled these issues, and her text urges a move toward these more realistic representations of rural life in literature.

Cooper most clearly highlights her advocacy of accurate representation when she traces the growth of realism in English painting and praises this mimicry in writing:

And so, writers began to look out of the window more frequently; when writing a pastoral they turned away from the little porcelain shepherds and shepherdesses, standing in high-heeled shoes and powdered wigs upon every mantel-piece, and they fixed their eyes upon the real living Roger and Dolly in the hay-field. Then they came to see that it would do just as well, nay, far better, to seat Roger and Dolly under a hawthorn, or an oak of merry England, than to paint them beneath a laurel, or an ilex of Greece or Rome; in short, they learned at length to look at nature by the light of the sun, and not by the glimmerings of the poet's lamp. And a great step this was, not only in art, but in moral and intellectual progress. (208)

Cooper's own method of studying her surroundings objectively, or by the light of the sun, and not by the glimmerings of the poet's lamp, results in important rhetorical distinctions between *Rural Hours* and *Walden*. Nevertheless, although he freely points out ways in which Cooper in *Rural Hours* outshines Thoreau in *Walden*—in her broader understanding of natural history and indigenous plants, in particular, for example—Buell, one of the most vociferous advocates of

Cooper's literary recognition, views *Rural Hours* mostly in terms of its similarities to *Walden*. He identifies her underlying point [as] Thoreauvian: a sermon on economy and also finds close rhetorical parallels between the texts. In Buell's summation, the fundamental similarity between Thoreau and Cooper is the ability to let one's imagination play whimsically but tenaciously and indeed sometimes almost interminably over some element of local landscape, lingering over nuances and making unexpected leaps.¹⁸ These rhetorical similarities certainly exist; indeed, the acts of observing, recording, and reflecting have become the backbone of American nature writing, in great part because of the strategies exercised by influential early nature writers such as Cooper and Thoreau.¹⁹ However, the content of these unexpected leaps of the imagination varies greatly between the authors, and acknowledging these differences affords a deeper understanding of their gendered relationships to the natural world.

Although each writes with the overarching goal of inspiring awareness of and respect for one's natural surroundings, Thoreau's imaginative wanderings often lead him back to self-reflection, whereas Cooper's are more likely to span different continents and centuries, without beginning with or returning to first-person narration. Thus, as Rochelle Johnson suggests, It is possible that theorizing Cooper's desire to see, to study, to watch—and not to wrap the world around herself and use it as a means to self-knowledge—might be a most useful starting point for placing *Rural Hours* in the nature writing tradition.²⁰ Johnson expands on this suggestion in her essay on the dilemma of representation plaguing Thoreau in *Walden*, which she effectively demonstrates is evinced through his use of metaphor and which she contrasts with Cooper's faith in literal description.²¹ Cooper's diary, as a result of these divergent narrative styles, is, as Johnson also has noted, more humbly wrought than Thoreau's.²² Nevertheless, the modesty of Cooper's prose is not to be mistaken as a rhetorical weakness, for her willingness to efface

the speaker of the text as a domineering, central observer contributes to her more consistent focus on the world around her. Although Johnson has noted the importance of recognizing Cooper's ability to elevate the prominence of the objects of her literary attention—most often natural objects and phenomena—over both her persona and her necessarily human orientation toward place, Cooper's stylistic divergence from Thoreau, to whom she is so often compared, has implications that extend beyond our understanding of the history of nature writing, as the emergence of a distinctly feminine utilitarian environmental ethos also extends to some regional fiction of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century.²³ Indeed, this stylistic divergence thus becomes a philosophical or moral divergence between later male and female writers, and acknowledging such differences allows us to uncover the intellectual genealogy of female regionalists also concerned with environmental, agricultural, and cultural themes.

Cooper's and Thoreau's stylistically distinct accounts of the health of their respective landscapes provide a starting point for such an investigation, as they illustrate the ways in which gender expectations shaped mid-century writers' perceptions of and relationships to nature. Tina Gianquitto has observed that Cooper is capable not only of seeing specific objects in nature but also of seeing them in the context of larger social, moral, and scientific debates and discussions,²⁴ and I would add that this tendency for Cooper's observations to inspire reflections on larger issues, rather than the self, contributes to the differences between her and Thoreau's environmental appraisals. Certainly, the authors demonstrate great variations, for example, in their perceptions of the resiliency of nature, and comparing passages from each text in which environmental health is a prominent theme—Cooper's critique of timber consumption and Thoreau's appraisal of Walden Pond's purity—exemplifies the directness of Cooper's argument, her trust that her language will result in a dignified response to the land, as Johnson

puts it, and the often abstract, though more lyrical, qualities of Thoreau's, even though Cooper's appreciation for the woods easily matches Thoreau's for Walden in its fervency.²⁵

In the very act of recording the day-to-day occurrences in her rapidly changing rural environment, Cooper's work is a conservationist text, and it also demonstrates a progressive environmental ethos in its attention to the decline of plant and animal species. As Michael Branch suggests, the book is a testimony to [her] deep concern about the accelerating loss of wild places and wild creatures.²⁶ One of the most groundbreaking aspects of Cooper's work is her sense of the dangers of deforestation well before any knowledge of its harmful effects upon global ecological stability and her corresponding appeal for conservation. Cooper writes, One would think that by this time, when the forest has fallen in all the valleys—when the hills are becoming more bare every day—when timber and fuel are rising in prices, and new uses are found for even indifferent woods—some forethought and care in this respect would be natural in people laying claim to common sense (132). Cooper's concerns are multifaceted, originating from economic, aesthetic, and moral standpoints. She criticizes this rapid consumption of the large pine timber (132) and suggests that the value of trees extends well beyond market price in dollars and cents to include importance in an intellectual and in a moral sense to the civilization amid which they exist (133). Indeed, for Cooper, [t]here is also something in the care of trees which rises above the common labors of husbandry, and speaks of a generous mind (134). Though Cooper could not have foreseen the environmental impact of deforestation evident to the twenty-first-century reader, her recognition of the moral implications of land misuse alone, her critique of the spirit of destructiveness (134), is innovative in light of the continued trend in environmental rhetoric that urges, as Carolyn Merchant does, for example, humanity to rethink its ethical relationship to nature, to consider itself nature's partner.²⁷

Thoreau laments the vigorous activities of the woodchoppers along Walden's shores (132) and expresses a similar need for people to expand their valuation of forests beyond the pecuniary to include the spiritual: I would that our farmers when they cut down a forest felt some of that awe which the old Romans did when they came to thin, or let the light to, a consecrated grove [...] that is, would believe it is sacred to some god (169). However, his writing style here clashes with Cooper's vision of ideal art, a more realistic art that situates its subjects among local natural features rather than a laurel, or an ilex of Greece or Rome (208). Thoreau's wish that American farmers toiling in their fields might suddenly experience the awe of the ancients, though it indicates his disapproval of deforestation, is fanciful. As a result of this tendency to look at nature by [...] the glimmerings of the poet's lamp, Thoreau does not express the same level of awareness that Cooper does about the long-term financial, aesthetic, and moral repercussions of deforestation, although the practice would have been ongoing and apparent to the author during his tenure at Walden.

According to Robert Sattelmeyer, because of the pressures of settlement and cultivation and environmental change in the Concord area for more than two hundred years before Thoreau's time at Walden, forest coverage was actually at its lowest in Concord in 1850, and the area around Walden Pond had seen a similar though less drastic decline in trees.²⁸ Merchant records the total forest coverage in 1850 Massachusetts as 40 percent, down from 95 percent in 1620.²⁹ In fact, according to Sattelmeyer, Despite today's pressures of urban sprawl and development, the area around the pond is significantly more heavily wooded today than it was when Thoreau was creating its image as a remote forested lake. Thoreau may have chosen to downplay the deforestation around Walden in his book because, as Sattelmeyer has suggested, it contradicts the romanticized picture of his environs he wanted to establish for his literary

experiment.³⁰ Buell also attributes Thoreau's reluctance to sound the preservationist note loudly to this pastoralizing impulse : One cannot argue simultaneously that sylvan utopia can be found within the town limits and that the locale is being devastated at an appalling rate; and the vision of a pristine nature close by appealed irresistibly to Thoreau for personal as well as rhetorical reasons. It was emotionally important to him to believe in Walden as a sanctuary, and it was all the easier for him to do so in the face of contrary evidence because of the myth of nature's inexhaustibility that mesmerized many of the astutest nineteenth-century minds.³¹ Even if Thoreau's motivations for attaching little importance to the ongoing deforestation around Walden were rhetorically driven, traceable to the larger and no less admirable goal of inspiring reverence for nature by exaggerating its vigor at Walden and exacerbated by the pastoral literary tradition, he does not call for reform and thus seems, in *Walden*, to accept deforestation as inevitable—quite unlike Cooper, who considers in detail the ways farms near Cooperstown might be improved through a little attention to the woods and trees (134).

Cooper in this passage moves beyond an expression of regret over the changing rural New York landscape to recommend deliberate preservation. Her plan, though simplistic, aesthetics-focused, and overly optimistic, is also seemingly plausible. She suggests:

Thinning woods and not blasting them; clearing only such ground as is marked for immediate tillage; preserving the wood on the hill-tops and rough side-hills; encouraging a coppice on this or that knoll; permitting bushes and young trees to grow at will along the brooks and water-courses; sowing, if need be, a grove on the bank of the pool, such as are now found on many of our farms; sparing an elm or two about the spring, with a willow also to overhang the well; planting one or two chestnuts, or oaks, or beeches, near the gates or bars; leaving a few others scattered about every field to shade

the cattle in summer, as is frequently done, and setting out others in groups, or singly, to shade the house—how little would be the labor or expense required to accomplish all this, and how desirable would be the result! (134)

What is perhaps most important about Cooper's consideration for forests is her call for reform, her direct attention to preserving the woods. As Roderick Frazier Nash has explained, many American writers in the early- to mid-nineteenth century expressed anxiety about the destruction of nature, John James Audubon, James Fenimore Cooper, and Washington Irving among them, and [c]oncern over the loss of wilderness necessarily preceded the first call for its protection.³² Although Nash overlooks Cooper's book in his study of the historical progression of American preservationist ideals as they were expressed in literature, the 1850 publication of *Rural Hours* places it at the forefront of this movement.³³ While Cooper's suggestions are not radical—she does not, after all, call for the immediate halt of timber harvesting or for government protection of wooded spaces—they urge both an alteration in attitude toward deforestation and modest methods of preservation. Indeed, typical of her practicality, which is linked to a conservative mindset that never neglects the basic needs of humans, Cooper in this vision carefully eliminates clear-cutting while still considering the economic welfare of rural New Yorkers. The passage suggests that conservation need not presage financial degradation, and the euphoric tone of its final sentence indicates her belief that residents would also benefit spiritually from the aesthetic benefits of such attention to trees.

In contrast to Cooper's anxiety about the multifaceted potential harmful effects of deforestation on her rural New York environment is Thoreau's confidence in the inalterability of Walden—a viable comparison because of each author's repeated focus, within a broader conversation about the natural world, on a more specific natural realm: the forest and Walden

Pond. In exultant prose he employs the extended metaphor of Walden as an unbreakable mirror as a tribute to nature's regenerative powers. Despite the emotional appeal and metaphorical novelty of the passage, however, Thoreau's image of Walden as inalterable is imprudent, considering the effects of human activities on the pond. He writes:

Nothing so fair, so pure, and at the same time so large, as a lake, perchance, lies on the surface of the earth. Sky water. It needs no fence. Nations come and go without defiling it. It is a mirror which no stone can crack, whose quicksilver will never wear off, whose gilding Nature continually repairs; no storms, no dust, can dim its surface ever fresh;—a mirror in which all impurity presented to it sinks, swept and dusted by the sun's hazy brush,—this the light dust-cloth,—which retains no breath that is breathed on it, but sends its own to float as clouds high above its surface, and be reflected in its bosom still. (129)

While Cooper recognizes the potentially devastating dynamism of her rural landscape, Thoreau offers a static vision of Walden that is lovely but deceiving. A few pages later he chastises the villagers of Concord for considering piping in Walden's water for use in domestic chores, but he reassures himself that despite the woodchoppers' and ice-cutters' work and the encroachment of the railroad, Walden is itself unchanged, the same water which my youthful eyes fell on, and concludes that the change is in [him], who has aged while Walden has remained perennially young (132). Similarly, he exhibits a greater interest in how the cutting of timber for his cabin enhances his outdoor experience—the act infuses the bread of his lunch with some of their fragrance (32) and thereby brings him emotionally closer to nature—than its impact on the land. He claims, paradoxically, Before I had done I was more the friend than the foe of the pine tree, though I cut down some of them, having become better acquainted with it (32). For Thoreau, even the death of nature can become an impetus for written expression of its spiritual riches.

This tendency for Thoreau to move from metaphor-laden environmental commentary to self-exploration, or to blend the two, exemplifies the differences between his and Cooper's environmental thinking. Though both authors exalt nature, Thoreau with an eloquence rarely equaled by Cooper, only Cooper's text might be viewed in aggregate as a direct entreaty for preservation. Thoreau's figurative language establishes a mood of reverence that inspires readers' admiration for Walden and, by extension, nature, but it fails to address the need for residents nearby to protect Walden and ultimately sends a misguided message about the pond's, and nature's, immutability. As Marti Kheel has argued, While the deliberate attempt to cultivate images that positively influence ethical conduct toward nature is a welcome development, metaphors should not be considered a conceptual *foundation* for a nature ethic.³⁴ The naïveté of Thoreau's metaphor becomes especially clear when one takes into account the now-apparent anthropogenic effects on the area, for a study performed in 2005 documents humans' contributions to changes in the nutrient status of Walden from about 1750,³⁵ and in more recent years Thoreau's book has been an asset to scientists tracking the effects of global warming on the vegetation around Walden.³⁶

Hence, Thoreau recognizes the spiritual benefits available to the individual who spends time observing natural phenomena like Walden and its surroundings, but he does not acknowledge the possible threats to the pond posed by humans. He thereby emerges as more concerned with the abstract possibilities of thinking about nature, with using the idea of Walden, the earth's eye (128), as a catalyst for philosophy and self exploration, than with the pond itself. As Louise Westling observes, In the end, Thoreau was not as interested in a particular place as he was in seeking to use his experiences as rhetoric.³⁷ This strategy suggests Thoreau's lack of ecological awareness, for, as Dana Phillips reminds us, emotion and personal uplift are

not the central concerns of ecology. Indeed, according to Phillips, thought that is truly ecological requires understanding what one sees, and experiencing a spiritual connection to nature has little relevance to such thought.³⁸ Thus, Thoreau's anti-materialist and subjective outlook facilitates his production of moving, nature-themed rhetoric, but it also clouds his ability to objectively record the ongoing changes to the landscape around Walden.

In the Spring chapter of *Walden*, Thoreau again celebrates the regenerative power of nature, specifically its inexhaustible vigor, and recalls how a rotting horse's carcass inspired in him a sense of the inviolable health of Nature (213). The passage that follows, like the one on the pond's inalterable purity, demonstrates his faith in the regenerative powers of nature but also his willingness to overlook the dangers of species decline for the sake of rhetorical power:

I love to see that Nature is so rife with life that myriads can be afforded to be sacrificed and suffered to prey on one another; that tender organizations can be so serenely squashed out of existence like pulp,—tadpoles which herons gobble up, and tortoises and toads run over in the road; and that sometimes it has rained flesh and blood! With the liability to accident, we must see how little account is to be made of it. (213-14)

Although many twenty-first-century readers might cringe at the idea of any species being serenely squashed out of existence like pulp and the subsequent dismissal of such an occurrence as one of little account, Thoreau's bloody description is evocative. It urges readers' greater attention to nature and thereby effectively expresses his environmental ethos, which revolves around the human ability to transcend the material world by seeking inspiration in the natural world. Ultimately, the Transcendentalist mindset contributes greatly to Thoreau's ability to generate awe and respect for nature. As Karl Kroeber has observed, Thoreau's most remarkable accomplishments are in his representations; his greatest skill is as a rhetorician. This

is why even writers who regard nature in an un-Thoreauvian fashion may still sincerely admire his achievement. That is, even later nature writers whose work more fully engages with the profoundest complexities of advanced ecological thought might find inspiration in *Walden*.³⁹

Cooper's text is one such early ecologically minded work—a characteristic that sets it apart from both *Walden* and popular women's writing of the era and aligns it more closely with the works of later American nature writers. Although Cooper's original title, *Rural Hours: By a Lady*, targets a primarily female readership, her overarching message about one's responsibility toward nature rarely smacks of sentimentalism and seems intended for both genders, and thereby reaches well beyond the domestic novel's typical lesson on female propriety. As Norwood suggests, Such harmonies between her role as a nineteenth-century female writer and the traditional nature essay style enhanced Cooper's ability to appeal to a broad readership.⁴⁰ Ironically, by creating a text that innovatively straddles genres, Cooper exemplifies a key facet of Transcendentalist belief: the philosophical ideal that all humans, regardless of sex, race, or social position, had the right to pursue *self-culture* and to engage in a *vocation*, or life's work, suited to one's individual character and talents.⁴¹ Cooper had tried her hand at domestic fiction with the 1846 publication of *Elinor Wyllys; or, The Young Folks of Longbridge, a Tale* under the pseudonym Amabel Penfeather, a work that never achieved the success of *Rural Hours*. Thus, even though Cooper does not demonstrate the subjectivity and faith in individual experience privileged by Transcendentalists and instead adopts a more objective and self-effacing viewpoint in *Rural Hours*, the experimentalism of the book is a testament to early American feminism, an intellectual movement that Tiffany Wayne characterizes as one of the major legacies of Transcendentalism.⁴² Furthermore, that Cooper in *Rural Hours* moves toward ecological understanding in her attention to the interconnectedness of living things marks her writing as

more in line with the methods of later nature writers than Thoreau's. As Kroeber has noted, The extremely personal, even private, nature of Thoreau's writing contrasts with much of the best American nature writing. That is, later writers, such as John Muir, Aldo Leopold, Rachel Carson, Wendell Barry, and Barry Lopez, perceive their personal experiences in nature as inherently social.⁴³

Certainly, Cooper, in contrast to Thoreau and his focus on the self, exhibits greater attention to detail and deftness in recording the goings-on around her, including, as Gianquitto has noted, the minutiae of the plants, animals, and especially birds that inhabited her landscape.⁴⁴ As a result, in addition to her exhortations against deforestation, throughout *Rural Hours* Cooper exhibits a keen awareness and criticism of the effects of civilization upon New York flora and fauna. Her mid-nineteenth-century records help chronicle a process of species decline that had started to become evident as early as the end of the seventeenth century in the United States, in great part because of the commercialization of the Indians' earlier material culture that brought with it a disintegration of earlier ecological practices.⁴⁵ As Branch has summarized, among the many plants and animals that Cooper identifies as having declined in population or disappeared altogether are the:

quail, pine, passenger pigeon, martin, pitcher plant, moccasin flower, fragrant azalea, hemlock, rattlesnake, mountain lion, ladyslipper, whip-poor-will, old-growth trees (all species), killdeer, crested woodpecker, blue gentian, deer, oak, moose, beaver, red-headed woodpecker, ruffed grouse, ducks, bass, large fish (all species), herring, panther, bear, pinnate grouse, white pelican, wolf, bison, fox, otter, fisher, wolverine, rabbit, hare, and squirrel.⁴⁶

In her diligent reportage Cooper promotes through repeated instances of straightforward observation a conservationist message that diverges from, but is no less remarkable than, what Thoreau frequently accomplishes through careful employment of figurative language. In Johnson's and Patterson's apt appraisal, [t]his reporting becomes a recurring refrain in *Rural Hours* and builds to a cumulative lament.⁴⁷ Though Cooper tends to avoid overtly sentimental first-person expressions of the emotional effects of this ongoing rapid ecological transformation, likely in her effort to appeal to a mixed-gender readership, one cannot read her book without sensing her anxiety over the changes she witnessed. Even her matter-of-fact observations, such as her recognition that every type of game will soon disappear from our woods and that this reckless extermination of the game in the United States would seem, indeed, without a precedent in the history of the world (190), are tinged with sadness and admonishment. Typical of her style, however, she accompanies these points with a rather practical solution: that all New York counties act upon their rights to establish hunting regulations (190).

Thoreau in *Walden* also acknowledges the disappearance of animal species in his rural environment; for example, in his discussion of the decline of hunting among New England youths he observes that a change is taking place, owing, not to an increased humanity, but to an increased scarcity of game (144). However, whereas Cooper primarily considers the alterability of her rural environment in her recognition of species decline, Thoreau expresses concern over the potential moral ramifications of hunting, fishing, and consuming flesh for the individual and thereby suggests the need for increased humanity. That is, he advocates abstaining from animal food not for the benefit of the creatures, but for the man. Substituting a little bread or a few potatoes for meat and fish is, according to Thoreau, both easier and cleaner, and, more importantly, it contributes to the development of the imagination (146). He argues that to obtain

sustenance by preying on other animals [...] is a miserable way to live and prophesies that it is a part of the destiny of the human race, in its gradual improvement, to leave off eating animals, as surely as the savage tribes have left off eating each other when they came in contact with the more civilized (147). A widespread shift in eating habits toward vegetarianism would presumably contribute to the conservation of hunted species, but Thoreau approaches the subject from an anthropocentric angle rather than a preservationist one. In short, Cooper repeatedly references species decline to suggest the dramatic changes being wrought on her farming community by the trend toward large-scale production and the corresponding deforestation; Thoreau, in contrast, employs recognition of species decline as an entrée into a discussion of the moral benefits of temperance of appetite upon the individual, himself in particular.⁴⁸ Though he does not trace it directly to *Walden*, Phillips recognizes in such self-interested tendencies a shortcoming common to the work of American nature writers that accounts for the genre's fundamentally contradictory character: at critical junctures, it swerves inward, erasing the world it has been at such pains to describe, and abandoning the physical for the metaphysical.⁴⁹

I do not mean to suggest, however, that Cooper's work is void of the sort of euphoric prose mastered by Thoreau or that she never frames her rural experiences in terms of aesthetics, but rather that her impetus for doing so contradicts Thoreau's and also can be linked to her female domestic vision. According to Buell, although both authors would deem a large tree a finer embellishment to a home than new paint or grand furniture, Cooper praises nature over artifice not because nature is wild rather than tame, but because it marks a farther progress' in civility than the axe-wielding phase of frontier living. The shade tree and the sofa are not enemies but alternative forms of cultivation.⁵⁰ Indeed, despite what she considers her rural environment's physical blights, namely felled trees, Cooper views the landscape, both the

cultivated and less altered tracts, as ripe with beauty, and her appreciation emanates from her adjective-rich observations. In a rather typical entry from the [s]weet, quiet day of May 3, she has a pleasant walk, during which she encounters brilliant wheat fields, comical beech bushes, and a bird singing charmingly, among other plants and fowl (33-34). Later that week, she exalts: How rapid is the advance of spring at this moment of her joyous approach! And how beautiful are all the plants in their graceful growth, the humblest herb unfolding its every leaf in beauty, full of purpose and power! (37). Her tone here is not unlike Thoreau's in his welcoming of spring to Walden, particularly his delighted and famed recognition of the sudden return of sand foliage along the railroad, which causes him to feel as though he stood in the laboratory of the Artist who made the world and [him] (205). Though comparatively rarely, Cooper also crafts poignant metaphors expressive of her appreciation for nature's beauty. Note, for example, her passage on how various plants receive water differently, in which she remarks that the rose and the honeysuckle wear those spherical diamond-like drops, sung by poets, and sipped by fairies (93). Hence, Cooper inspires environmental awareness not only by identifying trends in species decline and calling for reform but, like Thoreau, by sometimes aestheticizing her environment—though with seemingly different motivations. By assuming the position of the educated woman promoting proper stewardship of the home (and, by extension, the homeland), Cooper also promotes interest in the natural history of her area and in the relationships between the living things she aestheticizes, which prevents *Rural Hours* from offering simply a picturesque interpretation of her surroundings.

Nevertheless, as Johnson and Patterson also point out, Cooper's environmental ethos remains, at its core, human-centered because it stems from her belief that the natural environment from which God's power, love, and wisdom emanate is also intended to serve

human needs.⁵¹ Cooper's anthropocentric interests at times clash with her otherwise predominantly preservationist ideal, and these become especially clear when she does not express regret at the deaths of some local animals that pose a physical threat to humans.⁵² She tells of a two-day rattlesnake-hunting expedition during which three men killed 1,104 of the venomous creatures, and states, matter-of-factly, that [t]hey are taken for their fat, which is sold at a good price (54). In addition, although Cooper notes in a discussion of rumored panther sightings that the animals generally only attack humans if provoked (264), she later does not express disappointment about the deaths of two mountain lions in the area (282) and then sympathizes with a hunter killed by two panthers near a lake on the border of New Hampshire and Maine: What a moment it must have been, when, alone in the forest, the poor hunter fell, and those fierce beasts of prey both leaped upon him! (310). Furthermore, although tempered by her acknowledgement that none of God's creatures are made in vain and that a spider must, therefore, have some purpose, she professes a blatant dislike for the creature because of its plotting, creeping ways, and a sort of wicked expression about him (61). Certainly, Cooper's disinclination to despair the deaths of some creatures and disparagement of others sets her apart from some of her more radical preservationist successors; however, her ideal worldview ultimately emerges, because of the much more prevalent sympathetic recognition in *Rural Hours* of animals whose existence has been threatened by humans, as one in which animals and humans might coexist with the fewest repercussions for any creature and for the environment. She is anthropocentric in her recognition of humans' rights within a community that she believed must exhibit greater acknowledgement of the importance of other living things, but she is not *egocentric*.

Certainly, Cooper's book does not suggest a return to a wilderness state, as to do so would imply the necessary removal of humans, an idea that would counter her general conservatism and faith-based sense of righteousness; what *Rural Hours* promotes, rather, is the adoption of an environmental ethos based on practical sustainability and species preservation, a disposition that Cooper considers to be as important to the spiritual health of a community as to its physical health. Thoreau's legacy as an important environmentalist writer is also largely attributable to his spirituality, as he and his fellow Transcendentalists helped dissolve the longstanding view established by early settlers of the wilderness as a place that needed to be conquered for the spiritual and physical safety of its human inhabitants. As Nash explains, "The fears which the first New Englanders experienced in contact with the primeval forest gave way in their Concord descendants to confidence—in wilderness and in man. In contrast to the city, the wilderness was regarded as the environment where spiritual truths were least blunted. Hence, Thoreau felt it was necessary that one be able to venture into the wilderness so that one's soul might transcend the physical link to the material world."⁵³ *Walden* chronicles his experiment in transcendental living, his attempts to elevate his soul, and thus remains, at its core, an egocentric work. As Thoreau famously tells us: "I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived" (65). This overtly personal goal contrasts sharply with Cooper's understated claim that she hopes only to bring others "pleasure" via her copious observations on "rustic matters" (3), however, and helps distinguish the latter author's work as more ecological, for as Kroeber has observed, "it is impossible to have a truly ecological attitude that makes others, including other people, secondary to self."⁵⁴ It is Cooper's "Christian

domesticity, according to Buell, that makes her persona tamer than Thoreau's⁵⁵; it is also her feminine values that consistently cause her to focus on elements outside of the self.

Cooper's ideological fusion of religion and nature is, at times, contradictory because of its anthropocentric focus, but it is also complementary. It contributes to the complexity of *Rural Hours* and essentially helps advance Cooper's environmentalist message, for her book suggests that if New Englanders are to reap the spiritual benefits of their environment, they must devote more attention to learning about and cultivating appreciation for its natural features. Although Cooper maintains an anthropocentric perception that is rooted in her belief that all elements of nature were created by God for the use of people, she emphasizes that [i]t was not merely to gratify the outer senses of man that these good gifts were bestowed on the earth; they were made for our hearts, the ever-present expression of love, mercy, and power (46). This idea is characteristic of a change in mid-century Americans' thinking about the land, which was no longer, for many, an object of conquest. As Nash states, by the middle decades of the nineteenth century wilderness was recognized as a cultural and moral resource and a basis for national self-esteem.⁵⁶ Cooper and Thoreau both demonstrate an awareness of this national trend, but Cooper's work links spirituality and science in a manner that more clearly promotes an ecological consciousness among its readers. Her book suggests that Americans might use God's gifts, the earth's bounties, to cultivate the power associated with a strengthening repose of a noble contemplation (46). That is, people can elevate themselves morally by internalizing the grandeur of nature; therefore, each of these natural works of God is an essential factor in the development of humans' spiritual well-being. As Gianquitto has noted, *Rural Hours* documents the author's efforts to unite increasingly competing ways of understanding the natural world: a religious view that regards the design of nature as a direct product of God made for the benefit of

humankind and a scientific view that begins to present the world as a web of interrelated systems of which humans are simply a part.⁵⁷

A noteworthy example of this ecological awareness arises in Cooper's explanation of the European red poppy's relationship to a small insect known as the upholster bee. According to Cooper, after the bee makes a nest in a grain field, it uses tiny pieces of poppy petals to pad the nest, only laying a single egg when the brilliant cradle is complete. Cooper explains: This constant association with the wheat, which even the insects have learned by instinct, has not remained unheeded by man (123). Because of the poppy's connection with the precious grain, the flower appears in many stories from ancient mythology and was considered as sacred by the deity Ceres, the Roman goddess of agriculture (123). Cooper's desire to establish connectivity between insect, plant, man, and mythology is especially evident in this account of natural history. Because of this understanding of the world as a web, her work, as Johnson and Patterson have observed, contributes to the move that the genre of nature writing was making toward an emphasis on process and on the interconnectedness of things (that is, toward ecology) ; ultimately, [t]he vision she expresses in *Rural Hours* brings an ecological awareness to what might have been a much shallower anthropocentric aesthetic presentation.⁵⁸ Her Christian faith contributes to this progressively scientific vision, as she considers the presence of similar plants on other continents to be divine evidence of the interrelatedness of all living things. Another case in point of this conceptualization is Cooper's appraisal of the mandrakes, or May-apples—one of the innumerable works of God (46) to be found near her rural home. They are handsome plants, she notes, and they provide insipid though edible fruit—that is, they offer New Yorkers both spiritual and physical sustenance. They also, Cooper tells us, are found under a different variety in the hilly countries of Central Asia and thereby inspire

Cooper's ecological consideration: One likes to trace these links, connecting lands and races, so far apart, reminding us, as they do, that the earth is the common home of all (56). Plants, animals, people—though sometimes separated by oceans—are all evidence of God's work and therefore spiritually and scientifically linked. Nevertheless, this expansive vision and optimistic desire to establish global connectivity become problematic when Cooper strives to establish a link between Anglo Americans and Native Americans, the latter for whom New York was less and less a common home.⁵⁹

Her nostalgic yearning to emphasize the ecological relationship between these two cultures is evident when she writes of Native Americans: It was but yesterday that such beings peopled the forest, beings with as much of life as runs within our own veins, who drank their daily draught from the springs we now call our own; yesterday they were here, today scarce vestige of their existence can be pointed out among us (58). Because of the historical and mythological association of Native Americans with nature and their presence, though dwindling, in both Cooper's and Thoreau's respective Northeastern United States communities, it is fitting that both authors describe encounters with Native Americans in their environmentally minded works; however, the way each author approaches Native American themes again distinguishes Cooper's text as more externally focused than Thoreau's. Both authors describe encounters with basket weavers, for example, and while Cooper's experience initiates a lengthy discussion on Native American characteristics, the influence of civilization on these peoples, and the debt owed to them by white Americans, Thoreau frames his description of the Native American encounter with discourse on his financial difficulties and personal theories on work and commerce. In fact, though Cooper's July 17 entry, devoted almost entirely to her few encounters with Native Americans, is significantly longer than Thoreau's description of basket weavers in

Concord, a close study of the topical progression in each passage highlights Thoreau's tendency to call on subjects such as the environment or Native American practices to assist him in self-exploration and Cooper's contrasting propensity for remaining focused on the world around her.

Though brief, Thoreau's basket weaver passage, which appears in the first chapter, Economy, is an integral part of *Walden*, as it helps Thoreau explain, through the metaphor of writing as weaving (neither a financially worthwhile venture), his reasons for going to live at the pond. After describing his inability to turn his interests in writing and nature into profitable activities, he recounts an anecdote about a strolling Indian who attempted to sell his baskets at a local lawyer's house and became aggravated when he was turned down:

What! exclaimed the Indian as he went out the gate, do you mean to starve us?

Having seen his industrious white neighbors so well off,—that the lawyer had only to weave arguments, and by some magic wealth and standing followed, he had said to himself; I will go into business; I will weave baskets; it is a thing which I can do.

Thinking that when he had made the baskets he would have done his part, and then it would be the white man's to buy them, or at least make him think that it was so, or to make something else which it would be worth his while to buy. (16)

Thoreau goes on to remind us that he too had woven a kind of basket of a delicate texture, but [he] had not made it worth any one's while to buy them, in reference to his first book, *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers* (1849), which was a commercial failure (16), and by comparing his failed book to the product of the basket weaver, Thoreau simultaneously compliments the Native American man's artistry and degrades it. However, when Thoreau goes on to describe the lesson he learned from having been unsuccessful in his own experiences with weaving, he elevates himself intellectually over the Native American by suggesting that such

an experience should alter one's beliefs, that it should be a lesson on the importance of self-sufficiency. According to Thoreau, after this failure, instead of studying how to make it worth men's while to buy my baskets, I studied rather how to avoid the necessity of selling them (16). This revelation, of course, contributes to his decision to live experimentally at Walden, to embrace some of the modes of living typically associated, both in the middle of the nineteenth century and today, with Native Americans. As Robert Sayre has noted, The savagist image of the Indian as a solitary and self-sufficient forest hunter makes this association almost inevitable.⁶⁰ Inspired by the basket weaver's degradation, Thoreau set out to replicate aspects of the lives of precolonial Native Americans—that is, to mimic their activities before they, like him, were reduced to peddling their artistry to white men.⁶¹

But to suggest that this passage, in which Thoreau uses an anecdote about a third-party encounter with a basket weaver—one that may or may not be based on fact—to help explain a moment of self-revelation, signals a disinterest in Native American life would be a great injustice to a man who compiled thousands of pages of notes on Native Americans that he had dubbed the Indian Books.⁶² Indeed, although Thoreau downplays the experience of the basket weaver to emphasize his own decision-making process and does not empathize with the man's struggle to make a living, this brief passage is hardly representative of Thoreau's vast curiosity for and knowledge about Native Americans. According to Sayre, Thoreau scarcely did a thing *for* [Native Americans], but he read, thought, and wrote about them through his entire adult life.⁶³ Suzanne D. Rose finds evidence in the Indian Notebooks that by 1853 Thoreau's Indian studies were no longer a novelty pursued in the haphazard manner of a novice but the work of a confirmed researcher.⁶⁴ The comparatively brief basket-weaver excerpt is nonetheless of value to this project because it provides a point of rhetorical contrast that, like the passage on Walden's

inalterability, helps us understand Thoreau's ability to write in the tradition of Cooper—by also following a seasonal structure, cataloguing plant and animal life, emphasizing appreciation for nature, and addressing similar topics—while producing a more inwardly focused text that still promotes an environmentalist agenda.

Cooper's July 17 entry, in which she also discusses the presence of basket weavers in her village, begins with a description of Mill Island, home to a grist-mill and saw-mill, and former favorite resort of the Indians who, in the years after the village sprung up, would often camp on the once heavily wooded island (107). In keeping with one of the most dominant themes of *Rural Hours*, she addresses the effects of deforestation in the area, this time upon the activities of the Native Americans who no longer encamp on the island itself, for the oak on the bridge is almost the only tree standing on it (108). These musings on Mill Island and the Native Americans who once camped there inspire Cooper's reflections on Native American history, and she notes that when it is remembered that the land over which they now wander as strangers, in the midst of an alien race, was so lately their own—the heritage of their fathers—it is impossible to behold them without a feeling of peculiar interest (108). Her peculiar interest in these peoples manifests itself in an anecdote about three Oneida women who once visited her family home while trying to sell baskets in the village. The passage contains explicit detail about the women's dress, ornamentation, physical attributes, mannerisms, religious affiliations, aesthetic interests, and food preferences—all qualities that fulfill Cooper's domestic ideal. Being much pleased with the visit, Cooper and at least one unnamed companion (for she consistently uses the pronoun *we* in describing her excursions, which suggests, as Wayne Franklin has noted, that she may have been accompanied by one parent or both, although this is never made clear⁶⁵) go to the women's camp later that day, where they also meet two men and several children, and

an almost equally detailed description of these family members follows, although the author does not look upon the men in such a favorable light (109-10). Whereas Cooper considers the female members of the group to be so gentle and womanly, so free from anything coarse or rude in the midst of their untutored ignorance, she describes the men as having every mark of their race stamped upon them; but, alas! not a trace of the 'brave' about either and as possessing that heavy, sensual, spiritless expression, the stamp of vice, so painful to behold on the human countenance (109).

Although Stephen Germic has argued that Cooper in this passage fails to note the poverty, dispossession, and violence that have brought them to their state,⁶⁶ Cooper directly attributes the Native Americans' condition to the broader effects of [c]ivilization, a process of displacement which she views as having positive effects on the women and tragic repercussions for the men because of their historically gender-based system of labor division: The men, when no longer warriors and hunters, lose their native character; the fire of their savage energy is extinguished, and the dull and blackened embers alone remain (111). It is easier for the women, Cooper claims, to turn from field labors to household tasks than it is for the men to adopt quiet, regular, agricultural or mechanic pursuits (111).⁶⁷ That Anglo American domination is responsible for the unfeasibility in the mid nineteenth century of Native modes of living seems implicit. Furthermore, Germic's reading of Cooper's assignation of a stamp of vice upon the men as a suggestion that their moral failure is their full-bloodedness, their unmitigated racial presence also seems misguided in light of a later passage in which Cooper twice emphasizes the negative effects of alcoholism on the men.⁶⁸ Unaccustomed [...] to labor, a requisite of the capitalistic society in which they are now expected to participate (and Cooper does hope and expect that they will participate), the men, according to Cooper, sink into worthless, drinking

idlers, thus accounting for their brutal, stupid, drunken countenances (111). In short, Cooper refuses to romanticize Native men and thus paints a harsh picture, but, counter to Germic's evaluation, she attributes their lack of industry to alcoholism and their alcoholism to the hardships associated with Anglo American influence, which had catastrophic effects upon the race. As Cronon has stated, by 1800, New England Indians had little choice but to participate in the market system that had been established by European colonists, and their immersion into this system brought them disease, demographic collapse, economic dependency, and the loss of world ecological relationships they could never find again.⁶⁹ Cooper observantly characterizes these effects of colonization as obstacles in their path but downplays the extent of their destructiveness when she cheerfully notes that through energy and perseverance many Native men have found a new position among civilized men (111). Though the passage indicates Cooper's acceptance of the demise of Native traditions and her belief in the supremacy of Anglo ways, her commentary is ultimately sympathetic, her promotion of cooperation between races in line with her faith in the possibility of balanced coexistence among all living things.

Cooper, in a fashion typical of her writing, does not stop with describing these specific men and women, but rather uses these observations to introduce a more generalized discussion of Native American characteristics and a passage on white Americans' moral obligations to them. In an exhibition of persuasive verve perhaps matched only by her exhortations to curb the rapid consumption of timber, Cooper declares:

It is easy to wish these poor people well; but surely something more may be justly required of us—of those who have taken their country and their place on the earth. The time seems at last to have come when their own eyes are opening to the real good of civilization, the advantages of knowledge, the blessings of Christianity. Let us

acknowledge the strong claim they have upon us, not in word only, but in deed also. The native intellect of the red men who peopled this part of America surpassed that of many other races laboring under the curses of savage life; they have shown bravery, fortitude, religious feeling, eloquence, imagination, quickness of intellect, with much dignity of manner; and if we are true to our duty, now at the moment when they are making of their own accord movement in the path of improvement, perhaps the day may not be distant when men of Indian blood may be numbered among the wise and the good, laboring in behalf of our common country. (112)

That Cooper views the traditions of the red men as examples of savagery and looks upon their burgeoning assimilation into white culture as improvement must not be overlooked, as her writing, though it promotes racial acceptance, also reveals her condescension toward Native traditions and her conviction that full assimilation into white culture would be ideal for Native Americans. As Germic notes, her attitude toward Native Americans is complex: She is compelled to relate to Natives according to romantic idealizations and as victims of displacement. At the same time, she must erase the suggestion of any potentially compelling Native legal claims even as she establishes the ground for the right to redress.⁷⁰ Cooper seems to be doing just this when she asserts white Americans' indisputable ownership of what was once their country and also, as Germic has pointed out, by [a]t once recognizing and disregarding the notion that she may be crossing *their* path when she notes that a remnant of the great tribes of the Iroquois still linger about their old haunts, and occasionally cross our path (108).⁷¹

It is only fitting, from a historical standpoint, that Cooper's descriptions of Native peoples should be laden with contradiction, however. Indeed, Sayre's appraisal of Thoreau's complicated consideration for Natives might as easily be applied to Cooper: [S]avagism, with

all its errors, race-stereotypes, and civilized origins, was still a challenge to civilization. Indians, as a people, were largely unknown, unknowable, and doomed. But the Indian, as an idea, was enormously powerful: the emblem of self-reliance, nature, and wisdom—the daemon of the continent. And Thoreau was peculiarly situated to come under the spell.⁷² Certainly, central to both writers' concern for nature is the romanticization of the American Northeast before European settlement and, by extension, the less environmentally intrusive Native American presence there. In *Walden*, specifically, however, Thoreau's incorporation of Native American themes generally serves primarily to advance his expression of personal experience. In the chapter titled "Visitors," for example, Thoreau defends the hospitality of the Wampanoag chief Massassoit as it was described by Edward Winslow in a 1622 account of a visit to the Plymouth Colony, before his governorship there. According to Winslow, in addition to cramped sleeping quarters, the chief provided only two fish to feed more than forty men, and Thoreau responds to Winslow's criticism by remarking that he does not understand how the Indians could have done better. They had nothing to eat themselves (100). Although Thoreau in this passage exhibits understanding for the Wampanoag way of life, his support originates from his desire to justify his own reception of visitors to his rustic Walden cabin who might share in his frugal meal (98). He highlights the difficulties of the Walden experience, his personal experience, by aligning himself with tribal life. Thus, *Walden* and *Rural Hours* both suggest that Native American lifestyles, before European settlement and after, were prominent in their authors' minds; however, Cooper's interest in Native Americans complements her philosophy of inclusivity, her desire to connect lands and races in *Rural Hours*, while Thoreau's comments on Native Americans seem to be crafted for the specific purpose of self-expression in *Walden*, even though his other writings indicate a widespread, genuine interest in Native cultures.

Nevertheless, both authors' interests in Native American traditions might be traced to a similar preservationist impulse that regards the onward march of capitalism with trepidation—an impulse that is especially evident, though again in distinctly dissimilar ways, in their discussions of agricultural practices. Despite the divergent methods by which these authors incorporate environmental, Native American, and agricultural themes, their presence in both *Rural Hours* and *Walden* is indicative of the works' historicity, as these three topics are inextricably linked—that is, it would be difficult to address, in any way, the degradation of American land without at least acknowledging the European commodification of the land and its resources that were in great deal responsible for the disintegration of the more ecologically sound precolonial Native American methods of subsistence. European agricultural practices, in particular, were detrimental to the preservation of major ecological characteristics of the precolonial New England landscape that had for thousands of years been maintained by a complex set of Native American survival modes based on a conservation which was less the result of an enlightened ecological sensibility than of the Indians' limited social definition of need.⁷³ As in their approaches to environmental and Native American themes, Cooper's commentary on agriculture reveals her more directly worded and expansive worldview and Thoreau's more figurative expression of individualistic concerns. Fittingly, for Cooper, mid-century New York agricultural practices warranted greater attention to maintaining a sense of ecological balance among cultivated and uncultivated land; for Thoreau, the answer to the environmental threats posed by agriculture in Massachusetts, or so he hoped, was in the mostly solitary experience of subsistence farming. That is, each author is primarily interested in one of two general methods of farming described by Timothy Sweet: Thoreau in the sort characterized by seminomadic or

backwoods,' subsistence-oriented practices and Cooper in sedentary, intensive, market-oriented practices.⁷⁴

That Thoreau devotes a chapter of *Walden* to describing his experience with his two-and-a-half-acre bean field offers proof of his keen interest in agriculture, particularly the work of the subsistence farmer, and he was ultimately, Robert Gross asserts, the most powerful and articulate critic of agricultural capitalism that America produced in the decades before the Civil War.⁷⁵ Like Cooper's opposition to deforestation, Thoreau's critique of market farming is multifaceted; he questions the spiritual and moral ramifications posed by the financial pressures of the system, as well as its devastating effects on the land. He summarizes his opposition in the chapter titled 'The Bean Field':

Ancient poetry and mythology suggest, at least, that husbandry was once a sacred art; but it is pursued with irreverent haste and heedlessness by us, our object being to have large farms and large crops merely. We have no festival, nor procession, nor ceremony, not excepting our Cattle-shows and so called Thanksgivings, by which the farmer expresses a sense of the sacredness of his calling, or is reminded of its sacred origin. [...] By avarice and selfishness, and a grovelling habit, from which none of us is free, of regarding the soil as property, or the means of acquiring property chiefly, the landscape is deformed, husbandry is degraded with us, and the farmer leads the meanest of lives. He knows Nature but as a robber. (114)

Though a farmer's relationship to the land is something to be held sacred, Thoreau suggests, the activities required of participation in a market agricultural system destroy any hope of achieving personal happiness, of transcending the limits imposed upon the individual by capitalistic drive. In Thoreau's understanding, Merchant explains, 'From unfettered, free

individuals, [farmers] became slaves to their profits and property. Young farmers who had inherited farmland, houses, barns, cattle, and tools were only to be pitied because they remained forever in debt to their mortgage.⁷⁶ Thoreau witnessed, coupled with the moral and financial degradation associated with farming, the degradation of American land and believed that as the farmer robbed the landscape to help satiate his ever-increasing need for capital he was, in turn, robbed of his spirit. These observations, like those on Native American experiences, would help encourage Thoreau's foray into subsistence farming, a lifestyle he was hopeful could resolve the ethical and environmental dilemmas caused by market farming. As Merchant explains,

Perceiving the consequences of this capitalistic ecological revolution, Thoreau called for a return to an animistic consciousness and the ways of subsistence farmers. Treading lightly on the land would restore a nature that was active, vital, and deeply sensual.⁷⁷ That is, Thoreau believed increased environmental awareness, which could be achieved through nonexploitative agricultural practices, would promote spiritual wellness—and in many regards his experiment supports this theory. In the act of hoeing his field, for example, Thoreau uncovers ashes and tools of unchronicled nations now intermingled with other natural stones and bits of pottery and glass brought hither by the recent cultivators of the soil (109). The sound created by his hoe as it tinkled against the stones dotting the palimpsest-like soil produces music that, for Thoreau, yielded an immense and measurable crop (109). This figurative crop consists of Thoreau's delight in the natural details of his surroundings and his growing awareness of the land's history, which causes him to pity his city-dwelling friends and awakens his awareness of the kindredship [...] in nature (110). For Thoreau, self-consciously working the land leads to a heightened spiritual state that encourages an awareness of environmental history.

Ultimately, although Thoreau frequently denigrates the lifestyles of New England farmers, his time at Walden, as David Robinson has noted, can be understood as an agrarian experiment. However, Robinson's claim that the experiment demonstrates Thoreau's commitment both to the economic and ethical advantages of the small farm warrants scrutiny.⁷⁸ Indeed, although Thoreau indicates through his agricultural critique that he sought to extract himself from the environmentally harmful market farming system by growing enough crops to sustain him at Walden, he struggles to reconcile the agrarian and intellectual lives, periodically questioning his own activities and thus appearing to lose sight of this goal. He asks, "What was the meaning of this so steady and self-respecting, this small Herculean labor, I knew not. I came to love my rows, my beans, though so many more than I wanted. They attached me to the earth [...]. But why should I raise them? Only heaven knows" (107). He achieves through his "devot[ion] to husbandry" great respect for his crops, but his alteration of the land also inspires guilt, and he wonders: "[W]hat right had I to oust johnswort and the rest, and break up their ancient herb garden?" (111, 107). Thoreau's contradictory sentiments about the act of "making the earth say beans instead of grass" (108)—his pride and guilt, joy and frustration—coupled with his rejection of common agricultural practices, such as applying fertilizer, likely contributed to the field's "half-cultivated" state, as well as the confusion of his farming neighbors (109). Nevertheless, Thoreau's unconventional efforts yield more beans than he wishes to eat, as well as much theoretical support for his anti-materialist cause. His farming venture shapes his conviction that he will never again plant beans and corn but, rather, seek sustenance by sowing "sincerity, truth, simplicity, faith, innocence, and the like, and that other farmers should follow suit and concern themselves more with men than with crops" (113). This argument, however, loses a good deal of its force because of Thoreau's inability to simply

relinquish his unwanted crops to the wily Walden woodchucks and the sale of part of his beans, which brought him a profit of \$8.71½ and suggests that even he was susceptible to the market's lure. Ultimately, his bean-field experiment, when evaluated alongside his corresponding critique of market farming, is problematic in its contradictions.

This is likely because, as Gross has argued, Thoreau's critique was flawed by his idealization of the preindustrial order.⁷⁹ As Thoreau seems to have discovered, and as is suggested by his return to Concord after two years and two months at Walden, subsistence farming had become an impractical mode of living by the mid nineteenth century in this part of America. As early as 1720, Concord residents were dealing with the problem of not having enough land to support their growing families through subsistence farming, which contributed to the increased emigration of adult children from Concord to frontier land. Gross has pointed out that even the world of eighteenth-century farming demanded interdependence and mutual cooperation among households that would never have suited one who marched to a different drummer like Thoreau. Indeed, during the height of subsistence farming, in the decades before the arrival of the railroad to Concord in 1844, it would have been nearly impossible for a family to thrive without making store purchases or exchanging goods or labors with neighbors.⁸⁰ The rebel outcast lifestyle to which Thoreau aspires in Walden is an impractical vision, then, its unfeasibility made clear by the hardships he experienced, including hunger—which drove him, on occasion, to scour the woods, like a half-starved hound for meat (143)—and the requisite augmentation of his food stores by fishing and gathering.⁸¹

Although he is concerned about the effects of market farming upon both his neighbors and the Massachusetts landscape, Thoreau's go-it-alone approach to resolving such threats is, ultimately, an agricultural failure. According to Gross, Thoreau started with exhausted, barren

land, did nothing to improve it, obtained little from it, and announced himself quite content.⁸² He gleans from his dilettantish efforts at subsistence farming much fodder for *Walden*, but there remains little practical advice, save for a concise (and vague) paragraph about how to grow beans, on how one might go about bridging the gap between agricultural need and environmental risk.⁸³ Thoreau's consistent reliance on personal experience to facilitate literary expression of his Transcendentalist philosophy dominates any presence in *Walden* of suggestions on how one might resolve this dilemma and thus remains, at its core, an egocentric text. He shows us how we might think differently about our plant and animal food sources and the stress we place on the land by our increasingly intrusive methods of obtaining them, but his reluctance to recognize the practical shortcomings of his experiment (along with the subtly mocking tone he adopts in describing his efforts to maintain his bean field) suggest that he was not invested in agricultural reform as much as he was spiritual and intellectual reform, particularly as it applied to himself. At this, Thoreau suggests, as do academic and literary history, he was a success. He claims to have learned through the Walden experiment that if one advances confidently in the direction of his dreams, and endeavors to live the life which he has imagined, he will meet with a success unexpected in common hours (217). Thus, Thoreau concluded that he had discovered during his Walden stay the ability to transcend the old laws associated with upholding the status quo, laws suggesting that solitude, poverty, and weakness are hindrances to moral and intellectual growth (217). His experiment, then, might be deemed a literary and philosophical triumph—an intensely personal achievement—but should be viewed as an agricultural failure, the viability of the experiment compromised by his return to Concord and inevitable re-entry into the market society he sought to escape by living at Walden.

Because she was a member of the leisure class and did not reside on a farm, one might argue that Cooper also, though for different reasons, had little authority to critique her farming neighbors, though her episodic condemnation of their activities in *Rural Hours* is important to the development of her environmental ethos. Cooper's outsider position and alternately critical and admiring observations on Otsego County agriculture seem even less authoritative than Thoreau's agricultural accounts simply because he at least attempted to farm, though his ability to do so was certainly made easier by socially constructed prescriptions about gender-appropriate activities. Indeed, Cooper's agricultural knowledge does not originate from firsthand experience beyond the observations she made during her frequent walks and rides around the countryside and at least one visit to a local farm, which she describes with a somewhat naïve enthusiasm and attention to mundane detail that, as in her accounts of Native Americans, causes the entry to read like the notes of an amateur anthropologist.⁸⁴ Her class status and domesticity limit her ability to fully understand the relationship with nature afforded to those who not only observe it, but also work *within* it, and depend on its state for their livelihood. In Baym's appraisal, Many passages in *Rural Hours* show appreciation of country ways, but at best these are graciously patronizing or amusedly nostalgic. Cooper's distinction between herself and country folk allows her to consider them as though they too are part of nature, are objects for her imperial gaze.⁸⁵ One perceives Cooper's sense of social superiority, over farm women in particular, as well as her subscription to commonly held beliefs about gender roles, in the following passage:

We also chanced, on one occasion, to see a woman ploughing in this county, the only instance of the kind we have ever observed in our part of the world. Very possibly she may have been a foreigner, accustomed to hard work in the fields, in her own country. In Germany, we remember to have once seen *a woman* and *a cow* harnessed together,

dragging the plough, while a man, probably the husband, was driving both. This is the only instance in which we ever saw a woman in harness, though in travelling over Europe, one often sees the poor creatures toiling so hard, and looking so wretched, that one's heart aches for them. We American women certainly owe a debt of gratitude to our countrymen for their kindness and consideration for us generally. (106; original emphasis)

In addition to her adoption of an imperial gaze noted by Baym, Cooper also distances herself from the farm wife by emphasizing the novelty of seeing a woman at the plow and by suggesting that her activities are un-American. She does not yet recognize the potential independence available to skilled female American agriculturalists that would be celebrated by some turn-of-the-century regionalists such as Sarah Orne Jewett. Furthermore, Cooper seems, in her expression of gratitude to male Americans, oblivious to the social restraints inherent to the female experience in mid-nineteenth-century patriarchal America—yet another symptom of her leisure-class upbringing—and therefore unaware of the obstacles she might face in her own work were it not for her social status.⁸⁶ This passage, as a result, illustrates her limited ability to study farm life without letting her poorly disguised chauvinism cloud her observations.

In addition to her distorted pictures of farm life as less respectable and more quaint than her own privileged existence, Cooper often describes farms from a purely aesthetic standpoint, which, at times, overshadows her critique of land misuse. She often writes with an artist's eye, rather than a conservationist's, when she observes farm life, such as when she describes a large stone farmhouse, with maples grouped about in most brilliant color [where] a party of men were husking maize in the foreground; a group of cows grazing, in one direction, and a cart with a pile of noble pumpkins lying in the other and notes that [i]t would have made a good picture of an

American autumn scene (215)—and, in 1863, painter George Durrie would capture a strikingly similar scene with *Cider Making in the Country*. Furthermore, her conceptualization of the cultivation of the countryside as progress, a move toward the landscape aesthetic present in the old country, occasionally contradicts her harsh critique of deforestation (89). She takes amusement, for example, in studying the successive stage[s] of tillage around her, beginning with the first rude clearing, as well as a certain pleasure in thus beholding the agricultural history of the neighborhood unfolding before one (90-91).

This appreciation for the agricultural scene is not unequivocal, however, for there must be suggestions of unaltered nature present, such as the brilliant maples that offset the idyllic farmhouse, for Cooper to find beauty in her surroundings. Indeed, she takes delight in an agricultural scene primarily when it includes vestiges of uncultivated nature and thus fulfills the aesthetic ideal of the picturesque: [A]fter driving through a tame, uninteresting country, if we come suddenly upon a wild nook, with its groves, and brook, and rocks, we no doubt enjoy it the more from the charm of contrast (151). Similarly, she devotes several pages to expressing reverence for and imagining the history of a remaining grove of great pine trees, which she considers among the most striking objects in the county, and which she realizes were witness to the great change wrought by the axe and the saw; the forge and the wheel, their wild dignity of form thereby emphasized by their presence near civilization (116-20). Thus, although the gradual agricultural transformation of her countryside, is, for Cooper, a source of pride, she also takes great satisfaction in residing in a community where [e]ven within the limits of the village spots may still be found on the bank of the river, which are yet unbroken by the plough (92). Cooper's ideal rural community, then, is one in which the act of husbandry creates beauty only when it allows for at least partial preservation of native beauty.

Despite the contradictions in Cooper's agricultural observations, her concerns about the way the landscape was changing before her remain the impetus for her rapt attention to Otsego County farming, and her book suggests that careful control of these agricultural practices is necessary to curbing deforestation. Balance, both aesthetic and ecological, is important to Cooper's ideal worldview, which is always steadfastly aware of human need:

This general fertility, this blending of the fields of man and his tillage with the woods, the great husbandry of Providence, gives a fine character to the country, which it could not claim when the lonely savage roamed through wooded valleys, and which it must lose if ever cupidity, and the haste to grow rich, shall destroy the forest entirely, and leave these hills to posterity, bald and bare, as those of many older lands. No perfection of tillage, no luxuriance of produce can make up to a country for the loss of its forests; you may turn the soil into a very garden crowded with the richest crops, if shorn of wood, [...] but the noblest fruit of the earth, that which is the greatest proof of her strength, will be wanting.

(139)

Once again we see Cooper fuse nature, Native American history, and agriculture in a manner that assists in her promotion of a utilitarian conservationist ideal. She finds in the blending of fields and forests a model state that surpasses even the romanticized image of the precolonial wilderness, for it allows for human sustenance without depleting the land of its natural wealth. As Baym explains, for Cooper, Understanding the productive capacity of the earth and exploiting it are positive goods; misuse of the earth, always possible, is understood not in terms of nature itself as an absolute good, but in terms of exhausting a resource that the human population depends on.⁸⁷ I would add to this assessment that Cooper also makes an ethical argument in her warnings because of her confidence in the spiritual benefits of respecting the

land. The fine character of the partially cultivated country, she suggests, will help uphold the character of its inhabitants. This faith in the spiritual value of nature aligns Cooper ideologically with Thoreau; however, their agricultural critiques contrast because of the radical, egocentric attributes of Thoreau's subsistence-farming experiment and the practical, anthropocentric characteristics of Cooper's more distanced agricultural observations. It would not have been socially acceptable for Cooper to cultivate her own bean field, but the attentive outsider role created by gender prescriptions contributes to her ability to view agriculture through the wider lens of community responsibility.

Certainly, the important rhetorical differences between *Rural Hours* and *Walden* are largely attributable to the authors' different life experiences as they were shaped by mid-nineteenth-century gender expectations and, more specifically, the way these expectations applied to writers of this era. Resisting the urge to align and thereby simplify Cooper and Thoreau as contemporary mid-century nature writers with similar environmentalist objectives, and acknowledging instead their different rhetorical paths, is important, for by studying *Rural Hours* and *Walden* together, one might begin to understand why some later American women writers interested in the natural world also depict rural America quite differently from their male contemporaries. Furthermore, these differences, like those between *Rural Hours* and *Walden*, can largely be explained in sociohistorical terms, and when studied together, *Rural Hours* and *Walden* provide a conceptual framework for analyzing the continued inextricable prominence of environmental, Native American, and agricultural themes in regional literature produced as the United States entered the increasingly industrialized postwar era that Mark Twain dubbed the Gilded Age and which Alan Trachtenberg has characterized as the incorporation of America, a process that wrenched American society from the moorings of familiar values and

proceeded by contradiction and conflict.⁸⁸ The efforts of writers like Jewett, Chopin, and Cather, who often situate female characters in rural settings affected by urbanization and mechanization, embody the tumultuousness of the era by continuing to address, like Cooper, a woman's evolving place in rural America even as rural America was itself being transformed.

In *Rural Hours* Cooper created a literary model for Thoreau, the most influential nature writer in American history; urged women to challenge literary and domestic expectations; advocated an ecological awareness of plant and animals species; and, perhaps most importantly, issued the warning that rural Americans needed to rethink their relationship to the land and begin conservation efforts. Because of her own ability to look at nature by the light of the sun and record, with minutest detail, her observations of its beauty, as well as its scars, Cooper's work continues to help readers envision mid-nineteenth-century rural America and the environmental threats it faced more clearly.

Notes

¹ Susan Fenimore Cooper, *Rural Hours*, ed. Rochelle Johnson and Daniel Patterson (Athens: U of Georgia P, 1998) 3. Subsequent references will be cited parenthetically by page number. I use this edition because it reproduces the full text of Putnam's 1850 edition of *Rural Hours*, the edition Thoreau would have accessed, rather than the much-shortened version that was issued in 1887 and again in 1968.

² Norwood, *Made From This Earth*, 26.

³ Johnson and Patterson, introduction, *Susan Fenimore Cooper: New Essays on Rural Hours*, xi. Johnson and Patterson attribute the need for the 1998 edition of *Rural Hours* to increased public interest in environmental writing and note that this latest edition increased the book's readership greatly, as well as interest in Susan Fenimore Cooper and her writing.

⁴ All references are to Henry David Thoreau, *Walden*, ed. William Rossi (New York: Norton, 2008) and will be documented parenthetically.

⁵ Buell, *Environmental Imagination*, 407.

⁶ Buell, *Environmental Imagination*, 406.

⁷ Although the study of ecology did not begin until the late nineteenth century, Cooper might be said to display the values to which ecology dedicated itself early on—especially balance, harmony, unity, and economy, as they are described by Dana Phillips, but which are now seen as more or less unscientific, and hence as 'utopian' in the pejorative sense of the term. In Phillips, *The Truth of Ecology*, 42.

⁸ Norwood, *Made From this Earth*, 27.

⁹ Murphy, *Literature, Nature, and Other*, 25.

¹⁰ Buell, *Environmental Imagination*, 47. It should be noted that Buell characterized *Rural Hours* as unjustly neglected before the publication of the 1998 edition, which brought it more scholarly attention.

¹¹ Original emphasis. Karen J. Warren, *Ecofeminist Philosophy*, 46.

¹² Norwood, *Made From this Earth*, 27-28.

¹³ Norwood, Women's Roles in Nature Study and Environmental Protection, 13.

¹⁴ Within this movement, Magee writes, the demands of community and domestic life are intertwined, much like models of ecosystems, with the demands of the natural environment.

See Sentimental Ecology: Susan Fenimore Cooper's *Rural Hours*, 27-28.

¹⁵ Baym, *American Women of Letters*, 75.

¹⁶ Buell, *Environmental Imagination*, 406.

¹⁷ Warren, *Ecofeminist Philosophy*, 85.

¹⁸ Buell, *Environmental Imagination*, 406-07.

¹⁹ Thomas J. Lyon has observed that American nature writing typically consists of three features: natural history information, personal responses to nature, and philosophical interpretation of nature, though the prevalence of one factor over another varies greatly by text. Under his seven-point spectrum of different types of nature writing, which begins with field guides and professional papers and ends with philosophically focused essays on man's role in nature, *Rural Hours* might be most appropriately assigned to the second category in the spectrum, back—country living or nature experience essay. In *This Incomparable Land: A Guide to American Nature Writing*, 20, 22-23.

²⁰ Johnson, Placing *Rural Hours*, 82.

²¹ Johnson, *Walden, Rural Hours*, and the Dilemma of Representation, 180.

²² Johnson, *Dilemma of Representation*, 182.

²³ Johnson, *Dilemma of Representation*, 182.

²⁴ Gianquitto, "*Good Observers of Nature*," 104-5.

²⁵ Johnson, *Dilemma of Representation*, 180.

²⁶ Branch, *Five Generations of Literary Coopers*, 69.

²⁷ Merchant, *Reinventing Eden*, 6.

²⁸ Sattelmeyer, *Depopulation, Deforestation, and the Actual Walden Pond*, 241.

²⁹ Merchant, *Ecological Revolutions*, 225.

³⁰ Sattelmeyer, *Depopulation*, 242.

³¹ Buell, *Environmental Imagination*, 120.

³² Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind*, 95-98.

³³ According to Nash, George Caitlin, a painter and writer whose works centered on Native American experiences, was the first to move beyond regret to the preservation concept, as Caitlin in 1832 described in his journals the benefits of establishing a national park where both Indians and native wildlife might reside. Nash identifies the additional early American advocates of preservation as Thomas Cole, Horace Greeley, Thoreau (who in an 1852 journal entry expressed the need to protect portions of American land), Samuel H. Hammond, George Perkins Marsh, William Cullen Bryant, Frederick Law Olmstead, and Samuel Bowles. Aside from the works of Caitlin and Cole, who, according to Nash, proposed in the late-1840s writing a book that advocated wilderness preservation, all passages documented by Nash as early calls for wilderness protection were written after the 1850 publication of *Rural Hours*. In *Wilderness and the American Mind*, 100-07.

³⁴ Original emphasis, Kheel, *Nature Ethics: An Ecofeminist Perspective*, 214.

³⁵ See Dörte Köster, et al, Paleolimnological assessment of human-induced impacts on Walden Pond (Massachusetts, USA) using diatoms and stable isotopes, 117-131, which suggests that the geochemical and diatom records in the sediments of Walden Pond indicate substantial changes in the nutrient balance of the lake due to human impact during the last three centuries (129).

³⁶ See, for example, Edward Nickens, Walden Warming, 36-41, which discusses Boston University researchers' use of Thoreau's observations on seasonal events at Walden Pond to help create a record of springtime events in Concord as a means of tracking global climate change in the area, as well as Elizabeth Pennisi, Where Have All Thoreau's Flowers Gone? , 24-25, in which she uses Thoreau's data on the plants around Walden to suggest the effects of climate change on these species.

³⁷ Westling, *Green Breast of the New World*, 45.

³⁸ Phillips, *Truth of Ecology*, 204.

³⁹ Kroeber, *Ecology and American Literature: Thoreau and Un-Thoreau*, 313, 311.

⁴⁰ Norwood, *Made From This Earth*, 29.

⁴¹ Original emphasis, Wayne, *Woman Thinking*, 3.

⁴² Wayne, *Woman Thinking*, 6.

⁴³ Kroeber, *Ecology and American Literature*, 314.

⁴⁴ Gianquitto, "*Good Observers of Nature*", 103.

⁴⁵ William Cronon, *Changes in the Land: Indians, Colonists, and the Ecology of New England*, 99-100.

⁴⁶ Branch, *Five Generations*, 69.

⁴⁷ Johnson and Patterson, introduction, *Susan Fenimore Cooper*, xx.

⁴⁸ According to Cronon, later, in 1855, Thoreau would catalogue in his journal the differences in Massachusetts vegetation from how it was described in English traveler William Woods's account of his 1633 visit to southern New England, as well as the decline in mammal, fish, and bird species. In *Changes in the Land*, 3-4.

⁴⁹ Phillips, *Truth of Ecology*, 230.

⁵⁰ Buell, *Environmental Imagination*, 407.

⁵¹ Johnson and Patterson, introduction, *Susan Fenimore Cooper*, xix.

⁵² For more on Cooper's disregard for some animals, see Johnson and Patterson, introduction, *Susan Fenimore Cooper*, xix-xx, and Gianquitto, "Good Observers of Nature," 110.

⁵³ Nash, *Wilderness*, 85-86.

⁵⁴ Kroeber, *Ecology and American Literature*, 315.

⁵⁵ Buell, *Environmental Imagination*, 407.

⁵⁶ Nash, *Wilderness*, 67.

⁵⁷ Gianquitto, "Good Observers of Nature," 116.

⁵⁸ Johnson and Patterson, introduction, *Susan Fenimore Cooper*, xxi.

⁵⁹ About fifty years earlier, by 1800, Cronon reports, Native Americans in nearby New England had already been reduced to a small fraction of their former numbers, and those who had survived faced malnutrition because of their relegation to less fertile farming grounds and inability to travel in search of food as easily, as well as disease. In *Changes in the Land*, 160.

⁶⁰ Sayre, *Thoreau and the American Indians*, 61.

⁶¹ Though Thoreau did in some ways adopt the habits of precolonial Indians at Walden, specifically those of southern New England who, unlike the hunter-gatherer tribes who generally lived north of the Kennebec River in Maine, had adopted agriculture, his fixed settlement at the

pond contrasts with the seasonal relocation of Indian villages undertaken to follow food supplies. See Cronon, *Changes in the Land*, 38-39.

⁶² Sayre, *Thoreau and the American Indians*, 105. The existence of these prolific notes generated much speculation in the mid-twentieth century on whether Thoreau had intended to write a book on Native Americans. Sayre provides a detailed discussion of the debate in the chapter "A Book About Indians?" in *Thoreau and the American Indians*, 101-22.

⁶³ Original emphasis. Sayre, *Thoreau and the American Indians*, 25.

⁶⁴ Rose, *Following the Trail of Footsteps: From the Indian Notebooks to Walden*, 78.

⁶⁵ Franklin, *Under the Table: Susan Fenimore Cooper and the Construction of her Father's Reputation*, 7-8. Franklin views Cooper's use of the first person plural and lack of direct acknowledgement of her companions' identities to be among the ways Cooper deftly hides family business behind a veil in *Rural Hours* (7). That is, Cooper, Franklin suggests, actively strives to distinguish her work from that of her well-known father by limiting any references to his possible influence on her work.

⁶⁶ Germic, *Land Claims, Natives, and Nativism*, 488.

⁶⁷ Cooper's assessment seems rooted in both the reality of precolonial labor systems for southern New England Indians—a well-defined arrangement in which women performed agricultural and domestic duties while the men often left camp to hunt and fish (Cronon 44-45)—as well as the popular misconception among European settlers of Indian men as lazy. According to Cronon, "To the colonists, only Indian women appeared to do legitimate work; the men idled away their time in hunting, fishing, and wantonly burning the woods, none of which seemed like genuinely productive activities to Europeans, who were used to regarding such activities as leisurely pursuits. See *Changes in the Land*, 44-45, 52.

⁶⁸ Germic, *Land Claims*, 488.

⁶⁹ Cronon, *Changes in the Land*, 107.

⁷⁰ Germic, *Land Claims*, 497.

⁷¹ Germic's emphasis, *Land Claims*, 488.

⁷² Sayre, *Thoreau and the American Indians*, 26.

⁷³ Cronon, *Changes*, 98. As Cronon has demonstrated, crop-growing southern New England tribes, for example, minimalized their impact on the land by growing beans and other plants among their maize and thereby preventing erosion and weed growth, as well as by moving from place to place according to the seasons. Furthermore, by burning the undergrowth in select forests, they were able to create conditions favorable to food sources such as berries and also maintain habitats for many species of wildlife that contributed to their meat supply. See *Changes in the Land*, 43-44, 50-53.

⁷⁴ Sweet, *American Georgics*, 9.

⁷⁵ Gross, *Culture and Cultivation: Agriculture and Society in Thoreau's Concord*, 44.

⁷⁶ Merchant, *Ecological Revolutions*, 258.

⁷⁷ Merchant, *Ecological Revolutions*, 260.

⁷⁸ Robinson, *Unchronicled Nations': Agrarian Purpose and Thoreau's Ecological Knowing*, 326-28. Counter to the argument presented here, Robinson, it should be noted, finds in Thoreau's descriptions of agriculture evidence of his ecological orientation and a desire to establish cosmic harmony that can be traced to his Romantic learnings.

⁷⁹ Gross, *Culture and Cultivation*, 54.

⁸⁰ Gross, *Culture and Cultivation*, 44, 55, 46.

⁸¹ See, for example, *Walden*, 144, for his commentary on fishing out of necessity, and 161 for a description of the types of nuts, berries, and tubers he gathered.

⁸² Gross, *The Great Bean Field Hoax: Thoreau and the Agricultural Reformers*, 496.

⁸³ See *Walden*, 112-13.

⁸⁴ See *Rural Hours*, 95-102, for Cooper's description of her visit to Farmer B—'s.

⁸⁵ Baym, *American Women of Letters and the Nineteenth-Century Sciences*, 88.

⁸⁶ Although *Rural Hours* was originally published anonymously, Nina Baym points out, the titular addendum by a Lady suggests the importance of her class affiliation. In *American Women of Letters*, 73.

⁸⁷ Baym, *American Women of Letters*, 85.

⁸⁸ Trachtenberg, *The Incorporation of America: Culture and Society in the Gilded Age*, 7.

CHAPTER 2

WOMEN ACROSS THE WATER: THE HEALING HERMITAGE IN SELECT BIOREGIONALIST WORKS

The female narrator of Sarah Orne Jewett's best-known book, *The Country of the Pointed Firs* (1896), observes: "There is something in the fact of a hermitage that cannot fail to touch the imagination; the recluses are a sad kindred, but they are never commonplace" (442), and Americans' longstanding fascination and respect for *Walden* substantiates the former part of this claim. Despite the ecotouristical narrator's¹ characterization of the hermit as uncommon, however, these figures show up repeatedly in the writings of Jewett and Kate Chopin, their isolation stemming not only from their geographic distance from urban America, but also from their rejection of a more populated rural center, making them doubly removed from society. Furthermore, a number of these noteworthy characters, most of them women, are set off from their respective rural societies by water—a river, a bayou, the sea, and a swamp, for example—which acts as a natural barrier that further accentuates the reader's sense of their Thoreau-like immersion in nature. Among these figures are Marie Louise of Chopin's first novel, *At Fault* (1890); La Folle of her short story "Beyond the Bayou" (1891); Joanna Todd of Jewett's *Country of the Pointed Firs*; and Abby Martin of Jewett's "The Queen's Twin" (1899). An analysis of these characters and their literal and metaphorical relationships to their respective rustic environs suggests that Chopin and Jewett viewed nature as a refuge for women discriminated against because of race, gender, mental peculiarities, or a combination of these factors. By portraying these four outcast characters positively—as content with their ascetic existences, saintly in their actions, and steadfastly maternal, though typically childless—both authors advance an

environmental ethos that promotes a mutually beneficial relationship between nature and the individual distanced from enterprises that deplete the earth's resources and promote inequalities.

Though Chopin and Jewett are typically associated primarily with regionalism or local color fiction, these categorizations limit recognition of important economic, environmental, and feminist themes that, upon closer analysis, suggest these authors' importance to other intellectual movements. For example, Chopin and Jewett embrace the fundamentals of Transcendentalism in their wariness of capitalistic practices harmful to both nature and the individual; they advance key facets of ecofeminism in their focus on the female outcast's experience in nature and their idealization of a less intrusive human presence therein. Certainly, as Marcia Littenberg has demonstrated in regard to Jewett and fellow nineteenth-century New England author Celia Thaxter, it is possible to see in the works of certain women regionalists an evolution of the Transcendentalists' more self-consciously philosophical agenda into a literature that extends its authors' views to include the sympathetic connections to their region that transform both that region and nature itself and thereby embodies both a bioregionalist perspective and the goals of contemporary ecofeminists, and establishes a literary and historical connection between Transcendentalism and ecofeminism.² As a cornerstone of such continuities among American women regional writers, bioregionalism has nevertheless received insufficient attention, for this mode of thinking also helps account for these writers' move beyond emotional transcendence to advocate women's physical removal from traumatic situations associated with specific American regions and modes of living. In turn, an analysis of the ways in which Chopin's and Jewett's bioregional outlooks shape their promotion of women's independence produces a richer understanding of these regionalists' devotion to realistic representations of the practical benefits, especially for women, of being attuned to the resources and limits of one's natural environment.³

As I suggested in the previous chapter, the foundations of this ideological link are evident in *Rural Hours* by Susan Fenimore Cooper, who, despite being a contemporary of prominent Transcendentalists, remains more externally focused on her environs in *Rural Hours* than does Thoreau in the more philosophical *Walden*, although both texts ultimately promote greater environmental awareness. Often categorized alongside *Walden* as an important early example of American nature writing, *Rural Hours* has also been named the first American work of bioregionalism, a movement in which authors are especially knowledgeable about a location's natural history, and the later development of which was largely attributable to regional realists and local colorists.⁴ Like Cooper, Jewett and Chopin help advance bioregionalist philosophies because of their profound sense of place and its cultural history, as well as their sensitivity toward the sustainability of its inhabitants, primarily the women.⁵ Although the connection has remained unexplored, the gap between Transcendentalism and ecofeminism, by way of bioregionalism, is perhaps most clearly bridged via these authors' shared interest in the rural female recluse, a recurring emblem of transforming environmental and cultural sensibilities. Indeed, each recluse's personal experience is clearly connected to a specific rural locale and relative to its cultural history and natural environment. In addition to the Romantic associations of such connections between identity and place, emotions and nature, both authors, but predominantly Chopin, also perpetuate the flowering of symbolism associated with the earlier movement by attaching sociological significance to characters and natural features, namely bodies of water. Nevertheless, Chopin and Jewett use these symbols to advance messages that are firmly rooted in reality and that challenge unequal distributions of power. Indeed, depicting the rural hermitage as an ideal refuge for women discriminated against in some fashion allows

the authors to critique oppressive social hierarchies—such as that of the postbellum plantation—as well as address how these systems pose environmental threats to specific landscapes.

For Chopin, this location is frequently the Cane River area of Natchitoches Parish in west-central Louisiana, where she sets *At Fault* and *Beyond the Bayou*, both of which include characters, one minor and one the protagonist, whose near-seclusion in nature allows their transcendence of constrictive social codes, and which thereby embody a politics of place and an identification with the earth, key facets of the bioregionalist mindset.⁶ Romance drives the melodramatic plot of *At Fault*, but Chopin develops a cast of noteworthy secondary characters during her telling of the union of Thérèse Lafirme, the Creole widow and owner of Place-du-Bois, a 4,000-acre plantation on Louisiana's Cane River, and David Hosmer, a Northerner who builds a lumber mill on Thérèse's land.⁷ One such minor figure in this postwar narrative of regional reconciliation is Marie Louise, a coal black and enormously fat Creole former servant who has cared for Thérèse since infancy (80). Because of her weight and her dislike for the American plantation hands, Marie Louise chooses, despite Thérèse's repeated pleas that she move back to the plantation proper, to live in relative solitude and only cross the river under rare circumstances. Hence, Marie Louise enters into just two chapters in the novel and only when a more prominent character crosses the river that separates her cabin from the rest of the plantation and visits the elderly woman. The curious location of Marie Louise's home—its separation by water from the rest of Place-du-Bois—stands out because of its direct relationship to the death of Marie Louise, who perishes inside her cabin when the riverbank on which it sits is swept away, and because of its striking similarities to a setting developed in greater detail in another of Chopin's works, the short story *Beyond the Bayou*, published a year after *At Fault*. In both stories, Chopin's women across the water are emblems of waning Southern traditions,

specifically the black Southerner's relegation by whites to a second-tier social position, but also, though seldom read as such, testaments to the cathartic power of nature and harbingers of warnings about the potential effects of rapid changes to the landscape. The women's rejection of plantation society for near-solitude thereby welcomes ecofeminist consideration, as the agrarian lifestyle these characters flee revolves around a labor system that promotes the subjugation of women and African Americans.

Although readers remain unaware of the extent to which the horrors of slavery influenced Marie Louise's and La Folle's decisions to live in near seclusion (we know only that Marie Louise dislikes the American plantation hands and that La Folle was terrified by her exposure to Civil War fighting), and Chopin paints a rather rosy picture of post-Reconstruction servant life in Louisiana, it would be a gross oversight not to read in these characters' hermitic behaviors evidence of the damaging psychological effects of slavery. According to Paul Outka, after the war, the traumatic truth of antebellum Southern history [...] threatened to unravel the core white antebellum fantasy of the Southern plantation as an aristocratic racial Eden, rewriting what was perhaps the foundational myth of Southern whiteness according to a traumatic template.⁸ That Chopin gives these former slaves autonomy in *At Fault* and *Beyond the Bayou* and does not directly address any trauma they might have experienced as slaves—whether, for example, either solitary woman had family members from whom she was involuntarily separated—suggests that Chopin was at least tempted to perpetuate a postbellum nostalgia fantasy.⁹ Nevertheless, her adherence to such a fantasy is tenuous at best, and the isolation of Marie Louise and La Folle—precisely because its causes are only vaguely outlined—indicates that these characters' retreats into more natural realms are attributable primarily to the general trauma associated with being subjected to the systematic degradation of slavery, with being chattel.

Without providing sordid details of the women's lives as slaves, Chopin nevertheless critiques racial oppression by closely associating each woman with a portion of the Southern landscape that had been ravaged during the Civil War and that was still undergoing dangerously rapid alterations.

To examine the literary functions of Marie Louise of *At Fault* and La Folle of *Beyond the Bayou* without considering the unique geographical characteristics of the locations of their hermitages is to overlook how Chopin uses landscape—water, specifically, in these two instances—to highlight the degree of her characters' isolation. As Robin Warren has suggested, Landscape, both altered and natural, frames the actions of the characters in Chopin's stories and shapes the contours of their everyday lives [...]. Thus, to understand fully the culture of Kate Chopin's Cane River stories is to understand the physical geography of their setting.¹⁰ Certainly, as her most well-known work, *The Awakening* (1899), demonstrates, water is an important emblem in Chopin's fiction, operating on a symbolically dichotomous level as a powerful source of both life and death. Chopin emphasizes the importance of water in *The Awakening* when she tells us that [t]he voice of the sea speaks to the soul. The touch of the sea is sensuous, enfolding the body in its soft, close embrace (535). Water helps open Edna Pontellier's eyes to her body's capabilities and desires when she learns to swim at Grand Isle; it becomes the destroyer of this newfound self-awareness when she cannot reconcile these personal desires with social expectations and allows herself to drown. Marie Louise and La Folle have a less sensuous but similarly conflicted relationship with the water near their modest cabins. The element enhances the bucolic nature of their solitude and acts as a buffer from the influence of the plantations they have fled, as well as the memories of slavery and the Civil War, but also

serves as a threat to their day-to-day well-being as an uncontrollable force and barrier to potential human aid.

Marie Louise: An Emblem of Change

The self-published *At Fault*, which was well received by a number of contemporary reviewers, has garnered little critical attention compared to Chopin's more well-known works, such as *The Awakening*.¹¹ After the novel's republication in 1970, however, more scholars began to look past its romantic plot to the many important late-nineteenth-century social issues Chopin addresses in the novel. Divorce, alcoholism, racial discord, the changing roles of women in society, and the rapid and often unwelcome industrialization of the post-Civil War South come to the forefront as Chopin finally arrives at a happy ending for her two main characters, Thérèse and Hosmer. Yet she brings a number of secondary figures to their tragic ends—among them Marie Louise, the Creole former slave who has been with her since infancy, moving to Place-du-Bois from New Orleans with Thérèse after her marriage to Mr. Lafirme (81).¹² Most critics who have addressed Marie Louise's role in the novel see her as primarily symbolic, in line with a plot that revolves around a tidy emblematic pairing, that of Thérèse and Hosmer.¹³ As Suzanne Green and David Caudle note in a rather typical interpretation of the novel, Thérèse's marriage to Hosmer becomes not only a love match but a symbolic representation of the shotgun wedding between agriculture and industry that was occurring all over the post-Reconstruction South.¹⁴ Accordingly, Marie Louise and her cabin are typically read as emblematic of the Southern customs Thérèse wishes to preserve. Donald A. Ringe interprets Marie Louise as the symbolic link to Thérèse's past, the dissolution of which allows her to embark on a romantic future with Hosmer.¹⁵ Maureen Anderson sees in the washing away of Marie Louise's cabin a suggestion of the sacrament of Baptism, cleans[ing] Place du Bois of its Old South Symbols.¹⁶ Similarly,

Robert D. Arner views the Cane River as the master symbol of the changes occurring at Place-du-Bois, a force that eats away at the land on which Marie Louise's cabin stands, as well as Thérèse's narrowness of vision.¹⁷ The literary relationship between La Folle and Marie Louise has remained unexplored, however, and warrants further analysis because of the insight it offers into Chopin's sympathetic racial consciousness, as well as her ability to use natural elements metaphorically to promote, simultaneously, a more cautious consideration of both land use and the female psyche.¹⁸

The carefully calculated symbolism associated with the repeated water-woman-hermitage motif reveals not only Chopin's keen awareness of sociopolitical changes occurring in the post-war South, but also her penchant for intertwining environmental and feminist themes, and acknowledging the presence of these themes complicates a reading of the novel as one structured on simplistic symbolic dichotomies. Indeed, Chopin's novel does not, as the common symbolic reconciliation reading suggests, promote the popular and sentimental version of the pastoral ideal characterized by Leo Marx as a simple-minded wishfulness, a romantic perversion of thought and feeling,¹⁹ but rather a more complex sort that suggests her anxieties about changes to the landscape. More specifically, Chopin's book embraces a combination of pastoral and georgic sensibilities, for her protagonist wishes to preserve her rural lifestyle, not purely because of her sentimental attachment to Place-du-Bois, but also because of her belief in the possibility of environmental-economic balance, which derives from her firsthand knowledge of the land.²⁰ Certainly, Thérèse's regard for her Louisiana plantation's agricultural landscape and lifestyle stems largely from an emotional connection; however, this connection transcends mere romantic perversion because it originates with her day-to-day interactions with the land and its laborers. Ultimately, *At Fault* celebrates a cultivated, prosperous landscape, rather than the

simplistic and unrealistic pastoral ideal. Of course, that the lifestyle Thèrèse wishes to preserve depends largely on an unjust socio-racial hierarchy unsettles her convictions about its suitability and ultimately contributes to her acceptance of the inevitability of change.

The events of *At Fault* take place during a period when Southern agrarian areas similar to Place-du-Bois were beginning to see the effects of post-Reconstruction industrialization, and this setting allows Chopin to address widespread Southern anxieties about land use, primarily the prospective threat to agrarianism. Just after her husband's death, Thèrèse was driven from her plantation home by the encroaching railroad, her house abandoned to the inroads of progressive civilization, and the style of her new homestead highlights her respect for Southern tradition:

In building, she avoided the temptations offered by modern architectural innovations, and clung to the simplicity of large rooms and broad verandas (6). She resents the presence of the train station—that veritable machine in the garden—which squatted a brown and ugly intruder within her fair domain, and which she fears will bring a visionary troop of evils to the region (6-7).²¹ Nevertheless, when approached by Hosmer with a moneyed offer, she grants him permission to build a lumber mill on Place-du-Bois, though she does so with reluctance (8). Increasingly resigned to the inevitability of the industrial influences coming to the Cane River region—most likely because, as Karen Cole has noted, Northern influences in timber bolstered a depressed, postwar Southern economy—Thèrèse flees to the beloved woods bordering her plantation and [bids] a tearful farewell to the silence (9).²²

Over the ensuing year, the relationship between Hosmer and Thèrèse deepens in spite of their social differences, as do the environmental effects of time and industrialization on Place-du-Bois. As Anderson has noted, the ideal pastoral landscape of Place-du-Bois, bordered by the pine forest and the Cane River, is continually threatened by change, and as the novel progresses,

these barriers erode.²³ Despite her feelings for Hosmer, Thérèse, refuses to reciprocate his sentiments based on her beliefs about the immorality of his divorce to Fanny Larrimore, the prejudices of her Catholic education coloring her sentiment (31). Thérèse declares his divorce the act of a coward and challenges him to do what is right regarding Fanny (37). Thus, Hosmer travels to St. Louis where he reconciles with and remarries Fanny and shortly afterwards brings her to Thérèse's plantation to live. The marriage quickly declines, however, when Fanny begins to suspect her husband's affections for Thérèse and to drink heavily. Both Thérèse and Hosmer are also rendered miserable in Fanny's presence, and Thérèse begins to question the validity of her moral judgment, to feel that she might be at fault for this dreadful state of affairs. It is while she is in this rare state of self-doubt that Thérèse visits Marie Louise's cabin.

The cabin serves as an Edenic refuge from the stresses of the plantation: It was somewhat more pretentious than others of its class, being fashioned of planed painted boards, and having a brick chimney that stood fully exposed at one end. A great rose tree climbed and spread generously over one side, and the big red roses grew by hundreds amid the dark green setting of their leaves (80). Because of Marie Louise's ever increasing weight and contempt for *ces nèges Américains*, 'as she called the plantation hands—a restless lot forever shifting about and changing quarters, she no longer works for Thérèse, nor has she crossed the river onto Place-du-Bois for years, except in circumstances of the utmost importance—to nurse Thérèse through an illness in one instance, and to act as the head chef at an important dinner in another (81). It becomes clear that the cabin and Marie Louise are deeply enmeshed in the matrix of traditional beliefs weighing heavily on Thérèse's mind. As Thérèse gazes upon the Cane River rolling by Marie Louise's home, she gives herself up to doubts and misgivings as she questions her interference in Hosmer's relationship with Fanny (81). She indulges in the

daydream of what her life may have been like had she married Hosmer and is unsettled by her wonder at whether Fanny's happiness is worth the sacrifices she and Hosmer had made (82). This moral deliberation over the institution of marriage versus the benefits of divorce exhausts Thérèse, and she enters Marie Louise's bucolic cabin, where the servant soothes her by stroking her hair. Rather than divulge the details of her predicament to Marie Louise, however, Thérèse begins talking to the older woman about her cabin, which, like Thérèse's moral convictions, is in a precarious state.

Marie Louise and her home are, as Anderson and Arner have noted, symbolically linked to the social and political changes occurring in the South, but the importance of the cabin's physical location to Chopin's warnings about land use has remained unexplored. The cabin stands in a dangerous place, perched [h]igh up and perilously near the edge of the river, which is constantly eroding the banks and carrying away great sections from the land (80). Thérèse suggests moving the cabin back from the water's edge for what would be a second time, insisting that Marie Louise will end up in the river one day if she doesn't relocate, leaving Thérèse with nobody to love her. Despite Marie Louise's greatly inferior social position—she is, after all, a tenant on Thérèse's property and therefore subject to her decisions—she resists Thérèse's pleas and asserts that she is too old to move again. If the good God does not want to take care of me, then it's time for me to go, she declares (83). Nor will Marie Louise move in with Thérèse or allow her to build her a pretty little house on Place-du-Bois. She feels safe in her home because a priest has recently blessed it with holy water and thereby, she believes, caused the profusion of roses, and given her medals adorned with the Virgin Mary, one of which Marie Louise has on display like a silver star above her door (83). Nature and faith have wrapped themselves around Marie Louise in a comforting embrace, providing her with a refuge from the

plantation, and given her the confidence and a reason to take advantage of her elevated postwar social position by respectfully defying Thérèse and choosing the life that most suits her.

According to Arner, Marie Louise knows that change, decomposition, and death are part of the natural rhythm of things, and unlike Thérèse, who at this point still resists all change, she attempts to live in harmony with total nature.²⁴ The former servant foreshadows her symbolically necessary demise at nature's hands, as well as the specific circumstances of her death, by declaring to Thérèse that when she dies she will be in her house with her belongings (83).

Marie Louise disappears from the novel at this point, only to return when she is again visited, this time by Fanny, who flees Hosmer after an argument and crosses the river to get liquor from a servant. A drunken Fanny arrives on Marie Louise's doorstep during a raging storm where she, like Thérèse, finds warmth and comfort. Hosmer tracks down his wife, but Fanny refuses to leave Marie Louise's home, despite several attempts by Marie Louise to initiate reconciliation between the couple. Frustrated, Hosmer leaves the cabin and boards the flat that crosses the river, and while the flat is midstream, the ground on which Marie Louise's cabin stands at last gives way to the raging river. As the cabin quickly sinks, the smoke issuing in dense clouds from its shattered sides, the house toppling and the roof caving, Hosmer sees Fanny appear through the partially submerged door and jumps into the water after her (148). His efforts to save her are in vain, however, and [o]f Marie Louise there was no sign (148). This tremendous scene marks the end of Marie Louise's life and her role in the novel; however, as critics commonly note, her death resonates with symbolic significance, as it pointedly represents the erosion of Southern traditions. In Anderson's appraisal, As important representations of an Old South, Marie Louise and her cabin are fated victims to the ongoing transformation of the

plantation. Chopin provides the character of Marie Louise with little depth beyond the stereotypical mammy character so that when the old nurse is washed into the river, the reader feels little sympathy for the character.²⁵ Certainly, the death of the more despicable Fanny seems somehow more tragic than the loss of this self-sufficient, motherly former slave, allowing the reader to focus more on the symbolism of Marie Louise's demise than its sadness. The scene suggests social progress because the washing away of Old South traditions also means the eradication of an economic structure built on slave labor. The breaking away of Marie Louise's cabin seems a necessary symbolic loss in the ideological progression toward an era during which blacks and whites might dwell—metaphorically—on more equal ground in the South.

Fittingly, once these emblems of Thérèse's past disappear, she becomes more open to change. When the Cane River claims Fanny and Marie Louise (whose body is never recovered), Thérèse loosens her grip on her traditionally Southern ideals. Although she predicted she would have nobody to care for her if Marie Louise died, after both Marie Louise and Fanny are drowned, Thérèse is finally able to overlook Hosmer's divorce and marry him. Their union is stereotypically happy, but it too seems symbolically appropriate according to the thematic merging of the North and South. The deaths of Fanny and Marie Louise, also representatives of the regions, are consequences of this inevitable but tension-filled union of lifestyles and ideals. According to Ringe, Marie Louise and Fanny represent the last links to the past of the two main characters. [...] Their deaths in the river may be seen as a final symbolic freeing of Thérèse and David from their former selves.²⁶ The novel's optimistic ending suggests that Thérèse and David and the ideals they represent have successfully merged.

Certainly, *At Fault's* attention to social evolution through symbolic representations of characters and landscape highlight Chopin's keen awareness of the perilous state of Southern

agrarian traditions and irrepressible Northern influence around the turn of the century. However, despite the novel's optimistic outcome and the tidy symbolic and literal merging of Northern and Southern commercial ideals, a reading of the novel as one centered on regional symbolic dualities alone oversimplifies Chopin's work, in part because Americans' relationships to their changing landscape were riddled with contradiction during the era in which Chopin was writing. As Annette Kolodny has demonstrated, A conscious and determined struggle to formulate for themselves the meaning of their landscape characterizes the writing of nineteenth-century Americans as they navigated conflicting sentiments about their responsibilities toward the land.²⁷ This quintessentially American dilemma—Should we tread lightly on the land or attempt to subdue it?—is especially evident in Chopin's first novel, for, as Cole has pointed out, If the unchecked greed of Hosmer's postindustrial economy threatens the beloved woods, so too does the uncontrollable force of nature threaten culture when the river destroys Marie Louise and her cabin.²⁸ In a similarly contradictory fashion, Marie Louise is both personally rewarded by her reverence for the solitude provided by nature and destroyed by it. As an emblem not only of the Old South, but also the natural world—in this case, a rose-covered and idealistic but therefore also typical symbol of rustic America—Marie Louise's violent end points to the imminent demise of this natural sanctuary in the American South. Marie Louise's death is just as symbolically celebratory of social advancement as it is symbolically cautionary about environmental degradation.

By reading Chopin as a bioregionalist—one who is as in tune with the effects of human activities on the land as she is with the landscape's effect on human behavior—we can recognize in the unsettling circumstances of Marie Louise's demise a cautionary tale about the danger of rapid environmental changes. Indeed, the tragedy-riddled prelude to the marriage of Thérèse and

Hosmer, of the South and the North, foreshadows looming environmental destruction, as Hosmer's milling of the Piney Woods would alter the landscape of Chopin's Natchitoches Parish as it is presented in *At Fault*.²⁹ Prior to what Albert E. Cowdrey characterizes as the great commercial assault on southern timber that occurred during the Gilded Age, the exploitation of southern forests had been kept in check by numerous factors, including a lack of population and industry, although Southerners apparently had few reservations about felling trees to meet construction, fuel, and fencing needs.³⁰ For Louisiana, this restrained deforestation ended in the decades leading up to World War I when, as Robin Warren explains, the state became a center of the timber industry in the United States and the stately longleaf pine was [...] soon gone, leaving behind it fields of slash that burned over and over again until the federal government bought much of the barren, cut over land and turned it into the Kisatchie National Forest.³¹ The events of Chopin's novel occur during and acknowledge the beginning of this precarious era in the environmental history of Louisiana's pine woods.

Furthermore, the erosion of the riverbank responsible for Marie Louise's death would likely have been increased by the lumber milling on Place-du-Bois because, although erosion occurs naturally, human land use including agriculture and lumber milling can increase its rate dramatically. Hence, Marie Louise's violent erosion-related drowning suggests that Chopin saw in the agrarian South an environmental middle ground, one where humans could live off the land when a certain balance of agriculture and less altered nature—in this case, the Piney Woods—was maintained. Although she might not have been able to foresee the precise ecological effects of deforestation, Chopin's anxieties are well-founded, as the process has the potential to disrupt agricultural opportunities because deforestation wreaks havoc on the hydrological cycle by causing flooding first, then erosion, and then a decrease in rainfall.³² Thus, although Chopin

ignores the potential ecological damages wrought by farming, she nevertheless seems to recognize that too many alterations to the land, performed too quickly and in addition to agriculture, would have deadly effects for its human inhabitants—particularly those lower on the social scale.³³ Her allegiance to the georgic ideal and corresponding resistance to alterations to the land performed outside of agrarian activities is even more clearly presented in her short story *Beyond the Bayou*.

La Folle's Agrarian Refuge

In this *Bayou Folk* tale, Chopin again introduces a female servant who dwells alone in a cabin set off from a plantation by water, the water and solitary figure once again symbolically facilitating Chopin's commentary on changing Southern ideals, and the character's defiance of social norms suggesting the transformative powers of nature and, by extension, the necessity for its preservation. Like Marie Louise's cabin, La Folle's hermitage is neatly surrounded by water and the Piney Woods that act, once again, as both comforting buffers and precarious barriers:

The bayou curved like a crescent around the point of land on which La Folle's cabin stood. Between the stream and the hut lay a big abandoned field, where cattle were pastured when the bayou supplied them with water enough. Through the woods that spread back into unknown regions the woman had drawn an imaginary line, and past this circle she never stepped. This was the form of her only mania. (216)

For years she has dwelt alone in her solitary cabin after a terrifying incident during the skirmishing and sharpshooting of the Civil War that brought her master's bloodied son to her mother's cabin for refuge (216). Her mental limitations have not hindered her self-sufficiency, however, and this unusually physically strong woman is a successful farmer, having made her patch of cotton and corn and tobacco like the best of them (216). Her idyllic refuge is more

agrarian than Marie Louise's rose-covered home, but it too is the most suitable dwelling for this sensitive former slave, who takes comfort in the simplicities of rustic life, such as the proximity of cattle grazing near her cabin at night, rather than in Christian faith. Although their cabins' settings are undeniably similar, however, these characters' fates could not be more different, as Marie Louise's narrative ends in death and La Folle's in a state of euphoria with her conquering of the morbid and insane dread she had been under since childhood and her post-bellum return to Bellissime (218).

Chopin adopts a similar attitude toward Southern agrarian traditions in *Beyond the Bayou*, despite the happier fate of this story's isolated Creole servant. Like Marie Louise, La Folle is unable to cross the water separating her cabin and her master's plantation, although the barriers keeping Marie Louise and La Folle out of plantation society are vastly different. While the physical hindrances of enormous heft and age, coupled with disdain for the plantation's promiscuous American servants, prevent Marie Louise from crossing the Cane River, an intense fear of leaving the sanctuary of her cabin grounds—perhaps the sort of pathological anxiety produced as a sort of ex-post-facto readiness for the originary event typical of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder—keeps La Folle at home.³⁴ La Folle (the crazy in English) hasn't crossed the bayou since her childhood when she was scared out of her senses by the young man who ran into her mother's house, covered in blood and gunpowder, seeking refuge from Union pursuers (216). This young man, once known as P'tit Maître (little master), now runs Bellissime, the plantation on which La Folle has spent her entire life. He has several daughters whom La Folle has befriended with her fantastical stories of events taking place yonda, beyon' the bayou, but the servant has an especially close relationship with ten-year-old Chéri, the owner's son (216). One day after a visit to La Folle, Chéri goes hunting near her cabin and shoots himself in the leg

and afterwards arrives on her doorstep in what must seem to La Folle like a traumatic reenactment of the event plaguing her past. Nevertheless, La Folle carries the bleeding, crying child to the edge of the bayou and halts, screaming frantically for someone to help her. Standing at the edge of the unusually low water, La Folle experiences a terrible fear ... the fear of the world beyond the bayou (218). In this state of panic, La Folle's concern for Chéri overwhelms her fear of crossing the bayou. As she carries the bleeding boy to the plantation homestead, former slaves from across Bellissime flock to the unusual sight of La Folle in their midst. She delivers Chéri to her master's doorstep and faints, a behavior that indicates the force of the psychic strain imposed by La Folle's return to the plantation.

Nevertheless, La Folle awakens back in her isolated cabin the next day but then immediately prepares to repeat the journey, calmly, as if no tempest had shaken and threatened her existence but yesterday (220), and seemingly inspired by the physical splendor of the landscape beyond her cabin's plot. On this day, La Folle is joyous and full of wonder as she strides confidently toward the master's house and notices that the white, bursting cotton, with the dew upon it, gleamed for acres and acres like frosted silver in the early dawn (221). Her journey is deeply sensuous as she reawakens to the world, specifically the world of nature, beyond her little patch of earth. She treads slowly and with delight over the springy turf, that was delicious beneath her tread (221). The long-forgotten scents of violets, magnolias, jasmine, and roses overwhelm La Folle's olfactory senses, and then, standing for the second time in twenty-four hours on the front porch of the plantation homestead, [e]xultation possessed her soul (221). La Folle's delight is only enhanced when she learns that Chéri is recovering nicely from his gunshot wound. Overall, La Folle's re-entry into plantation society is nothing short of rapturous: A look of wonder and deep content crept into her face as she watched for the first

time the sun rise upon the new, the beautiful world beyond the bayou (222). This landscape is for La Folle primarily a vegetative one, however, and she exhibits little interest in the homes of the plantation hands whom she baffled the day before, indicating her allegiance to nature over her fellow humans, those links to her psychologically injurious past (and likely those who bestowed upon her the derogatory nickname), which solitude helped soothe and repair.

Although Chopin's lavish description of La Folle's second plantation visit is overtly pastoral, she resists partaking fully in what Outka describes as the nostalgic inversion of the historical trauma of slavery that was characterized by white authors' compulsion to rewrite the Southern past into an unrealistic story of a lost racial Eden where everyone knew their place and was happy in it.³⁵ Indeed, Chopin makes it clear that La Folle was, in fact, severely traumatized as a slave, and that she can willingly visit the plantation only when she begins to perceive it as a new and beautiful world and not the source of violence.

Certainly, Chopin's similar temporary geographic placement of Marie Louise and La Folle suggests that the evolving position of the female Creole slave-turned-servant was prominent, at least for a time, in the author's social consciousness, and like Marie Louise, La Folle is a symbolic representative of the South—of its bloody past but more explicitly of its potential future. Whereas Marie Louise perishes in the name of social progress as a symbol of repressive Southern ideals, La Folle's glorious return to Bellissime signifies the ushering in of an era of greater racial equality—an era in which former slaves, like Marie Louise and La Folle, might defy their former masters with greater confidence. Although Timothy Nixon interprets La Folle's journey as peaceful re-entry into plantation life, a validation and idealization of a socio-racial hierarchy built on blacks' submission to whites and, therefore, evidence of the author's own complacency toward racism, La Folle's final actions in the story disrupt a reading of

Beyond the Bayou as intrinsically racist.³⁶ Indeed, La Folle recognizes upon re-entering plantation life that her social position as a black servant has improved during her absence from society, a revelation made clear by her bold behavior upon her first visits in decades to the Bellissime manor and Chopin's characterization of the world beyond the bayou as new to La Folle. As Green notes, at the end of the nineteenth century, it was highly unusual—and daring—for a Black woman to come to the front door and expect to be admitted to the house.³⁷ Yet La Folle does just this, not once but twice in the course of the narrative. On the second occasion, La Folle is greeted by Chéri's surprised mother and is told that the boy is sleeping soundly and asked to return later—a request La Folle politely but firmly declines: *Non, madame, I'm goin' wait yair tell Chéri wake up,* she says and sits down on a porch step (222). La Folle's calm rejection of the madame's request and the madame's acceptance of La Folle's attitude—behaviors that mirror Marie Louise's dismissal of Thérèse's suggestions that she move again and Thérèse's subsequent acquiescence to her wishes—indicate that the South has, in fact, changed during the servant's absence.

Indeed, La Folle returns to Bellissime to discover an atmosphere in which social expectations for all races are undergoing modification. According to Green, her gentle refusal to leave is La Folle's sign that she will not be dismissed because she is a member of the Other race—that had been traditionally less important than the One white race. Green further points out that La Folle begins to subvert the superior attitude that Blacks faced. She silently refuses to participate in a dialogue that is based in the master-slave narrative, thus positioning herself such that she can begin to rise above her separated societal status.³⁸ Thus, La Folle's journey across the bayou and behavior at Bellissime symbolize the voyage of all former slaves toward an era of greater racial equality in the South. Despite the divergent outcomes in the tales of Marie

Louise and La Folle, Chopin's symbolic treatment of these key characters and their unique forays into near-solitude as a means of escaping socio-racial systems built on subjugation reflect the author's concerns about the South's quickly evolving socioeconomic structure and corresponding environmental threats, which were offset by her welcoming of greater racial equality. The clearly established servant-water-hermitage link allows Chopin to develop an intricately interwoven message about gender, race, and the environment that marks her work as bioregional and proto-ecofeminist.

Although this story's most prominent themes appear to be cultural, it, like *At Fault*, reflects Chopin's adherence to georgic ideals, as La Folle's triumph suggests that the Southern agrarian landscape might be preserved, even improved, after the devastating impact of the Civil War, without slave labor and with greater equality among races. Like Marie Louise's role in *At Fault*, La Folle's symbolic significance extends well beyond that of a representative of the South's past and future, as she, too, is overtly associated with nature, though it is, in this case, an agrarian landscape to which she is most closely linked, instead of the less-altered pine woods. For La Folle, who has grown her own food near her hermitage and who relishes agricultural achievement, escaping the limits of her comforting but isolated plot opens the door for greater personal satisfaction, which is emphasized by her delight in the greater biodiversity of the land beyond her hermitage. Chopin's interest in the land's agrarian capacities and how they inform and are shaped by its human inhabitants, as well as the importance of both personal development and community to these rural areas, contributes to her stories' bioregionalist themes. Indeed, inherent to the bioregional perspective encouraged by Kirkpatrick Sale is the necessity for an awareness of a region's agricultural potential— [t]he limits of its resources; the carrying capacities of its lands and waters; the places where it must not be stressed; the places where its

bounties can best be developed; the treasures it holds and the treasures it withholds.³⁹ La Folle recognizes at once the more diverse vegetative treasures of the plantation proper—luxurious flowers and graceful palms accentuating the vast acres of cotton and creating a scene that looked like enchantment beneath the sparkling sheen of dew (221)—and this fertility encourages her return. Because of her agricultural skills, this is a place where she might better hone her individual potential, but also become a member of the community she had forsaken, and thereby embrace yet another prominent aspect of the bioregional vision, as, according to Sale, by living closer to the land one necessarily lives closer to the community, able to enjoy the communitarian values of cooperation, participation, sodality, and reciprocity that enhance individual development.⁴⁰ It is only when the social structure of the community has been altered, however, its antebellum racial hierarchy begun to be unsettled, that La Folle exhibits a desire to rejoin its ranks.

Hence, as it is for Marie Louise, rural nature is a source of both protection and empowerment for La Folle, and her story highlights the spiritual and practical resources available to women, specifically to black women at a crucial point in the history of race relations in the South, who develop intimate knowledge of the land. That La Folle is Creole, born in America and, more specifically, a native of the Cane River region, further emphasizes her long-term association with a specific landscape. Solitude soothes La Folle while she deals with the horrors of wartime memories, and her self-cultivated crops sustain her; in turn, La Folle bestows upon rural nature and its diversity an attitude of intense respect. La Folle's behaviors, as well as those of notable Jewett hermits, prefigure the contemporary practices associated with ecotherapy, a type of psychotherapy that recognizes the interconnectedness of humans' and nature's wellbeing and seeks to heal the human psyche and the currently dysfunctional, even lethal, human-nature

relationship through activities that frequently involve close interaction with nature.⁴¹ In promoting a similar sort of reciprocal relationship, Chopin also challenges the circumstances responsible for La Folle's long-term seclusion, namely the violence and social hierarchies perpetuated by slavery. She is, like Marie Louise, only suited for plantation life when that society rises to begin to meet her sensible expectations about peace and equality.

In contrast to Marie Louise, that rotund, morally upstanding, motherly figure of *At Fault*, however, La Folle, despite her maternal attitude toward her master's son, is notably more masculine in her physique and interests, traits that allow Chopin to blur socially constructed lines between genders and thereby challenge readers' expectations. Indeed, the large, gaunt black woman possesses more physical strength than most men (216), which contributes to her agricultural self-sufficiency and, more importantly, discourages the common associations between femaleness and fragility. La Folle is not a typical earth mother figure whose close association with nature dangerously invites subjugation due to traditionally gendered interpretations of the land—described by Kolodny as America's oldest and most cherished fantasy: a daily reality of harmony between man and nature based on an experience of the land as essentially feminine⁴²—but a notably more progressive image of womanhood. She is physically capable, emotionally resilient, and instinctively maternal. In essence, whereas Marie Louise perishes as an emblem of waning Southern ideals, La Folle ultimately thrives as a female representative of the New South—a place where opportunities, though still primarily agrarian, are beginning to be available on a more equal basis among genders and races.

The Women of Jewett's Coastal Maine

While she is less interested in agrarianism than Chopin, Jewett also attaches great importance to her characters' relationships with their landscape, primarily coastal Maine and its

declining maritime settlements, much like the town of South Berwick where Jewett was raised. Though often labeled a regional realist or local colorist, her works are even less classifiable than Chopin's but, therefore, even more receptive to cross-category analysis of how prominent bioregionalist themes invite ecofeminist interpretations. As Marjorie Pryse has suggested, Jewett's writing encourages us to avoid substituting one category for another and also to be less reductive, more attuned to the borders across and between the categories we construct as critics, whether we understand these categories to be literary modes (realism, local color, regionalism), subject positions (race, class, gender), or narrative forms (story, sketch, novel).⁴³ Like Chopin's awareness of the environmental risks posed by industrialization to the pine woods of Louisiana, Jewett saw in the changing landscape around her potential threats to both animal and human inhabitants, and Richardson has argued that in *Country of the Pointed Firs* and select Dunnet Landing stories, Jewett's representations of nature call for a renovation of attitudes about humans and the environment, a call that illustrates Jewett as a proponent of ecology.⁴⁴

Certainly, Jewett exhibits thoughtful understanding of the interconnectedness of the environmental health of her rural settings and the health of their inhabitants. Her concerns about the environmental impact of increasing industrial activities are perhaps most directly expressed in the sketch *The White Rose Road*, first published in 1889, in which she describes a carriage outing in the rural area near the fishing village of Ogunquit, Maine.⁴⁵ She recalls:

Once, as you came close to the river, you were sure to find fishermen scattered along,—sometimes I myself have been discovered; but it is not much use to go fishing any more. If some public-spirited person would kindly be the Frank Buckland of New England, and try to have the laws enforced that protect the inland fisheries, he would do his country great service. Years ago, there were so many salmon that, as an enthusiastic old friend

once assured me, you could walk across on them below the falls; but now they are unknown, simply because certain substances which would enrich the farms are thrown from factories and tanneries into our clear New England streams. Good river fish are growing very scarce. [...] [T]he supply of one necessary sort of good cheap food is lost to a growing community, for the lack of a little thought and care in the factory companies and saw-mills, and the building in some cases of fish-ways over the dams. I think that the need of preaching against this bad economy is very great. (720)⁴⁶

Although Jewett exhibits dismay at the disappearance of the salmon, her concerns are primarily anthropocentric, and her rhetoric promotes a little thought and care that would ultimately contribute to the practical sustainability of an important food source for New Englanders. That she foregrounds human need, however, does not negate the innovativeness or importance of her vision, for place-specific sensibility is a keystone of the bioregionalist agenda, which, according to Buell, aims to avoid the extremes of [...] free-floating sentimentalism of fancying that one is in tune with nature' or Gaia.'⁴⁷ While Jewett celebrates nature's wonders, her works are more focused on the ways in which her characters, particularly the women, can benefit personally from intimate knowledge of the natural features of their isolated communities.

Hence, Jewett's works, like Chopin's, also promote a bioregionalist agenda through her historical familiarity with and sensitivity toward rural coastal towns and their inhabitants, and they suggest proto-ecofeminist themes through her repeated portrayals of a potentially cathartic and empowering natural world that women might respectfully use to transcend restrictive customs. As Willa Cather, a friend and admirer of the author, noted, Miss Jewett wrote of the people who grew out of the soil and the life of the country near her heart, not about exceptional individuals at war with their environment.⁴⁸ Indeed, although coastal life proves difficult for

some of Jewett's characters, many of whom were widowed early because of their husbands' dangerous work at sea, most greet their relative seclusion, which increased following the demise of the maritime industry in Maine, with poise and quiet optimism.⁴⁹ As Laurie Crumpacker has observed, Jewett's characters comprise matrifocal communities where widows and spinsters, lonely wives and sweethearts can play leadership roles without significant male interference, and unlike her male characters, nearly all of Jewett's women seem energized by the struggle to survive under adverse conditions.⁵⁰ A member of the leisure class throughout her life, the figures that dominate the pages of her most well-known stories are nevertheless these women of rural Maine, the likes of whom she would have encountered on her many outings with her country physician father, and Jewett demonstrates a keen awareness of how these women's attitudes toward nature contribute to their well-being.⁵¹

That Jewett viewed women's roles in society in terms of their relationships with nature is especially evident in the nonfiction sketch titled *From a Mournful Villager* (1881) in which she writes:

The disappearance of many of the village front yards may come to be typical of the altered position of woman, and mark a stronghold on her way from the much talked-of slavery and subjection to a coveted equality. She used to be shut off from the wide acres of the farm, and had no voice in the world's politics; she must stay in the house, or only hold sway out of doors in this prim corner of land where she was queen. No wonder that women clung to their rights in their flower-gardens then, and no wonder that they have grown a little careless of them now, and that lawn mowers find so ready a sale. The whole world is their front yard nowadays! (587)

This celebratory passage seems premature in light of the many professional and educational opportunities, as well as property and voting rights, still unavailable to women in 1881; however, it highlights the clear-cut connection between women, land, and rights established by Jewett and other late-nineteenth-century women writers in their attention to rural lifestyles, and these themes show up repeatedly throughout the Jewett canon, both in her most well-known works and in other stories and autobiographical sketches about New England. If women are to continue to increase their equality in androcentric late-nineteenth-century America, her stories suggest, they must also demonstrate knowledge of the potential of the land beyond their village front gardens.

For example, Jewett's conceptualization of the mutually beneficial relationship with nature available to women is vividly expressed in the story *The Flight of Betsy Lane*, in which mostly elderly residents of the Byfleet Poor-farm enhance their subsistence by growing corn and beans and protect their crops by erecting each year a scarecrow made to resemble one of the poor-house family (797). Though this makeshift family includes some men, in the story Jewett describes the most recent scarecrows as easily recognized representations of two of the home's elderly women residents, standing on guard against the crows (797). The imagery here is striking and plainly symbolic of the women's appreciation for the agriculture that aids in their meager subsistence. And rural areas are not only a refuge for the elderly in Jewett's work, as they offer advantages to female New Englanders of all ages, many of whom exhibit mental peculiarities and antisocial behavior. In her much-anthologized story *A White Heron* (1886), young Sylvia, despite spending eight years in a crowded manufacturing town among a houseful of children, is especially suited for life at her grandmother's secluded homestead simply because she is [a]fraid of folks (670). The reasons for this silent child's fear remain

unexplained, but it is clear that the woods allow her to begin to flourish, and her final allegiance to the white heron over the attractive ornithologist suggests that they are also a source of growth and self-recognition. Indeed, it is at the top of the great pine overlooking the herons' nest that Sylvie realizes that she is a part of a vast and awesome world (676).

We might assume, from Jewett's description of Esther of the Dunnet Landing story *The Dunnet Shepherdess* (1899) that the possible years without male companionship ahead for Sylvia will enhance, rather than damage, her sensitive character. After having given up teaching for the lonely life of the shepherdess, Esther was untouched by the fret and fury of life; she had lived in sunshine and rain among her silly sheep, and had been refined instead of coarsened, while her touching patience with a ramping old mother [...] had given back a lovely self-possessing, and habit of sweet temper (527). Furthermore, the posthumously published sequel to Esther's story, *William's Wedding* (1910), suggests that isolation has not destroyed the shepherdess's romantic life or sexuality. For forty years William Blackett, brother of Mrs. Todd, makes a pretext of 'goin' fishin' so that he might visit Esther on her out-of-the-way farm (561), and after the death of Esther's mother, the elderly couple finally marry. The orphaned lamb Esther carries on her wedding day is suggestive of her long-preserved virginity; however, Esther is every bit the blushing bride, a pretty, girlish color brightening her cheeks as she anticipates moving into her husband's home (566). Thus, the hermitage for Jewett provides women young and old with a refuge from disagreeable lifestyles and patriarchal influences and an opportunity to hone their own, often especially unique, senses of self. The hardships associated with solitude polish these women and preserve, rather than diminish, their passion in all its forms.

Nevertheless, Jewett's hermitic characters generally experience some sort of hurtful experience that inspires their retreat, and the psychological effects of such events are not be

underestimated, for as feminist therapist Laura Brown has argued, common perceptions about what type of events constitute traumas should be expanded beyond those that occur publicly and are typically associated with male culture (such as wars) to include the experiences that women encounter in the interpersonal realm and at the hands of those [they] love and depend upon.⁵² Miss Joanna Todd of *Country of the Pointed Firs*, a long-dead legend among Dunnet Landing residents who is separated from society, and, in this case, from the mainland by a body of water, is a victim of such everyday trauma. Joanna's escape from her small coastal society, though different in its motivations, parallels the choices of Chopin's servant figures to live in near-solitude, doubly removed from urban America, without the comforts of companionship or the benefits of commerce. Furthermore, as it is for Marie Louise and La Folle, the rural hermitage is both a source of empowerment and danger for this important secondary character, as well as some of the other mostly solitary figures in the novel. As Kelly L. Richardson has pointed out, Peppered among the narrator's interactions with these characters are descriptions of Dunnet Landing and the surrounding islands, which show how nature nurtures as well as isolates, develops as well as deprives, gives as well as takes away.⁵³ Remembered twenty years after her death as a sort of nun or hermit person who lived out there for years all alone on Shell-heap Island, named for a still-visible collection of shells created by its former Native American inhabitants, Miss Joanna Todd sails from Dunnet Landing, a fictional seaport town on Coastal Maine, when her fiancé, a young man from the city, leaves her a month before their wedding for another woman (429-30). Joanna is financially secure, well-liked among Dunnet Landing citizens, and has caring relatives and another potential suitor, but her betrayal leaves her feeling like she was n't fit to live with anybody, and wanted to be free (429), and she never returns to the mainland.

In a novel populated with solitary figures, Joanna stands out because of the impetus for her seclusion, her profound guilt over her anger toward a God who would allow such duplicity, and this guilt derives from popular turn-of-the-century conceptions of ideal spiritual and womanly attitudes.⁵⁴ Mrs. Todd recalls Joanna's confession after her fiancé's betrayal: I was in great wrath and trouble, and my thoughts was so wicked towards God that I can't expect ever to be forgiven (439). Just as Marie Louise and La Folle find refuge in nature from the race- and gender-based social hierarchy of the plantation, Joanna flees a rural New England fishing village in which thriving puritanical beliefs inspire guilt over her justifiable, though perhaps misdirected, anger. In fact, Crumpacker sees in Reverend Dimmick, a Calvinist minister who attempts, unsuccessfully, to coax Joanna back to the mainland, Jewett's most devastating critique of the contemporary New England Ministry and ascribes Joanna's intense guilt to her upbringing among the Calvinist doctrines of humiliation and self-punishment.⁵⁵ Certainly, as Crumpacker also points out, the Reverend Dimmick, an awkward young man from inland, is negatively portrayed and especially offensive to Joanna, and even pious Mrs. Todd, when he chooses to read a prayer that emphasizes God's power.⁵⁶ Despite Joanna's blasphemy and resistance to the minister's concern for her spiritual state, however, she does not forsake Christianity on the island, which is made clear by the presence of a little old Bible a-layin' on the shelf in her cabin and her nun-like status in Dunnet Landing lore (433, 438). Hence, although Joanna is driven to the island by guilt attributable to residual Calvinist beliefs, her refusal to return indicates that she has adopted an alternative, more personalized religion in an environment well-suited to meditation (and inhospitable to drop-ins by meddling ministers). She maintains her spirituality through solitude, communion with nature, and faithfulness to her own ideals—and not those of the mainland community—and her lifestyle is ultimately an assertion of spiritual

independence. Fittingly, when the narrator visits Joanna's lonely spot on the island, she reflects on the shrines of solitude the world over (444).

In addition to the widely accepted repressive religious doctrines that encourage her withdrawal, turn-of-the-century domestic ideals also shape Joanna's decisions. Because, according to Alan Trachtenberg, in the last decades of the nineteenth century the image of the domestic sphere, with its hearth, its parlor table, its warm kitchen and loyal wife-mother, served as the centerpiece of a cluster of images representing the norm of American life,⁵⁷ one can assume that Joanna's wrath is closely linked to her humiliation, that of a woman who wa'n't so young as she had been and who had the sole dream of marryin', an' havin' a real home and somebody to look to (430). Her dismay at failing to live up to the status quo is also indicative of the economic era, as the capitalist ecological revolution of the nineteenth century, Carolyn Merchant has shown, split production and reproduction into two separate spheres and thereby contributed to the idealization of domesticity. According to Merchant, As the amorality of the marketplace created its moral antithesis in domesticity, high ideals were attached to women's functions within the home.⁵⁸ Thus, Joanna likely considers her inability to marry a failure to fulfill not only the economic and social expectations of her conservative coastal society, but also its moral expectations, which also helps account for her excessive guilt and subsequent self-imposed isolation, which, according to Mrs. Todd, she enacts as a penance (431).

Certainly, the society that promotes domesticity as the feminine ideal and thereby restricts professional opportunities leaves few options for young women who do not wed, and Joanna's rejection of Dunnet Landing and subsequent asceticism might also be read as a denunciation of market-influenced social politics. Paradoxically, however, Joanna's move to the island is not an act of entering unaltered nature and escaping all social conventions, but rather a

way of engaging in domesticity outside of the communal gaze. According to Vera Norwood, Joanna's retirement to the hermitage supports rather than subverts gentility—she isolates herself out of shame for being tricked by a scoundrel. Implicit in such behavior is women's role as conservator of the values of the home, family, and civilization in the face, not of wild nature, but of irresponsible men bred by the new urban wilderness.⁵⁹ Joanna preserves her decorum on the island by turning a rundown cabin built by her father into a sort of homelike and pleasant place, complete with a smoking chimney, a flower plot, and handmade floor mats, and by wearing a pretty gingham dress when she receives the rare visit from Mrs. Todd and the reverend during their unsuccessful mission to bring her back to Dunnet Landing (435, 437). Even in isolation, Joanna is compelled to live up to the feminine ideal, perhaps forever demonstrating to herself that she could have been a good wife to her wayward fiancé—though unwilling to demonstrate such skills purely for the sake of the community. She clearly takes pleasure in making a comfortable home on the desolate island, however, and the preservation of her femininity under such circumstances seems more like a personal triumph than an automated adherence to gender-prescriptive customs.

Despite Joanna's domestic achievements on the island, these triumphs nevertheless occur in the midst of nature more raw than anything experienced by Jewett's Dunnet Landing residents, and Joanna's ability to live comfortably in such a place is a testament to environmental asceticism. Indeed, by associating Joanna's hermitage—as well as that of Abby Martin of *The Queen's Twin*—with Native American history, Jewett indicates that to live as her female hermits do is to adopt some of the more tedious but historically less environmentally intrusive methods of subsistence associated with Native Americans.⁶⁰ Strikingly, the only other long-term inhabitants of Shell-heap Island, which is a very bad place to land by ship, have been Native

Americans, and their former presence there has given the island a mythical quality among older Dunnet Landing residents because of tales about Indian cannibalism and a captive left there to die who afterwards haunted the island (428). According to Mrs. Todd's gossipy friend Mrs. Fosdick, the island was 'counted a great place in Indian times; you can pick up their stone tools 'most any time if you hunt about. There's a beautiful spring o' water, too. She goes on to recall when residents used to tell queer stories about Shell-heap Island and reveals that [s]ome said 't was a bangeing-place for the Indians, and an old chief resided there once that ruled the winds (428).⁶¹ Mrs. Todd and her friend quickly discount the supernatural and violent tales, but the lore surrounding Shell-heap Island attaches an aura of danger to Joanna's story that is further enhanced by an annual cold snap that residents thought would send her back to the mainland (431). The idea of depending almost solely on the land, the sea, and one's own skills for survival is so alien to the Dunnet Landing women of just two decades later—even the hardy, landwise herbalist Mrs. Todd—that they can only associate Joanna's behavior with the increasingly romanticized legacy of Maine's Native Americans.

Jewett gives us few details about the struggles of day-to-day existence on the island, but we can glean from the text that Joanna's life is indeed difficult, and that she subsists by fishing, digging for clams, catching lobsters, raising chickens, gardening, gathering herbs and berries, and partaking in rare gifts of fruit and fish tossed ashore by sailors, though she was more and more forgotten by her old friends as the years went on (432). Her survival amid such conditions captivates the novel's narrator, who is so taken by Joanna's story that she sails out to visit Shell-heap Island and the ruins of her cabin. The narrator, a writer, romanticizes the long-dead recluse as one of those whom sorrow made too lonely to brave the sight of men, too timid to front the simple world she knew, yet valiant enough to live alone with her poor insistent human nature and

the calms and passions of the sea and sky (444), an attitude in line with Mrs. Todd's sympathetic treatment of the area's recluses—those many curiosities of human nature, as she fondly refers to them (429). This unfailing kindness displayed by the respectable Mrs. Todd indicates the author's own reverence for the woman able to survive alone in a rustic, even dangerous, setting. Indeed, although Barbara Johns interprets Joanna's behavior as suicidal, her refusal to return to shore a clear rejection of her own self and a destroyer of her sexuality, her social standing, [and] her relationships,⁶² the respect lavished upon Joanna by the book's narrator and Mrs. Todd suggest that Joanna's story is, in the primarily feminine world of Dunnet Landing, a source of pride and inspiration. As Susan Allen Toth notes in a discussion of *Country of the Pointed Firs*, While Jewett is no conscious proponent of the new woman, she does contribute a series of characters who illustrate the richness of life a woman can achieve even when she must build that life alone.⁶³ It is no surprise that twenty years after Joanna's death, when Dunnet Landing's male population had dwindled because of the decline of the shipping industry, female characters with fewer opportunities to marry would take pride in the local history of one who ultimately chose to thwart such traditions. Hence, there is a feminist stance that promotes an awareness of the availability of spiritual and physical resources available to women who understand the natural bounties of their particular rural environs.

Abby Martin's Royal Fantasy

Jewett again interlaces feminist and environmental themes in *The Queen's Twin*, in which she again gives voice to the unnamed female narrator of *Country of the Pointed Firs*, writer and observant visitor to Dunnet Landing. In this story, first published in 1899 in *The Atlantic* but later added to editions of *Country*, the relationship between Jewett's bioregionalist perspective and her ecofeminist message is clearly expressed through two key facets: first, in

Jewett's recognition of Maine's cultural history, particularly its Native American heritage, and in her assertion, once again, that unaltered nature provides an invaluable refuge to women who seek an alternative to a typically patriarchal world. This Dunnet Landing tale recounts our narrator's visit alongside Mrs. Todd to see Abby Martin, an elderly widow whose hermitage is frequently unreachable because of the great heron swamp that anybody can't travel over all summer, except during dry stretches and before the fall rains have begun (494). Furthermore, when travel is possible, Mrs. Martin's home is accessible only by foot and by way of an old Indian path, now much overgrown and barely discernable in places, although Mrs. Todd on occasion makes the journey to visit this old friend, whom she describes as a real good interesting woman, even though she might be called a little peculiar (496, 499).

What is most peculiar about Mrs. Martin, and what convinces the narrator that she must make her acquaintance, is her odd conviction that she is the twin of Great Britain's Queen Victoria, with whom she shares a birthday, as well as several other personal details, including the name of her husband, Albert. According to Mrs. Martin, Her Royal Majesty and I opened our eyes upon this world together; say what you may, 't is a bond between us (505). Like La Folle and Joanna Todd, Mrs. Martin's solitude is chosen and seems to be both a result of and a facilitator of her eccentric convictions, the great swamp protecting her from the outside world but also robbing her of material pleasures and posing a threat to her physical and psychological well-being. This setting is fitting, for, as David Miller has noted, the swamp, an entity that lives off its own decay and produces so much vegetation that it can actually be seen to strangle itself, has a legacy of contradictory associations in America because of this mingling of forces normally thought to be opposed—life and death, good and evil.⁶⁴ Jewett emphasizes the potential perils of such exaggerated solitude when the narrator, during a stop along the difficult

journey the hermitage, acknowledges (in a rather Naturalistic moment) that she felt a sudden fear of the unconquerable, immediate forces of Nature, as in the irresistible moment of a thunderstorm (501). Indeed, Jewett foregrounds the story of Abby Martin with extensive exposition on the extent of Mrs. Martin's isolation, the geography of the route, and the agricultural history of the area, and thereby indicates the importance of understanding the region, its history, and its natural features to understanding Mrs. Martin's lifestyle.

Although some critics have found Jewett to be imperialistic and even racist, a bioregionalist interpretation of *The Queen's Twin* unsettles such critiques.⁶⁵ Indeed, Jewett's awareness of the history of coastal Maine emerges throughout her *Dunnet Landing* tales in her attention to the region's cultural history, which extends beyond its European roots to include its Native American legacy, as well as in her older characters' knowledge of and respect for different cultures, including those of non-Anglo people. Jewett emphasizes her regard for such an expansive worldview in the opening paragraph of *The Queen's Twin*, in which she writes:

The coast of Maine was in former years brought so near to foreign shores by its busy fleet of ships that among the older men and women one still finds a surprising proportion of travelers. Each seaward-stretching headland with its high-set houses, each island of a single farm, has sent its spies to view many a Land of Eschol; one may see plain, contented old faces at the windows, whose eyes have looked at far-away ports and known the splendors of the Eastern world. They shame the easy voyager of the North Atlantic and the Mediterranean; they have rounded the Cape of Good Hope and braved the angry seas of Cape Horn in small wooden ships [...]. More than this one cannot give to a young State for its enlightenment; the sea captains and the captains' wives of Maine knew something of the wide world, and never mistook their native parishes for the whole

instead of a part thereof; they knew not only Thomaston and Castine and Portland, but London and Bristol and Bordeaux, and the strange-mannered harbors of the China Sea. (493)

Clearly, Jewett considers a familiarity with global diversity an asset, a form of intellectual and spiritual enlightenment, and the passage indicates her concern about the decline of such worldly knowledge among Maine's residents with fewer opportunities to travel following the disappearance of small wooden ships from its harbors. Her celebration of the residents' recognition of the cultural limitations of their native parishes also corresponds with a bioregional ideology, as the bioregional horizon must extend beyond merely local horizon: the locale cannot shut itself off from translocal forces even if it wanted to, according to Buell.⁶⁶

Furthermore, the prominence of a physical Native American presence in the tale points to Jewett's understanding of Maine's history prior to European settlement, for, as Jacqueline Shea Murphy has pointed out, "What is most important about the old Indian path, the story makes clear, is that it has plainly *not* disappeared."⁶⁷ In addition, the juxtaposition of the narrator's observations about the landscape's beauty with Mrs. Todd's commentary on its unsuitability for agriculture further bespeaks Jewett's awareness of the land's limitations, as well as her recognition of the problems associated with romanticized landscapes. Mrs. Todd and the narrator strike out on this lonesome trail across the long-unploughed turf of the pastures, and through a birdless and beastless wood until they arrive at a hill where the narrator can see a splendid world of sea and shore (497-500). Here, [t]he autumn colors already brightened the landscape; and here and there at the edge of a dark tract of pointed firs stood a row of bright swamp-maples like scarlet flowers (500). Interrupting the narrator's reverie on the biodiversity before her, however, is Mrs. Todd's jarring declaration: "Poor land, this is!" (500). She goes on

to explain the area's history of failed farms and the impossibility of working a land that is always hungry (500). The narrator notes that even the extant farms bear a look of gathering age, though the settlement was, after all, so young [...] and it seemed as if the first impulse of agriculture had soon spent itself without hope of renewal (501). Certainly, Jewett's story makes clear that the landscape is not well-suited to the agricultural methods practiced by its European settlers; nevertheless, there exists a vigor of growth, a persistence and savagery about the sturdy little trees that thwart farmers' efforts (500). The incorporation of the word savagery, though disparaging in its modern associations, is especially important in emphasizing the area's Native history, the lingering traces of which will probably outlast the marks, the poor bushy fields, of its failed farms (502)—just like the shell heap of the island survives any noticeable traces of Joanna Todd. According to Murphy, the story inscribes, alongside the history of Indian removal that has enabled the women's voyage across Dunnet Landing to visit the queen's twin, a prophecy of Native American persistence and renewal inscribed on the land itself.⁶⁸ If Jewett wrote with the goal of preserving an accurate image of her homeland, an objective commonly associated with regional writing, she makes clear to readers that the area's Native American legacy should not and will not be erased.

Though Mrs. Martin is, like Joanna Todd, closely associated with Maine's Native American history through her home's unique location, she is much less well-suited for its physical hardships. Indeed, it seems a wonder that this bent-shouldered, little old woman has survived as long as she has, and her specific methods of obtaining food remain a mystery (503). Hence, what is most valuable to Mrs. Martin is not the presence of natural resources around her hermitage, which enables Joanna's continued defiance of social and religious norms, but rather the absence of people. Nevertheless, like Joanna's, this character's loyalty to solitude and

asceticism derives from her early experiences with limitations imposed by gender, which is emphasized in Mrs. Martin's touching story of her only firsthand account of the queen, which she experienced as a young wife and which was almost made impossible because of men's control over her actions. Mrs. Martin recalls the hard voyage she made to London with the sole hope of seeing Queen Victoria leave Buckingham Palace, during which she had to cook for the ship's crew during the entire trip (506). While anchored in the Thames, Mrs. Martin approaches her husband, Albert, and her brother, Horace, about taking her to see the queen, but they laugh at her, seem ashamed by her excited pleading, and refuse to accompany her ashore. This denial—in itself a form of trauma initiated by Abby's closest male family members—leaves Abby 'most brokenhearted, and she goes below deck to cry. Her atypical display of grief shocks her husband, however, and he eventually talks his brother-in-law into allowing his young wife to go on shore with the ship's carpenter as a companion, making Horace see that Abby had more than worked [her] passage and deserved such an outing (506). The event is one that will shape the course of Abby's life. Indeed, the glimpse of the queen Abby receives as she drives out of the palace, all prancing horses and shining gold, and in a beautiful carriage, is a moment of heaven for her. I saw her plain, and she looked right at me so pleasant and happy, just as if she knew there was somethin' different between us from other folks, Abby says. Since that moment, she recalls, there hasn't been no friend I've felt so near to me ever since (507).

Certainly, Abby's most intimate relationship, even during her husband's life, is her imagined one with Queen Victoria, a woman historicized as an image of sexual restraint, and Abby's behavior is an assertion of emotional independence in the face of limitations imposed by gender. Unable to maintain complete control over her physical location, both in England and back in the United States, Mrs. Martin liberates herself in the only way she can, by envisioning

an alternate life. Continued solitude, after her husband's death, permits Mrs. Martin to engage in her fantasies—even prepare her home for a visit from the queen, on one occasion—without admonishment from others. Her hermitic lifestyle facilitates what is ultimately survivalist behavior, as the delusions allow her to maintain her emotional independence. Indeed, the rewards of isolation seem to outweigh its psychological risks for Mrs. Martin, and, as Judith Fetterly and Marjorie Pryse explain, If we ask why Mrs. Todd is so interested in Abby Martin, we might answer that she finds in her a model for approaching the challenges of loneliness, survival, and self-esteem, even if it leads one to be considered eccentric, queer, or even delusional by others.⁶⁹ Abby channels the psychic pain she experienced as a young wife into an agreeable fantasy.

Thus, in considering the different rural lifestyles available to women, Chopin and Jewett seem united in one laudable goal: They use the rural hermitage as a means of promoting increased women's rights by suggesting that women are capable of living and even thriving without the aid of men or modern conveniences. However, that all four of these characters exhibit some sort of pronounced mental peculiarity that acts as an impetus for their seclusion—Marie Louise's elitism, La Folle's fear, Joanna Todd's guilt, and Abby Martin's fantasy—problematizes a reading of any one of these works as unequivocally feminist by speaking to the novelty of the idea of women's self-sufficiency in a rustic setting and thereby highlighting Chopin's and Jewett's own partial investment in the status quo associated with proper womanly behavior. No completely sane woman, the stories suggest, would engage in such a dangerous and isolating living experiment. Both authors' promotions of women's rights are tempered by their unwillingness to make rural self-sufficiency an option for normal women. Because of this resistance by the authors, which is itself symptomatic of the androcentric values of the era

that privileged domesticity and motherhood, tensions arise in all four works between the narrators' attitudes toward the isolated women and these women's reputations in their larger rural communities. Indeed, the narrators, and frequently other female characters, exhibit sympathy and even admiration for the hermits, even though such compassion clashes with the women's reception by other Natchitoches Parish and Dunnet Landing-area residents.

We know, for example, that the unnamed narrator of *Country* idolizes Joanna Todd and that Mrs. Todd considers Joanna to be like one of the saints in the desert (442), although most of Joanna's contemporaries had gradually forgotten about her as the years passed and she continued to live on the island. The same narrator is also sympathetic toward Abby Martin, primarily because of Mrs. Todd's gratitude for the old woman's friendship and quick willingness to overlook her strange beliefs about Queen Victoria and to view her, instead of delusional, as a real good interesting woman (495). In contrast, however, even some of Mrs. Martin's family members shun her, a daughter-in-law once remarking to Mrs. Todd that she'd much rather have the Queen to spend the day if she could choose between the two (499). Thérésé of *At Fault* cherishes the maternal companionship of Marie Louise, but Marie Louise's denunciation of plantation society because of her contempt for the non-Creole servants would be sure to generate comparable scorn among the servants. Similarly, the omniscient narrator of *Beyond the Bayou* paints a sympathetic portrait of a victim of war's horrors in La Folle, while La Folle exhibits no interest in having a relationship with any of the plantation hands and the hands only an interest in La Folle akin to that generated by a circus act. Each woman, the stories' sympathetic narrators suggest, has in some way been traumatized by her respective more populated rural society—and not, despite others' attitudes, simply off her rocker—and turns to rural nature and the challenges it presents to facilitate growth and healing. In fact, Fetterly and Pryse see in Abby Martin and

her fantastical relationship a striking example of a woman who has managed to create for herself a sense of connection, community, and significance, to find meaning in her life by developing an interest that allows her to retain a sense of her own dignity,⁷⁰ and similarly proactive, though unusual, efforts to preserve self-respect are evident in the hermitic behaviors of Marie Louise, La Folle, and Joanna Todd, for each of whom self-sufficiency is a moral victory.

The discord between narrative attitude toward the hermit and community reception of the hermit points to both Chopin's and Jewett's admiration for such figures and a shared vision of an American future in which such antisocial behaviors are either unnecessary because of a decline in social inequalities for women and racial minorities, or viewed as a woman's choice and assertion of individuality and not an off-beat gesture of acquiescence to their inability to live up to the domestic ideal. In fact, evidence exists in *Country* that such a conceptual shift is under way, both in the twenty years separating Joanna Todd's time on Shell-heap Island and our narrator's visit there, as well as in some older residents' acknowledgment of dwindling commonality of the hermitage in the area. According to Mrs. Fosdick, Dunnet Landing and the surrounding area had once housed a number of recluses, those strange straying creatur's that used to rove the country [...], the ones that used to hive away in their own houses with some strange notion or other, but now have significantly fewer (429). This discussion on hermits causes the narrator to conclude that [t]here was something mediaeval in the behavior of poor Joanna Todd under the disappointment of the heart (433). Hence, such self-imposed banishment due to a failed relationship would never be permitted among loved ones in late-nineteenth-century Dunnet Landing or perhaps desired by the betrayed. Mrs. Fosdick makes it clear that the social climate has in fact changed in Dunnet Landing, the conservative religious heritage driving Joanna's shame dissipating somewhat, when she remarks that Joanna would

have likely responded to such a situation twenty years later by moving away to live with other relatives, for [t]he world's bigger an' freer than it used to be (440). Unfortunately, except for La Folle, whose triumphant return to plantation society indicates that decreased race- and gender-based behavioral prescriptions have at least begun to increase opportunities for former slaves, these women do not live to see a freer world. Fortunately, the stories suggest, the rural hermitage offers self-sufficient women—young or old, robust or frail, black or white—a means of transcending the conditions that threaten their well-being.

Hence, Chopin's and Jewett's depictions of the hermitage as a source of respite and empowerment for female characters unwilling to adapt to social structures characterized by race and gender discrimination help advance an environmental ethic that stems less from ecological awareness than from survivalist impulses—much like that associated with the environmental legacy of Native Americans. According to Merchant, before colonization, Native American attitudes about the environment were probably not consciously formulated as a conservation ethic, but were integral parts of the total fabric of tribal life and had a latent survival function.⁷¹ That these environmental ideologies are rooted in pragmatism and self-preservation does not negate their ethical value; indeed, they are in tune with characteristics of the bioregional outlook that Sale promotes as not merely a new way of envisioning and enacting a very old American ideal, but also a crucial, and perhaps virtually the only possible, means of arresting the impending ecological apocalypse.⁷² For Sale, this bioregional vision is a project of understanding place [that] is neither nostalgic nor utopian but rather the realistic sort of occupation anyone can participate in every day that has an immediate and practical chance of curbing our present waste and recklessness.⁷³ Chopin's and Jewett's hermits were returning to

this old American ideal, a place-based sustainable existence, just as America was moving toward metropolitanism.

Indeed, in an era marked by rapid industrial growth and increasingly easy travel and communication, the female hermits of Chopin and Jewett unselfconsciously enact such methods of conservation by removing themselves from capitalistic systems characterized by gender- and race-specific roles. Though dramatized in each work as peculiar behavior, when the narrator of *Country* has discovered the spot where Joanna Todd's cabin once sat, her reflection suggests the universal need for such an investment in solitude, if only temporarily: In the life of each of us [...] there is a place remote and islanded, and given to endless regret or secret happiness; we are each the uncompanioned hermit and recluse of an hour or a day; we understand our fellows of the cell to whatever age of history they may belong (444). Strikingly, the narrator's ability to connect with Joanna and, by extension, people across the ages comes most forcefully when she is alone in a nearly untouched landscape. Jewett, like Chopin, seems to have foreseen an era in which these shrines of solitude, the Waldens of the world, would hold an increasingly important position in the environmental ethos of a nation.

Notes

¹ Buell, *Future of Environmental Criticism*, 77.

² Marcia Littenberg, *From Transcendentalism to Ecofeminism: Celia Thaxter and Sarah Orne Jewett's Island Views Revisited*, 149-50.

³ Contrary to my reading of Jewett's novel as an example of bioregionalist literature, Buell refers to *The Country of the Pointed Firs* as an example of [t]raditional writing about place, rather than the more progressive bioregional writing, because its locale is treated as pretty much frozen in time, with allusions to past and future dispensations minimized, although he tempers this characterization with the acknowledgement that Jewett's Dunnet Landing is a locale not wholly impervious to outside influences. See *Future of Environmental Criticism*, 77.

⁴ Buell, *The Environmental Imagination*, 406.

⁵ As Karen J. Warren has explained, Bioregionalism centralizes the importance of place in environmental ethics. To establish such a position means one must know the natural and human history of a place, and learn and develop a region's human and ecological possibilities in a sustainable manner over time. See *Ecofeminist Philosophy*, 85.

⁶ Kirkpatrick Sale, Preface, *Dwellers in the Land: The Bioregional Vision*, x.

⁷ All references to *At Fault* are from *Kate Chopin: Complete Novels and Stories*, ed. Sandra M. Gilbert (New York: Library of America, 2002) 5-159. Subsequent references will be documented parenthetically by page number.

⁸ Outka, *Race and Nature from Transcendentalism to the Harlem Renaissance*, 83.

⁹ Outka, *Race and Nature*, 84. Such a fantasy, Outka notes, shaped the writings of so-called Lost Cause writers including George Bagby, Thomas Nelson Page, and Joel Chandler Harris.

¹⁰ Warren, *The Physical and Cultural Geography of Kate Chopin's Cane River Fiction*, 91-2.

¹¹ For a summary of contemporary reviews, see Per Seyersted, *Kate Chopin: A Critical Biography*, 53, and Emily Toth, *Kate Chopin*, 190-96.

¹² Hosmer's wife Fanny, Emily Toth has pointed out, was one of the first alcoholic women in American fiction; *At Fault* was also among the early American novels to depict a divorce. In *Kate Chopin*, 184, 191.

¹³ David Russell is an exception. He challenges the common interpretation of Thérèse and Hosmer's marriage as a metaphorical reunion of the North and South and argues that *At Fault* depicts a Southern geography for national reunion based on the politics of white supremacy. See *A Vision of Reunion: Kate Chopin's At Fault*, 8-25.

¹⁴ Caudle and Green, introduction, *At Fault*, xii.

¹⁵ Ringe, *Cane River World: Kate Chopin's At Fault and Related Stories*, 164.

¹⁶ Anderson, *Unraveling the Southern Pastoral Tradition: A New Look at Kate Chopin's At Fault*, 7.

¹⁷ Arner, *Landscape Symbolism in Kate Chopin's At Fault*, 148.

¹⁸ Writing in 1971, Richard H. Potter acknowledged the presence of interesting questions concerning racial relations and attitudes in both *At Fault* and *Bayou Folk*, the 1894 short story collection in which *Beyond the Bayou* appeared, and noted that La Folle's solitude is reminiscent of the isolation of [...] Marie Louise in *At Fault* but does not draw additional parallels between the characters. In *Negroes in the Fiction of Kate Chopin*, 46 and 50.

¹⁹ Marx, *The Machine in the Garden*, 5, 10.

²⁰ For more on the differences between pastoral and georgic, see Timothy Sweet's introduction to *American Georgic: Economy and Environment in Early American Literature*, 1-11.

²¹ Chopin utilizes a pervasive trope in American fiction before the mid-twentieth century in her characterization of the railroad as disruptive to the idyllic scenery of Place-du-Bois. As Marx has pointed out, [I]t is difficult to think of a major American writer upon whom the image of the machine's sudden appearance in the landscape has not exercised its fascination. See *Machine in the Garden*, 16-17.

²² Cole, A Message from the Pine Woods of Central Louisiana, 66.

²³ Anderson, Unraveling the Southern Pastoral Tradition, 4-5.

²⁴ Arner, Landscape Symbolism, 148.

²⁵ Anderson, Unraveling the Southern Pastoral Tradition, 6-7.

²⁶ Ringe, Cane River World, 164.

²⁷ Kolodny, *The Lay of the Land*, 71.

²⁸ Cole, A Message from the Pine Woods, 70.

²⁹ Certainly, Marie Louise is not the only symbolically significant figure to meet a tragic end in this novel. An additional victim of the work's merging of Northern and Southern ideals is the half-Native American, half-black character Joçint who, like Marie Louise, is closely associated with nature. Chopin shrewdly places this surly young man in a trying predicament, as Joçint, who lives in an isolated cabin in the Piney Woods near the Cane River with his black father Morico, spends his days working in the mill, all the while knowing that his little Creole pony was roaming the woods in vicious idleness and his rifle gathering an unsightly rust on the cabin wall at home (12). Because of the historical and mythical association of Native Americans to nature, Joçint feels drawn to woodland life and resistant to mill work. Fittingly, Joçint also dislikes Thérèse, for he thought she was one upon whom partly rested the fault of this intrusive Industry which had come to fire the souls of indolent fathers with a greedy ambition for gain, at

the sore expense of revolting youth (13). Joçint is so repulsed by his life that he decides to burn down the mill, after which he is shot and killed by Grégoire, Thérèse's hot-blooded nephew (another representative of the South who also is later killed). With Joçint's death, the last shred of active resistance to deforestation in the novel disappears, and the mill is quickly rebuilt. Through these events, linked closely to Joçint's Native American heritage, Chopin laments the industrialization of the South, this disappearance of its native landscape. For more on Joçint's role, see Chapter 4.

³⁰ Cowdrey, *This Land, This South: An Environmental History*, 89-93.

³¹ Warren, *The Physical and Cultural Geography of Kate Chopin's Cane River Fiction*, 107.

³² Al Gore, *Earth in the Balance: Ecology and the Human Spirit*, 120.

³³ Chopin's appreciation for farming is a typically American mindset and traceable, as Roderick Nash has shown, to the pioneer's association of wilderness with hardship and danger in a variety of forms and corresponding belief that the rural, controlled, state of nature was the object of his affection and the goal of his labor. See *Wilderness and the American Mind*, 30.

³⁴ Outka, *Race and Nature*, 21. Cathy Caruth defines post-traumatic stress disorder, or PTSD, as an overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events in which the response to the event occurs in the often uncontrolled, repetitive appearance of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena that reflects the direct imposition on the mind of the unavoidable reality of horrific events, the taking over of the mind, psychically and neurobiologically, by an event that it cannot control. In *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*, 57-58.

³⁵ Outka, *Race and Nature*, 90, 85.

³⁶ Nixon, *Same Path, Different Purpose: Chopin's La Folle and Welty's Phoenix Jackson*, 944-46.

³⁷ Green, 'Fear, Freedom and the Perils of Ethnicity: Otherness in Kate Chopin's *Beyond the Bayou*' and Zora Neale Hurston's *Sweat*,' 121.

³⁸ Green, 'Fear, Freedom and the Perils of Ethnicity,' 121.

³⁹ Sale, *Dwellers in the Land*, 42.

⁴⁰ Sale, *Dwellers in the Land*, 47.

⁴¹ Linda Buzzell and Craig Chalquist, 'Psyche and Nature in a Circle of Healing,' introduction, *Ecotherapy: Healing with Nature in Mind*, 18.

⁴² Kolodny, *The Lay of the Land*, 8.

⁴³ Pryse, 'Sex, Class, and Category Crisis,' 526.

⁴⁴ Richardson, 'A Happy, Rural Seat of Various Views,' 97.

⁴⁵ Unless otherwise noted, all references to works by Jewett, including *The Country of the Pointed Firs*, are from the collection *Sarah Orne Jewett: Novels and Stories* (New York: Library of America, 1996) and will be documented parenthetically by page number.

⁴⁶ Frank Buckland was a nineteenth-century English natural historian and inspector of salmon fisheries and was responsible for introducing salmon to Australia. See Christopher Gardner-Thorpe's 'Who was ... Frank Buckland?' , 187-88.

⁴⁷ Buell, *Future of Environmental Criticism*, 83.

⁴⁸ Willa Cather, preface to *The Country of the Pointed Firs and Other Stories* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1955) 9.

⁴⁹ Jewett's female characters' ability to effectively deal with loss is itself a culturally prescribed skill, according to Mitchell Breitwieser, who argues in a discussion of *Deephaven*, Jewett's first book, that Jewett believed that grieving could be and needed to be taught by practice and example, and that such teaching depends upon the vigor of certain formal and informal

vernacular cultural institutions, without which mourning is endangered and rampant melancholia is risked. See *National Melancholy: Mourning and Opportunity in Classic American Literature*, 162.

⁵⁰ Crumpacker, *The Art of the Healer: Women in the Fiction of Sarah Orne Jewett*, 156.

⁵¹ Josephine Donovan, *Sarah Orne Jewett*, 3. Donovan has also argued convincingly that Jewett, despite her upbringing, identified more easily with the less privileged people of rural Maine than she did with the upper class and that this connection is clearly presented in her sympathetic portrayals of the poor throughout her fiction. In *Jewett on Race, Class, Ethnicity, and Imperialism: A Reply to Her Critics*, 407.

⁵² Brown, *Not Outside the Range: One Feminist Perspective on Psychic Trauma*, 102.

⁵³ Richardson, 'A Happy, Rural Seat of Various Views': The Ecological Spirit in Sarah Orne Jewett's *The Country of the Pointed Firs* and the Dunnet Landing Stories, 97.

⁵⁴ Additional important but isolated figures include the mother and brother of Mrs. Todd; the elderly Mrs. Blackett and her socially awkward son William, who live on Green Island, the verdant and pastoral outermost island (400); and Captain Littlepage, a retired sailor, now more than eighty years old, whom Mrs. Todd describes as one who has overset his mind with too much reading (387-88) and who shares with the narrator the memorable seafarer's tale of an arctic settlement inhabited by fog-shaped men (395-96).

⁵⁵ Crumpacker, *The Art of the Healer*, 161. Crumpacker attributes what she reads as Jewett's critique of Calvinism in this story to Jewett's adherence to the philosophies distributed by Emmanuel Swedenborg, an eighteenth-century Swedish mystic and scientist who believed he had access to the spiritual world (162-63). For more on Jewett's resistance to Calvinist doctrines

and her interest in Swedenborgianism, see Josephine Donovan's Jewett and Swedenborg, 731-50.

⁵⁶ Crumpacker, *The Art of the Healer*, 162.

⁵⁷ Trachtenberg, *The Incorporation of America*, 129.

⁵⁸ Merchant, *Ecological Revolutions*, 233, 245.

⁵⁹ Norwood, *Made From this Earth*, 196.

⁶⁰ As William Cronon has demonstrated, European agricultural practices were detrimental to the preservation of major ecological characteristics of the precolonial New England landscape that had for thousands of years been maintained by a complex set of Native American survival modes based on a conservation which was less the result of an enlightened ecological sensibility than of the Indians' limited social definition of 'need.' See *Changes in the Land: Indians, Colonists, and the Ecology of New England*, 98.

⁶¹ Donovan has investigated the ambiguity surrounding the word 'bangeing' in this passage, which at least one critic has interpreted as meaning 'lazy' and therefore indicative of Jewett's negative stereotyping of Native Americans. Donovan counters this reading by pointing out that 'bangeing,' a term still used in Maine, simply means 'hanging out'; hence, a 'bangeing-place' in Jewett's fiction refers to a 'gathering place.' See *Jewett on Race, Class, Ethnicity, and Imperialism*, 413.

⁶² Johns, *Some Reflections on the Spinster in New England Literature*, 38.

⁶³ Toth, 'The Rarest and Most Peculiar Grape': Versions of the New England Woman in Nineteenth-Century Local Color Literature, 26.

⁶⁴ Miller, *Dark Eden: The Swamp in Nineteenth-Century American Culture*, 10.

⁶⁵ For a critical history and reinvestigat[ion] of the alleged racism, fascism, pro-imperialism, and classicism ascribed to her work, see Donovan's 'Jewett on Race, Class, Ethnicity, and Imperialism,' 403-16. In addition, see Marjorie Pryse's 'Sex, Class, and Category Crisis': Reading Jewett's Transitivity, which also challenges critics' assertions of imperialism and racism in Jewett, as well as what Pryse identifies as a corresponding tendency to discount feminist criticism under such readings. For a critical history of scholars who have noted the absence of racial themes or interpreted Jewett's work as expressive of a seemingly racist infatuation with Anglo-Norman culture, see Jacqueline Shea Murphy, 'Replacing Regionalism: Abenaki Tales and Jewett's Coastal Maine,' 665-66.

⁶⁶ Buell, *The Future of Environmental Criticism*, 88.

⁶⁷ Murphy, 'Abenaki Tales and Jewett's Coastal Maine,' 680.

⁶⁸ Murphy, 'Abenaki Tales and Jewett's Coastal Maine,' 680.

⁶⁹ Fetterly and Pryse, *Writing Out of Place: Regionalism, Women, and American Literary Culture*, 327.

⁷⁰ Fetterly and Pryse, *Writing Out of Place*, 120.

⁷¹ Merchant, *Ecological Revolutions*, 47.

⁷² Sale, *Dwellers in the Land*, xxiv.

⁷³ Sale, *Dwellers in the Land*, 48.

CHAPTER 3

FEMINISTS OF THE MIDDLE BORDER: GARLAND, CATHER, AND

THE FEMALE LAND ETHIC

Any one thereabouts would have told you that this was one of the richest farms on the Divide, and that the farmer was a woman.

Willa Cather, *O Pioneers!*

As children of the Middle Border—the agricultural region roughly encompassing Iowa, Minnesota, Wisconsin, Nebraska, and the Dakotas—Hamlin Garland and Willa Cather were well acquainted with the ways in which nineteenth-century rural life could both inspire artistic achievement and threaten the health and intellectual opportunities of its inhabitants. Some of their most influential works, including Garland's short story collection *Main-Travelled Roads* (1891) and novel *Rose of Dutcher's Colly* (1895), and the novels that comprise Cather's "Prairie Trilogy," *O Pioneers!* (1913), *The Song of the Lark* (1915), and *My Ántonia* (1918), consider this dichotomous relationship with the region and, more specifically, how women of the late nineteenth century sought to reconcile a desire for autonomy with the drudgery of farm life. Cumulatively, these works highlight the authors' shared awareness of the cultural limitations imposed by an agricultural lifestyle and suggest a need for increased opportunities for rural women and emphasize the benefits of marital equality. Despite their overlapping feminist agendas, however, the farmer's daughter of Garland's stories—a pathetic, endangered figure who surfaces time and time again in his early fiction—repeatedly fails to achieve the self-fulfillment of Cather's heroines. This trend suggests that Garland was reluctant to imagine the agricultural opportunities available to women of the era, or to acknowledge the cultural and practical benefits afforded to women who acquired the deep knowledge of their natural environments associated

with the bioregional perspective described in Chapter 2. Even the rise of his most fully realized female protagonist, Rose Dutcher, who leaves her father's Wisconsin farm to attend college and become a poet, is undermined by the much greater importance Garland places on Rose's marriage to a forward-thinking man than he does on her artistic development. Ultimately, Garland both compromises his feminist agenda in his repeated depictions of farm women who need to be rescued, and fails in his attempt to realistically depict the New Woman in *Rose of Dutcher's Coolly* because of his dismissal of the importance of a land ethic to his character's development.

Aldo Leopold famously advocated the land ethic in *A Sand County Almanac* in 1949, explaining that such an outlook enlarges the boundaries of the community to include soils, waters, plants, and animals, or collectively: the land. In short, Leopold wrote, a land ethic changes the role of Homo sapiens from conqueror of the land-community to plain member and citizen of it. It implies respect for his fellow-members, and also respect for the community as such (171). Garland, I find, excludes his female characters from thoughtful, respectful participation in the land-community to which they belong, while women regionalists including Cather were already drawing regularly upon women's investment in the health of, and their relationships to, their rural environments in their prose. Thus, this study explores two distinct conceptualizations of women's attitudes toward their rural environments, and my interest is in these literary impressions, rather than in the veracity of Garland's and Cather's depictions of women's life on the frontier. Indeed, my goal is not to support or refute the historical accuracy of their portrayals, for, as Glenda Riley notes, [O]ne can conclude that if any fact is clear about women's experiences in the West, it is that no entirely persuasive generalization exists regarding those experiences.¹ Rather, I hope to draw attention to the differences in Garland's and

Cather's interpretations of rural women's experiences, specifically the extent to which they viewed farm life as potentially liberating for women, and to identify the dominant socio-cultural forces that contribute to these contrasting literary portraits. Indeed, I find that Garland and Cather respond quite differently to prominent late-century intellectual movements, and exploring the often contradictory but inextricable effects of Darwinism, literary realism, and feminism upon their fiction helps account for their incongruous portrayals of farm life.

As Bert Bender has demonstrated, Darwin's theory of sexual selection—the notion that certain evolutionary traits occur as a result of competitive struggle among same-sex members of a species (including humans)—was of particular interest, even more so than the theory of natural selection, to American writers after 1871.² Darwin's theory, which he explored at length in *The Descent of Man* (1871), suggests that physical strength and beauty among male members of a species derive from this competition and help determine females' selection of the most desirable mate. Of course, such ideas pose challenges to liberal ideology, particularly to prominent questions of reform around the turn of the century. According to Bender, [T]his threat is especially felt in reference to biological questions of racial or sexual difference and the attendant problems of social equality.³ I would like to propose that Garland's subscription to the theory of sexual selection accounts, at least in part, for his repeated portrayals of rural women in search of male rescuers and the women's subsequent selection of such rescuers as husbands. That is, Garland's own notions of social reform are compromised by the image of male virility (and analogous image of female weakness) enforced by Darwin's theory. Moreover, just as Garland's work might be viewed in terms of his adherence to Darwinian thought, so might Cather's fiction be viewed in terms of her resistance to such ideologies. Bender has argued convincingly that in *The Song of the Lark* Cather continued the project (begun in *O Pioneers!*) of presenting a

version of evolutionary thought wherein she could transcend the force of sexual selection that Darwin had theorized in order to explain the evolution of sexual difference.⁴ Bender reveals that as an effort to dispel Darwin's theory, Cather offers various alternatives to traditional womanhood, a trend traceable throughout her prairie trilogy that results in the development of Cather's larger myth of evolutionary progress beyond natural and sexual selection.⁵ Thus, acknowledging these writers' varying reception to Darwinian science provides a starting point for understanding Garland's particular form of feminism.

Literary realism, a mode enthusiastically advocated by Garland, developed in large part, of course, because of Americans' increasingly scientific worldview in the latter half of the nineteenth century. As Jennifer Carol Cook explains, Realism was touted as the genre to pursue a truth undistorted by the excesses of emotion, a discipline which would, like science, employ disinterested rationality to represent life as it really was. She identifies additional affinities between the disciplines that include: the methodology of science, which observes and records with fruitful objectivity; the value system of science, which privileges rationality over emotion; the language of science, which prefers an economy of expression; and the ultimate aims of science, which seek to find the objective truth, and in so doing, to disabuse the populace of its myths.⁶ Garland established direct connections between evolutionary theory and the future of American literature in the Literary Prophecy chapter of *Crumbling Idols*, a collection of essays published in 1894.⁷ He praises the splendid light of Darwin's work and argues that [t]he study of evolution has made the present the most critical and self-analytical of all ages known to us. It has liberated the thought of the individual as never before, and the power of tradition grows fainter every year.⁸ The antidote to the power of tradition in literature, namely the

impact of romanticism, was literary realism, or 'veritism,' as Garland called his version of realism, a mode whose power and influence augment—or evolve—daily, he argued.⁹

Cather, on the other hand, wrote in opposition to the dominant literary mode of the turn of the century and expressed concern about the 'encroaching realism and 'veritism' and other forms of literary unpleasantness.¹⁰ According to Sharon O'Brien, literary realism told the 'wrong story' for Cather: 'As a woman striving to escape the traditional female role, Cather wanted to read a different story about the relationship between the individual and society than the one she found in *Germinal*, *Main-Travelled Roads*, or even *The Rise of Silas Lapham*. She wanted to know that individual force, will, and passion could make a difference, that Emerson's 'Self-Reliance' was a reliable guide to human endeavor.'¹¹ As a result of this conscious resistance to literary realism, Cather's prairie novels offer, at times, a romantic view of rural America as a realm of spiritual enlightenment and professional advancement for independent women like those she creates in Alexandra Bergson, Thea Kronborg, and Antonia Shimerda. Cather's fiction therefore reveals her debt to the romantic writers of the nineteenth century while simultaneously helping usher in an era of literary modernism through its celebration of female individualism and autonomy amid rapid social changes, as well as, Guy Reynolds has argued, through its concern with the representation of the psychological processes of the self as it connects with and interacts with environment.¹² Thus, because each writer responded to realism differently—Garland promoting and actively attempting to shape the genre, Cather writing against its conventions and setting the stage for literary modernism—I do not attempt to address the tenets of realism in general at any length, but rather to acknowledge a particular trend in regional writing that reflects concern about rural women's experiences. Indeed, my primary interest is in both authors not only as feminists, but also as regionalists who emphasize specific

geographical settings and consider how region-specific factors such as history, economy, and, in particular, environment impact the lives of their female characters.

Although a great deal of critical attention has been devoted to Cather's environmental ethos, the self-sufficiency of her female protagonists, and, more recently, the ways in which these inseparable aspects of her fiction invite ecofeminist consideration,¹³ Garland's works have generated comparatively scant attention—both in general and in terms of ecological analysis. According to Keith Newlin, many early critics disparaged Garland's putative abandonment of realism around the time *Rose* was published, and, as a result, [t]he notion of a rapid rise into prominence and a tragic fall into literary obscurity has dominated all discussions of Garland's life and career to date.¹⁴ Correspondingly, Donald Pizer asserts in a recent article on *Sexuality in Rose of Dutcher's Coolly* that critics have tended to ignore dark and unresolved sexual themes in the novel in large part because Garland has not been taken seriously enough as an intellect and as an artist to consider the possibility of the existence of disturbing themes in his fiction (288). I believe this easy dismissal of Garland's literary merit is also to blame for the lack of ecofeminist studies of his works. Certainly, contemporary scholars have shied away from considering the ways in which Garland both contrasts with and prefigures Cather in his propensity for considering farm life in terms of its impact on women, despite the call by Patrick Murphy for scholars to study the writings of men and women together and evaluate the differences between their writings in terms of ecological criteria,¹⁵ and in lieu of Glen Love's and Lawrence Buell's assertion that recent critics' general devaluation of realism may have gone too far and thus resulted in ecocritical oversights.¹⁶ Furthermore, in examining Garland's works in terms of their relationship to Cather's prairie epics, we can heed Cheryll Glotfelty's advice for the future of Cather ecocriticism, which includes the suggestion that we take a

relational approach to Cather studies, acknowledging her participation in different literary ecosystems alongside other writers of the region and era. Such an approach, Glotfelty insightfully puts forth, is true to the spirit of ecology, which looks at systems and interactions rather than isolated individuals or single works.¹⁷ Certainly, studying Garland alongside Cather proves that these authors' discourses about rural womanhood intersect with discourses about profession, region, and nature in widely differing ways.

Garland's early work in particular deserves critical re-examination, as the animosity his female characters often exhibit toward their rural environments contradicts important female regionalists' general interpretation of this relationship as a potentially liberating force. As I have shown in the previous two chapters, in the latter half of the nineteenth century, women writers were re-imagining their relationships with rural America and discovering in the world outside their front doors inspiration for literature that would interlace feminist and environmental themes. A committed advocate of an enhanced cultural life in the West, Garland nevertheless fails to consider the land as an enabling context for enlightenment or opportunity for rural women—despite the trend around the middle of the century by writers such as Susan Fenimore Cooper to promote knowledge of one's natural environment as a source of cultural pride and refinement, or the tendency, several decades later, for regional writers including Kate Chopin and Sarah Orne Jewett to envision solitary life amid raw nature as a means of female respite from patriarchal society and a facilitator of personal empowerment. Undoubtedly, one of the most valuable intellectual contributions of regionalism—a movement that Judith Fetterly and Marjorie Pryse have suggested is in effect a women's literary tradition¹⁸—is the insight it offers into women writers' perceptions of their surroundings, perceptions that privileged one's relationship with the land. Cather, encouraged in large part by Jewett, draws on this trend

through her enduring portrayals of the Midwestern landscape and the intelligent, resourceful frontier woman in *My Ántonia* and *O Pioneers!*¹⁹ Indeed, these two novels suggest that adopting an environmental ethos based on respect for the land's capacities contributes to women's autonomy, and they do so without obscuring the potential cruelty of farm life or perpetuating an agrarian myth.

Despite the clear historical progression of such ideas and Garland's deeply conscious involvement in the regional movement alongside these women writers, his works disrupt the rhetorical pattern I have identified as proto-ecofeminist and proto-bioregionalist.²⁰ Although I have until this point examined this trend in women's literature, Garland's feminism, his belief that the political and social subjugation of woman was a survival of an older stage of social evolution and was increasingly unjustified in an era of growing devotion to individual freedom and personality,²¹ invites closer attention to his early writing, particularly because of its ideological departure from other regionalist texts with similar goals of social reform. Hence, in this chapter I will examine Garland's reluctance to grant his female characters a fully developed land ethic akin to that depicted by Cather and demonstrate how this literary tactic results in a reductive rhetorical pattern that undermines his promotion of women's rights.²² Bound to the soil by their husbands' or fathers' debts, but oblivious to their responsibility toward the land and the emotive power of the land stimulating men's attachment (which is thoroughly expressed throughout *Main-Travelled Roads*), Garland's farm women are primarily flat characters who appear to be drawn to elicit pathos from readers. Using Cather's prairie trilogy heroines as points of contrast, I will argue that in his tendency to portray female characters who exhibit little autonomy and respect for their natural environments, Garland offers a less progressive but no

less historically valuable form of feminist literature that provides insight into how late-century intellectual movements shaped reformist fiction in various ways.

Certainly, the most prominent ideological link between Garland and Cather is their adherence to the belief that the American Midwest provided a rich setting for exploring women's relationships to the land in fiction, and this interest is traceable to their similar childhood experiences, which are invaluable to understanding the development of their philosophies of art. Garland, born in 1860 in Wisconsin, was the son of a restless farmer who moved his family frequently, first from Wisconsin to Minnesota and then to Iowa, where Garland would spend much of his childhood, and finally to the Dakota Territory. Cather was born on a northern Virginia farm in 1873 but moved to a Nebraska homestead in 1883 and then to the small town of Red Cloud, Nebraska, in 1884. Both authors, Neil Gustafson has pointed out, experienced their removal from comfortable existences and the shock of the flat plain at age nine. Yet despite the harsh landscape, life in the small towns of Osage, Iowa, and Red Cloud were hardly void of intellectual stimulation for Garland and Cather, whose voracious reading habits were supported by family members and rural acquaintances.²³ Garland finished seminary school in Osage in 1881 and went to Boston in 1884, where he began lecturing and teaching literature courses; in 1916 he moved to New York. Like Garland, Cather moved East after college, first to Pittsburgh in 1896 and then to New York a decade later. Garland died in 1940 in Hollywood from a cerebral hemorrhage; Cather died of the same cause in 1947 in New York. Despite the allure of professional opportunities available in America's largest cities, both Cather and Garland were compelled to periodically revisit the harsh landscapes of the childhoods that captivated their imaginations and inspired their most enduring literary contributions.²⁴ As Gustafson explains, [I]t is the very mix of experiences they both had on that prairie and in those small towns (and

their eventual need to leave them) that formed [the] minds and characters of these two most important chroniclers of that life. ²⁵

Why, then, was Garland so reluctant to recognize the potential motivational aspects of the Middle Border experience for women when he himself had experienced the intellectual drive generated by a simultaneously inspiring and stifling environment? Why did Cather view Nebraska's hard-working immigrant women and their daughters as models for two of her most enduring heroines, Alexandra Bergson and Antonia Shimerda Cuzak, rather than as figures who would inevitably be beaten down by farm life? In addition to the authors' dissimilar responses to sexual selection and realism, we must also consider how the authors' literary handling of gender problems contributes to the development of two distinctly different types of feminism. Indeed, Garland's fiction offers a valuable look at the difficulties associated with realist projects that deal with women's rights, as the effort to uncover objective truth in fiction put realists like Garland in a predicament when it came to gender issues because of their desire to simultaneously make moral statements. According to William Morgan, [A] realist sense of manhood is inevitably fashioned in relation to a late Victorian ethos of social care and humanitarian commitment—a commitment that evolves out of sentimentalism and domesticity. ²⁶ Thus, although Garland advocated the rejection of romanticism, he was, like Cather, operating under the pressure of a literary tradition that also promoted the democratic ideals in which he believed. Acknowledging the tension caused by the romantic influence on Garland's fiction also helps account for his complicity in promoting the domestic ideal, for, according to Morgan, [r]ealist writers—many times against their own public personas—are consequently agents who perpetuate, publicize, and help to modernize the cultures of sentimentality and domesticity. ²⁷ Garland's objectivity, it

seems, may have been compromised by his humanitarian ideals, including his support for better conditions for farm women.

Certainly, reality and truthfulness are closely ethically aligned under Garland's theory of veritism, and such an association is characteristic of the era. Indeed, [f]or the realists, genre questions and formal commitments derive from moral questions and moral commitments.²⁸ As Cook explains, In seeking a language that could reveal truth and engender sympathy and not merely reiterate the pernicious commonplaces of their societies, realist writers were forced to walk a tightrope between sentimentalism on the one hand and science on the other, and to forge ahead into an unknown literary future.²⁹ Garland took an active role in shaping this literary future, interweaving his support for realism, nationalism, individualism, and original local art in *Crumbling Idols* and arguing vehemently for the production and consumption of a national literature based on accurate studies of speech and life that was creative and not imitative of European models (16). To help unite and advance such ideals, he established the theory of veritism, which is a form of literary impressionism. According to Garland, the veritist is occupied in stating his sincere convictions, believing that only in that way is the truth advanced (21). For the veritist, then, the artist's impression is real if it is a truthful depiction of what he has seen.³⁰ Garland believed such sincerity in art made it ethically superior to imitative work, and he encouraged young writers—Westerners in particular—to [rise] to the perception of the significant and beautiful in their own environment (24). Garland saw in the American West fertile ground for the artistry of budding veritists and prophesied the passing away of the literary supremacy of the East (114). He predicted that the new literature of the West would be infused with descriptions of natural scenery, and deal not with crime and abnormities, nor with deceased persons but rather with the wholesome love of honest men for honest women,

with the heroism of labor, the comradeship of men,—a drama of average types of character, infinitely varied, but always characteristic (25). His vision, Jane Johnson notes, is of a gentler school of realism that aims to encourage reform by drawing on readers' sympathy for society's noble sufferers.³¹ These sufferers to whom Garland wanted to bring attention were the men and women who toiled on the struggling farms across the West.

Nevertheless, the heroism of labor is a characteristic rarely displayed by his farm women, and they seem, with little variance, more wretched than noble because of their almost complete lack of autonomy. Garland populates *Main-Travelled Roads* with women of different ages and European-American backgrounds, but few exhibit the wholesome enjoyment of the Western landscape advocated in *Crumbling Idols*, and none of them are among the scores of original young writers and artists just rising to power in the West that he claimed would make the region a center of cultural activity (*CI* 118). Rather, isolation, dissatisfaction, and self-denial characterize the lives of Garland's farm women in this collection, and the only opportunities for social advancement occur with the help of male figures who are willing to remove them from their harsh living conditions—a stark thematic framework that might be attributed to his adherence to veritism. That is, Garland could not write what he did not perceive to be true about farm women; his stories spring from his perception of reality. As Carol Fairbanks has suggested, Garland hears and sees—and records—only what conforms to his view of midwestern life, which results in a stereotyped portrait of pioneer women.³² Certainly, without turning to historical records to determine the accuracy of his portrayals we can conclude that Garland's image of frontier women is reductive in his consistent victimization of such figures. Thus, his particular feminism derives primarily from his ability to engender readers' sympathy for farm

women, rather than his ability to promote equality by creating female portraits of strength and inspiration.

That is not to say, of course, that Garland imagined the difficulties his farm figures endure. He was well aware of the toil and hopelessness experienced by farm wives and daughters because of his biographical background, and he describes in a 1922 foreword to *Main-Travelled Roads* the mood of bitterness under which he wrote the stories, which were inspired by visits to Ordway, South Dakota, in 1887 and 1889, to see his parents:

The farther I got from Chicago the more depressing the landscape became. [...] The houses, bare as boxes, dropped on the treeless plains, the barbed-wire fences running at right angles, and the towns mere assemblages of flimsy wooden sheds with painted-pine battlement, produced on me the effect of an almost helpless and sterile poverty.

My dark mood was deepened into bitterness by my father's farm, where I found my mother imprisoned in a small cabin on the enormous sunburnt, treeless plain, with no expectation of her ever living anywhere else. Deserted by her sons and failing in health, she endured the discomforts of her life uncomplainingly—but my resentment of things as they are deepened during my talks with her neighbors who were all housed in the same unshaded cabins in equal poverty and loneliness. (xx)³³

Garland's poignant recollection helps account for the prominence of the deprived, imprisoned farm women in his early fiction, as well as the more explicit feminist agenda that would inform *Rose of Dutcher's Coolly*.³⁴ Certainly, in *Main-Travelled Roads*, the women are sympathetically drawn and resemble his mother in their lack of opportunities and their reliance upon men's goodwill.³⁵ Garland is, through these characters, able on occasion to flesh out his fantasy of rescuing his mother; however, the result is an overwrought rhetorical pattern that deprives his

female characters of all opportunities for independence and suggests his reliance on sentimental notions of manhood.

The extent to which Garland believed men to be responsible for rural women's physical well-being is most clearly expressed in *A Branch Road*, the story of a young man's rash departure from his rural Iowa community after a young woman has hurt his pride; his return from the West, seven years later, to find her a farmer's wife and a thin and bent and weary [...] dying woman (38); and his subsequent demand that she leave with him to travel East and then to Europe (43). The story, which is one of several in the collection that indicate Garland's adherence to the image of male virility suggested by sexual selection, begins in 1880 and flashes forward to 1887, a lapse during which an economic downturn has taken its toll on the region. Will Hannan, an ambitious seminary student who strives to demonstrate that he can work as hard as any farm boy and read Caesar's Commentaries beside (17), suffers a shock of homecoming not unlike that described by Garland in his foreword. In Will's case, however, it is his former sweetheart's poverty and abuse at the hands of her garrulous, miserly in-laws and coarse husband that send him reeling, and Will finds Agnes's living situation to be a matter of life and death—one for which he deems himself wholly responsible. I threw my life away and killed you—that's what I did! he declares (40). Overcome with a passion of pity and remorse, Will demands that Agnes leave with him immediately while her husband and in-laws are at church (43). Agnes agrees but then surprises Will by gathering up her newborn, about whom Will had entirely forgotten.

As the makeshift family exits the dilapidated farmhouse and enters the sun, Will shudders with a thrill of fear (44) that Garland attributes to his awareness of Agnes's physical frailty, but the reader might suspect that Will's alarm stems from additional sources. Indeed, the story

concludes optimistically, with a description of the beautiful world that lay before them (44), but the scene sits uneasily, as the reader knows that pity and spontaneity are hardly a sound foundation for marriage. Garland's hero rescues the damsel in distress, but we are left wondering what future disappointments await the naive new couple and remain doubtful that Agnes will ever be able to recover the health and spirit to which Will was initially attracted.³⁶ Thus, we see the complications of sexual selection as it applies to realist fiction in this image of human sterility juxtaposed with the pulsating natural world. Indeed, Will has won his mate from her husband, and Agnes has perhaps selected a more suitable mate in Will, but the resultant pairing does not seem likely to possess the fecundity or reproductive advantage associated with Darwin's theory.

Though its outcome is more hopeful, Garland creates a similar picture of rural women's lack of opportunities in *Among the Corn-Rows*, which tells of a bachelor farmer who is tired of his own cooking and therefore decides to leave the sunlit Dakota prairie, return to his home state of Wisconsin where [g]irls are as thick as huckleberries, and t' bring one back (90-91). During Rob Rodebaker's visit to Waupac County, he looks up a former acquaintance on her Norwegian father's farm and finds her driving a horse and plough under a fierce July sun. Garland's subsequent description of Julia Peterson and her response to the land and her work perhaps best exemplifies Garland's perception of women's attitudes toward farming and is therefore worth quoting in full. Garland writes:

Julia Peterson, faint with hunger, was toiling back and forth between the corn-rows, holding the handles of the double-shovel corn-plough, while her little brother Otto rode the steaming horse. Her heart was full of bitterness, her face flushed with heat, and her muscles aching with fatigue. The heat grew terrible. The corn came to her shoulders,

and not a breath seemed to reach her, while the sun, nearing the noon mark, lay pitilessly upon her shoulders, protected only by a calico dress. The dust rose under her feet, and as she was wet with perspiration it soiled her till with a woman's instinctive cleanliness, she shuddered. Her head throbbed dangerously. What matter to her that the kingbird pitched jovially from the maples to catch the wandering bluebottle fly, that the robin was feeding its young, that the bobolink was singing? All these things, if she saw them, only threw her bondage to labor into greater relief. (97-98)

Julia finds some relief when she sneaks away with her younger brother to bathe her feet in a pool nearby, and as she rested, the beauty of the scene came to her (99). Her attention to the natural world around her is short-lived, however, and her thoughts shift to her constant, tenderest, and most secret dream—the dream of matrimony to a man who would come to release her from such drudgery and who would be a Yankee, not a Norwegian (99).³⁷ Enter Rob, who comes trudging up the dirt road during Julia's reverie and who, in the course of an afternoon, convinces her to marry him secretly that night, leave her family behind, and move to the Dakota Territory with him. Like *A Branch Road*, the story concludes with the young woman running off with her male rescuer, away from field work to a farm where her primary duties will be domestic—to cook and to put Rob's shanty in shape (91).

When one contrasts Garland's images of Agnes and Julia with that of young Antonia Shimerda bragging to her friend Jim Burden about how much ploughing she had done that day (791), it is hard to deny the differences in how Cather and Garland imagined rural Midwestern women's perceptions of farm life. Julia feels only beaten down by the man's work her father gives her and for which she receives no pay (107); Antonia orders Jim to ask Jake how much he ploughed to-day, for she does not want to be outdone by the male farm hand (791). Where

Cather envisioned opportunities for economic independence and competitive satisfaction for Antonia, who would devote herself to sustaining the family business after her father's death, even if it meant being hired out as a farm hand, Garland makes it clear that Julia is being taken advantage of by her old-fashioned father. Rather than demanding pay for her work, however, the only opportunity for advancement Julia perceives is a marriage to someone who will not force her to work in the fields. Garland emphasizes that, although there is some tenderness between Julia and Rob, their marriage is more of a business venture than a love match when Rob promises her she will get half of everything he makes, and when Julia recognizes that by marrying Rob [s]he'd be a member of a new firm (107, 109).

Despite the lighthearted outcome of *Among the Corn-Rows*, the rural Midwest is for Garland's women still void of economic opportunity outside of marriage, and this prison-like atmosphere darkens Julia's attitude toward the natural world around her. Her inability (or unwillingness; Garland doesn't specify) to take pleasure in the kingbird, wandering bluebottle fly, robin, and bobolink in her immediate environment contrasts with the reverence for local biodiversity that is typical of the female bioregional mindset as expressed by writers like Cooper, Jewett, Chopin, and Cather, who advocated a culture that is native to a place and lectured Nebraskans on the importance of learning about and protecting native plant species.³⁸ Perhaps more importantly, however, Julia's easy dismissal of nature's wonders clashes with the celebration of natural elements regularly expressed by Garland's male characters. For example, Rob's friend Seagraves, junior editor of the Boomtown *Spike*, just pages earlier muses that the pigeons, the larks, the cranes, the multitudinous voices of the ground-birds and snipes and insects, made the air pulsate with sound—a chorus that died away into an infinite murmur of music (89). Seagraves, who is holding down a claim near Rob, is so moved by the landscape

before him that he declares it wholly American: No other land or time can match this mellow air, this wealth of color, much less the strange social conditions of life on this sunlit Dakota prairie (89-90). The doors to cultural knowledge are wide open to Seagraves, even in rural America, and he develops a reverence for the land that is not available to Julia because of her gender. Thus, the socioeconomic makeup of the Middle Border robs Garland's heroines not only of financial and professional opportunities, but also of the potential to develop aesthetic, cultural, and spiritual attachments to the earth. In his attempts to promote better treatment for women by emphasizing their victimhood, Garland downplays the possibility that they, too, might develop some attachment to the land upon which they have toiled—that they might have reciprocally beneficial experiences farming like those of Alexandra Bergson of *O Pioneers!*, who finds that it is in the soil that she expresses herself best (178).³⁹

When a woman is capable of thriving on a farm in these stories, Garland makes it clear that a wholly domestic life is preferable to one that involves field work—even if it means transforming oneself and betraying loved ones to secure a husband who will allow such a lifestyle. With *The Creamery Man*, Garland once again demonstrates his allegiance to the traditional marriage plot. His protagonist Claude Williams is, like Rob Rodebaker, a young man who does not believe in women working in the fields (146), and he hopes this conviction will be enough to persuade the daughter of one of Molasses Gap's most successful farmers to marry him. As a woman who is already excused from field work, however, Lucindy Kennedy is above the dandyish creamery man's station, and, after an influential visit to Minneapolis, she firmly rejects his advances. Although Claude is deeply in love with 'Cindy, he rashly decides to settle for the next best thing, a good, generous soul (147) named Nina Haldeman who is no stranger to farm labor but who, in an effort to earn Claude's admiration, starts dressing more like a

Yankee, begins going to the most fashionable church in town, and finally refuses to work in her German father's fields (153-54). In essence, Nina makes over her appearance and lifestyle, and, as a result, Claude determines that she is certainly much improved. All she needed was a little encouragement and advice and she would make a handsome wife (160). It remains clear that Claude's admiration for Nina pales in comparison to his adoration for 'Cindy; nevertheless, and much to her parents' dismay, Claude realizes that a marriage to Nina, an only child, will also guarantee him possession of her ailing father's Wisconsin farm—and perhaps make 'Cindy jealous to boot (161). Once again, Garland's characters marry out of financial and domestic convenience, and both seem to be entering into a reckless pact that will only bring emotional unrest, particularly to Nina, who loves Claude. Nina's actions seem especially foolhardy because, unlike Alexandra, she fails to consider taking over the farm's operations when it passes to her mother, thus gaining some form of professional and economic independence. The opportunity to avoid field work completely clouds Nina's ability to recognize the long-term emotional and financial consequences of handing her family farm over to an agriculturally inexperienced tradesman who does not love her. Indeed, in a rather Darwinistic outcome, Nina chooses the peacock-like creamery man and a life of dependence upon him.

Not all women of the Middle Border receive a permanent respite from farm labor, however, and age seems to be the primary determinant of their eligibility. Mrs. Markham of *A Day's Pleasure*, for example, has a houseful of children to care for and has already been physically broken down by farm life, and the sixty-year-old wife of Uncle Ethan Ripley has toiled relentlessly on a farm for decades, without a day or a night off (172). Through these characters, Garland maintains his theme of female imprisonment by emphasizing how vital it is to the women to leave the farm—if even for a short spell. *A Day's Pleasure* describes with

heart-wrenching clarity the [s]avage anger and hopeless tragedy of the embittered, weary farm wife as she witnesses the comforts of life in the town of Belleplain during a rare daylong visit to purchase supplies, and the soothing, transformative powers of a well-to-do townswoman's brief companionship and expressions of tenderness and sympathy for Mrs. Markham (170). Similarly, *Mrs. Ripley's Trip* chronicles the elderly wife's preparations, after her shocking decision to leave her husband alone over Thanksgiving, to go back to Yaark State (171), and her sense of accomplishment at having made the journey and her readiness to [take] up her burden again, never more thinking to lay it down (183).⁴⁰ Interestingly, Mrs. Ripley's profoundest assertion of independence serves not to sever her bonds to the farm, but rather to prepare her mentally for the final, difficult stage of a life that has already been filled with hardship. Garland's Middle Border heroines are rewarded by their ventures off the farm, but these outings also bring into sharp focus the inescapability of such a lifestyle once youth has been lost.

In summary, throughout *Main-Travelled Roads* Garland portrays farming as too physically demanding and socially stifling for most women, and, if a woman is hardy enough to flourish on a farm, as in Nina's case, the effects diminish her desirability and thereby hinder her chances of marrying. The solution to this widespread predicament, the stories suggest, is for men to establish a clear division of labor between genders on the farm, limiting women's work to household duties. This ideological template of course counters the general move toward equality sought by leading turn-of-the-century feminists such as Charlotte Perkins Gilman who, like Garland, believed in the evolutionary social advancement of women. As evolutionists, Gilman and Garland differ dramatically, however, as Gilman considered the idea of marriage as a partnership to be flawed on the grounds that whatever the economic value of the domestic

industry of women is, they do not get it. [...] Their labor is neither given nor taken as a factor in economic exchange. Exempt from this system, women are never truly men's business partners, regardless of the quality or quantity of their domestic duties.⁴¹ Garland, in contrast, considers a marriage partnership that places women firmly in the home to be the ideal for the farm women of his collection, and in projecting such a notion he weakens and pigeonholes his heroines by suggesting that domesticity is the most to which they can aspire. His conservatism, I find, is traceable in part to his particular adaptation of sexual selection, a theory with which Gilman quarreled because she believed it contributed to sex-distinction in the human race [that] is so excessive as not only to affect injuriously its own purposes, but to check and pervert the progress of the race. This occurs, Gilman posited, when mate becomes the master, when economic necessity is added to sex-attraction and the two great evolutionary forces—sexual selection and natural selection—work together to develop [sic] sex-distinction in the human female.⁴² Gilman considered women's aspirations to the domestic ideal a particularly harmful by-product of this overwrought sex-distinction while Garland idealizes such a process because of the potential safety it grants to women who obtain economic security through marriage.

Notably, this labor-division theme in *Main-Travelled Roads* also contradicts Garland's own earlier assertions about the social evolution of women's rights, including his vision of an ideal world in which the liberty of man and woman is bounded only by the equal rights of others and [w]oman stands there as independent of man as man is independent of woman.⁴³ Without a doubt, there are few opportunities for women's independence in the collection, and any social gains are the result of a man's sympathy or his need for a partnership that will grant him greater domestic ease. Indeed, it seems that Garland's feminism was evolutionary in nature. In Carp's astute appraisal, Garland, despite his early advocacy of women's rights, ultimately

promotes the domestic ideal in his fiction: Garland concludes that if life in the West is improved, then farm women [...] will be able to dress well, speak correctly, and become educated and cultured. They will assume their natural role of protectors of moral and spiritual values. [...] What Garland is therefore affirming as the ideal conception of femininity to which every woman should have the opportunity to aspire is the innocent, pure, domestic being celebrated by the Cult of True Womanhood.⁴⁴ To be fair, Garland's rescue narratives derive from noble, humanistic motives; indeed, these Middle Border stories rarely exist independently of his underlying message about the need for land policy reform, and, as such, highlight his belief that rural women's suffering is just one of many consequences of a faulty economic system.⁴⁵ Should farms gain greater economic stability, his stories suggest, the need for women to seek refuge from hard labor will decrease. However, this objective compromises his support for women's rights because of his tendency to make women helpless victims of—rather than fully invested participants in—the system he wished to change.

Furthermore, one must remember that, although it seems counterproductive from a feminist perspective, Garland's inclination to exclude women from a system he considered dangerous to their well-being stemmed, in large part, from respect for his own family members and concern for women in general. This apprehension, however, results in an overly simplistic portrait of farm women that suggests the challenges to realists' objectivity in lieu of their humanitarian goals. As Fetterly and Pryse note, Garland often expresses sympathy for his characters [...] but that sympathy falls short of exploring ideological contradictions, such as those inherent to the lives of regional wives.⁴⁶ These contradictions might include one's love for family versus a desire for personal freedom, the pull of the Jeffersonian agrarian ideal versus an oppressive sense of hopelessness, and an appreciation for nature versus a yearning for culture.

We see this struggle in Mrs. Ripley when she sheds a few tears at the thought of leaving her grandson behind as she prepares to fulfill her greatest dream of traveling back to New York and in her revelation, upon returning, that she kept thinking of Ripley and Tukey all the time she was away (181-82). But this is the fullest expression in the collection of the contradictory impulses that might drive farm women's thoughts and behaviors, and Mrs. Ripley's attachment is clearly to her loved ones and not to the land.

Cather's prairie heroines, in contrast, exhibit more fully the probably contradictory qualities of the farm woman's relationship to the land and her lifestyle and, therefore, more complexity as characters who act as inspirational models of womanhood. Without a doubt, hard work also takes a physical toll on Cather's heroines—Antonia, for example, is a battered woman [...], not a lovely girl (926) by novel's end, and Alexandra frequently goes to bed so tired after she had been in the open all day, overseeing the branding of the cattle or the loading of the pigs and aching with fatigue that she would dream of being carried by a faceless man who took from her all bodily weariness (238-39).⁴⁷ In addition to the physical hardships of life on the Divide, social isolation sometimes proves difficult for Cather's heroines. Alexandra, middle-aged at the end of *O Pioneers!* but preparing for the new experience of marriage to her childhood friend Carl Linstrum, reveals to her fiancé that she is tired and has been very lonely on her farm (290). She feels great relief at the companionship marriage will bring her. Alexandra and Antonia also experience the cultural void of country life and the educational sacrifices required to sustain a farm. Alexandra notes that farmers pay a high rent for their lifestyle, and it is an intellectual price to which she refers: [O]ur minds get stiff, she confides to Carl (198). And at age fifteen, Antonia cries to Jim over her decision to forego an education and work like mans now to help make this land one good farm (792). Finally, each woman

is certainly attuned to the financial hardships associated with farming. The Bergson family experiences [d]routh, chinch-bugs, hail, everything! in its early years (167), all of which exacerbate the strain of debt. Similarly, *Ántonia* and her Bohemian family live almost hand-to-mouth after immigrating to Nebraska, relying heavily on the kindness of the Burdens, and later, when *Ántonia* has married, she and her husband Cuzak find the first ten years [...] a hard struggle on their new farm (920). They ultimately become resigned to the fact that they will never possess great wealth because of the many mouths they must feed.

Nevertheless, all of these hardships are offset by a supremely powerful force that helps account for the women's attachment to rural Nebraska: their land ethic, a reverence for their environment that stems in part from their awareness of the many opportunities afforded by such a lifestyle—opportunities that remain out of Garland's female characters' reach. For example, Alexandra's bold decision to acquire *more* debt to buy up the land that others were abandoning after three years of drouth and failure had brought everyone on the Divide to the brink of despair (161) intensifies her already strong attachment to the land. After this decision has been settled upon by her and her reluctant brothers, Alexandra had a new consciousness of the country, felt almost a new relationship to it. [...] The chirping of the insects down in the long grass had been like the sweetest music. She had felt as if her heart were hiding out there, somewhere, with the quail and the plover and all the little wild things that crooned or buzzed in the sun (173). Similarly, *Ántonia* feels a special kinship with the land after her stint as a hired girl and finds in farming an antidote to the frequent sad spells she experienced while in town. I belong on a farm, she tells Jim. I'm never lonesome here like I used to be in town (921). Despite their similarities, the most notable of which are their powerful wills to succeed, shared reverence for rural Nebraska, and ethics-based approach to its cultivation, Alexandra and

Ántonia remain two distinct characters, both of whom stand as alternatives to traditional models of womanhood. Indeed, Cather demonstrates the various positive outcomes of devotion to a rural lifestyle by granting Alexandra vast financial success and by making it clear that while Ántonia will continue to struggle daily to feed her family, she has an almost rapturous appreciation for her rural life that makes wealth seem insignificant.

Moreover, with these two characters Cather also contributes to the dissemination of alternatives to Darwinian ideas about sexual biology by emphasizing that their most impressive qualities extend beyond their potential as sexual beings. As Bender has suggested, from her initial descriptions of Alexandra's physical strength, Cather signals her intent to resist the categories of sexual difference that Darwin had accounted for with the theory of sexual selection. She also does this by creating a foil to Alexandra in Marie Tovesky, a character whose unfortunate participation in Darwinian sexual entanglement leads to her death and that of her lover at the hands of a jealous husband.⁴⁸ Furthermore, Bender notes, Five years later, in her more famous earth mother, Ántonia, Cather would not absolutely deny the biological necessity of sexual reproduction (Ántonia reappears at the end with her impressive brood). Even then, however, Cather took great pains [...] to repress or sublimate the sexual reality.⁴⁹ Thus, Cather is never simply masculinizing her prairie heroines by distancing them from engagement in sexual struggle; rather, her motives are more complex and traceable to a feminist agenda that seeks to provide inspirational literary alternatives to a wholly domestic life.

Indeed, despite the physical impact of such a lifestyle, Cather's heroines, unlike Garland's, are elevated rather than broken by farm life, and, as a result, their individuality takes on almost mythic qualities, a trend that points to Cather's romantic sensibilities. In Jim's eyes, Ántonia, with her grizzled hair (914) and missing teeth, still had that something which fires

the imagination, could still stop one's breath for a moment by a look or gesture that somehow revealed the meaning in common things. She had only to stand in the orchard, to put her hand on a little crab tree and look up at the apples, to make you feel the goodness of planting and tending and harvesting at last (926). Cather emphasizes *Ántonia's* allure to the male narrator through the Edenic imagery in the orchard passage. After being disgraced in her youth and coming back to Nebraska to perform the work of a man on the farm (904), this mother of ten or eleven children (913) remains a vibrant image of fertility. Later, Jim muses that [w]hatever else was gone, *Ántonia* had not lost the fire of life (917). *Ántonia* manages her large farm, as well as her large household, and maintains an almost mythic attractiveness, a sort of spiritual beauty that transcends the physical and that contributes to the development of Cather's expansion of ideal female qualities well beyond those honed through sexual selection. Similarly, when Carl returns to Nebraska, he finds little changed about Alexandra physically, but her presence seems to have been magnified somehow, and he feels astonish[ed] by his old friend (203). Carl seems to understand his bewilderment more clearly later when he has come back from Alaska and realizes that Alexandra truly belong[s] to the land (289). Thus, these characters' close associations with the land invigorate rather than drain them, and the idea of belonging to the land—rather than the inverse—is a key component of this reciprocal relationship.

Indeed, Alexandra and *Ántonia* display not only a keen attachment to their environments and lifestyles, but also an ideologically progressive view of farming that contradicts the common American perception of nature as wholly intended for man's use and therefore in need of subjugation—an idea that surfaces at the conclusion of Garland's story *The Return of a Private* when the soldier recognizes that [h]is war with the South was over, and his fight, his daily

running fight with nature and against the injustice of his fellow-men, was begun again (129). One finds in this passage from *Main-Travelled Roads* echoes of Frederick Jackson Turner's controversial Frontier Thesis, which suggests that the entire character of America has been determined by men's need to be prepared to meet nature's challenges head-on to survive on the increasingly westward-moving frontier.⁵⁰ Despite the prevalence of such attitudes in America around the turn of the century, this martial position toward nature contradicts the environmental ethos based on stewardship that prevails throughout Cather's Prairie Trilogy.⁵¹ Cather emphasizes the novelty of such an attitude in *O Pioneers!* when she writes that [f]or the first time, perhaps, since that land emerged from the waters of geologic ages, a human face was set toward it with love and yearning by Alexandra (170). Of course, this hyperbolic passage is disconcertingly dismissive in terms of race (namely its failure to acknowledge former Native American inhabitants of the region) and historically distorted in its suggestion that Alexandra might be the first to look upon the land with true respect; nevertheless, it also indicates the imprint of Darwinian science upon Cather's imagination. Indeed, Bender points out that the passage appears after Alexandra's dying father has decided to leave the tangle—a resonantly Darwinian term, Bender notes—in her care, and that with such language Cather underscores her point that Alexandra will lead evolutionary progress to new levels beyond the Darwinian order.⁵² The passage contributes to the development of Alexandra's mythical qualities and therefore reinforces Cather's romantic inclinations which at times sit uneasily with her forward-looking environmental ethos.

Certainly, Cather's prairie heroines demonstrate a rather progressive care-based approach to cultivation, willingly thwarting standard agricultural practices and challenging men's ideas at times because of their belief that careful consideration of the land's capacities will make it

flourish. The novels, which take as their primary topic the work of defining the basic terms of the human community's relationship to the natural environment, might be situated within the American georgic tradition as it is described Timothy Sweet because they are neither wholly arcadian in an emphasis on harmony with nature, nor imperial in an emphasis on human dominion over nature.⁵³ Indeed, the novels idealize a sort of environmental-economic middle ground that acknowledges humans' need to work the land, as well as human's capacity for respectful consideration of the land. As Mary Ryder notes, 'From Alexandra Bergson's raising alfalfa to rejuvenate the land—an experiment considered foolish by her brothers—to Ántonia Shimerda's devoted watering of young trees, Cather acknowledges that the great fact was the land itself' and it was rich and strong and glorious.'⁵⁴ Ántonia's reverence for nature can be seen in her unequalled orchard, which is full of trees that she loves as if they were people (919). And Alexandra's willingness to buck agricultural trends aligns her with the ethically radical ideas of Crazy Ivar, the Norwegian horse doctor who lives in a sod dugout, refuses to eat meat, and will not let people bring guns onto his property because his large pond is an oasis for migrating fowl. Despite her brothers' mockery of the immigrant, Alexandra heeds his advice to preserve her hogs' health by cleaning up their living conditions and allowing them to graze (159-60). Notions such as these pay off for both women, as they ultimately achieve the status of respectable farmers because of their humility toward the land and willingness to cooperate with the great operations of nature (*OP* 173).

I do not mean to suggest that Garland did not have a similarly keen respect for the rural land about which he writes, or that none of his male characters demonstrate respect for their environment. In fact, his male characters and narrators often speak rapturously of their Middle Border landscape; however, as is also clear from the narrative patterns noted here, this same

reverence is neither experienced by nor accessible to his female characters, as it is in Cather's novels. As a result, Garland's portrait of the farm woman in *Main-Travelled Roads* is, despite the varying tenor and action of his stories and the pleasing equilibrium of the collection as a whole, too reductive. By not providing his characters with clear components of the land ethic that causes some women regionalists' characters to view farm life as potentially nourishing to their individualistic energy and rife with opportunities to cross gender barriers, Garland deprives his female characters of the ability to complement his sympathetic feminism by acting as inspirational agents that signify women's capacity for equality to men. Indeed, to suggest that women were never invigorated, rewarded, and inspired by rural experiences—which is the overwhelming picture painted by Garland's early farm fiction—clashes with the turn-of-the-century representation of rural America by women writers like Cather who saw farm life as a potential enabler of women's social advancement. While acknowledging that frontier life was not without hardships (like those experienced by Cather's prairie heroines), women regionalists nevertheless envisioned in that lifestyle means for entrepreneurial experimentation and assertions of individualism (Alexandra's decision to erect the first silo on the Divide comes to mind (180)). Despite his repeated disavowal of such opportunities for women in *Main-Travelled Roads*, however, Garland at least acknowledged and attempted to capture the potential motivational spirit of the natural world as it applies to women four years later in *Rose of Dutcher's Coolly*, the novel often deemed his best.⁵⁵

The Rise of the Artist: Rose Dutcher and Thea Kronborg

Likely inspired by their own travels and the intellectual growth facilitated by the great cities of the East and Midwest, both Garland and Cather also envision lives for female characters outside of the Middle Border setting. Indeed, the most pronounced differences in these authors'

understanding of the way a land ethic (or lack thereof) shapes women's potential—specifically their artistic potential—become especially clear when their heroines leave their isolated rural communities, as they do in *Rose of Dutcher's Coolly* and *The Song of the Lark*. These works welcome comparison, as the many similarities in the stories of Rose Dutcher and Thea Kronborg emphasize the importance of women's evolving position in America to both authors, and, more specifically, how one's awareness of her natural environment influences her art. In each work, a young girl from a rural community aspires to artistic achievement—Rose to becoming a poet and Thea an opera singer—and faces the necessary distress associated with leaving her family for a Midwest metropolis where such opportunities are possible. Furthermore, these novels also both chronicle their heroines' sexual awakenings alongside their artistic awakenings, and consider how the pressure to marry at times threatens their resolve to achieve professional recognition.

Most importantly, however, the protagonists both develop a greater recognition of how nature can influence their art, although this awareness remains underdeveloped in *Rose*. Indeed, by analyzing these works together, we can recognize a distinct difference in how Garland and Cather appraised the natural environment in terms of its potential advantageous effects upon young women struggling to escape the professional, cultural, and intellectual confines of rural communities. While Thea Kronborg develops a land ethic that is rooted in the remarkable ambiance of an Arizona canyon, and transfers this emotional appreciation for and knowledge of the landscape to her performances, *Rose* exhibits a superficial respect for rural Wisconsin that derives not from love for the land or a particular way of life, but rather from her awareness of how celebrating a region's distinctions in poetry can appeal to an urban audience's nostalgic admiration for rural America. Ultimately, despite these plot similarities, *Rose* fails to grasp the professional success achieved by Thea and instead discovers wedded bliss, and Garland's vision

of the New Woman therefore seems more like a template for the more powerful figure of Cather's later novel. Certainly, the twenty years that separate the publication of these works stand out in the greater attention Cather devotes to artistic fulfillment over domestic aspirations; nevertheless, Garland's protagonist might have been a more inspiring and enduring portrait of the New Woman had she embraced the land ethic that helps fuel Thea's rise to greatness.

Garland attempts to establish this feature of his heroine's character when she suddenly discovers in the once-loathed rural landscape of her childhood inspiration for original poetry, but it comes too late in the novel's flawed second half to seem plausible in light of Garland's heavy emphasis in the first half on Rose's disdain for rural life, as well as on several men's powerful influence over Rose and her imagination, which diminishes her autonomy. Critics have generally deemed the portion of the book devoted to Rose's Chicago experiences weaker than the Wisconsin section,⁵⁶ and Pizer attributes the unease that most modern readers have about the conclusion of *Rose of Dutcher's Coolly* to a strong element of unconscious self-betrayal in Rose's excitement over her marriage to Warren Mason, a rather bland newspaperman and novelist who is fifteen years her senior. According to Pizer, What Garland apparently envisioned as a triumphant conclusion of Rose's quest for an independent existence is, when looked at beyond her and Mason's pledge to New Woman ideals, still a marriage in which the woman is to be reduced to the conventional function of domestic angel.⁵⁷ These plot ironies certainly exist; however, I would add to Pizer's assessment that the weakness of the novel's latter half stems not only from the rather odd and passionless marital agreement struck by Rose and Mason, and Rose's delight with such a pact, but more importantly from her highly contradictory and swiftly changing attitudes toward her rural homeland, which undercut her believability as a character and authenticity as an artist.

Nevertheless, thoughtful critics who recognize the novel's weaknesses have brought into Garland's tenuous and hasty depiction of Rose's transformed relationship to her homeland as the impetus for her ability to produce original poetry. Robert Bray, for example, declares that the continuity of action [in the novel] stems from the author's convincing ability to make Rose the woman and poet seem an organic completion of the teleology first actuated by her in the land.⁵⁸ And according to Pizer, In an exemplification of the thesis of *Crumbling Idols*, [Rose] realizes by the close of the novel that her true strength and talent lie in the expression of her individual perception of her own Wisconsin valley.⁵⁹ A closer look at the text reveals, however, that the improvements to Rose's poetry are inspired not principally by her reformed attitude toward her homeland but by her quest to win Mason's admiration for her work—as well as her persona in general. Indeed, for all of her achievements, the heroine of Garland's carefully crafted defense of the New Woman⁶⁰ triumphs primarily at finding a husband who promises her total autonomy, and there exists an uncomfortable irony in this presumably progressive character's search for a husband who promises her personal independence. Ultimately, Garland's prototype achieves self-fulfillment primarily because she is fortunate enough to be surrounded by men like Mason who influence or support her decisions along the way. Because Garland actively attempts to create a prototype in Rose and to sketch her generation as one characterized by new men and women (as Rose's friend Dr. Isabel Herrick, the only woman in the novel to significantly influence Rose, refers to their young group of friends (213)), male characters' influence over Rose's life might be considered a reflection of Garland's assessment of modern women's limited independence in general.

Prior to Rose's subscription to the domestic status quo, however, she is compelling as a sexually alert child who is both strengthened and stifled by the lifestyle of toil and troubled

dreaming that proves fatal for her mother when Rose is only five years old (4). Throughout the novel (and to a tedious extent) Garland emphasizes the admirable effects of country life on Rose's appearance and health. She is a sturdy, smart, wholesome, beautiful—all in all ideal—girl whose childish heart rebelled at sex-distinction (17), and who therefore rejects housework in favor of caring for the farm horses: She could use a fork in the barn deftly as a boy by the time she was twelve, and in stacking times she handed bundles across the stack to her father (25). Somewhat ironically, considering the impact of typically masculine duties on Garland's *Main-Travelled Roads* women, It was the variety of work, perhaps, which prevented her from acquiring that pathetic and lamentable stoop (or crook) in the shoulders and back which many country girls have in varying degree (25). Physically stunning and emotionally perceptive, Rose is at age thirteen alert to the regeneration occurring on the farm and awakens easily to the terrible hunger of desire when she and her childhood playmate Carl are in the forest one day (13). This sexual longing blossoms into unadulterated obsession with a young male circus performer who becomes, in addition to the center of her erotic fantasies, the first man in a line of several who are ultimately responsible for the course of Rose's life outside the coulé. In a rather deft portrayal of the workings of the female teenaged mind, Garland weaves an intricate picture of Rose's association of the tights-clad circus rider's physical beauty with something much more profound, a sad deep hunger, which she could not understand (59). As a result of Rose's run-in with the rider William De Lisle, she begins to live for him, focusing all her energies on becoming the woman she believes would be his ideal. Ultimately, Rose sublimates her longing for De Lisle into scholarly aspirations: Vast ambitions began in her. She determined to be a great scholar. She would be something great for his sake. Under De Lisle's spell, she decides that she will write books like *Ivanhoe* (61).

Her devotion to her De Lisle-inspired studies pays off when she catches the eye of Dr. Thatcher, a Madison physician who encounters Rose during a visit to the squalid little den of a schoolhouse that he also attended as a child living in the coulé (65). Although Dr. Thatcher perceives her scholarly talent, Rose's beauty is largely responsible for his interest in her, as his noble intentions of helping her attend college in Madison are offset by his eventual admission to his wife that Rose must move out of their home because of his sexual attraction to her (129). Nevertheless, it is because of Dr. Thatcher, who feels compelled to rescue Rose from farm life, that she gets this opportunity, and, unlike the men of *Main-Travelled Roads*, rather than introduce Rose to a world limited to domestic duties, Dr. Thatcher vows to help her apply her great energy and resolution to her education (78). When Rose receives her father's permission to leave the coulé and live with Dr. Mason after completing her preparatory schooling, she develops an intense admiration of her rural environment that Garland perhaps incorporates to foreshadow the development of her original, local poetry later. To Rose, [e]very sign of spring was doubly significant; the warm sun, the passing of wild-fowl, the first robin, the green grass, the fall of the frost, all appealed to her with a power which transcended words (81). Just as Garland's humanitarianism at times clouds the objectivity of his realist projects, so too do Rose's emotions contribute to the subjectivity of her responses to nature here. Furthermore, Garland undercuts an opportunity to paint an incipient respect for the natural world in Rose at this point, for she still does not see in nature the impetus for the words that will comprise her art, and her respect for these rural elements reads as a fleeting and fitting emotional accompaniment to her happiness at leaving them behind. This detachment is further emphasized by her attitude toward farm life after she has attended college.

Indeed, when she returns to her father's farm several years later, Rose still sees little in the land of her childhood except a lack of intellectual stimuli and an abundance of domestic drudgery. In Rose's mind, rural Wisconsin is a wilderness. It had nothing for her but nature, and nature palls upon a girl of twenty, with red blood in her veins, and splendid dreams in her heart (173). Suffocated by the countryside, she contemplates moving to Chicago:

This was the age of cities. The world's thought went on in the great cities. The life in these valleys was mere stagnant water, the great stream of life swept by far out and down there, where men and women met in millions. To live here was to be a cow, a tad-pole! Grass grew here, yes—but she could not live on grass. The birds sang here, yes—but there were Patti, and Duse, and Bernhardt out there in the world.

Here you could arise at five o'clock to cook breakfast and wash dishes, and get dinner, and sweep and mend, and get supper, and so on, till you rotted, like a post stuck in the mud. Your soul would rot. [...] There was no stimulus in these surroundings, she told herself; everything was against her higher self. (172-73)

Clearly, Rose has yet to recognize the stimulus that she will later rely upon for her poetry. At age twenty, Rose's disparagement of country life is still vehement, and she leaves her doting father behind once again with the hopes of finding the man who is to fill out [her] life (173).

Upon her arrival in Chicago, Garland introduces a potential candidate for Rose's self-fulfillment through marriage, but Owen Taylor and Rose display an insurmountable difference: their incongruent attitudes toward nature. Indeed, Garland goes so far as to create a foil specifically as a contrast to Rose's attitudes toward the natural world in Taylor, a young lawyer from Colorado who lives in the same boarding house as Rose and who adores John Muir and has traveled extensively throughout the West (201). Taylor is a kind, well-spoken young man

who does not criticize Rose's dismissive attitude toward nature, even though he himself longs to be back again where the lone old peaks bulge against the sky (217). Indeed, despite Rose's rather adolescent declaration to Taylor: I don't care for the wilderness as you do. What is a bird compared to a man, anyway? I like people. I want to be where dramas are being played. Men make the world, bears don't (218), Taylor is attracted to Rose. He, like her, has come to Chicago to find a spouse, but Rose quickly shatters his hopes of finding a woman who loves the wilderness as he does: No woman loves the wilderness—as a home. All women love cities and streets and children, she tells him (219). Garland's narrator notes the flippancy of Rose's comments, but, coming on the heels of her disparagement of rural Wisconsin life, they only serve to round out what is quickly becoming a full portrait of female hostility toward anything *not* urban.

This antagonism strikes to the core of Rose's identity later when, while at the opera, her social discomfort causes her to feel a sudden disgust with her name; it sounded vulgarly of the world of weeds and cattle (272). Fittingly, the man who ultimately wields the most power over Rose's life is a man who feels a similar disgust toward this world. I'm no wild lover of the country, Warren Mason confesses; Cattle I hate, he declares (391-92). Nevertheless, the opera proves transformative for Rose, although it is not solely the beauty of the music that inspires her to settle on one ambition—to write, to be a great poetress (277). Indeed, Garland tentatively points to Mason as the key motivator for her newfound resolution: The music, the audience-room, the splendid assemblage, and some compelling power in Mason—all of these (or he alone) had changed her point of view (281). The parenthetical injection here is noteworthy because it indicates Garland's discomfort with granting Rose total control over her new pledge to

produce original poetry. It is ultimately Mason, who advises her during the opera to burn all her imitative poetry and start anew, who shapes Rose's artistic development most profoundly.

Certainly, nature in all its rawness makes an impact on Rose after she experiences a raging sea storm after the opera scene; however, the emotional storm that Garland creates as a parallel builds out of Rose's growing passion for Mason and not her art. It is only after the storm, when Rose begins to suspect an impending proposal from Mason, that she also begins to appreciate the land of her childhood and decides to return to Wisconsin, which suggests that the exciting prospect of marriage is primarily responsible for her suddenly transformed perception of the *coulé*. Nevertheless, Garland attempts to depict an autonomous artistic awakening to the beauty of farmland:

Rose went directly from that storm to the repose and apparent peace of the country, and it helped her to make a great discovery. She found that every familiar thing had taken on a peculiar value—a literary and artistic value. It was all so reposeful, so secure. A red barn set against a gray-green wooded hillside was no longer commonplace. How pretty! she thought; I never noticed before. (371)

Rose's intellectual stirring continues when a crow flying by with ringing, rough cry made her blood leap, and she finds that cows no longer meld into the fields, as their legs moving invisibly gave them a yielding motion like a vast centipede (371). After several pages describing the newly rapturous effects of country life upon Rose, Garland sums up her discovery of poetic inspiration: Rhymes grew in her mind upon subjects hitherto untouched by her literary perception. Things she had known all her life, familiar plants, flowers, trees, etc., seemed touched all at once by supernatural radiance (374). At last, Rose finds her calling: She will be a local-color poet and share with the world the beauty and nuances of rural Wisconsin.

Or, perhaps she will create such portraits through her poetry as, once again, her objectivity is compromised, this time by her profound happiness at having secured a mate in Warren.

Rose's professional achievement in the novel reaches its apex when Mason receives her telegram consenting to marry him and travels to her father's farm. Rose recites some of her new poetry to Mason while they are hiking (the lines themselves unavailable to the reader), and, moved to kiss her hand by the freshness of her words, he declares: "You're a poet. [...] You have found your voice, and I—I love you because you are a poet you are a beautiful woman (401). This is the last we learn about Rose's career (or the beginnings thereof), although we might suppose that because Mason is a respected journalist, and because he criticized her earlier work as too imitative of European writers, Rose's poetry has improved enough to generate the literary recognition for which she once hungered. Nevertheless, Rose's acknowledgment that [h]is praise of her poem, her victory over him as a critic was great, but his final words drowned in fierce light the flame of her art's enthusiasm (401), explicitly dominates any excitement about her future as a poet. She delightedly turns her face toward wifedom and fame at this point, but the two futures hardly carry an equal weight for Rose. As Roger Carp has pointed out, [T]he fact that this novel [...] ends at the time the leading characters wed testifies to Garland's inability to conceive realistically what a marriage of equals' would be like. What seems apparent is that while Garland could grant women the opportunities to become educated and cultured, in the end no other roles could be seen for them except those of wife and mother.⁶¹ The tenuousness of Rose's attachment to rural Wisconsin is further emphasized by her plans to leave the coulé that night to return to the city with her fiancé, for whom [i]t is a greater pleasure [...] to meet men than trees, and concerts are more than winds in the pines (402). Rose's appreciation for the land and life that she once considered soul-sucking reaches its crescendo in a

matter of weeks, at which point she then departs, yet again, for the city. For Rose, it seems the enchantment of rural life is most keenly felt from a flat in Chicago.

When Rose bemoans Chicago's costly fashion trends and expresses her desire to wear a dress suit like a man to the opera (262),⁶² she conjures up images of a young Willa Cather who, as a teenager, flouted tradition by donning masculine attire, and who, like Garland, would become most famous for her portraits of frontier America and its women settlers.⁶³ In *The Song of the Lark*, Thea Kronborg, Cather's Scandinavian-American heroine, also discovers in Chicago greater opportunities for her professional development, yet she develops and retains an attachment to a specific geographical location that Cather much more clearly identifies as a key inspiration for her musical achievement. Unlike Rose's shallow and hasty celebration of rural Wisconsin, which quickly garners her Mason's admiration, Thea's experience in Arizona is a significantly more private awakening that begins as awe and respect for her environment and its past and then translates into artistic inspiration and historical awareness. Indeed, Thea becomes, over the course of the novel, a geographical being as the figure is described by Robert Sack. She is one who recognizes that our actions are inescapably constrained and enabled by space and place, and these draw together the natural and the cultural, where culture is but a composite of social relations and meaning. [...] By observing how we live in the world we can understand the connections among these forces.⁶⁴ Certainly, coming to terms with the interconnectedness among living things is a key component to Thea's artistic development, and this awareness helps also to develop the land ethic that will guide her career.

In this case, it is an adopted landscape which nourishes Thea's land ethic, more so than the land around Moonstone, Colorado, the frail, brightly painted desert town (326) where Thea grows up, yet Panther Canyon's hold over her is no less profound for having been established

during adulthood. Moreover, Thea's readiness to acknowledge the impact of the land upon her work, to demonstrate sustained reverence for this historic crevice in Arizona, burgeons from her appreciation for the rural land of her childhood. Indeed, during her first visit to the orchestra in Chicago, Thea hears Dvorak's Symphony in E minor and transmutes her thrill into associations first with the high tableland above Laramie, which she once visited with her father, but discovers that [t]here was home in it, too, this music that returns her to the sand hills, the grasshoppers and locusts, all the things that wakened and chirped in the morning; the reaching and reaching of high plains; the immeasurable yearning of flat lands (468). Furthermore, after her first year in Chicago, Thea returns to Moonstone for a visit, and while on the train, she has the sense of going back to a friendly soil, whose friendship was somehow going to strengthen her; a naive, generous country that gave one its joyous force, its large-hearted, childlike power to love, just as it gave one its coarse, brilliant flowers (485). Her attitude of reciprocity, of being open to the strength derived from feelings of kinship toward the environment, will inform not only Thea's response to Panther Canyon, but also her career, after she returns to the city.

Just as Cather does not romanticize farm life for her heroines, neither is city life uncomplicated for Thea, who finds Chicago to be a wilderness through which one had to find one's way (463) as she struggles first to find her musical calling and later with the isolation that accompanies her devotion to her career. By the end of her second year there, Thea seems a moving figure of discouragement (543) to Fred Ottenburg, the brewery heir who will become her lover and who arranges Thea's trip to Panther Canyon, the restorative, inspirational visit to the Arizona cliff dwellings that was inspired by Cather's trip to Walnut Canyon in 1912 and has generated a wealth of commentary. While some readers relish the vibrant thematic tapestry of art, history, and nature Cather painstakingly weaves in the pivotal *Ancient People* section of

the novel, others take issue with Thea's identification with the Native Americans who built the city, her sense that she develops a certain understanding of those old people by living in their environment (550).⁶⁵ This association, however, should be examined in terms of the influence of evolutionary science upon Cather, as it suggests that Thea seems to be moving toward what Brian Boyd has called a biocultural perspective for understanding art. That is, [D]espite its many forms, art, too, is a specifically human adaptation, biologically part of our species. It offers tangible advantages for human survival and reproduction.⁶⁶ Notably, it is through the relics of an extinguished society, the fragments of pottery everywhere from the graceful jars of the ancients (551)—that Thea recognizes the enduring power of her own art. She associates the pieces of the ancients' jars with her throat, also a vessel (552), and begins to consider her voice a well of potential, her talent linked to the earth and its history through the vehicle of song. After two months in the canyon, before Fred joins her, she has decided to pursue her career with renewed vigor by studying in Germany, for the Cliff-Dwellers had lengthened her past and she feels she had older and higher obligations (555). Thus, the ubiquitous pottery, which is both utilitarian and beautiful, helps Thea gain a sense of belonging, a more precious personal history that is lengthened because she now identifies with the larger human past. She discovers in ancient pottery and contemporary song a historical connection that transcends race.

Thea's newfound sense of the interconnectedness between humans extends also to the canyon's non-human organisms, which results in an ecological thematic framework throughout the Arizona section. As Ann Moseley points out, Before Thea experiences her personal artistic awakening [...] she must come to understand the culture and ecology of the canyon.⁶⁷ Indeed, Cather describes Thea's felt connection with the extinct Natives, but also the other organisms living there, such as the young cottonwoods that form a living, chattering screen behind which

she took her bath every morning (547), as well as the stream itself and even the geological formations that allow such an experience. These, too, contribute to her renewed devotion to song, particularly the canyon's naturally musical creatures. As Moseley notes, A significant part of Thea's growth as a singer in Panther Canyon results from experiencing the rhythmic and often symphonic voices of nature's singers, namely various birds and insects.⁶⁸ Accordingly, one of the most transformative moments for Thea takes place when, in a moment of solitude, an eagle soaring above the cliffs fuses with Thea's newly formed concepts on art and history. In a moment of recognition:

Thea sprang to her feet as if she had been thrown up from the rock by volcanic action. She stood rigid on the edge of the stone shelf, straining her eyes after that strong, tawny flight. O eagle of eagles! Endeavor, achievement, desire, glorious striving of human art! From a cleft in the heart of the world she saluted it. [...] It had come all the way; when men lived in caves, it was there. A vanished race; but along the trails, in the stream, under the spreading cactus, there still glittered in the sun the bits of their frail clay vessels, fragments of their desire. (567)

Thea sees the eagle, above the land for centuries, as a symbol of the fortitude also of humans and the universal, timeless need to create art. She embraces among the cliffs, in the eagle's shadow, the ferocity of her longing to produce art as one of the basic needs of humankind, a need inspired by nature and also experienced by the ancients.

Nevertheless, the romanticization of a vanished race in this passage justifiably causes unease; however, once again the passage's racial insensitivity seems to derive from romantic and feminist impulses. Indeed, Cather attempts to transcend issues of race to advance an image of womanhood that counters the stereotypical domestic model. According to Bender, with *Song*

Cather was again working to free her heroine from submitting to the workings of sexual selection that lead naturally to marriage. Thus, in this passage, Cather dramatizes Thea's evolutionary ascent beyond both the ancient people of Panther Canyon [...] and her own present identity.⁶⁹ In doing so, we also see Cather embracing romantic sentiments while challenging the theory of sexual selection, as well as contributing to a particular strain of regional feminism that privileges the sort of relationship to the land developed by Thea.

Long after her trip to the cliff city, when Thea is a world-renowned soprano, she acknowledges the effect of the experience on her young psyche: I don't know if I'd ever have gotten anywhere without Panther Canyon. [...] One can learn how to sing, but no singing teacher can give anybody what I got down there, she tells Fred (685). Although Thea's life brims with the activity and metropolitan humdrum she once fled, and she (quite unlike Rose) continues to struggle with the solitude associated with her profession and the recognition that life does not consist of fairy tales (689), she retains the image of the canyon and the memory of its emotive power and simplifying influence over her art. As Thea stripped away the distractions of the city in the canyon, she could focus on and develop her own theory of art, a theory that idealizes simplification and is reflective of Cather's own ideals for writing. Indeed, Cather famously muses in *The Novel Demeublé*, How wonderful it would be if we could throw all the furniture out of the window in prose,⁷⁰ and her ruminations closely resemble those of Thea who discovers at Panther Canyon that her thoughts are like a ragbag and determines that she must throw this lumber away. As Thea's ideas become simplified they become sharper and clearer, and she becomes more focused on [m]usical phrases (554-55). Her newfound ability to hone in on what is important shapes the course of her career and becomes especially evident during her final performance of the novel. As Fred and Dr. Archie watch her on stage in

New York, Fred tries to verbalize what sets Thea apart from other opera stars: It's the idea, the basic idea, pulsing behind every bar she sings. She simplifies a character down to the musical ideal it's built on, and makes everything conform to that. [...] Instead of inventing a lot of business and expedients to suggest character, she knows the thing at the root, and lets the musical pattern take care of her. The score pours her into all those lovely postures, makes the light and shadow go over her face, lifts her and drops her (649). Thea's music, then, is an extension of a basic idea that she grasps through simplification. Fred's metaphors in this passage, his claim that Thea knows something at the root and lets the music pour into her, re-establishes her connection to the world of the canyon and Thea's sense that her voice is a vessel.

Trade the activity of singing in this passage for writing, and Cather's own philosophies on art, which she expressed later in nonfiction, continue to be reflected. Art, it seems to me, should simplify, Cather wrote in 1920. That, indeed, is very nearly the whole of the higher artistic process; finding what conventions of form and what detail one can do without and yet preserve the spirit of the whole—so that all that one has suppressed and cut away is there to the reader's consciousness as much as if it were in type on the page.⁷¹ This ability to preserve the spirit of a thing described by Cather is perhaps what makes her Prairie Trilogy heroines agents of inspiration while Garland's rural women remain mere outlines. Indeed, the basic idea of the landscape's influence on women puls[es] behind the pages of Cather's novels; the absence of such an idea compromises the development of Garland's heroines. Ultimately, the driving force of artistic inspiration derived from knowledge of nature and history—a notably romantic impulse—helps Thea come into full possession of things she had been refining and perfecting for so long during the performance in New York (697), a triumph not experienced by Rose, whose poetry never matures in Garland's novel.

Despite the flaws in Garland's portrayal of the New Woman, however, his attention to women's rights should not be dismissed, as his 1894 novel helps set the stage not only for Thea Kronborg, but for a string of turn-of-the-century heroines such as Edna Pontellier, Carrie Meeber, and Lily Bart, who would also, and to varying levels of success, navigate the rigid social conventions inherent to a patriarchal society in their quests to achieve various forms of personal fulfillment. Moreover, Garland's unwillingness to grant his rural heroines autonomy is an asset to understanding the history and difficulty of these quests—which occurred on the Plains as well as in the cities, in kitchens as well as in colleges, and were undertaken by farm wives as well as by artists. By examining this trend in Garland's early fiction, we learn more about the challenges experienced by the women who sought to bend conventions, for Garland's inability to recognize the rewards of the feminine land ethic, both for women and the rapidly changing American landscape alike, highlights the limited perceptions about women's professional potential with which writers like Cather had to contend.

Notes

¹Riley, "Women in the West," 326. Although it is not my goal to assess the historical accuracy of either author's works, historian Mary Neth has examined the truthfulness of Garland's depictions of farm women's experiences and concluded that "[d]espite Garland's view that women were eager to move out of the field or barn, oral histories reveal that attitudes toward the more 'masculine' types of work they performed were much more mixed." Her analysis of Midwestern farm women's oral histories reveals that being excused from typically masculine duties did not mean that women's workloads would necessarily be lighter; furthermore, "many women viewed their labors in the barn and field not only as necessities but as a pleasure." See "Gender and the Family Labor System," 568-69. Certainly, however, as Neth also notes, not all farm women of the late nineteenth century took "pleasure" in the labor associated with farming. Social isolation, frequent pregnancies, financial strain, loved ones' deaths, and the physical toil associated with tending to children, a home, and, frequently, crops and livestock in addition typified the lives of some nineteenth-century farm women, and they might have few, if any, means of avoiding such hardships. Historian Mary Fink, who also draws on rural women's personal accounts, has challenged the notion that frontier agricultural lifestyles facilitated women's increased equality with men. She argues that because of an unequal distribution of labor which allowed men more leisure time than women, the organization of duties in a typical nuclear family in Nebraska around the turn of the century "undermined its liberating potential" for most women. See *Agrarian Women*, 10.

²Bender, *Descent of Love*, 7.

³Bender, *Descent of Love*, 4-5.

⁴Bender, *Evolution and "the Sex Problem,"* 164.

⁵ Bender, *Evolution and "the Sex Problem,"* 172.

⁶ Cook, *Machine and Metaphor,* 3-4.

⁷ All references to *Crumbling Idols* are from the edition published in 1960 by Belknap Press and are cited parenthetically.

⁸ Garland, *Crumbling Idols,* 37-38.

⁹ Garland, *Crumbling Idols,* 42.

¹⁰ Cather, *World and the Parish,* 137.

¹¹ O'Brien, *Willa Cather,* 151-52. *Germinal* is an 1885 novel by Émile Zola; *The Rise of Silas Lapham* is an 1885 novel by William Dean Howells.

¹² Reynolds explores the "modernity of Cather's environmental imagination" by positioning her work alongside the writing of Gertrude Stein, the pragmatism of William James, and the architecture of Frank Lloyd Wright. See "Modernist Space," 173-215.

¹³ For more than a decade and a half, Cather's fiction has inspired a large and continually growing body of environmentally minded criticism. In her influential 1995 article "Willa Cather's Ecology of Place," Susan Rosowski called attention to the ways in which Cather's education in the sciences during college contributed to the development of an "ecological dialectic" that informs her fiction (43). And in 2001, Mary Ryder observed that Cather's "ecological concerns were more far-reaching than merely to record nature's beauties and explore her mysteries" and declared that Cather's "values are those of an ecofeminist." See "Willa Cather as Nature Writer: A Cry in the Wilderness," 75-76. Of course, not all contemporary critics share a view of Cather's fiction as ecologically minded, and, as Cheryll Glotfelty has pointed out, some scholars criticize her for being "unenvironmental" in her writing. Indeed, as Glotfelty notes, Cather's works have inspired "a strikingly variegated palette of green readings"

(30). For a summarization of the history of Cather ecocriticism, refer to Glotfelty's "A Guided Tour of Ecocriticism, with Excursions to Catherland," 28-39.

¹⁴ Newlin argues that rather than simply being a sell-out to the romantic impulse, "Garland was a consummate professional who tried—and excelled—in a variety of literary genres; when one didn't yield what he hoped in satisfaction, acclaim, or money [...] he tried another." See "Why Hamlin Garland Left the Main-Travelled Road," 71.

¹⁵ Murphy, *Literature, Nature, and Other*, 25

¹⁶ Love, *Practical Ecocriticism*, 136; and Buell, *Environmental Imagination*, 87-88.

¹⁷ Glotfelty, "A Guided Tour of Ecocriticism," 39.

¹⁸ Fetterly and Pryse, *Writing Out of Place*, 13.

¹⁹ Cather dedicated her first "Prairie Trilogy" novel, *O Pioneers!* to the memory of Jewett. For more on the personal and literary relationship between the authors, see Sharon O'Brien's *Willa Cather: The Emerging Voice*, 334-77.

²⁰ Without a doubt, as an active critic, reformer, and writer, Garland was enmeshed in a world of letters that included those female contemporaries discussed here. Letters written by Jewett in response to several from Garland suggest that, although they apparently never met, they corresponded at least once about regional realism, and Garland's anecdotes reveal that he thought highly of Jewett as a writer. See James Nagel's "Sarah Orne Jewett Writes to Hamlin Garland," 416-23. Additionally, Neil Gustafson's research reveals that Cather also responded to letters from Garland in which he expressed admiration for her work. See "Willa Cather and Hamlin Garland," 11. And Garland likely would have been familiar with Chopin's writing, as she wrote a severe review of *Crumbling Idols* for *St. Louis Life* in 1894, in which she argued that Garland "undervalues the importance of the past in art and exaggerates the significance of the

present” (693).

²¹ Pizer, *Hamlin Garland's Early Work and Career*, 72. In “A New Declaration of Rights,” an 1891 article published in *The Arena*, Garland suggested that once a woman received equal pay for her work, she would become “the free agent of her own destiny. Then marriage will be a co-partnership between equals. Prostitution will disappear, and marrying for a home, that first cousin of prostitution, will also disappear. It is a woman’s dependency, her fear of the world, fear of want, of the terrible struggle outside that enslaves her” (qtd. in Pizer, *Garland's Early Work and Career*, 212).

²² The most in-depth critique of Garland’s portrayals of pioneer women has been written by Carol Fairbanks, who discusses their presentation in the autobiographies *A Son of the Middle Border* (1917) and *A Daughter of the Middle Border* (1921), and the novel *Trail-makers of the Middle Border* (1921), and challenges Garland’s “very limited understanding of the pioneer woman.” See *Prairie Women*, 12-17. Additionally, although she does not refer specifically to the female characters of *Main-Travelled Roads*, Glenda Riley calls attention to Garland’s “heart-rending ‘Prairie Mother’ image” in “Women in the West,” in which she argues against stereotyping, “speculating and mythologizing about frontier women” and instead turning directly to women’s written records of life on the frontier, which demonstrate the widely varying experiences of women (312). Riley discovers in her study of women’s writings that some women embraced the prospect of a new life on the frontier: “Although men in nineteenth century America were charged with ‘breadwinning’ and often made decisions regarding how and where income was to be produced, it was also true that the pushes and pulls of western migration were oblivious of gender. Women, as well as men, could contrast opportunities at home with the opportunities of the West” (314).

²³ Gustafson, “Willa Cather and Hamlin Garland,” 9.

²⁴ Gustafson, “Willa Cather and Hamlin Garland,” 10.

²⁵ Gustafson, “Willa Cather and Hamlin Garland,” 10.

²⁶ Morgan, *Questionable Charity*, 5.

²⁷ Morgan, *Questionable Charity*, 5-6.

²⁸ Morgan, *Questionable Charity*, 10.

²⁹ Cook, *Machine and Metaphor*, 10.

³⁰ Johnson, Introduction, xxii.

³¹ Johnson, Introduction, xix-xx.

³² Fairbanks, *Pioneer Women*, 15.

³³ All references to *Main-Travelled Roads* are from the 1995 edition published by Bison Books, which reproduces the 1922 edition printed by Harper and Brothers and includes the foreword written by Garland for the 1891 edition and the introduction by William Dean Howells that first appeared in 1893.

³⁴ Garland’s feminist ideals were also largely shaped by the work of Herbert Spencer, by the progressive agenda of *The Arena*, and by the plays of Henrik Ibsen. See Pizer, *Hamlin Garland’s Early Work and Career*, 72.

³⁵ Garland chronicles the difficult life of his mother, Belle Garland, in *A Pioneer Mother*, published in 1922. Even in this brief biography, however, there is evidence of Garland’s own projection of feelings upon his mother and his overgeneralization of women’s attitudes: “I don’t know what her feelings were about these constant removals to the border, but I suspect now that each new migration was a greater hardship than those which preceded it. My father’s adventurous and restless spirit was never satisfied. The sunset land always allured him, and my

mother, being one of those who follow their husbands' feet without a complaining word, seemed always ready to take up the trail. With the blindness of youth and the spirit of seeking which I inherited I saw no tear on my mother's face. I inferred that she, too, was eager and exalted at the thought of 'going West.' I now see that she must have suffered each time the bitter pangs of doubt and unrest which strike every woman's heart when called to leave her snug, safe fire for a ruder cabin in strange lands" (9).

³⁶ Pizer offers an interesting and especially dark reading of the story, which he compares to "Up the Coulé," concluding that, despite Will's intervention, "life is over" for Agnes: "[F]arm life has taken its toll and crushed the one remaining behind. Only pity and material comfort can be offered—gone is the chance for a full life, for self-development and self-realization." See *Hamlin Garland's Early Work and Career*, 73-74.

³⁷ Noting Garland's depictions of harsh European expectations of women's labor in "Among the Corn-Rows" and "The Creamery Man," Mary Neth has demonstrated that, although ethnicity dictated, to an extent, the amount of time nineteenth-century farm women spent working in fields, a much more complex set of factors, including highly individualized family demographics and dynamics, determined the division of labor among genders on farms. See "Gender and the Family Labor System."

³⁸ Rosowski, "Willa Cather's Ecology of Place," 40.

³⁹ All references to *O Pioneers!*, *My Ántonia*, and *The Song of the Lark* are from the Library of America collection *Cather: Novels and Stories 1905-1918*, published in 1999, and are cited parenthetically.

⁴⁰ In his 1891 review of *Main-Travelled Roads*, which, beginning in 1893, was used as an introduction to the collection, William Dean Howells praised "Mrs. Ripley's Trip" by noting

that it has a “delicate touch, like that of Miss Wilkins” (Introduction 4). Certainly, this story invites comparison, as Fetterly and Price and Newlin have noted, to Mary E. Wilkins Freeman’s “The Revolt of Mother,” published two years later. See *Writing Out of Place*, 15-16, and *Hamlin Garland: A Life*, 120.

⁴¹ Gilman, *Women and Economics*, 14-17.

⁴² Gilman, *Women and Economics*, 37-38.

⁴³ Garland, “Women and Their Organization,” *The Standard* (Oct. 8, 1890): 5, as quoted in Pizer, *Hamlin Garland’s Early Work and Career*, 72.

⁴⁴ Carp, “Hamlin Garland and the Cult of True Womanhood,” 86.

⁴⁵ During the 1890s, Garland was a vociferous supporter of American economist Henry George’s single-tax program (often referred to as Georgism), which sought to reduce monopolies and the power of the landed aristocracy by replacing all taxes with a single land tax. The reformers suggested that the government levy this tax to people who occupied land and that those occupiers would keep the proceeds from their labor. Garland advocates the single tax explicitly in “A New Declaration of Rights,” *The Arena* (January 1891): 157-84.

⁴⁶ Fetterly and Pryse, *Writing Out of Place*, 16.

⁴⁷ Bender characterizes Alexandra’s recurring dream sequence of being carried by a man as evidence of Cather’s “central point that sexual selection is the chief impediment to evolutionary progress.” See *Evolution and “the Sex Problem,”* 174.

⁴⁸ Bender, *Evolution and “the Sex Problem,”* 171, 170.

⁴⁹ Bender, *Evolution and “the Sex Problem,”* 172.

⁵⁰ This overlapping of ideologies between the men is historically fitting, as both Garland and Turner presented papers at the 1893 Columbian Exposition in Chicago, Turner on “The

Significance of the Frontier in American History” and Garland on “Local Color in Fiction.”

⁵¹ Susan Rosowski has argued that Cather, in her stories of the West, “was freeing herself” from the “notion of historic genesis” promulgated in Turner’s thesis. “Where Turner’s primitive is overcome by the progress of western expansion, Cather’s primitive is revealed by an awakening of desire,” Rosowski writes. “This desire is born out of a sense of emptiness and void experienced in the West and manifests itself in “an energy animating life.” See *Birth of a Nation*, 60.

⁵² Bender, *Evolution and “the Sex Problem,”* 173.

⁵³ Sweet, *American Georgics*, 2-5.

⁵⁴ Ryder, “Willa Cather as Nature Writer,” 76.

⁵⁵ See McCullough, *Hamlin Garland*, 66; Pizer, *Hamlin Garland’s Early Work and Career*, 159; and Bray, “Hamlin Garland’s *Rose of Dutcher’s Coolly*,” 339.

⁵⁶ William Dean Howells called the last two-thirds of the novel “wooden and mechanical” (qtd. in Pizer, *Hamlin Garland’s Early Work*, 158), and Pizer and McCullough have also criticized the latter portions of the novel. See Pizer’s *Hamlin Garland’s Early Work and Career*, 158-59, and “Sexuality in *Rose of Dutcher’s Coolly*,” 296; and McCullough’s *Hamlin Garland*, 74.

⁵⁷ Pizer, “Sexuality in *Rose of Dutcher’s Coolly*,” 296.

⁵⁸ Bray, “Hamlin Garland’s *Rose of Dutcher’s Coolly*,” 341.

⁵⁹ Pizer, *Hamlin Garland’s Early Work*, 157-58.

⁶⁰ Newlin, Introduction, xiii.

⁶¹ Carp, “Hamlin Garland and the Cult of True Womanhood,” 89.

⁶² All references to *Rose of Dutcher’s Coolly* are from the edition published by the University of Nebraska Press in 2005 and edited by Keith Newlin. This book reproduces the text of the first

edition, published by Stone and Kimball of Chicago in 1895. The edition of 1899 was cleaned up by Garland partially in response to criticism of its sexuality, and Garland added a scene at the end that depicts a happily wed Rose and Mason in their Chicago apartment; nevertheless, the 1895 edition, Newlin notes, is the one that most modern critics cite (Introduction xxiv). All references to the novel are cited parenthetically.

⁶³ For more on this period of Cather's life, during which she created a masculine persona, see Sharon O'Brien's biography *Willa Cather: The Emerging Voice*, 96-113, and the photo section of the biography for images of a young "William" Cather.

⁶⁴ Sack, *Homo Geographicus*, 25.

⁶⁵ Carolyn Woidat, for example, argues that Cather herself was drawn to the escapism offered by visits to Southwestern sites rich in Native American history, places like Walnut Canyon and its fictionalized version in the novel, and that these sites "appeal to white visitors because the empty dwellings allow them to escape their own country's history of conflict with Native Americans; here tourists can enjoy a fanciful escape from racial politics and imagine their own affinities with romanticized Indians." See "The Indian-Detour in Willa Cather's Southwestern Novels," 33.

⁶⁶ Boyd, *On the Origin of Stories*, 1.

⁶⁷ Moseley, "The Creative Ecology of Walnut Canyon," 218.

⁶⁸ Moseley, "The Creative Ecology of Walnut Canyon," 226.

⁶⁹ Bender, *Evolution and "the Sex Problem,"* 181, 184.

⁷⁰ Cather, "The Novel D meubl ," 42.

⁷¹ Cather, "On the Art of Fiction," 102.

CHAPTER 4

RESISTING THE COMMODIFICATION OF CULTURES: NATIVE AMERICAN GEOGRAPHIES IN THE WORKS OF JEWETT, CHOPIN, AND CATHER

When you see those ancient, pyramidal pueblos once more brought nearer by the sunset light that beats on them like gold-beaters' hammers, [...] you begin to feel that custom, ritual, integrity of tradition have a reality that goes deeper than the bustling business of the world.

Willa Cather, "Mesa Verde Wonderland is Easy to Reach"

When Sarah Orne Jewett visited the World's Columbian Exposition of 1893 with longtime companion Annie Fields, she became one of the numerous influential American thinkers to visit the more than 600 acres of grounds thoughtfully planned and organized to project an image of American progress and beauty: the White City.¹ The author was honored at the fair's State of Maine Building, which featured her portrait, and a letter to a Berwick friend reveals her appreciation for fair architecture and her nationalistic pride in the event: "[A]t Chicago nobody can see the great sights of that Exposition—the great buildings and bridges and columns—without being proud of his country, which is in itself one of the best things in the world," she wrote on May 2, 1893.² Despite Jewett's celebration of the fair in her letter, there is a conspicuous absence of praise for or even acknowledgement of the most popular attraction at the fair, the Midway Plaisance, a mile-long stretch of concessions and living ethnological displays organized into various cultural "villages."³ Indeed, Jewett seems to have taken primary delight in the more refined fair attractions, great classically inspired exhibition halls that constituted an idealized American city and which offered a dramatic contrast to the raucous, lurid environment of the Midway, the "fantastic underside of the White City."⁴

The absence of any recognition of the Midway exhibits in Jewett's published letters mimics, in many regards, the absence of direct treatment of ethnological issues in her most widely read fiction. Racial minorities surface rarely and only on the peripheries of her best-known works, existing in minor roles or as anonymous figures of legend, such as the former Native American inhabitants of Shell-heap Island in *The Country of the Pointed Firs* (1896). Her treatment of cultural issues (and, at times, lack thereof) has resulted in vigorous debate, with critics such as Sandra Zagarell and Elizabeth Ammons finding in *Country of the Pointed Firs* evidence of an exclusionary, imperialist attitude and others, including Josephine Donovan, Judith Fetterly, and Marjorie Pryse, responding with defenses of Jewett's cultural politics.⁵ Although Jewett, who was of English and French descent, exhibits an affinity for the Anglo-Norman families populating the coastal areas of which she most frequently writes, the general lack of ethnic minorities in her writing also stems from her attempts to accurately portray life in these New England communities.⁶ As Jacqueline Shea Murphy asserts, Jewett's regionalism [...] may thus be read not as recounting a nostalgic New England that works to create an omnipotent nation and subjugate other nations, but rather as expressing both an identity that comes from inhabiting a particular place and a recognition of what that habitation excludes (in Jewett's fictional world, Indians who lived before) as well as its cultural (linguistic, religious, ethnic) history and specificity (in Jewett's world, that of white, Anglo-Norman middle-class women's culture).⁷ Furthermore, while ethnic minorities rarely take on prominent roles in her works, Jewett, like Thoreau before her, often acknowledges the history of New England's Native Americans in stories and sketches that promote stewardship of the environment. Thus, without denigrating racial minorities or taking liberties with issues that extend well beyond her first-hand knowledge of the white female New England experience, Jewett takes caution with cultural

themes—and thereby avoids the sort of exploitation of ethnic differences capitalized on at the World’s Columbian Exposition in an effort by organizers to promote an image of the United States as a growing industrial power, an endeavor symptomatic of American imperialism.

Indeed, any minority who attended—or was relegated to being part of—an exhibit would have been well aware of the limitations and contradictions associated with Chicago’s attempted image of social advancement and cultural harmony. As contemporary historians have noted, the exposition, both in its planning and execution, helped reinforce racial stereotypes and promoted exclusionary practices.⁸ Despite petitioning early for participation at the fair, for example, African Americans could not establish exhibits without the approval of a white committee and were excluded from prominent fair administrative roles. They were invited to attend the fair during an independent Jubilee or Colored People’s Day, the merits of which were fiercely debated among African Americans, and which featured a speech by Frederick Douglass—as well as watermelon stands set up to belittle the day’s events.⁹ Native Americans’ petitions to create their own fair exhibits were also denied, and they filled only menial roles at the exposition, which took place just three years after the Wounded Knee Massacre in South Dakota. They were exploited by fair planners, recruited by the ethnology department to participate in living exhibits that highlighted primitive modes of existence.¹⁰ Moreover, women’s participation in fair events has generated scrutiny in recent decades. Alan Trachtenberg, for example, has argued that although women were prominent as fair speakers, had a building of their own designed by a woman architect, and worked alongside the World’s Columbian Commission as members of the Board of Lady Managers, the prevailing note was domesticity, the unique, and uniquely virtuous, powers of women as mothers, homemakers, teachers, and cooks.¹¹ Hence, the unified, unspoiled image promoted by the classically inspired facades of the White City masked a tightly

controlled social order based on exclusion and the maintenance of social and cultural boundaries.¹² An event constructed as a celebration of global culture, the Chicago World's Fair facilitated white Americans' efforts to assert their superiority over non-Anglo cultures, a fitting—and intended—commemoration of Columbus's landfall four hundred years earlier.¹³

Despite the regrettable cultural legacy of the exposition, however, because of its scope and impact on culture, it provides an invaluable, well-recorded image of American life during an era of rampant industrialization and growing consumerism. More importantly, the World's Fair offers clues to the intellectual attitudes of the time and therefore functions as a cultural backdrop for understanding well-to-do white women's interest in the impact of such epochal changes as this concern emerged in the writings of authors such as Jewett and Kate Chopin (who also attended the fair), and, later, Willa Cather. While Native Americans' strictly circumscribed roles at the fair upheld an organizational system that allowed planners to celebrate technological advances because they were juxtaposed against lifestyles deemed more primitive or savage, paradoxically Native Americans' roles in these women's writings frequently support warnings about the impacts of increasing bureaucracy, industry, urbanization, and consumerism. Indeed, an examination of the writers' incorporation of Native American characters, ruins, and, most notably, landscapes demonstrates these women's subversion of the strategy that fair planners employed to help them promote an imperialistic image of cultural refinement. That is, unlike fair organizers, these authors refuse to participate in what Curtis M. Hinsley calls the commodification of the exotic ; they do not utilize Native American themes to celebrate the ascension of civilized power over nature and primitives, but rather to draw attention to contemporary issues such as women's rights, environmental degradation, and the corruptibility of capitalism.¹⁴

Indeed, within the anti-industrial sentiments at the heart of many of these writers' stories, novels, and essays rests an inextricable message about the role of women in an increasingly industrialized world, a world where the physical reminders of Native American cultures are forever disappearing but nevertheless still present—and of growing interest to white Americans. When Frederick Jackson Turner declared the passing away of the frontier during his address at the World's Columbian Exposition, he revealed anxieties over the disappearance of Americans' perceived source of their distinctive character. Without the frontier experience, which Turner helped Americans identify as a defining force in their culture, Americans developed a general sense of nostalgic regret over the disappearance of wilderness conditions, according to Roderick Frazier Nash.¹⁵ Over time, this regret contributed to an increased interest in wilderness preservation, as well as in more primitive lifestyles, the latter of which culminated in the American celebration of savagery that was in full stride by second decade of the twentieth century.¹⁶ Certainly, however, Americans' growing primitivism was already being marketed to by the time Turner presented his 1893 speech; it was on prominent display at the Chicago World's Fair in the Native American camps that helped comprise its ethnological attractions, as well as in the spectacle of Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show, which was set up just outside fairgrounds and which featured frontier personalities such as the Lakota Sioux chief Sitting Bull. Certainly, Jewett, Chopin, and Cather were by no means immune to this trend, which is especially clear in their works that also reveal a feminist objective.

For example, as I argued in Chapter 2, when Poor Joanna Todd of Jewett's *Country of the Pointed Firs* establishes her hermitage on an uninhabited island named for the great shell-heap created by the Native Americans who once lived there (428), she enters the world of the Natives as it presumably existed before the island was settled by whites, and she finds there

sparse but sufficient natural resources to sustain her, in addition to a refuge from the Puritanical, patriarchal influences that cause her embarrassment at being scorned by her fiancé.¹⁷ Joanna's openness to an ascetic lifestyle that mirrors that of the island's former Native American inhabitants allows her to make a feminist statement to her community about the destructive influence of gender expectations and the liberating forces of nature. As I will demonstrate, Joanna's story provides just one example of the feminist and environmentalist messages that are interwoven with Native American themes in women regionalists' writing around the turn of the century.

As a result of this narrative pattern, Jewett, Chopin, and Cather all grappled with two interrelated conundrums: how to preserve, honor, and recapture the past without succumbing to a paralyzing romantic nostalgia, and how to actively shape the future without becoming a part of the increasingly powerful industrial/bureaucratic machine. The complexity of these goals becomes especially vivid when we examine the limitations associated with these Anglo women's identification with and sympathy for Native Americans. Indeed, a consequence of their shared tendency to explore contemporary issues in terms of their oppositional relationship to a Native American past is the frequent reduction of Native American multiplicity to a homogenous trope, a figure drained of specific tribal allegiance and historical fullness: the Indian. More specifically, all three authors consistently reinforce the belief that Native Americans experience a heightened spiritual connection to nature, a notion that was prominent during the World's Fair era and that remains deeply ingrained in the American imagination—creating a figure Shepard Krech has termed the ecological Indian.¹⁸ This simplifying impulse can be attributed, at least in part, to the lasting effects of literary sentimentalism's mid-nineteenth-century popularity, which are evident at times in the writing of all three authors. According to Laura Wexler,

Sentimentalism encourages a large-scale imaginative depersonalization of those outside its complex specifications at the same time that it elaborately personalizes, magnifies, and flatters those who can accommodate to its image of an interior. Moreover, Wexler argues, the afterglow of sentimentalization in the last decades of the century should not be exclude[d] from the theory of the cultural work of domestic fiction on the basis that doing so distorts the history of its concrete social institutionalization¹⁹ Certainly, the few Native Americans who do appear in these three authors' works are gravely depersonalized due to their connection to a romanticized environmental past; they are further obscured by the writers' tendency to call on this idealized past as a potential model for the future, a future in which white American women's land ethic will contribute to their increased social and political power.

While the Native American exists only on the peripheries of Jewett's and Cather's most well-known works and is generally marginalized as a symbol of environmental change in Chopin's stories, contemporary essays and autobiographical stories by Zitkala-Ša, the Dakota Sioux also known as Gertrude Simmons Bonnin, provide a more authoritative account of Native American life around the turn of the century. Zitkala-Ša, who was born in 1876 on the Yankton Reservation, the year of the Battle of the Little Bighorn, chronicles Native American experiences during the volatile last decades of the century which remain unexplored by Jewett, Chopin, and Cather: white settlers' encroachment upon reservations, Native children's enforced acculturation in Indian schools, and the culturally destructive and confusing influences of Christianity. Zitkala-Ša also provides a sense of what it was like to be on the other end of Americans' growing fascination for Native cultures, to feel the psychological impact of the unflinching gaze of bold white faces, of scornful and yet curious eyes.²⁰ Her writings resist easy categorization, however, as she at times espouses radical reform and at others strikes a more conservative note.

Zitkala-Ša, that is, does not consistently differ in viewpoint or ideology from Jewett, Chopin, and Cather. Wexler has demonstrated that by the time [...] she came to write [her] autobiographical stories, Zitkala-Ša's self-conception had been so effectively ensnared within the codes of sentiment that there was no Indian in them that was left untouched by Western codes,²¹ and this influence is particularly evident in these early stories. Nevertheless, Zitkala-Ša's works offer invaluable insight into the ways in which historically marginalized figures also responded to and actively participated in the epochal socioeconomic changes of the turn of the century, changes that depended, in large part, on the sustained renunciation of Native American rights. Furthermore, her writing at times privileges the same interlocking chain of cultural, environmental, and feminist issues shaping these Anglo women regionalists' works, which further indicates its importance to women authors of the era. Indeed, Zitkala-Ša (or Red Bird) also, and often more directly, expresses anti-bureaucratic sentiment, characterizes the natural world as a source of respite and inspiration, and calls on women to create new standards for intercultural empathy. Thus, throughout this chapter I will periodically turn to Zitkala-Ša's writing for a more culturally inclusive perspective of Native American history, a theme that is central to the feminist and environmentalist messages in works by Jewett, Chopin, and Cather.

The development of such themes depends on the associations all three authors establish, to varying degrees, between modern industry and its effects on specific geographical spaces that the authors distinguish as directly linked to a Native American past—Jewett's New England coast, Chopin's Piney Woods, and Cather's Southwestern cliff cities, for example—and as potentially important to American women's futures. Ultimately, although these authors' interests in Native American traditions might be traced to a conservative impulse that regards the onward march of capitalism with trepidation, inherent to this critique is a rather progressive

vision of feminine environmental stewardship. Despite their idealization of Native lifestyles and their reduction of Native multiplicity, to consider any of these authors' approaches to Native American themes as evidence of white imperialistic leanings is to overlook the way all three incorporate such concepts to help them condemn the increasingly rampant consumerism and industrialization of the turn of the century, and to suggest the value of recognizing this cultural legacy to the future of American women and the natural world.

Jewett's Rural Observations

Jewett's interest in the interconnectedness of coastal Maine's environmental health, its Native American history, and the wellbeing of its inhabitants is most clearly presented in the infrequently discussed sketch "The White Rose Road," published in 1889 in *The Atlantic Monthly* and in the 1890 collection *Strangers and Wayfarers*.²² As I noted in Chapter 2, in this work, which describes a mid-June carriage trip Jewett takes from Berwick to visit an elderly farmer residing near the coast, Jewett laments the disappearance of salmon from an Ogunquit-area river that is still accessible through an old Indian trail, and proposes practical methods of environmental stewardship—a little thought and care in the factory companies and saw-mills—that would repair streams that have been spoiled by industrial pollutants and thereby preserve this important food supply (719-20). As Paula Blanchard observes, this environmental polemic seems at first glance to be a queer digression in Jewett's sketch; however, in the context of the necessary historic balance between man and nature, and the yearly cycle that brings back the white rose and makes human life possible and enduring, the spoliation of the river is an act of violence against the whole fabric of life.²³ Indeed, the inclusion of this environmental warning at the end of this reaching work that divulges Jewett's emotional investment in both the history and future of the coastal area sharpens a bioregional vision that

acknowledges the basic needs of rural Maine residents, the dangers of environmental misuse, and the area's cultural history. It is this latter aspect of the sketch that I would like to explore more fully here, for Jewett's first-person acknowledgment of the area's Native American history alongside her celebration of its European legacy—within the context of what might be described as a distinctly American travel narrative of the Thoreauvian tradition—reveals her awareness of the cultural complexities of the region and her overall dismay at the demise of a particular rural way of life. Moreover, Jewett's interest in rural women's rights coalesces with these environmental and cultural themes through her conjectures about the future of a young girl she sees working the land and her reflections on the life of a prominent elderly woman, both of whom appear against the pastoral backdrop of her outing. Ultimately, *The White Rose Road* suggests that through her fidelity to a rural lifestyle that acknowledges the history and agricultural thresholds of the land, a woman may discover avenues of self-expression, even creative output, as well as autonomy and social power.

From the opening paragraph of *The White Rose Road* the complexity of Jewett's thematic structure is apparent, as her attitude toward the land wavers between mournful and celebratory because of her regret over the desertion of farms and her simultaneous appreciation for the young trees that seem to be taking back the land (710). Moreover, her metaphorical conflation of the trees and Native Americans bespeaks more than reliance upon an overused trope; it reveals her sense of the rightful presence in the area of both and even goes so far as to hint at the possibility of the Indians' return, a prospect that Jewett does not consider without anxiety. She writes:

There is little left of the large timber which once filled the region, but much young growth, and there are hundreds of acres of cleared land and pasture-ground where the

forests are springing fast and covering the country once more, as if they had no idea of losing in their war with civilization and the intruding white settler. The pine woods and the Indians seem to be next of kin, and the former owners of this corner of New England are the only proper figures to paint into such landscapes. [...] A farmer passing through with his axe is but an intruder, and children straying home from school give one a feeling of solicitude at their unprotectedness. The pine woods are the red man's house, and it may be hazardous even yet for the gray farmhouses to stand so near the eaves of the forest. (710-11)

In Jewett's appraisal, the red man's house is regaining size and strength, and the descendant of the farmers who once cleared the land is an intruder therein. This passage indicates Jewett's acute sense of the threat to country life during this period of commercialization and westward migration, as well as her awareness that such a cultural transformation would not be the first to take place in the region. Moreover, Jewett indicates that a return to Native American cultural dominance would not occur without violence against white inhabitants; the ominousness of Jewett's Indian lurking in the woods traces to longstanding fears of Indian raids dating back to American captivity narratives of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Jewett adapts the captivity narrative's theme of danger, however, by eliminating the accompanying theme of religious redemption that was typical of such works, such as Mary Rowlandson's, and by shifting her focus instead to the mutability of cultural forces in the area.²⁴ Ultimately, by associating the resilient pine woods with the area's former Native inhabitants, Jewett creates a landscape that draws attention to the possible impermanence of white settlers and their agricultural pursuits. These inhabitants' greatest opportunities for redemption, the sketch suggests, will derive from their willingness to accept and learn from such changes.

Although Zagarell has suggested that *The White Rose Road* is informed by Jewett's Nordicism, her belief that American civilization will progress by means of Norman conquest and predominance, this assessment oversimplifies the sweeping regional history acknowledged in the sketch and downplays Jewett's apprehension about the state of this civilization, which is made clear by her anxiety-laden metaphor of new-growth trees as Indians.²⁵ Certainly, Jewett alludes proudly to Maine's Anglo heritage in her description of the old farmer, who had a fine face, of the older New England type, clean-shaven and strong-featured,—a type that is fast passing away and who might have been a Cumberland dalesman, such were his dignity, self-possession, and English soberness of manner (714). And her admiration for New Englanders' British ancestry is also made clear in her esteem for the matriarch of one of the area's ancient families whom she encounters during her return trip (718). Nevertheless, when Jewett's reverence for Anglo tradition is juxtaposed with the sketch's allusions to Native American rights, the most clearly developed picture is of a New England community whose cultural and economic futures are in question.

Furthermore, Jewett's regret over the empty barns and overgrown pastures seems to stem partly from the potential disappearance of a particularly liberating way of life for women that centers on a close association with the land, and she emphasizes the potential for such a loss through her speculations about a young farm girl and in her nostalgic tribute to the elderly woman. Indeed, among the women in the fields that sunny day is a thin little girl working away lustily with a big hoe on a patch of land that is covered by a fanciful array of a little of everything (711). Jewett speculates that older family members have given the child charge of the plot and that she has delighted in the responsibility it affords: One can imagine how the young creature had planned it in spring, and persuaded the men to plough and harrow it, and

since then had stoutly done all the work herself, and meant to send the harvest of the piece to market, and pocket her honest gains, as they came in, for some great end (712). In addition to the agricultural skills honed by such tasks and the satisfaction gleaned by producing and selling crops, the garden, in Jewett's mind, has already enhanced the child's personality. Jewett foresees that the sun will brown and dry her like a spear of grass on that hot slope but observes that a spark of fine spirit is in the small body (712). Furthermore, by developing the garden, the girl is also able to help provide for her family, and an unusual profusion of sage inspires Jewett's speculation that there may be a large family with a downfall of measles yet ahead, and she does not mean to be caught without sage-tea (712). This little girl with a green thumb thereby seems a precursor to other independent Jewett characters, which bespeaks the author's tendency to advocate women's horticultural knowledge as a means of creative output and financial security. Indeed, this farm child could easily be a forerunner to the venerable herbalist Almira Todd of *Country of the Pointed Firs*, and her agricultural prowess mirrors that of Polly Finch, the plucky heroine of the story *Farmer Finch* (1896), a young woman who possesses second-rate teaching skills and therefore thwarts vocational expectations by helping her father with their farm and saving it from financial ruin.²⁶ In short, the child has only gained—spiritually, socially, and financially—through her careful cultivation of the modest garden.

A few pages later, Jewett builds on this portrait of rural female autonomy in her tribute to an elderly woman who has just buried a son and is walking home from his funeral. The unusual public appearance of this figure inspires a revelatory passage that indicates Jewett's appreciation for England's royal traditions, but also her quickness to universalize such traditions by ascribing royal behavior to nature rather than to imperial blood:

She was like a presence out of the last century, tall and erect, dark-eyed and of striking features, and a firm look not modern, but as if her mind were still set upon an earlier and simpler scheme of life. An air of dominion cloaked her finely. She had long been queen of her surroundings and law-giver to her great family. Royalty is a quality, one of Nature's gifts, and there one might behold it as truly as if Victoria Regina Imperatrix had passed by. [...] We had seen a royal progress; she was the central figure of that rural society; as you looked at the little group, you could see her only. Now that she came abroad so rarely, her presence was not without deep significance, and so she took her homeward way with a primitive kind of majesty. (719)

Country life has given this woman of noble character (though indeterminably of noble lineage) the means of exercising her authority over her rural family and, in doing so, achieving great respect in her community. Nevertheless, the matriarch's remaining time is fleeting, and she is a fading emblem of the matrifocal communities that rose to prominence while their husbands were at sea and that have crumbled alongside the shipping and farming industries in New England. It becomes clear that the girl working her garden may possess similarly admirable character traits but that her achievement of an equally revered status is unlikely. Perhaps the spark of fine spirit so apparent in the girl will find an outlet for expression in the city, for the woman's impending death suggests the imminent demise of a specific way of life, an imaginative trajectory that Jewett supports through her attention to the region's dynamic cultural history.

Indeed, Jewett's characterization of the elderly woman's bearing as somehow primitive aligns her, to a degree, with the Native Americans who inhabited the region before the Anglo-Normans. Jewett appears to regret the dilution of a so-called royal lineage in New England more so than she does the decline of the region's Native Americans, but her acknowledgment of

both cultures' impact on the area is important. Because of this historical recognition, particularly her willingness to acknowledge Native Americans' previous inhabitation of the area, one senses Jewett's self-conscious status not as a privileged dweller in such a realm, but rather as a member of an equally ephemeral group of New Englanders. Time and change are fluid in the sketch; alterations to the landscape accompany changes in its population—and this seems to be acceptable to Jewett. Indeed, the optimistic note that concludes the sketch indicates her acquiescence to change—which, she has made clear, involves the decline of New England's oldest Yankee families—and therefore offers a challenge to claims that she is an imperialist: It will be good to remember the white rose road and its quietness in many a busy town day to come. As I think of these slight sketches, I wonder if they will have to others a tinge of sadness; but I have seldom spent an afternoon so full of pleasure and fresh and delighted consciousness of the possibilities of rural life (721).

Thus, the sketch is more than a nostalgia-laden portrait of a region in decline or a lamentation over the breakdown of Anglo-Norman dominance. Jewett's primary concerns center on the future, how such changes will affect women and the land, and they culminate with her hope that although [m]an has done best he can to ruin the world he lives in, he will learn from his mistakes, and the possibilities of rural life will prevail (721). In her refusal to romanticize the region's Anglo-Norman agricultural heyday, we see Jewett coming to terms with the mutability of life, particularly with perpetual cultural and social change, as well as her awareness of and resistance to certain types of environmental change, namely the pollution of local waterways. Her sketch thereby indicates her allegiance to a bioregional perspective, a familiarity with the area that includes deep knowledge of [t]he limits of its resources, the carrying capacities of its lands and waters; the places where its bounties can best be developed [...]. And

the cultures of the people, of the populations native to the land and of those who have grown up with it, the human social and economic arrangements shaped by and adapted to the geographic ones.²⁷ Certainly, Jewett divulges few details about the life of the red man who was once the primary figure in the Ogunquit region such as his specific tribal affiliation or customs; however, her historical awareness of and respect for the people who have grown up with the land—Native Americans *and* European Americans—augment her commentary on environmental and social dynamism.

Nevertheless, by consigning Native Americans to the wooded corners of her sketch, Jewett avoids considering the friction of these interactions from a Native American perspective and therefore ignores the possibility that Native Americans experienced a similar fear of the cultural Other, along with a keen awareness of the importance of intercultural contact. Zitkala-Ša's semiautobiographical works capture these sentiments, however, and help us form a more complete picture of late-century racial anxieties. Although as a child she initially welcomed the prospect of change promised by the Christian missionaries who visited the Yankton Reservation in South Dakota, she recalls also the fear experienced by her mother for the future of a people increasingly under the influence of white Americans. In *Impressions of an Indian Childhood*, first published in the *Atlantic Monthly* in 1900, Zitkala-Ša describes her mother's angry tears at the continual threat posed by the paleface, that sickly sham who has driven them to the reservation upon which she still feels vulnerable to his decisions (69), as well as her mother's reluctance to let her daughter attend boarding school in the East (84).²⁸ Like Jewett's narrator in *The White Rose Road*, however, Zitkala-Ša's mother is aware of the inevitability of cultural mutability, which leads her to grant her daughter's naïve wish to travel East on the iron horse: She will need an education when she is grown, for then there will be fewer real Dakotas, and

many more palefaces, her mother reasons. This tearing her away, so young, from her mother is necessary, if I would have her an educated woman. The palefaces, who owe us a large debt for stolen lands, have begun to pay a tardy justice in offering some education to our children. But I know my daughter must suffer keenly in this experiment (86). Thus, like Jewett's Anglo narrator, Zitkala-Ša's mother, while expressing a nostalgic yearning for a time when her people were once very happy (85), also has her sights set on the future and actively participates in its development. By allowing her daughter to travel to Indiana for schooling, she contributes to the changing sociopolitical climate for women, a climate in which educated women like Zitkala-Ša and Jewett would be able to exact greater influence.

Although Jewett would employ Native American themes sparingly in *The White Rose Road* and in her major works, using them primarily to develop her ideas about women and environment, she did at times explore other cultures in writing, depicting Southerners, French Canadians, and Irish. Notably, when she set out to write a story for an 1893 edition of *Scribner's Magazine* commemorating the World's Columbian Exposition—a publication Jewett enthusiastically described as a *Great Representative Number!*—she stepped well beyond the comfort of her matrifocal New England communities to write about Irish immigrants.²⁹ The prominent theme of *Between Mass and Vespers* is redemption, with the good intentions of an aging parish priest and an Irish laborer rewarded through their confrontation of a local swindler and the young Irish man's subsequent repentance.³⁰ That Jewett chose to write sympathetically of the notoriously ill-treated Irish in a *Representative Number* about the United States during a time when the influx of immigrants continued to generate backlash is noteworthy, as it indicates her awareness of cultural flux and consideration for traditions outside of her own. As Josephine Donovan notes, It seems likely that her purpose in exploring cultures remote to her and her

readers was to counter popular prejudices,³¹ and we also see this humanistic impulse in the early story "Tame Indians," published in *The Independent* in 1875, in which Jewett recounts her visit to an Oneida mission near Green Bay, Wisconsin, and which constitutes a rare departure from her tendency to avoid straightforward depictions of Native Americans—a departure inspired, perhaps, because Jewett had in this case gained some first-hand knowledge of Oneida culture. In the story, the female narrator tells a friend's two younger siblings about the trip, during which she attended an Oneida church service, and in doing so dispels many of the children's romantic notions about Native Americans. Charles Johanningsmeier has argued that with this work Jewett struggled with how best to represent the racial or rural "other" as a regional author, and finally suggested to the readers of the rather liberal Christian publication in which the story appeared that they should strive to learn more about frequently misrepresented cultures.³² Ultimately, then, although Jewett celebrated her own Anglo-Norman heritage and expressed regret over its decline in New England, she was not immune to the honorable qualities of other cultures or, as Ben Slope has noted, the potentially exclusionary nature of events like the Chicago World's Fair.³³ Like the Native Americans whom she envisioned in the flourishing new-growth woods of her Maine landscape, so do these other cultures hold their ground in her social consciousness, at times permeating and shaping her writing about women and the natural world, as they would the writing of Chopin and Cather.

Chopin's Tragic Half-Indians

The World's Columbian Exposition seems to have fed Kate Chopin's imagination, biographer Emily Toth notes, and, like Jewett, Chopin appears to have been especially inspired by the off-Midway exhibits, particularly the works of Impressionist painters, which she would emulate in her writing after her trip to Chicago.³⁴ Surely, however, the Midway's ethnographic

attractions would not have gone unnoticed by Chopin, who in the years leading up to the fair had written extensively about intercultural contact among the diverse inhabitants of the Cane River region of Louisiana, depicting, on two occasions, the trials of half-Indian characters, both of whom appear in works that intertwine messages about women, race, and environment. Such characters figure prominently in nineteenth-century American literature, William Scheick has noted, and they reveal unresolved conflicts related to, yet in important respects different from, those centered upon the Indian.³⁵ Chopin's attitude toward her mixed-race characters is ambivalent—they function neither as romanticized images of the Noble Red Man (or Woman), nor as barbaric Others—and therefore is rather typical of the era.³⁶ Fittingly, Chopin's half-Native characters are social pariahs who are cast primarily in liminal physical locations, spaces that are not wholly unaltered by man but that have yet to feel the full force of industrialization that was sweeping across the South after the Civil War. Joçint, a secondary character in Chopin's 1890 novel *At Fault*, and Loka, the titular figure of an 1892 story, possess stereotypical qualities associated with Native Americans around the turn of the century, including a supposedly heightened kinship to the natural world and a resistance to white social expectations, but their alignment with particular transitional geographic spaces also makes them tragic figures whose fates serve as warnings about the potential effects of industrialization and help advocate women's adoption of increasingly complex professional and moral roles outside the realm of domestic duties.³⁷

Chopin makes this association most overtly through Joçint, the half-Indian son of the former slave Morico, who lives in an isolated cabin in Louisiana's Piney Woods, which are being destroyed by a newly established lumber mill on Thérèse Lafirme's plantation. Just as Marie Louise, the aging Creole hermit, must perish as a tragic symbol of waning Southern

traditions in *At Fault*, so must the woods-loving Joçint die as a symbol of the tensions between preserving rural traditions and the encroachment of industrialization upon the South affecting Place-du-Bois.³⁸ Although some critics have overlooked the sociocultural significance of Joçint's Native American heritage and have chosen to read him as a version of the black beast stereotype of pro-lynching fiction that allows Chopin to reinforce the usefulness of white violence, or as a representative of the uncontained blackness that rejects the reimposition of the Old South order,³⁹ acknowledging only his racial darkness obscures the important associations between Joçint and nature that highlight the extent and nature of the environmental violence occurring in the novel. This critical emphasis on Joçint's African American heritage derives primarily from his murder by a white character that is often construed as a lynching and the event's mollifying influence on black plantation hands. Nevertheless, Chopin carefully differentiates Joçint's death from sort of group violence typical of a lynching, holds the sole perpetrator accountable for his racially motivated crime, and, most importantly, distinguishes Joçint as a racial outsider to the novel's black community. Downplaying Joçint's Native American heritage constitutes a misappropriation of what Chopin was trying to accomplish thematically, as his mixed lineage helps unravel a plot that initially depends on dichotomous associations, such as the North vs. the South, the woods vs. the mill, and nature vs. industry. Indeed, as Joçint's life falls apart, so does this orderly system of binary representation.

Chopin shrewdly places this surly half-Indian in a trying predicament, as Joçint must work at the mill each day with his heart in the pine hills and knowing that his little Creole pony was roaming the woods in vicious idleness and his rifle gathering an unsightly rust on the cabin wall at home (12). Because of the historical and mythical association of Native Americans with nature, Joçint's resistance to the mill and his job there are fitting, as is his dislike for Thérèse,

whom he holds accountable for the fault of this intrusive Industry which had come to fire the souls of indolent fathers with a greedy ambition for gain, at the sore expense of revolting youth (13). Chopin repeatedly emphasizes Joçint's rebelliousness—for example, the mill proprietor catches him intentionally letting the logs roll off the carriage (24)—and this character trait also places him in line with nineteenth-century Americans' views of the half-Indian figure as exceedingly mercurial and therefore particularly at risk for early death.⁴⁰ Accordingly, Joçint is so repulsed by this post-bellum fusion of Southern agriculture and Northern commercialism that he sets fire to the mill on Halloween night, an act for which he is shot and killed by Thérèse's Creole nephew, Grègoire Santien. Thus, Chopin reinforces half-blood stereotypes through Joçint's allegiance to the woods, his willful defiance of social norms, and his untimely death, and he therefore seems a fitting victim of the merging of Southern and Northern economic ideals occurring on the plantation, for this symbol of pre-industrial America has no apparent place in a world where the forest is a commodity. Moreover, it seems historically significant that it was this political and economic union of the North and the South after the Civil War that would allow for the final military push against Native American resistance in the West.

Despite this typecasting, however, Joçint's death generates a good deal of pathos that complements Chopin's warnings about the effects of industrialization, as the destruction of the Pine Woods takes on added significance because of the loss of a human life intended to represent harmony with nature. Chopin neatly inverts the Indian-forest connection established by Jewett in *The White Rose Road* — trees grow and so does the strength of Jewett's red man ; trees die and so does Chopin's Native American—and therefore reinforces these two authors' shared metaphorical rendering of Native Americans while distinguishing her own account as more sentimental than Jewett's. Indeed, Joçint is no Injun Joe, that murderin' half-breed of Mark

Twain's *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (1876), a simplistic figure who, as Harry Brown notes, is unconflicted by mixed motives, unsympathetic in his brute language, unredeemable in his human vengeance for petty wrongs and therefore a direct descendent of the villainous half-blood of the American dime novel tradition.⁴¹ Rather, as Per Seyersted points out, Joçint's decision to burn down the lumber mill is an act of vengeance against the modern machines rather than their owners.⁴² Certainly, these machines are both eating away at the forest Joçint loves and eroding his sense of belonging. When Joçint comes home from work one day and begins devouring his elderly father's dinner, he defends his actions by complaining that he got no chance [...] fu' go fine nuttin in de 'ood (22) because of his long hours at the mill. And when Thérèse, who is visiting the cabin, invites him to come to her home for food, he remarks that he got no chance [...] fu' go to de 'ouse neider (23). Although Joçint appears to refer literally to the time impositions caused by his position at the mill, we might also read this conversation as metaphorically indicative of his outsider position. He can no longer hunt in the woods that were presumably the home of his Native American ancestors, yet there is no place for him among the black servants and white inhabitants of the main house. He must either starve or earn a living at the mill he despises.

Thus, despite his churlish behaviors, Joçint is a decidedly more complex character than a figure like Injun Joe, and his death scene—which Robert Arner has aptly characterized as little short of apocalyptic⁴³—emphasizes the violence of the merging of Northern and Southern ideals that have caused his distress and his tragic position as a racial outsider. Joçint does not fulfill the hypersexualized and criminalized, black as beast metaphor typical of the frightening drama of lynching.⁴⁴ Chopin without a doubt animalizes her character, who creeps through the woods like a stealthy beast on the way to his final crime and who strangles his own dog without

remorse when the brute attempts to follow (94-95); however, there is never any indication that Joçint is a sexual threat. Indeed, he wants nothing to do with Thérèse—or any other white character in the novel, for that matter. Although the aftermath of Joçint’s death resembles a lynching, we must note that the white youth Grègoire, for whom Joçint harbored a mutual animosity, is the only person at the scene when Joçint dies. Moreover, when the fire draws a crowd, these onlookers attempt to remove Joçint’s body from the flames. Certainly, his death causes a spectacle, but it is ultimately the living spectacle of a man violently refusing to let anyone else touch the victim’s body to which [a]ll eyes were fastened (99). As Joçint’s body burns, his elderly father Morico arrives and begins shoving people, including David Hosmer and Grègoire, away from his son. Finally Hosmer, the St. Louis mill proprietor, stands back watches the scene in awe: The devouring element, loosed in its awful recklessness there in the heart of this lonely forest. The motley group of black and white standing out in the great red light, powerless to do more than wait and watch (99). The dreadfulness of the scene only escalates when Morico, attempting to remove Joçint on his own, collapses and dies, still clinging to the lifeless body of his son (99).

In this key scene, Chopin emphasizes the outsider status of the racial hybrid Joçint by linking his body to the red light of the fire, from which the black and white onlookers remain at safe distance. She also accomplishes this by noting that the servants are generally in accord that Joçint was only properly served in getting w’at he done ben lookin’ fu’ dis long time’ (100). Thus, Joçint’s beloved woods may eventually be destroyed by the mill, but the African Americans at Place-du-Bois need not feel threatened under a post-bellum labor system in which former slaves are able to step easily into the roles of sharecroppers or mill workers. As a mixed-race pariah who is killed by a privileged white youth, Joçint’s death underscores the racism that

underlies this outwardly harmonious revision of the economic and racial status quo at Place-du-Bois. Notably, Grègoire also dies as an indirect result of his violent act, further developing this theme of racial violence. Chopin foreshadows the death of Thérèse's nephew when, in a dream, Hosmer confuses Joçint and Grègoire and mumbles, "Don't let Grègoire burn—take him from the fire" (116). And she emphasizes the racist underpinnings of Joçint's murder through Grègoire's consequent downward spiral, during which he loses the affection of David's sister Melicent, drinks heavily, leaves the plantation, and finally gets shot and killed in a gunfight with a Texas colonel who angers him by calling him "Frenchy" (130). When one recalls the cultural heritage of Joçint, whose father Morico could only speak French, the racial divide between the two characters closes somewhat, and this perhaps helps account for Grègoire's quickness to draw on the colonel after a comment that, according to the drifter who bears the news of his death, "most takes ez a insufficient cause for rilin'" (130). That is, when Grègoire has left Louisiana and stepped into the shoes of the racial outsider, if even temporarily, he becomes fully aware of the barbarity of his hasty actions against Joçint.

With Joçint's death, the last shred of active resistance to deforestation in the novel disappears, and the mill is quickly rebuilt, ushering in a period of presumed stability on the plantation that is further supported by the rather contrived union of Thérèse and Hosmer. Through this course of events, which pivots on Joçint's Native American heritage and related (albeit stereotypical) role as a nature-loving victim of change, Chopin laments the industrialization of the South while simultaneously indicating its economic inescapability and suggesting women's evolving social and professional duties. Indeed, in this novel the New Woman's rise occurs, at least in part, at the expense of a Native American character's life. Chopin thereby depicts a New South in which women must be more aware of their influence

over political and social issues, for with the relaxation of patriarchal expectations comes greater responsibility, and Thérèse fails in her professional and moral responsibilities toward Joçint. As the book's title suggests, Thérèse is at fault for the drowning death of Hosmer's alcoholic wife, a woman she urges him to bring back to the plantation to live because of Thérèse's belief in marital sanctity, but also, though indirectly, for the deaths of Joçint and Grègoire, for it is our protagonist who allows the mill to be built on her land. Nevertheless, in Thérèse's capacity for enduring such consequences, the novel emphasizes the merits of adaptability, for, as Arner has noted, Thérèse ultimately recognizes that her view of life was inadequate to cope with the realities of situations.⁴⁵ Thérèse's ability to cast aside outdated social and political beliefs, such as her initial resistance to both divorce and to an economic alliance with Northern industry, as well as her willingness to acknowledge her culpability in the tragedies that have befallen her plantation, allow her to triumph personally and professionally, as she discovers happiness with Hosmer and establishes a sort of economical middle ground on her plantation. Thus, Chopin ultimately issues a feminist statement by depicting a new order of resilient, capable Southern women and by fracturing antebellum patriarchal ideals, as well as by seeing Thérèse safely through the turmoil that accompanies such a transformation. Nevertheless, the violent course to this resolution has left its mark: Lives have been lost, the Pine Woods spoiled. Chopin's novel demonstrates that the road to professional and social independence for Southern women will be wrought with obstacles, and the balance between such achievements and personal fulfillment is a delicate one.

As she does with the location of Joçint and Morico's woodland cabin, Chopin creates an in-between geographical space to emphasize the social struggle of her mixed-race protagonist in Loka, published in *The Youth's Companion* in 1892 and again two years later in *Bayou Folk*.

Although the lamentation of environmental change is not as prominent as it is in *At Fault*, the contradictory impulses driving Americans' attitudes toward Native Americans are especially plain in this short story, which offers alternating racist and compassionate discourses about its half-breed Indian protagonist (266) that complement Loka's discouraging search for a home, a physical space in which she can honor both of her cultural halves. Although Loka is typically considered a children's story, it includes adult themes such as Native American dispossession and white Americans' prejudice that characterized the social climate of the era; the tale concludes, however, with a child-appropriate moral about the merits of appreciating cultural differences. Although Bonnie Shaker has argued that with this story Chopin upholds a racial hierarchy that depends on the subjugation of the half-Indian other, this reading downplays Chopin's sympathy for Loka and the sacrifices Loka is forced to make because of the demise of both her culture and the wooded area she most closely associates with home, as well as Chopin's harsh retribution against Loka's blatantly racist mistress.⁴⁶ Certainly, the impact of literary sentimentalism, which, as Wexler has demonstrated, aimed at the subjugation of different classes and even races who were compelled to play not the leading roles but the human scenery before which the melodrama of middle-class redemption could be enacted,⁴⁷ seems evident in Loka's passivity and inability to escape her living situation. Like Joçint, she is a symbolic Native American hinge, a product of the tensions between Chopin's racial nostalgia and her environmental foresight. However, Chopin adapts the sentimental template somewhat by placing Loka in the story's leading role and by withholding moral redemption from her white mistress. Loka is, no doubt, closely aligned with the story's scenery, but she is not a part of it. Moreover, her struggle to fit in reflects Zitkala-Ša's own hardships as a teen, particularly her dismay at finding, after attending school in the East, herself in a deplorable situation : Even

nature seemed to have no place for me. I was neither a wee girl nor a tall one; neither a wild Indian nor a tame one. ⁴⁸ Similarly, Loka, because she is half-Indian and half-white (as was Zitkala-Ša), and because she is a teenager, does not know where she belong[s] (266).

Chopin's physical description of this displaced youth, who shows up in Natchitoches wearing rags and begging for food, embodies stereotypes about Native American physiognomy:

Loka was not beautiful [...]. Her coarse, unkempt black hair framed a broad, swarthy face without a redeeming feature, except eyes that were not bad; slow in their movements, but frank eyes enough. She was big-boned and clumsy (266). However, this description also desexualizes the teenager, which helps support Chopin's later depiction of a white man's interest in Loka's well-being as innocently paternal, and differentiates Loka from the stereotypically beautiful tragic mulatta figure. In addition, Chopin unsettles this foundation of racial typecasting with sarcastic references to the women of the Band of United Endeavor and other considerate Natchitoches residents who take it upon themselves to find Loka a home, a job, and opportunities for the good moral training she needs (266).⁴⁹ This underhanded critique of the white characters' practical philanthrop[y] continues with Loka's placement, under the guidance of Madame Laballière (presumably the haughty Creole Clarissa of At the 'Cadian Ball) with the 'Cadian Padues, a modest farming family who would be a tier lower on the social scale than the area's wealthy Creole planters. Chopin builds on her critique of do-gooders' thinly disguised racism with her harsh portrayal of Madam Tontine Padue, a small, black-eyed, aggressive woman who hires Loka as a servant but then attempts to rid her of her perceived savageness, which she believes can be work[ed] out of her (266-67). Indeed, nearly everything about Loka aggravates Tontine, including the girl's inability to speak French, her

slow ways, and her stolid indifference to work—all of which Tontine connects to Loka's Choctaw heritage (267).

Despite this dismal living situation, Loka has a tender relationship with the Padue baby Bibine, a highly sentimental connection that Chopin establishes to offset Loka's romanticized desire to return to the woods, each impulse plainly linked to one of Loka's racial halves. Tontine entrusts Loka with care of the infant one day while the rest of the family goes into town, and in the quiet house, with Bibine sleeping peacefully, she begins to feel the pull of her past as she looks out over the countryside. Chopin resorts to zealous Native American typecasting and misconstrues tradition as she describes the vision (as opposed to memory) Loka has of the beatings she suffered in the past at the hands of the alcoholic squaw Marot but reiterates that Loka could not feel just then that the sin and pain of that life were anything beside the joy of its freedom (269-70). Indeed, Loka, in hackneyed literary fashion, is simply sick for the woods and her vagabond life, and, in a symbolic act of rebellion against white American influence, sheds her heavy brogans and prepares to flee (270). Unable to leave the baby she had grown to love so, Loka carts Bibine off with her, and the Padues come home to an empty house (270). After several frenzied hours of searching, however, they see Loka emerge out of the woods with the infant.

Although Tontine is enraged and wants to dismiss the girl, Loka easily pacifies Tontine's husband Baptiste by stating that it was the baby who made her overcome her desire to return to the woods and a life of thievery. In a display of seemingly genuine understanding, Tontine's husband soothes Loka and then calmly chastises his wife for trying to assert so much control over the teenager. Baptiste, in rather contradictory logic, both affirms Loka's similarity to the Padues and, paradoxically, her cultural individuality: That girl, she done tole us how she was

temp' to-day to turn *canaille*—like we all temp' sometime'. W'at was it save her? That li'le chile w'at you hole in yo' arm. An' now you want to take her guarjun angel 'way f'om her? *Non, non, ma femme*. [...] We got to rememba she ent like you an' me, po' thing; she's one Injun, her (272).⁵⁰ In a symbolic temporary return to her Native American heritage, Loka has travelled into the uncultivated woods, but she has returned to merge with the Padue family, where she will presumably experience greater understanding from its members without having to disguise her Choctaw heritage. Thus, the story's message is neither wholly assimilationist nor exclusionary. Although Scheick finds that the story is more concerned with the essential humanity of its protagonist than with any point about miscegenation or racial prejudice,⁵¹ Loka clearly promotes racial acceptance and cultural enlightenment as the most desirable solutions to the friction between the Padues and their servant.

Chopin's story offers more than a simplistic moral about how to gently handle the racial Other, however. Like *At Fault*, *Loka* is a commentary on Southern women's power—what it takes to thrive in this diverse and transforming social climate and, more notably, how such power can be lost. Indeed, Madame Tontine is harshly punished for her cruel treatment of Loka by losing control of her household to her husband in their squabble over what to do with Loka once she returns with Bibine. Thus, Chopin issues a message about women's moral roles alongside her commentary on race. Moreover, these concepts coalesce primarily through Chopin's placement of her half-Indian character in a notably transitional geographic space, an ephemeral location that is reflective of Richard White's theory of the middle ground as a site of cultural accommodation in the early history of European and Indian contact in North America that eroded when Indians ceased to have the power to force whites onto the middle ground.⁵² Certainly, it is Loka who has been forced into a living situation with the Padues, who reside on

the outskirts of the expansive Laballière plantation where Baptiste farms the few acres Laballière has sold him (269). The meager Padue farm functions as a symbolic and literal middle space between the commercial agriculture of the Laballière plantation, which took up all the land in sight and the dense woods at its border that the plantation will likely eventually devour (269). Chopin emphasizes the transitional geography of the site when, as Loka rocks Bibine and gazes out across the countryside, she notices a symbol of industrial agriculture, the long pipe of the steam-gin of Laballière's plantation, off to the right and, in the opposite direction, the woods that inspire Loka's vision of her past (268-69). Because of her mixed heritage, the farm of the lower-class Padues is presumably the most fitting home for Loka, a teen with whom the white upper class wants no contact and who has been poorly cared for by other Native Americans.⁵³

Nevertheless, Tontine makes a comfortable existence in the Padue home impossible and, like Joçint, Loka feels compelled to take refuge in the woods. Unlike Joçint, however, Loka has a personal relationship that makes a full rebellion against white society impossible, and she is left homeless, for the woods, already threatened by agriculture, conceal the dangerous figures of her past, and she has no future as an equal member of a white household, 'Cadian or Creole.

Although Shaker points out that [p]erhaps, as her name suggests, what is 'crazy' about Loka is that she chooses to stay in a physical place that manifests her cultural place as indentured servitude,⁵⁴ the story illustrates that Loka ultimately has no choices. Typical of Chopin's ambivalence, Loka's lack of autonomy excludes her from aspiring to an equal social position among the white women of the New South; paradoxically, Loka's attributes—her love for the white baby, willingness to try to please the Padues, and desire to reject the cheating ways of her former Native American companions—strengthen Chopin's critique of white Southern women's exclusionary attitudes. Ultimately, the story suggests that white America is responsible for the

degradation of Loka's culture and therefore also responsible for providing her with an alternative to lifelong rootlessness.

The hopelessness of Loka's situation provides an opportunity for Tontine to step up and demonstrate the sort of consideration also withheld from Joçint by Thérèse Lafirme, particularly to display her moral superiority over the sanctimonious Band of United Endeavor, but Tontine fails dismally because of her resistance to change—in her household and in the world around her. Rather, it is Baptiste who discovers in the situation an opportunity for social advancement, and because of his empathy for Loka, he is rewarded by gaining the upper hand over his domineering wife. [D]etermined to profit by his wife's lachrymose and wilted condition to assert his authority, Baptiste claims control over household decisions: I want to say who 's masta in this house—it's me (272). The Padues will keep Loka on, he declares, and they will remember her cultural differences, her kindness to Bibine, and the disadvantages she has endured. Although Baptiste is temperate toward his wife during this show of dominance, Tontine's defeat is clear. The matriarch of the New South, the story suggests, is responsible for helping shape its social climate and overcoming the region's racist legacy, and women like Tontine who are unable to adapt to such a transition are not worthy of domestic responsibilities, let alone the social and economic rights being afforded to women during this gradual destabilization of patriarchal society. Perhaps Tontine, then, is the most appropriate inhabitant of the story's carefully crafted transitional geographic space, forever rooted in an outdated belief system, unworthy of social responsibility and oblivious to the merits of honoring her region's cultural legacy. Loka may remain a servant in the Padue household, but she will no longer be an avenue for Tontine's expressions of racial angst thanks to Baptiste's paternalism. Thus, with this story Chopin refuses to simplify or dichotomize the forces contributing to Loka's predicament, depicting instead a

web of conflicting allegiances and identifications that reflect the complexity of evolving social relations.

Zitkala-Ša's 1921 pamphlet *Americanize the First American* demonstrates that concern for historically marginalized people continued to be deemed a moral imperative for many modern American women in the decades after *Loka* was published. Like Chopin, Zitkala-Ša would pinpoint women's involvement in sociopolitical spheres as necessary to resolving intercultural conflict, and she would take issue with unfair bureaucratic dealings, though on a much larger scale than those dictated by the ladies' *Band of United Endeavor*. *Americanize the First American* calls attention to the miserable living conditions on reservations, particularly for Indian children threatened by influenza and winter weather, and lambasts the government for failing to fulfill treaties and for withholding citizenship from nearly all Native Americans. Interestingly, however, instead of appealing directly to congress to repair these channels of inefficiency and criminal neglect, she presses a female audience to take action: *Womanhood of America, to you I appeal in behalf of the Red Man and his children. [...] Give him those educational advantages pressed with so much enthusiasm upon the foreigner. Revoke the tyrannical powers of Government superintendents over a voiceless people and extend American opportunities to the first American—the Red Man.*⁵⁵ Zitkala-Ša, who was actively involved in the mostly white General Federation of Women's Clubs in the 1920s, unsettles race and gender expectations in this passage as she champions increased rights for a voiceless people. Indeed, she both reinforces Chopin's image of the Native American who lacks autonomy and therefore deserves greater consideration from white Americans, and simultaneously challenges this image by speaking out as a Native American woman *with* a voice. Ultimately, by contesting government policy, she exhibits the agency deprived of *Loka* by Chopin, which includes the

power to shape her own future and the future of her race through education and activism, while making a similar statement about white women's ethical responsibilities toward other races.

Cather's Cities in the Sky

Cather's works reflect an even more pronounced interest than do Jewett's and Chopin's in the ways in which a landscape directly associated with Native American history—namely one that has pueblo ruins built directly into its natural features—can emphasize the disadvantages of bureaucracy, materialism, and industrialization while highlighting Americans' changing social responsibilities around the turn of the century. Although Cather would not visit Chicago until 1895, two years after the World's Fair closed its gates, her most influential later works suggest her awareness of intellectual interests of the day, as one of the popular attractions at the 1893 Columbian Exposition was the cliff-dwellers exhibit. This artificial mountain was modeled after Colorado ruins and housed artifacts from Mesa Verde, the site of prehistoric Native American pueblos in Colorado that would shape the unique development of Cather's 1925 novel *The Professor's House*.⁵⁶ Cather had long been captivated by the history of the Southwest's cliff-dwelling cultures. According to her friend Edith Lewis, [S]he and her brothers had thought and speculated about them since they were children. The cliff-dwellers were one of the native myths of the American West; children knew about them before they were conscious of knowing about them.⁵⁷ Without a doubt, the wonders of ancient ruins elevated above the earth had taken root in her imagination well before her first trip there and are reflected in her early story *The Enchanted Bluff* (1909), in which several boyhood friends' dreams of visiting a mesa once inhabited by Native Americans go unrealized. Perhaps inspired by such legends to visit the area (as well as her brother Douglass, who was working on the railroad in Winslow, Arizona), Cather made the first of four trips to the Southwest in 1912, during which she was moved by the

Spanish mission churches with their gardens, the native Indian villages, the glamorous high-coloured landscape, and above all the ancient cliff-dwellings of the vanished Indian tribes, relics of an extraordinary and beautiful civilization, which she saw at Walnut Canyon —images, biographer Hermione Lee notes, that would haunt her forever.⁵⁸ Certainly, the Arizona canyon becomes a powerful backdrop in *The Song of the Lark* (1915) when Thea Kronborg experiences a sensual artistic awakening among the prehistoric Anasazi dwellings of the fictionalized Panther Canyon. Three years later, in 1915, Cather took a trip to Colorado's Mesa Verde that would also have a deep impact on her literary imagination, culminating in Tom Outland's Story, the pivotal section of *The Professor's House* (1925). Additionally, a visit to Santa Fe and the outlying area in 1925 would help dictate the course of Father Latour's journeys in *Death Comes for the Archbishop* (1927) and encourage Cather's incorporation of landmarks such as the Ácoma pueblos and the legendary Enchanted Mesa.⁵⁹

The profound influence of Cather's experiences in the Southwest on her fiction have been well-documented, somewhat by her own hand in nonfiction, but particularly by David Harrell, whose 1992 book was the first to thoroughly explore the extent to which Cather's Mesa Verde trip contributed to the artistic development of *The Professor's House* and which inspired much important scholarly work on Cather and the Southwest.⁶⁰ Harrell traces Cather's interest in the discovery of an abandoned cliff city from the 1909 story The Enchanted Bluff, to a brief mention in *Alexander's Bridge* (1912), and to The Ancient People section of *The Song of the Lark* —all of which anticipate Tom Outland's Story in *The Professor's House*.⁶¹ In this chapter, I would like to call attention to a specific thematic constant among Cather's cliff-city stories, namely the dichotomous relationship she establishes by celebrating the history of ancient cliff-dwelling cultures while simultaneously criticizing an increasingly materialistic American

society—an association that had taken shape, *The Enchanted Bluff* demonstrates, well before Cather first set sight on a prehistoric pueblo. Indeed, this work is significant not only as a precursor to the more frequently analyzed *Tom Outland's Story*, but also as the story that marks the origin of the anti-consumerism message that is inherent, in some fashion, to all of Cather's portrayals of Southwestern Indian ruins. This motif, the depiction of specific Southwestern geographic spaces as an invaluable antidote to American consumerism, emerges in *The Enchanted Bluff*, but it experiences its fullest development in *The Professor's House*, a novel that offers direct, heretofore overlooked evidence that Cather was opposed to the commodification of Native American cultures occurring around the turn of the century at events like the World's Columbian Exposition.⁶²

Furthermore, by recognizing that for Cather the attraction of writing about a city preserved in the dry air and almost perpetual sunlight like a fly in amber (*PH* 221) extended well beyond her admiration for the beauty of the Southwestern landscape and her awareness of trends in American tourism, we see thorough evidence of a pattern, first forged by Jewett and Chopin, of turn-of-the-century American women writers addressing contemporary issues within a framework of historical themes by re-creating Native American landscapes. Moreover, although Cather drew on the Native American history and natural forces present in Panther Canyon to establish the land ethic that inspires Thea Kronborg's artistic success in *The Song of the Lark*,⁶³ by the time she had written *Tom Outland's Story* Cather had moved beyond envisioning these specifically Native American landscapes as venues of female growth and empowerment to make a gender-neutral statement about the benefits of preserving such spaces for an entire post-war generation affected by the commercialism of the prosperous twenties. Indeed, World War I, which is responsible for Outland's death, and its economic aftermath,

which feeds Professor Godfrey St. Peter's disillusionment, seem to have enlarged the parameters of Cather's valuation of Native American geographies, an appreciation that culminates in expressions of religious sanctity.

The imaginative discovery of a foil to the flurry of modern industry in the remnants of pre-Columbus civilizations is nevertheless evident in the early anti-materialist message of *The Enchanted Bluff*, a story that appeared in *Harper's* in 1909 and that is based on the legend of New Mexico's Enchanted Mesa.⁶⁴ In this tale, which Janis Stout has called a provocative transitional work between [Cather's] writing about Nebraska and her writing about the Southwest,⁶⁵ six Nebraska boys in the twilight of their youth celebrate their last night of summer freedom by camping out on a sand bar. That evening, their conversation is full of wonder as they stare at the stars, pointing out constellations, pondering the ways of the Aztecs, contemplating the existence of the gold sought by Coronado, speculating about the source of their river, and sharing their dreams of adventure. One boy, Tip Smith, describes the legend of the Enchanted Bluff, a dolorous tale of a peaceful tribe living upon a great rock in New Mexico that allowed them to easily defend themselves from their enemies, a story which Tip has learned from his uncle, a drifting miner (70). One day, according to the boy, a storm destroyed the handmade staircase leading from the farmlands at the base of the mesa back up to the top, and a war party came along and killed off the stranded men with all the old folks and women looking on from the rock (70). With no way to get down, the remaining villagers perished on top of the mesa, and, according to Tip, nobody has ever been up there since (70). Tip has made it his mission to climb that there bluff, and the other boys quickly get on board, vowing to find the mesa and reach its summit (71). Soon, the whole project of the Enchanted Bluff is born (72).

The story jumps ahead twenty years to reveal that none of the boys ever searched for the bluff; moreover, the courses their lives have taken suggest that economic imperatives, so ingrained in Americans' sense of duty, have destroyed their dream. Percy Pound is a stockbroker in Kansas City and will go nowhere that his red touring-car cannot carry him, Cather writes; the Hassler brothers have become the town tailors; Tip Smith runs the grocery store; and Arthur Adams never left Sandtown, Nebraska, and died in his twenties (72). The narrator's vocation remains a mystery, but his willingness to [revive] the romance of the lone red rock and the extinct people one evening during a moonlit walk with Tip suggests that he is still drawn to the imaginative outlet provided by the story (73). However, when we discover that Tip's young son, Bert, has been let in to the story, and thinks of nothing but the Enchanted Bluff, the fantasy takes on two distinct forms: While the story of the mesa lives on in the minds of boys as a source of hope for the future, in the minds of men it is an imagined historical ideal that offers an antidote to a degraded present. The fantasy of visiting the mesa is fully out of reach for the adult men, a pipe dream made impossible by their immersion in the day-to-day routines associated with earning a living, activities upon which Cather casts a dull pallor that contrasts sharply with boyish dreams of discovery.

Indeed, she mocks the fat-cat lifestyle of the stockbroker Percy, gives Tip a slatternly, unthrifty wife, and assigns the narrator an attitude of wistful discontent, thereby indicting typical modern American life in the first decade of the twentieth century (73). Moreover, in juxtaposing such a lifestyle with that of the handsome people who avoided conflict at all cost and who became extinct in large part because of their elevated morals (complemented, of course, by their elevated home), Cather also challenges prominent perceptions about Native American ethics. According to Trachtenberg, By the 1890s, [...] the Indian had been incorporated into

America no longer simply as 'savage,' a fantasy object of ambivalent romantic identification or racial hatred, but as 'lowest order,' outcast and pariah who represented the fate of all those who do not work, do not own, do not prefer the benefits of legal status within the hierarchies of modern institutions to the prerogatives of freedom and cultural autonomy.⁶⁶ Cather disrupts this fidelity to blind faith in materialism, institutionalism, and bureaucratic relations and condemns the resultant racism by mythologizing the more admirable mode of living in this story. That is, the imagined magic of the Enchanted Bluff derives from its dichotomous relationship to the lackluster lives of the men. Cather refuses to commodify the mesa, removing direct contact with it from the realm of possibility for these all-too-ordinary characters.

Nevertheless, she would grant her readers entry into such an enchanted sphere with Tom Outland's discovery of the Cliff City in *The Professor's House*. Having walked among the pueblo ruins herself at Mesa Verde National Park in 1915, Cather further forged an oppositional link between 'the bustling business of the world' and the human history interwoven directly into the Southwestern landscape. In a 1916 newspaper article, she explains this correlation:

The Mesa Verde is not, as many people think, an inconveniently situated museum. It is the story of an early race, of the social and religious life of a people indigenous to that soil and to its rocky splendors. It is the human expression of that land of sharp contours, brutal contrasts, glorious color and blinding light. The human consciousness, as we know it today, dwelt there, and a feeling for beauty and order was certainly not absent. There are in those stone villages no suggestions revolting to our sensibilities. No sinister ideas lurk in the sun-drenched ruins hung among the crags. One has only to go down into Hopiland to find the same life going on today on other mesa tops; houses like these, kivas like these, ceremonial and religious implements like these—every detail preserved with

the utmost fidelity. When you see those ancient, pyramidal pueblos once more brought nearer by the sunset light that beats on them like gold-beaters' hammers, when the aromatic pinon [sic] smoke begins to curl up in the still air and the boys bring in the cattle and the old Indians come out in their white burnouses and take their accustomed grave positions upon the housetops, you begin to feel that custom, ritual, integrity of tradition have a reality that goes deeper than the bustling business of the world.⁶⁷

Cather introduces the antithesis to the characters depicted in *The Enchanted Bluff*, those men unwittingly immersed in the sinister ideas that Cather associates with modern life, in the figure of Tom Outland, the adventurer, scholar, and inventor whose life is ended all too soon during World War I. As Glen Love notes, Tom Outland's short life, taken in summary, is more mythic than real. [...] But though he seems a glittering idea, as one of the characters describes him, his spoken narrative anchors him to the commonality of human experience and to the everyday magic of sensory life.⁶⁸ By granting Outland access to the ruins, she is able to propose a model for how Americans *should* respond to Native American history, a model that also involves the renunciation of consumer culture and the celebration of American environment and history.

Indeed, Outland's rapturous discovery of the prehistoric ruins of the Blue Mesa, his elevation of the experience to a religious emotion, and the comfort his story brings Professor Godfrey St. Peter (the disillusioned, erudite narrator who is often closely associated with Cather herself⁶⁹) point to Cather's investment in honoring the Southwest's Native American cultures (253). Furthermore, the transposition of the discovery of true national treasures against the present-day greedy in-fighting among St. Peter's family members and academic associates helps make this novel a treatise on the corruptibility of consumer culture. Cather indicts materialism directly in the words of St. Peter who, after an orgy of acquisition in Chicago with his daughter

Rosamond, frustratingly declares to his wife that they should omit the verb 'to buy' in all forms for a time (191-92). She expands on this critique through her depiction of self-interested Washington officials who exhibit little astonishment at the discoveries unearthed at Cliff City, and it is this frequently overlooked aspect of the novel, specifically Cather's negative depiction of Smithsonian scholars and an Indian Commission authority, that I would like to address more fully, for it contributes not only to Cather's emphasis on the importance of Native American history, but also offers a subtle challenge to the type of commodification of cultures that had occurred at events like the Chicago World's Fair. Indeed, with the details of Outland's fruitless trip to Washington, Cather pointedly critiques governmental attitudes toward Native American cultures when the Smithsonian officials of her novel decide to devote government funds to an International Exposition to be held in Europe (most likely the International Paris Exposition of 1900, according to Harrell),⁷⁰ rather than to an excursion devoted to documenting and preserving the discoveries at Cliff City.

After the weeks-long rigmarole associated with getting an interview with the Director of the Smithsonian (which involves a run-in with an Indian Commission clerk who tries to swindle Tom out of a piece of pottery that the clerk wishes to use as an ashtray and, later, an expensive lunch with the director's irritating secretary), Outland at last generates the director's interest in the Blue Mesa and is introduced to Dr. Ripley, the authority on prehistoric Indian remains for the museum (242). Dr. Ripley is an ambiguous figure who studies the pottery Outland has brought to Washington with interest but then does not return it to him. He seems excited about visiting Cliff City but then easily dismisses the venture when funding is not granted. Apparently, the Director and all his staff had one interest which dwarfed every other :

There was to be an International Exposition of some sort in Europe the following summer, and they were all pulling strings to get appointed on juries or sent to international congresses—appointments that would pay their expenses abroad, and give them a salary in addition. There was, indeed, a bill before Congress for appropriations for the Smithsonian; but there was also a bill for Exposition appropriations, and that was the one they were really pushing. They kept me hanging on through March and April, but in the end it came to nothing. Dr. Ripley told me he was sorry, but the sum Congress had allowed the Smithsonian wouldn't cover an expedition to the South-west. (242-43)

A friendly office assistant reveals to Outland that the only thing Dr. Ripley really cared about was getting a free trip to Europe. The Native American expert and the Smithsonian Director don't care much about dead and gone Indians, according to Virginia Ward. What they do care about is going to Paris, and getting another ribbon on their coats (243).

This aspect of Outland's Washington trip, which results in his return to the Blue Mesa and the crushing discovery that his friend Roddy Blake has sold off to a German collector the artifacts he had spent months cataloguing, raises important questions about Cather's rhetorical goals. Harrell, the only scholar to analyze the fictional Smithsonian officials' behavior at length, has argued convincingly that Cather intentionally misrepresents the Smithsonian's attitude toward Native American archaeology and anthropology. He points out that [t]he Smithsonian helped support numerous surveys and explorations of the Southwest during the 1860s and 1870s, Smithsonian archaeologist William Henry Holmes saw parts of Mesa Verde thirteen years before the Wetherills did, and by 1922, when Cather probably finished writing *Tom Outland's Story*, 'the Smithsonian had done or sponsored so much work at Mesa Verde that it took dozens of volumes to describe it.⁷¹ Why, then, the disparaging portrait of Smithsonian scholars? Harrell

posits that Outland's ill treatment in Washington serves the literary function of reinvigorating his devotion to protecting the mesa: "The point [...] is that Outland is the only one who can understand the mesa, at least in the way Cather would have it. When he learns that a profit-motivated foreigner [...] has been digging out all those secrets in his absence—and with Blake's blessing—he goes into a righteous rage made all the more vehement by the fresh memories of his time in Washington."⁷² Certainly, Outland's fidelity to Cliff City is made stronger by officials' dismissal of its national importance. After Blake departs and Outland is alone among the ruins, his books his only company, he discovers that the mesa [is] no longer an adventure, but a religious emotion, and he experiences unadulterated happiness that summer, high and blue, a life in itself (253-54). Nevertheless, Harrell's evaluation of Cather's depiction of Washington officials fails to address the significance of the one interest that commands the majority of the Smithsonian's attention and funding—the upcoming International Exposition in Europe, an issue that deserves closer scrutiny, for its negative implications amplify Cather's anti-consumerist and preservationist ideals because of the imperialist agenda of American world's fair authorities.

Indeed, it is unlikely that Cather included the International Exposition carelessly, as the event, like the Columbian Exposition seven years earlier, promoted the very ideals that Cather's novel challenges. Historian Robert Rydell, an authority on world's fairs, has demonstrated that both expositions were treated by organizers as an opportunity to promote American nationalism, an outlook that contributed to the enforcement of cultural and social hierarchies through carefully chosen exhibits. According to Rydell, the primary goal of U.S. exhibit organizers for the Paris exposition was to demonstrate to the world and to Americans back home that the newly reconstructed American nation-state had come of age as an imperial power in the decades following the Civil War.⁷³ Certainly, exhibit organizers' treatment of Native American cultures

supported such an objective. As occurred during the planning of the Columbian Exposition, Native Americans were not allowed to determine their representation at the Paris exposition; however, unlike at the 1893 event, they were not made the subjects of living ethnological exhibits in Paris. Two years earlier, at the 1898 fair in Omaha, the Bureau of Indian Affairs drew criticism for a violent wild-west-type show that featured Native Americans of the Great Plains dueling with white antagonists. Responding to the backlash from reformers, the Commissioner of Indian Affairs decided to concentrate government efforts for the Paris fair on representing the ‘civilizing’ work of American Indian schools. The result was an exhibit consisting of only three cases, most of which featured the products of Native American students, including crafts and schoolwork that reflected their intellectual capacity.⁷⁴ In Rydell’s appraisal, The American Indian exhibit may have been small and a crass example of tokenism, but it was viewed in France as an effective demonstration to the world that the United States had taken steps to ‘civilize’ those it had not exterminated through its wars of imperial conquest at home.⁷⁵ Thus, although the Paris fair officials did not capitalize on Native Americans by casting them in crowd-pleasing scenes arranged to suggest their primitivism, the depiction of Native Americans as assets to a country quickly expanding into world markets nevertheless commodifies an entire race.

Zitkala-Ša, who had herself traveled to the Paris exposition to play violin with the Carlisle Indian Industrial School of Pennsylvania, where she became a teacher 1897,⁷⁶ would that same year harshly criticize this very sort of cultural display in ‘An Indian Teacher Among Indians,’ published in the *Atlantic Monthly* in 1900.⁷⁷ As an employee of Carlisle, Zitkala-Ša became acquainted with the school’s policy of welcoming ‘Christian palefaces’ so they could be

astounded at seeing the children of savage warriors so docile and industrious, a policy that would help influence her decision, after a visit home, to resign from her position. She recalls:

As answers to their shallow inquiries they received the students' sample work to look upon. Examining the neatly figured pages, and gazing upon the Indian girls and boys bending over their books, the white visitors walked out of the schoolhouse well satisfied: they were educating the children of the red man! They were paying a liberal fee to the government employees in whose able hands lay the small forest of Indian timber.

In this fashion many have passed idly through the Indian schools during the last decade, afterward to boast of their charity to the North American Indian. But few there are who have paused to question whether real life or long-lasting death lies beneath this semblance of civilization. (112-13)

Her reference to the small forest of Indian timber under the direction of government employees is especially noteworthy in this passage, as it introduces yet another Native American/tree metaphor that is reminiscent of those utilized by Jewett and, more abstractly, by Chopin. By referring to Native American students as timber, rather than as trees, Zitkala-Ša suggests that these children are being treated as a resource by government overseers, as donation-generating objects of public interest. The smallness of her Native American forest also highlights the scarcity of this commodity and hints at its eventual extinction through the process of assimilation.

Notably, the Paris exhibit did not feature the type of relics recovered from Mesa Verde—items like the little bowl coveted by the Indian Commission employee in Cather's novel, clerk to the commissioner who declares to Outland that his business [is] with living Indians, not dead ones (238)—but rather educational products similar to those described by Zitkala-Ša. In

this regard, Cather's depiction of a governmental official appears to ring true, as the Native American exhibit in Paris did, in fact, highlight the productivity of living Indians. Moreover, the Indian commissioner in her novel is likely a member of the same agency that Zitkala-Ša vehemently criticized in the early 1920s, asking her readers: Do you know what *your* Bureau of Indian Affairs, in Washington, D.C., really is? How it is organized and how it deals with wards of the nation? and denouncing the institution as despotic-grown bureaucracy that was imposing upon the liberty-loving Indians of America a wardship growing more deadly by the year.⁷⁸ Thus, although Cather misrepresents Smithsonian officials' interest in Southwestern pueblos, there seems to be some accuracy in her depiction of government attitudes toward Native American representation at the great International Exposition of the turn of the century, particularly if she is, in fact, referring to the Paris exposition. By suggesting that government officials' interests are misplaced, even ignoble, Cather asserts the importance of Native American culture to an American identity and challenges the commerce-based nationalistic image presented at the exhibition. She indicates her awareness of the commodification of cultures in an international sphere, and she contests such representation by elevating human experience—specifically Outland's at Blue Mesa, where he develops a very different sort of nationalism that is rooted in his sense of kinship to those Native Americans who lived there before him—over human production and consumption, the economic forces U.S. contributors chose to promote at the Paris fair.

Indeed, Cather's interest in the value of Native American history to American identity extends beyond the feminist statements issued by Jewett and Chopin, as well as her own feminist ideology expressed in *The Song of the Lark*, to suggest the benefits to *all* Americans of honoring this cultural legacy and, furthermore, by granting her Native American geographies holy stature.

As I suggested in Chapter 3, Cather's Panther Canyon is a site of distinctly feminine growth and renewal in *The Song of the Lark*, a novel that promotes the importance of the land ethic to American women's spiritual and professional development. By the time she was working on *The Professor's House*, however, Cather had begun to view the pueblos of the Southwest as a gender-neutral source of inspiration and cultural awareness worthy of the sort of filial piety exhibited by Outland (253). The sacredness of the mesa to Cather, the extent to which she associated such landmarks with religious devotion, seems only to have increased during her career, and, in *Death Comes for the Archbishop* (1927), Cather's city in the sky has become, for Father Latour, the embodiment of the utmost expression of human need (336).⁷⁹ Cather's protagonist sees in the great rock of the Ácomas the highest comparison of loyalty in love and friendship, a physical manifestation of the rocklike permanence of the idea of God (335-36). Such ideas, of course, transcend race and gender for Latour; nevertheless, his celebration of anything so simple as life upon a great rock, a geographical icon of safety and permanence akin to that granted spiritually by God, once again reinforces Cather's appreciation for a life stripped of unnecessary material acquisitions—characterized by those dream-defying pursuits of the men in *The Enchanted Bluff* and the self-interested motives of the government officials of *The Professor's House*.

Although Zitkala-Ša would ultimately reject Christianity, she exhibits a reverence for the natural world that is not unlike Cather's Christian veneration for spaces untouched by modern industry. Writing of both the pale-faced missionary and the hoodooed aborigine, Zitkala-Ša announces in the 1902 essay *Why I Am a Pagan*: "A wee child toddling in a wonder world, I prefer to their dogma my excursions into the natural gardens where the voice of the Great Spirit is heard in the twittering of the birds, the rippling of mighty waters, and the sweet breathing of

flowers. If this is Paganism, then at present, at least, I am a Pagan.⁸⁰ She discovers in the world of the Great Spirit restorative powers and avenues of self-reflection; indeed, after spending an idle while on a sunny river brink, she feels that, like the grass, she grew somewhat, and that the wildflowers have soothe[d] [her] soul (1130). She also finds, after a walk among the green hills, that she is in keen sympathy with [her] fellow creatures, for [she] seem[s] to see clearly again that all are akin (1130-31). Notably, the relationship to nature that Zitkala-Ša describes is similar, in various ways, to that experienced by certain white female characters in the fiction of Jewett, Chopin, and Cather. Like Joanna Todd, she turns to solitary nature as a refuge from Christian judgment; like Thérèse Lafirme, she finds in a rolling river inspiration for reflection; and like Thea Kronborg, she feels an almost Darwinistic connection to other species. Furthermore, as a Native American writer striving to honor her cultural past, she also exhibits the sort of intimate attachment to nature that all three Anglo women also, at some point, attribute to Native American cultures. Hence, by examining Zitkala-Ša's works alongside those of white female regionalists, we begin to see an ideological bridge between cultures in the form of women writers advocating American women's self-conscious engagement in the natural world as a means of increasing equality—gender, cultural, or both.

Thus, although they integrate Native American landscapes into their writing to varying extents, Cather more actively than Jewett or Chopin, all three authors reject the opportunity to capitalize on Americans' attraction to misrepresented Native American cultures pandered to by world's fair organizers and instead suggest the importance of honoring pre-industrial modes of existence. They refuse to participate in the commodification of the exotic identified by Hinsley as a prominent feature of the collective phenomenon of the industrial exposition of the latter half of the nineteenth century,⁸¹ and choose, instead, to promote the *inclusion* of the

exotic—in Americans' awareness of the nation's environmental and cultural history and, for Chopin, in Americans' homes. In doing so, their works suggest, women might speed the deterioration of patriarchal ideals by placing themselves at the forefront of a more culturally and environmentally sensitive society. The organicism of this egalitarian outlook aligns these authors with some modern environmental activists, particularly the bioregionalists who, like Jewett, Chopin, and Cather, advocate a sustainable, harmonious existence among humans and nonhuman species based on region-specific ecological and cultural knowledge. Moreover, by directing readers' attention to specific geographical areas once inhabited by Native Americans, and by characterizing such spaces as sites of contrast to the industrial growth and consumerism on the increase in cities such as Chicago and Washington, D.C., the authors also foreshadow a more general growing and prolonged interest in American environmental stewardship—a movement that has resulted in the continued preservation of such landscapes in places such as Maine's Acadia National Park, Louisiana's Kitsatchie National Forest, and Colorado's Mesa Verde National Park. When juxtaposed with the White City, an ephemeral phenomenon built out of a plaster-like substance that was no match for the fires that would destroy many of the buildings in the months after the fair, Jewett's coastal forests, Chopin's Pine Woods, and Cather's cliff cities are distinct emblems of the continued importance of landscape to American identity.

Notes

¹ Blanchard, *Sarah Orne Jewett*, 265.

² Jewett was writing to William Hayes Ward of the *Independent* to suggest that he publish an essay on the state of contemporary architecture in light of the impact of the World's Columbian Exposition: It seems to me that there is such a good chance just now for impressing our architectural lesson upon the public mind! and emphasizing our need for holding fast to whatever we have that is characteristic in our town and state life. She also urged that the publication not let drop the Sunday question at Chicago, referring to the controversy about whether to open the exposition on Sundays, and argued that people's exposure to nature and art at the fair was more beneficial to them than more time spent in their little houses. See *Sarah Orne Jewett Letters*, 81-82.

³ Rydell, *The World's Columbian Exposition*, 268.

⁴ Hinsley, *The World as Marketplace*, 354.

⁵ See Ammons, *Material Culture, Empire, and Jewett's Country of the Pointed Firs*, 96-97; and Zagarell, *Country's Portrayal of Community and the Exclusion of Difference*, 39-56, and *Crosscurrents: Registers of Nordicism, Community, and Culture in Jewett's Country of the Pointed Firs*, 357. Additionally, for a thorough critical history of scholars who have noted the absence of cultural themes or interpreted Jewett's work as expressive of a seemingly racist infatuation with Anglo-Norman culture, and a questioning of such positions, see Jacqueline Shea Murphy, *Replacing Regionalism: Abenaki Tales and Jewett's Coastal Maine*, 665-66. For a critical summary and vigorous reinvestigation of the alleged racism, fascism, pro-imperialism, and classicism ascribed to her work, see Josephine Donovan's *Jewett on Race, Class, Ethnicity, and Imperialism*, 403-16; yet another recent defense of Jewett's cultural politics appears in Fetterley and Pryse, *Writing Out of Place*, 29, 235.

⁶ For a more thorough discussion of the Orne and Jewett family histories, see Paula Blanchard, *Sarah Orne Jewett*, 6.

⁷ Murphy, *Replacing Regionalism*, 684.

⁸ See *Grand Illusions: Chicago World's Fair of 1893* by Neil Harris et al., especially Robert W. Rydell's chapter "A Cultural Frankenstein?: The Chicago World's Columbian Exposition of 1893," 143-70; Rydell's "The World's Columbian Exposition of 1893: Racist Underpinnings of a Utopian Artifact"; and Alan Trachtenberg's *The Incorporation of America*, 208-34.

⁹ Rydell, "A Cultural Frankenstein?," 144-46.

¹⁰ Rydell, "A Cultural Frankenstein?," 160; Trachtenberg, *Incorporation of America*, 220-21.

¹¹ Trachtenberg, *Incorporation of America*, 221.

¹² As Rydell has noted, the fair's living ethnological exhibits featured "people typed as 'exotic' or 'savage' from all over the world, not just the United States, all of which helped advance fair organizers' imperialistic vision. See "A Cultural Frankenstein?," 143. In addition to the American Indian Village, the Midway featured Algerian, Chinese, Dahomey, Dutch East India, German, Irish, Laplander, South Sea Islander, and Turkish villages, among other attractions such as Cairo Street, the Moorish Palace, and the Persian Building. See Bolotin and Laing, *The World's Columbian Exposition*, 107.

¹³ Frederick Ward Putnam of the Peabody Museum at Harvard and head of the Department of Ethnology and Archaeology for the fair outlined his goals for human displays to the Committee of Liberal Arts in Chicago in 1891. He regarded the "out-of-doors exhibit of the native peoples of America, in their own houses, dressed in their native costumes and surrounded by their own utensils [...] to be an essential and appropriate display at the exposition. He continues: "I have used the words 'essential' and 'appropriate' in this connection, and have done so after due

consideration; for we must never lose sight of the fact that this Exposition is a Columbian Exposition; that its very existence is due to the fact that the voyage of Columbus 400 years ago led to the discovery of America by our race, its subsequent peopling by the Europeans and the consequent development of greater nations on the continent. This development, as we shall show, has been of a most remarkable character upon this continent; and all nations of the world will show what they have done in the great struggle during four centuries. He goes on to identify the great object lesson of such exhibits to be the educational value of showing in their natural conditions of life the different types of peoples who were here when Columbus was crossing the Atlantic Ocean and leading the way for a great wave of humanity that was soon spread over the continent and forced those unsuspecting peoples to give way before a mighty power. These people, Putnam notes, have about vanished into history, and now is the last opportunity for the world to see them and to realize what their condition, their life, their customs, their arts were four centuries ago (qtd. in Hinsley, 346-47).

¹⁴ Hinsley, *The World as Marketplace*, 345.

¹⁵ Nash, *Wilderness in the American Mind*, 147.

¹⁶ Nash, *Wilderness in the American Mind*, 151.

¹⁷ All references to *The Country of the Pointed Firs* are from the collection *Sarah Orne Jewett: Novels and Stories* (New York: Library of America, 1996) and are cited parenthetically.

¹⁸ Krech's *Ecological Indian* is the popular American image of the Native North American as ecologist and conservationist (16). In *The Ecological Indian: Myth and History* Krech explores the accuracy of this image among Native cultures throughout North American history.

¹⁹ Wexler, *Tender Violence*, 17.

²⁰ Zitkala-Ša, *The School Days of an Indian Girl*, 87, 101. All references to *School Days* are from the version included in collection *American Indian Stories, Legends, and Other Writings* (New York: Penguin, 2003).

²¹ Wexler, *Tender Violence*, 22-23.

²² All references to *The White Rose Road* are from the collection *Sarah Orne Jewett: Novels and Stories* (New York: Library of America, 1996) and will be cited parenthetically.

²³ Blanchard, *Sarah Orne Jewett*, 210.

²⁴ Mary Rowlandson and her children were abducted by Native Americans during a raid on the village of Lancaster, Massachusetts, in 1676. She was held captive for three months, and she later chronicled her experience in *The Sovereignty and Goodness of God: Being a Narrative of the Captivity and Restoration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson*.

²⁵ See Zagarell, *Crosscurrents*, 358, and Footnote 3.

²⁶ This story was published in 1885 in *Harper's* and appears in the 1896 collection *A White Heron and Other Stories*. According to Paula Blanchard, with Farmer Finch Jewett fire[s] another small feminist shot on the heels of her novel *A Country Doctor*, which promotes, to some nineteenth-century critics' dismay, professional equality for women (189).

²⁷ Kirkpatrick Sale, *Dwellers in the Land*, 42.

²⁸ All references to *Impressions of an Indian Childhood* are from the collection *American Indian Stories, Legends, and Other Writings* (New York: Penguin, 2003) and are documented parenthetically.

²⁹ Jewett, *Letters*, 104.

³⁰ Other well-known contributors to Volume 13 of *Scribner's Magazine* included William Dean Howells, Thomas Bailey Aldrich, Bret Harte, Walter Besant, Thomas Hardy, Henry James,

Frances Hodgson Burnett, Edith Wharton, Robert Louis Stevenson, and George Washington Cable.

³¹ Donovan, *Sarah Orne Jewett*, 94.

³² Charles Johanningsmeier, 'Subverting Readers' Assumptions and Expectations: Jewett's Tame Indians,' 234-36.

³³ In 'Jewett at the Fair: Seeing Citizens in *The Flight of Betsey Lane*', Slote argues that the excursion of poor, elderly Betsey Lane to the 1876 Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia depicted in *The Flight of Betsey Lane* (published in 1893, the year of the World's Columbian Exposition) serves to challenge notions of imperial self-regard promoted by events like the Chicago fair (52). According to Slote, the story implies no critique of U.S. hegemony; yet it also often works against a perspectival regime its leisure-class readers had presumably come to expect, a way of seeing that constructed some human subjects as inherently more qualified for othering, annexation, and exploitation than others. The story corrects for this national myopia, not through new insight, but by asserting as an alternative the personal, imaginative power of an immediate, authorial eye-witness, granting that capacity for wonder to its otherwise dispossessed title character, and meanwhile keeping it from its audience (53).

³⁴ Toth, *Kate Chopin*, 221. Although she does not suggest an explicit connection, Toth also draws intriguing parallels between the exclusion of black women from World's Columbian Exposition representation and their resulting inability to recount the exploitation of the female slave, the struggles of a woman of color whose body is not her own, which is also central to Chopin's 1893 story *La Belle Zoraïde* (221-22).

³⁵ Scheick, *The Half-Blood*, 1.

³⁶ For more on the sociohistorical factors contributing to the ambiguity of such characters, see Chapter 1 of Scheick's *The Half-Blood*, 1-18.

³⁷ All references to *At Fault* and *Loka* are from the collection *Kate Chopin: Complete Novels and Stories* (New York: Library of America, 2002) and will be cited parenthetically.

³⁸ For an analysis of Marie Louise's symbolic significance to the novel's theme of regional reconciliation, see Chapter 2.

³⁹ Gunning, *Race, Rape, and Lynching*, 120-21, and Russell, *A Vision of Reunion*, 13.

⁴⁰ Scheick, *The Half-Blood*, 11.

⁴¹ Brown, *Injun Joe's Ghost*, 14.

⁴² Seyersted, *Kate Chopin*, 79.

⁴³ Arner, *Landscape Symbolism*, 152.

⁴⁴ See Gunning, *Race, Rape, and Lynching*, 3-4.

⁴⁵ Arner, *Landscape Symbolism*, 148.

⁴⁶ Shaker, *Coloring Locals*, 70.

⁴⁷ Wexler, *Tender Violence*, 15.

⁴⁸ Zitkala-Ša, *The School Days of an Indian Girl*, 97.

⁴⁹ Shaker and Thomas Bonner both consider the character *Loka* to be more of an object that facilitates Chopin's critique of contemporary philanthropical efforts than a subject. See Shaker's *Coloring Locals*, 64, and Bonner's *Kate Chopin Companion*, 92. Toth goes so far as to describe *Loka* as Chopin's most critical portrait of Cloutierville women. In *Kate Chopin*, 213.

Although my reading of the story is informed by these interpretations and also acknowledges Chopin's critique of women's philanthropy groups, I find that *Loka* offers a more reaching

commentary on post-bellum women's social responsibilities, duties that include a moral investment in the cultural future of the region.

⁵⁰ The French word *canaille* has several possible translations as a noun; among them are scoundrel, rogue, and riff-raff. As an adjective, it suggests roguish behavior.

⁵¹ Scheick, *The Half-Blood*, 28.

⁵² White, *The Middle Ground*, xiv-xv.

⁵³ In addition to the basket weaver Marot, Loka reminisces about Choctaw Joe and Sampite, men who gamble each night and fight with knives when wild with drink, as well as about the fun she had riding Choctaw Joe's swift stolen pony (269).

⁵⁴ Shaker, *Coloring Locals*, 68.

⁵⁵ Americanize the First American, *American Indian Stories, Legends, and Other Writings*, 243-44.

⁵⁶ In *The Official Directory of the World's Columbian Exposition*, the exhibit is given the following description: The adobe home of the Cliff Dwellers is near the Anthropological Building. The home is a reproduction of Battle Rock Mountain in the MacElmo [sic] Valley of Colorado. It is built of stone, iron, staff and wood, but is artistically arranged to imitate nature, and is covered with vines and moss. The entrance is through a cave in the side the mountain. The interior contains cactus and other vegetation. Caverns open from the sides of the cañon and in them may be seen a mummy, utensils, etc., as found on the original site. Various implements of the dwellers are scattered around (196). In addition to artifacts recovered from the McElmo Canyon area near Cortez, Colorado, the H. Jay Smith Exploring Company displayed relics collected by the Wetherill brothers near Mesa Verde, Colorado, in the exhibit. See J.J. Brody and Rebecca Allen, *Beauty from the Earth*, 62-64.

⁵⁷ Lewis, *Willa Cather Living*, 81.

⁵⁸ Lee, *Willa Cather*, 87-88.

⁵⁹ Lee, *Willa Cather*, 162-63.

⁶⁰ See Harrell's *From Mesa Verde to The Professor's House* (Albuquerque: U of NM P, 1992), which demonstrates how Tom Outland's Story follows and departs from the factual history of Mesa Verde's discovery. Additionally, see *Willa Cather and the American Southwest* (Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 2002), edited by John Swift and Joseph Urgo, which features essays based on presentations given during the Mesa Verde Symposium of October 1999, a reinvestigation of Cather's relationship to the American Southwest that was inspired, in part, by Harrell's earlier scholarship.

⁶¹ Harrell, *From Mesa Verde to The Professor's House*, 87-101.

⁶² All references to *The Professor's House* are from the collection *Willa Cather: Later Novels* (New York: Library of America, 1990) and are cited parenthetically. References to *The Enchanted Bluff* are from *Cather: Stories, Poems, and other Writings* (New York: Library of America, 1992) and are also cited parenthetically.

⁶³ This is an argument I develop more fully in Chapter 3.

⁶⁴ Biographer Sharon O'Brien finds in the story, which Cather believed Jewett would enjoy, strong evidence of the connection between Jewett's influence and Cather's artistic self-discovery. See *Willa Cather*, 370-71.

⁶⁵ Stout, *Picturing a Different West*, 133.

⁶⁶ Trachtenberg, *Incorporation of America*, 34.

⁶⁷ Cather, *Mesa Verde Wonderland*, 7.

⁶⁸ Love, *Practical Ecocriticism*, 105.

⁶⁹ Lee, *Willa Cather*, 224-29.

⁷⁰ Harrell points out that Cather's cousin Howard Gore was a juror and director for the International Paris Exposition of 1900. See *From Mesa Verde to The Professor's House*, 26-27 and 117.

⁷¹ Harrell, *From Mesa Verde to The Professor's House*, 118-19. The Wetherills were a well-known ranching family in southwestern Colorado, and Richard Wetherill is often credited with the discovery of the Cliff Palace at Mesa Verde in 1888, a story that informs Tom Outland's discovery of Cliff City. Cather spoke one of Richard Wetherill's brothers during her trip to Mesa Verde in 1915. For more on this trip and Cather's conversation with the Wetherill brother in Mancos, see Chapter 2 of Harrell's *From Mesa Verde to The Professor's House*.

⁷² Harrell, *From Mesa Verde to The Professor's House*, 119.

⁷³ Rydell, *Gateway to the American Century*, 128.

⁷⁴ Rydell, *Gateway to the American Century*, 139.

⁷⁵ Rydell, *Gateway to the American Century*, 139.

⁷⁶ Introduction, *American Indian Stories*, xliii.

⁷⁷ All references to *An Indian Teacher Among Indians* are from *American Indian Stories, Legends, and Other Writings* and are cited parenthetically.

⁷⁸ Zitkala-Ša, *America's Indian Problem*, 156, and *Bureaucracy Versus Democracy*, 245, both of which appear in the collection *American Indian Stories, Legends, and Other Writings*.

⁷⁹ All references to *The Professor's House* are from *Willa Cather: Later Novels* (New York: Library of America, 1990) and are cited parenthetically.

⁸⁰ Zitkala-Ša, *Why I Am A Pagan*, 1132. All references to this essay are from the *Norton Anthology of American Literature, Vol. C* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2003) and will be cited parenthetically.

⁸¹ Hinsley, *The World as Marketplace*, 345.

CONCLUSION

Throughout this dissertation, beginning with the first chapter's examination of the stylistic and intellectual differences between Susan Fenimore Cooper and Henry David Thoreau, I have returned time and again to three principal, intersecting topics: women's rights, environmental health, and Native American history. I have examined at length the ways in which turn-of-the-century American women regionalists' treatments of these issues regularly inform one another in their writing, establishing a distinct, traceable ideological pattern. Ultimately, this pattern suggests that while women regionalists such as Sarah Orne Jewett, Kate Chopin, and Willa Cather were juggling a number of literary goals—promoting women's rights, documenting regional characteristics, and honoring the country's cultural history, for example—they were also deeply interested in the state of nonhuman nature and, at times, invested in promoting its conservation. Indeed, confronted with the social and economic changes that accompanied the development of the country's modern industrial economy, these women recognized the practical importance of carefully considering how such changes were affecting both the land and its inhabitants, especially the women, at a regional level. Thus, as the nineteenth century drew to a close and the twentieth dawned, celebrating the natural world and issuing warnings about its health—and making such topics inextricable from an overarching promotion of egalitarianism—became a vital way for women to engage in a particular form of literary activism.

Although I have situated selected works by Chopin, Jewett, and Cather in their historical contexts, I have also sought to demonstrate their persistent relevance to contemporary and future audiences, as well as their ongoing importance to ecocriticism. To be more specific, the novels, stories, and nonfiction works discussed here provide an entry point into the underdeveloped realm of bioregional literary studies, a critical idiom that honors ecofeminism's

acknowledgement of the inextricable subjugation of land and humans, and also offers remedies to such problems through its advocacy of a new kind of ecocultural bond that is deeply rooted in the place itself.¹ Embracing this sort of perspective requires much more than respect for a particular landscape, however; it demands the cultivation of knowledge—of local flora and fauna, of agricultural capacities, of the cultural and natural history of one’s environment, of the traditions and lore of a region’s people—and the adaptation of behaviors based on this information. In Gary Snyder’s words, Bioregional awareness teaches us *specific* ways. It is not enough just to ‘love nature’ or to want to ‘be in harmony with Gaia.’ Our relationship to the natural world takes place in a *place*, and it must be grounded in information and experience.² By developing this type of awareness, bioregional theory suggests, we can move toward more sustainable living conditions that respect the needs of both human and nonhuman inhabitants.

Thus, bioregionalism provides both a useful critical orientation for the study of literature, as well as an ethical framework for dealing with contemporary environmental problems. Moreover, bioregional literary studies prompt us to move beyond conceptualizations of race and gender in literature to consider how authors’ attitudes toward their natural environments shape these constructions. Such analyses reinvigorate scholarship by offering a fresh critical platform—one that works with, not against, race and gender studies, as I have demonstrated in the last four chapters, and from which scholars can approach texts that consider people’s physical and spiritual relationships to their natural environments. Ultimately, as Paul Lindholdt argues, bioregionalism provides an especially accessible starting point for reform: ‘From the bioregional vision, a muscular literary activism can result, one as useful for *belles lettres* as for scholarship, as pertinent to scholarly readerships as to the needs of government managers and the public at large.’³ Certainly, despite its emphasis on the local, bioregionalism does not endorse

life in a vacuum or a rose-colored obliviousness to global environmental and economic processes, as some critics have suggested.⁴ On the contrary, bioregional philosophy offers an accessible ideological stance and template for behaviors that encourage people to cooperate at a community level to influence global change.

Although Ursula Heise has criticized attachments to place as an ethical framework for environmentalism and demonstrated that [a] change in scale from large to small entities [...] does not in and of itself guarantee anything in the way of more ecologically sustainable modes of living,⁵ the fact remains that Americans' sense of environmental responsibility is trending toward the local, even if the resultant behaviors are not always classified as bioregionalist. Indeed, increasingly interested in sustainable living methods that help curb the consumption of natural resources, Americans often initiate such efforts at the community level.⁶ Ultimately, these locally enacted measures—some of them undeniably also enticing for their money-saving prospects in addition to their environmental benefits—seek to counteract a global environmental predicament. Certainly, local activism is often predicated upon an awareness of global issues. Nevertheless, this widespread public effort to go green tends to overlook bioregionalism's emphasis on the stories, written and otherwise, of the people who lived in our particular regions before us, even though, as this study and others have demonstrated, Americans understood the need to ease environmental strain well over a century before a phenomenon like global warming became part of the national consciousness.

Familiarizing ourselves with the rich lore of our own geographical precursors, which includes among its many forms Native American legends, European folktales, and African-American myths, in addition to the fiction of late-nineteenth-century regionalists, can help us engage in bioregional learning. When Jewett, for example, describes the fishing habits of

Dunnet Landing residents in *The Country of the Pointed Firs*, we are able to obtain clues, if we are so inclined, about which species might have been most accessible to the people who fished in Maine's coastal waters around the end of the nineteenth century. Jewett mentions mackerel, cod, and haddock, and also notes the threat posed to such species by the plaguey dog-fish (or shark) (475). When Chopin chronicles her heroine's triumphant expedition from her isolated cabin to the plantation house in *Beyond the Bayou*, we experience, alongside La Folle's emotional journey, the Southern countryside's transformation from uncultivated to cultivated. As we make our way through the brush and scrub cottonwood-trees bordering the bayou, past the field of white, bursting cotton, and onto the broad stretch of velvety lawn adorned with lush flowerbeds, we gain some perspective of the botanical divisions between such worlds as they might have existed on a post-Reconstruction plantation (221). And when the young narrator of Cather's *My Ántonia* recalls his first overwhelming impressions of Nebraska as a land of no fences, no creeks or trees, no hills or fields (718), we can envision an ocean of native grasses against which we might juxtapose the present-day reality of a rural Midwest in which large-scale grain operations are standard. Of course, each of these fictional portrayals of regional characteristics is colored by the author's particular subjectivity and social position; nevertheless, such descriptions challenge us to take seriously American authors' appraisals of their rural environments during a significant era in the environmental history of the nation.

Indeed, examined collectively, passages like these, which exemplify regionalism's fidelity to describing a place's distinctive features, help us envision the biological past as well as identify and evaluate patterns in American attitudes toward the natural world. In identifying these patterns we can trace the limitations and detrimental consequences of earlier perspectives, but also the dazzling (and perhaps previously unacknowledged) moments of environmental insight

and activism. Certainly, works like *The Country of the Pointed Firs*, *Bayou Folk*, and *My Ántonia*, among others discussed in this study, help us piece together an awareness of women regionalists' burgeoning environmental ethics, establishing the writings of Jewett, Chopin, and Cather as invaluable to the ever-evolving understanding of the historical importance of nature to American national identity. Moreover, although this project focuses on selected texts from a particular literary tradition, its analytical trajectories can be applied to literature from both within this tradition—How, for example, do Mary Austin's representations of the American West substantiate or deviate from the literary trend I have identified?—and to literature of different epochs and countries. Indeed, as I have shown, environmental thought intersects with cultural and social forces in surprising and revealing ways, and acknowledging the ecocentricity of relevant literary works allows for lines of interpretation that are as diverse and far-reaching as the globe itself. Thus, as we move ever closer to an ecological understanding of the earth's processes, so might we begin to trace the interconnectedness of environmental concerns as they have surfaced in literature throughout the ages, reading both backwards and forwards from the literary insights of the American regionalist movement.

Notes

¹ Paul Lindholt, *Literary Activism and the Bioregional Agenda*, 126.

² Original emphasis. Snyder, *The Practice of the Wild*, 39.

³ Lindholt, *Literary Activism and the Bioregional Agenda*, 125.

⁴ See Carolyn Merchant, *Radical Ecology*, 221-22.

⁵ See *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet*, 46-47.

⁶ For example, community gardens and farmers' markets allow people in many areas to eat locally grown, seasonal produce, thereby conserving fossil fuels used in the long-distance transportation of food to markets. Restaurants and retailers have also responded to this trend and evolved to meet buyers' growing demands for organic and all-natural products. More municipal bike lanes and streamlined public transportation systems, improvements that require taxpayer support, are helping reduce the need to drive to essential locations. And many Americans feel morally obligated to take advantage of civic recycling services and to take basic steps to reduce water and electricity consumption at home, thereby easing the strain on local reservoirs and power grids.

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