

EMERSON AND ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS



SUSAN L. DUNSTON

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SELECTIONS LICENSED

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Abbreviations

- CW* *The Collected Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson*. Edited by Alfred R. Ferguson, Joseph Slater, Douglas Emory Wilson, Ronald A. Bosco, et al. 10 vols. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971–2013.
- EL* *The Early Lectures of Ralph Waldo Emerson*. Edited by Stephen E. Whicher, Robert E. Spiller, and Wallace E. Williams. 3 vols. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1964–1972.
- L* *The Letters of Ralph Waldo Emerson*. Edited by Ralph Rusk and Eleanor M. Tilton. 10 vols. New York: Columbia University Press, 1939, 1990–1995.
- LL* *The Later Lectures of Ralph Waldo Emerson, 1843–1871*. Edited by Ronald A. Bosco and Joel Myerson. 2 vols. Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2001.
- JM* *The Journals and Miscellaneous Notebooks of Ralph Waldo Emerson*. Edited by William H. Gilman, et al. 16 vols. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1960–1982.
- SL* *Selected Lectures of Ralph Waldo Emerson*. ed. Ronald A. Bosco and Joel Myerson. Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2005.
- TN* *The Topical Notebooks of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, 3 vols. Edited by Ralph H. Orth et. al. Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1990–1994.

Introduction

In 1832, Ralph Waldo Emerson visited the natural history museum in France where the displays indelibly impressed on him the simultaneity of variety and continuity, the connectivity of difference and identity, in the universe. In a lengthy journal entry, he wrote what instantly struck him: “how much finer things are in composition than alone,” that is, in relation to each other (*JMN* 4:198). The curated arrays of mineral, animal, and plant specimens suggested to him not only an existing “occult relation” between the human and nonhuman but also relations yet to come (*JMN* 4:200). This visceral experience of his own—and all of humanity’s—relation to each individual in “this bewildering series” as well as to the “upheaving principle of life everywhere incipient” prompted in him “strange sympathies,” an umbilical sense of connection, desire, and responsibility (*JMN* 4:199, 199, 200). In this dual understanding of relation as existing and as yet to come, he declared to his journal he would be a naturalist. The sympathies he experienced in viewing the natural history exhibits would mark his subsequent engagement in existing relations with the nonhuman and also his creative endeavors toward new and finer relations or compositions. One of the first lessons of nature, he wrote in 1836, is that “Truth, and goodness, and beauty, are but different faces of the same All” (*CW* 1:17). He sought to practice this seamless integration of values in his relations and to reflect and generate it with his writing. Casting off the retrospective and conventional, he set a course of observing the subtle and complex relations in which he found himself, living in original relation, and creating compositions that would invoke and inspire relations that ensured the emergence of “remote generations” in the future and, moreover, that those generations would be able to find themselves wholly and truly in justice and beauty (*CW* 1:132).

In Emerson's view, "relation and connection are not somewhere and sometimes, but everywhere and always," physically so, for we are "made of the same atoms as the world is" and share "the same impressions, predisposition, and destiny" (*CW* 6:17, 128, 128). This ontological fact, he argued, must shape our answer to the "practical question of the conduct of life. How shall I live?" (*CW* 6:1), for we, and the world, co-constitute those relations and connections. They are, therefore, not only fated but also emergent. Thus, the values that we bring to bear on those relational and connective structures matter not just to us but also to the entire community and each of its members. In a very real sense, Emerson wrote of the same singularly human endeavor throughout his life: to respond morally and aesthetically, continually and authentically, to the world as it presents itself because "all is made of one piece . . . animal and planet, food and eater, are of one kind" (*CW* 6:26). His sentiment finds further expression in Linda Hogan's words: "what happens to people and what happens to the land is the same thing."¹ For Emerson, an ethical relation to the environment is a necessary consequence of individual identity that is both inherent and emergent, being always and only relational. Indeed, for Emerson, the ongoing creation of the world—in short, sustainability—depends on our open and creative acknowledgment of that fact.

Emerson's philosophy has roots in a variety of traditions, including romanticism and Asian and western philosophies and religion. But his ideas are also rooted in his own place and time: literally in the soil of his environs, figuratively in the possibilities posed by the west and a "new yet unapproachable America" (*CW* 3:41), in nineteenth-century natural science and its emerging understanding of natural evolution, and in the challenge of achieving ethical relations and parity in a bitterly divided, slave-holding, patriarchal society that rapidly, often rapaciously, expands its territorial and industrial reach. But it is the forward momentum, more than the history, of Emerson's convictions and insights that interests me here, the ways in which he anticipates feminist theories of difference and intersubjectivity as they play out in ecofeminism, the anthropomorphism of Loren Eiseley's and Aldo Leopold's environmental empathies, and the systems-based approach of ecology; the ways in which his philosophy of creativity heralds future environmentalist concepts such as sustainability, emergence, and biomic webs; and the ways in which his expression is foundational of the poetic, personal, and profoundly objective genre known as "nature writing." Much in the vein of Emerson's argument that the "highest effect" of art is "to make new artists" (*CW* 2:216), the aim of nature writing is to make new naturalists. Emerson called them lovers of nature.

Emerson's oeuvre offers more than the standard romantic contributions to environmental ethics, though those are there: the organic worldview as opposed to the mechanistic; nature conceived as agent, teacher, friend, and

healer with whom we find ourselves in an intersubjective relationship; nature appreciated as the standard of truth, beauty, and ethics; the restoration of sympathy and imagination to science and philosophy; and the importance of the personal, particular, and ordinary. His philosophy of nature also offers more than Concordian Transcendentalism, though its features are also there: the emphasis on thought and the ideal, the commitment to personal and cultural reform, the spirituality, and the quest to realize genius in literary terms and transformative power. And though he gravitated toward Asian spiritual and wisdom traditions, he brought to them, and brought them to bear on, questions raised in his terrain and by his culture. Emerson amplified European romantic theories of creativity with additional and rigorous correlation to creativity in nature. He saw human creative power and possibility only in relation to submission to truth. Entwining freedom and fact was the intellectual analog to the evolution he saw writ large in nature. Philosophically and practically he committed to ameliorative possibility rather than conceding all to determinism. Writing out of the political, cultural, and territorial uncertainties of a new country toward “new ideas, new men, new thoughts” (*CW* 1:7), Emerson started by aspiring to and advocating a nature literacy that has become central to contemporary environmental ethics in a direct line from Thoreau and Muir to, for example, Edward Abbey and Terry Tempest Williams. He wrote with a remarkably accurate and predictive view of the future’s possibilities for truth, aesthetic, and moral values regarding the environment, almost as if to the doorstep of Leopold’s pronouncement that “The outstanding scientific discovery of the twentieth century is . . . the complexity of the land organism. Only those who know the most about it can appreciate how little we know about it. The last word in ignorance is the man who says of an animal or plant: ‘What good is it?’”²

Despite a deepening understanding of our genetic and elemental relation to the nonhuman world, we now find ourselves in the midst of a very belated assessment of our relationship to the environment. In large part it is as a philosopher that Emerson’s usefulness to environmental ethics is most clearly evident. In the first place, he yokes philosophical thinking to practical action: philosophy is as the philosopher is and does. As a result, his philosophy is sensuous, experiential, and reformist. As a practice it is attentive, relational, empathetic, and aesthetically sensitive. Perhaps the signature characteristic of Emerson’s philosophy is its essential incompleteness: each “thought is felt as initial, and promises a sequel” (*CW* 3:41). He knew “better than to claim any completeness” (*CW* 3:47) in his views, any more than nature claims completeness in any creature or formation.³ Yet, as Stanley Cavell has noted, there remains a “widely shared, fixated critical gesture . . . on the part of his friends and of his enemies . . . of denying to Emerson the title of philosopher,” much less the mantle of natural, scientific, or environmental philosopher. Nevertheless, in conceiving philosophy as physical and

practical, as entailing being attentive and attuned to nature, and as continuously unfolding and becoming as nature is; in conceiving humans as consanguine with the nonhuman and as ourselves evolving; and in conceiving “his work as a writer” to be “attracting the human . . . to the work of becoming human,”⁴ Emerson’s approach is a significant philosophical antecedent and contributor to contemporary environmental ethics. In addition, his philosophy of nature converges on environmental ethics together with intellectual strains as diverse as ecology, Indigenous science and ethics, Sufi poetry, feminism, and systems thinking, revealing overlooked common ground. With rising concerns about environmental degradation and sustainability, there is increasing reason and value in rethinking Emerson’s ideas about nature and our relation to it for their usefulness and insight toward living in ethical relation to the environment.

The core aim of this book is to show the Emersonian arc in environmental ethics by delineating Emerson’s own environmental ethics and direct influence in that area as well as by demonstrating the resonances between his ideas and diverse approaches in contemporary environmental ethics. As is usual in philosophy, the interplay and genealogy of insights and texts are more circular and mutual than linear or strictly chronological. Chapter 1 investigates Emerson’s “original relation to the universe” as an acknowledgement of consanguinity with the environment and a practice of environmental literacy (*CW* 1:7). Chapter 2 delineates his sense that such a relationship incurs moral and aesthetic responsibility on the part of humans in keeping with the moral and aesthetic laws of nature. This integration of ethical and aesthetic values with truth and with the truth-value of our statements about the environment is foundational to nature writing. Chapter 3 considers Emerson’s philosophy of nature and environmental ethics in relation to three contemporary environmentalist permutations of long-standing traditions—feminism, systems thinking, and Indigenous science and values—and the shared commitment of all four to environmental activism and global justice. Chapter 4 examines the relationship between garden and wilderness as a practice for Emerson, and in American culture at large, in multiple spheres: personal, political, and philosophical. Chapter 5 explores the connection between Emerson’s affinity for Asian philosophy and environmental ethics, a connection that has received little attention in studies of Emerson and Asian thought.

Running the gamut of these chapters are the themes of literacy, narrative, empathy, emergence, value creation, and relation (both as connection and as tale or account). All are versions of “*croisements*,” which nature loves, Emerson noted, quoting and agreeing with Charles Fourier (*JMN* 9:50 and 296). *Croisements* are crossings, crossbreedings, and crossroads, and Emerson associated them with the daring “transitions from one to the other,” “Mixtures,” and “Alternation” that enable artistic, creative, and ameliorative

possibility (*JMN* 9:296; 10:45, 45). The need for environmental ethics emerges as human self-interest is at cross-purposes with the interests of the rest of what Aldo Leopold calls the “land” or “biotic community.” Environmental ethics is mandated by the existential crossroad that is what Leopold calls “the man-land community,”⁵ and it is possible in the crossovers between mindfulness and physical being, in the connective tissue formed by the visceral sympathies such as Emerson experienced at the natural history exhibits and the circulatory fusion he described early in *Nature*.

NOTES

1. Linda Hogan, “Creations,” in *Heart of the Land: Essays on Last Great Places*, ed. Joseph Barbato and Lisa Weinman (New York: Vintage Books, 1996), 102.
2. Aldo Leopold, *Round River: From the Journals of Aldo Leopold*, ed. Luna B. Leopold (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 146.
3. Without what I have called Emerson’s “commitment to incompleteness,” no age would either “write its own books” (*CW* 1:56) or, as Robert Habich writes, build its own Waldos (Susan Field [Dunston], *The Romance of Desire: Emerson’s Commitment to Incompletion* [Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1997]; Robert D. Habich, *Building Their Own Waldos: Emerson’s First Biographers and the Politics of Life-Writing in the Gilded Age* [Iowa City, IA: University of Iowa Press, 2011]).
4. Stanley Cavell, *This New Yet Unapproachable America: Lectures after Emerson after Wittgenstein* (Albuquerque, NM: Living Batch Press, 1989), 78, 10.
5. Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac and Sketches Here and There*, special commemorative ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 210, 15.

Chapter One

Emerson and Environmental Literacy

In his 1836 manifesto, *Nature*, Emerson called for an “original relation to the universe” (*CW* 1:7), a personal relation at once ontological, ethical, and aesthetic. A tremendous amount of his philosophy is packed into this short summation of the essence and purpose of life. “Original” not only encompasses self-reliance and uniqueness (“imitation is suicide” [*CW* 2:27]), but also origination. Emerson suggests that the individual emerges, and becomes finer, only in relation. Only in relation can you, as he wrote near the end of *Nature*, “Build . . . your own world” (*CW* 1:45). “Universe,” unpacked later in *Nature* as “Unity in Variety” (*CW* 1:27), includes not only Emerson’s monistic metaphysics and our elemental kinship with the world (we are “made of the same atoms as the world is” [*CW* 6:128]), but also the definitional and astounding variety of a living world. The unity makes variety possible: “unless the atoms were made of one stuff, they could never blend and act with one another” (*CW* 6:173). “Relation” is the crux of the phrase and the part most relevant to environmental ethics. It is the central concept in Emerson’s phrase, and the nexus of sameness and difference, the moment of connection and separation, in his philosophical practice. In Emerson’s view, all sustained creativity hinges on relation. In practice, an original relation is itself emergent and dynamic, and thus requires attentiveness, attunement, and adjustment. For Emerson, philosophy—ethics in particular—was a process of affirmation, effort, and transformation. The guiding relation for Emerson was that with nature. All other relations, including that with God, spirit, or “over-soul” (*CW* 6:157), arose within the experience of this first relation, were informed by it, and referred to it. As Robert Richardson has noted, Emerson always “held up his doings—his writing and his life—to the great standard, that is, to nature.”¹

Emerson often described this original relation with the universe in terms of literacy, and in keeping with the title of his first book *Nature* I use the term “nature literacy” to describe Emerson’s approach. “Nature is a language,” he wrote in 1833, and he wished to “read the great book which is written in that tongue” (*EL* 1:26). He variously described the world as a cipher to be read, as a sliding surface of fugitive words, and as the expression of the invisible. Each of these descriptions suggests a method for reading the world—its signs, its depths, its spirit. They also suggest sources and methods of writing. Emerson chose Goethe as the exemplary writer for *Representative Men*, but the essay on Goethe names nature itself a writer: “All things are engaged in writing their history. . . . The rolling rock leaves its scratches on the mountain; the river its channel in the soil; the animal its bones in the stratum; the fern and leaf its modest epitaph in the coal” (*CW* 4:151). Erosion, flow, mineralization, decay, and so forth are nature’s pen and ink. Nature is also the source of human writers. We too are nature’s pen and ink, for “Nature will be reported” (*CW* 4:151). “Men are born to write,” Emerson continues (*CW* 4:152), significantly not born writers but born *to write*, to become writers. Reading is requisite to writing. Both entail original relation, the quality of which depends on the alignment and integration of truth-value with ethical and aesthetic values. Integrated, these values form the “highest expression”; disintegrated they fall into “penny-wisdom,” harmful mis-descriptions, and “unpoetic” efforts (*CW* 1:17, 43, 39).

Certainly aspects of *Nature* and Emerson’s philosophy in general might appear contrary to contemporary environmental ethics, but the seeds of contemporary views are in Emerson’s advocacy of nature literacy.² Statements like “Nature is thoroughly mediate . . . [and] receives the dominion of man” (*CW* 1:25) understandably trigger alarms for environmentalists as might Emerson’s sweeping introductory remarks, which announce his intentions to read for the “end” or purpose of nature and a comprehensive “theory of nature” with his confidence that “we have no questions to ask which are unanswerable” (*CW* 1:7, 8, 7), and the brief chapter that identifies the first use of nature as commodity. But in seeking the teleology of nature, Emerson looks to relational difference and generative performance, and the answers to the questions entail vulnerability, empathy, and the humility to know always “there remains much to learn of his relation to the world” (*CW* 1:39). As Emerson defines it, commodity consists not simply in profit but also in debt: it is the name for “all those advantages which our senses *owe* to nature” (*CW* 1:11 emphasis mine). Furthermore, he steadily critiques the cold science of unsympathetic naturalists who “freeze their subject under the wintry light of the understanding” as well as ideal theory that “makes nature foreign to me, and does not account for that consanguinity which we acknowledge to it” (*CW* 1:44, 38). Explicitly invoking the Cabinet of Natural History Emerson visited in France in 1833, *Nature* also critiques any enterprise that fails to

respect and sustain the “occult recognition and sympathy in regard to the most unwieldy and eccentric forms of beast, fish, and insect” (*CW* 1:40). The sexual politics of being the “lover of nature,” his figuring of nature as female, and his desire for a “manly contemplation of the whole” are also problematic for contemporary understandings of what is, and has been, at stake in gendering the environment (*CW* 9, 39),³ yet Emerson advocates reception, not domination or acquisition. In reading nature as “the terminus . . . of the invisible” (*CW* 1:22), a transcendental or Christian neo-Platonic tenor might seem to edge out the woods he walks, but inevitably he turned to, not from, nature for spiritual experience. The physical universe was Emerson’s text, and his reading and writing were a matter of nature literacy.

ORIGINAL RELATION

The idea of an “original relation to the universe” germinated and grew in Emerson’s own experiences. Many entries in Emerson’s first journals chart quite adolescent anxieties about his identity and where he might fit, or be of use, in the world. Their subject is interior; he morosely names it “the dubious theme—myself” (*JMN* 2:111). The journal entries of the early 1820s that describe hikes and time outdoors away from school tend toward self-centered, intellectual engagement that is functionally near disengagement. For example, a trip to Mount Holyoke is marked by “adding our names in the books to the long list of strangers whom curiosity has attracted to this hill” and produces a descriptive journal entry that reads like an impersonal guidebook (*JMN* 2:183). Another, more complex example from June 9, 1822, suggests more engagement with the outside world and its significations:

Upon a mountain-solitude a man instantly feels a sensible exaltation and a better claim to his rights in the universe. He who wanders in the woods perceives how natural it was to pagan imagination to find gods in every deep grove & by each fountain head. Nature seems to him not to be silent but to be eager & striving to break out into music. Each tree, flower, and stone, he invests with life & character; and it is impossible that the wind which breathes so expressive a sound amid the leaves—should mean nothing. (*JMN* 1:138)

However, Emerson’s relation here is not entirely original either. He does not claim the relation as his own but generically “a man’s.” Emerson’s inclination is to take nature as eagerly expressing itself and himself the lucky and willing audience to its musical expression, but he distances himself from this intuition by speaking of it in third person as if embarrassed he might appear silly. Such an intuition, he suggests, is the stuff of paganism and anthropomorphic whimsy. Ironically this approach produces an anthropocentrism

—valuing nature in terms of the man’s pleasure and entitlement—that Emerson will later shed. The same sort of defensive intellectualism and anthropocentrism shadows an entry from 1823 in which he considers a question his brother Edward put to him: “Whether I have a right to make use of animals,” and his own response, which was “yes” (*JMN* 2:95). He records his argument that reindeer, camels, whales, sheep, oxen, and the like afford “universal application to our purposes” and are fittingly adapted to the various environments a growing human population has come to inhabit (*JMN* 2:96). With a simplistic aggressiveness not demonstrated in later arguments, he defends the hunter, for example a “poor native of Lapland,” saying “Let the tender hearted advocate of the brute creation go there, & choose whether he will make the beasts *his* food, or be himself, *theirs*” (*JMN* 2:95, 96). Stuck in the logic of either/or, he only briefly acknowledged the possibility of another point of view to the journal, and perhaps to Edward as well: “But it will be said they have rights” (*JMN* 2:96).

By late 1832, when he traveled to Europe to seek again his own relation to the universe after the death of his first wife, Ellen, he had less patience for such insecurities and simplistic debate and more conviction that if there were to be an original relation he would need to yield to it and to make it his continual practice. In Paris during the summer of 1833, he visited the Cabinet of Natural History and famously wrote in his journal that he would “be a naturalist.” The lengthy, effusive passage reveals the immediate details of the exhibit and his emerging insights about relation, pattern, and composition that led to this announcement.

How much finer things are in composition than alone. ‘Tis wise in man to make Cabinets. When I was come into the Ornithological Chambers, I wished I had come only there. The fancy-coloured vests of these elegant beings make me as pensive as the hues & forms of a cabinet of shells, formerly. It is a beautiful collection & makes the visiter as calm & genial as a bridegroom. The limits of the possible are enlarged, & the real is stranger than the imaginary . . . One parrot of a fellow . . . deserves as special mention as a picture of Raphael in a Gallery . . .

In other rooms I saw amber containing perfect musquitoes, grand blocks of quartz, native gold in all its forms of crystallization, threads, plates, crystals, dust; & silver black as from fire . . . Here we are impressed with the inexhaustible riches of nature. The Universe is a more amazing puzzle than ever as you glance along this bewildering series of animated forms—the hazy butterflies, the carved shells, the birds, beasts, fishes, insects, snakes,—& the upheaving principle of life everywhere incipient in the very rock aping organized forms. Not a form so grotesque, so savage, nor so beautiful but is an expression of some property inherent in man the observer—an occult relation between the very scorpions and man. I feel the centipede in me—cayman, carp, eagle, & fox. I am moved by strange sympathies, I say continually “I will be a naturalist. (*JMN* 4:198–200)⁴

This is an original relationship as new and full of creative potential as a wedding day yet emotionally and cognitively complex, for Emerson was not a bridegroom but instead a widower who, grieving his “one first love,” was nevertheless able to say with joy and onward momentum that things are finer together than in isolation. The phrase “one first love” dates from a journal entry written soon after Ellen’s death. In it, Emerson explicitly connects his relation with Ellen to a relation with nature and wonders if the loss is total and irreparable: “Shall I ever again be able to connect the face of outward nature, the mists of the morn, the star of eve, the flowers, & all poetry, with the heart & life of an enchanting friend?” At that point he answered negatively: “No. There is one birth & one baptism & one first love and the affections cannot keep their youth any more than men” (*JMN* 3:227). The emotional history from that despair in February 1831 to the expressed insights about composition and relation in France in 1833 is inclusive and productive. The bridegroom is without his bride, but Emerson did not leave Ellen out of the trip to Europe or out of his thought and expression, and he was composed and poised to strike a new direction.

By the time Emerson visited the Cabinet of Natural History in Paris, he had also developed the security he did not have in youth to tolerate the bewilderment, ambiguity, and vulnerability that sympathy entails. Earlier he had withdrawn to the stifling refuge of intellectualizing or morbid introspection; now he explored, accepting the vulnerability and risk. Daring to pursue an original relation is never easy. There is the problem of social expectations: “For nonconformity the world whips you with its displeasure” (*CW* 2:32). In October 1832, Emerson rather grimly resolved to himself in his journal, despite such displeasure, “I will not live out of me/I will not see with others’ eyes . . . I dare attempt to lay out my own road” (*JMN* 4:47). That problem, however, is local and identifiable, and as Emerson usually considered it, human and societal. The greater challenge in laying out one’s own road is the ubiquitous uncertainty and otherness that lies just out of sight around the bend. For this is the nature of Emerson’s original relation: that each party, itself an unfolding series of variations, remains unknowing and unknowable. The edge of that mystery is the pertinent point of encounter. Strange sympathies arise only in the gap signaled by intimate encounter. Even, he wrote in his journal, “if you go into a family where you supposed a perfect understanding & intimate bonds subsisted, you find with surprise that . . . husband & wife observe each other’s acts & words with much of a stranger’s curiosity” (*JMN* 5:193–194). Emerson’s relation with nature remained occult and intimate, the sympathies strange, because he continually encountered nature, again and again immersing himself *now* in its unfolding variety.

In 1837, he ended a list of lovely encounters outdoors by exclaiming “how like a smile of the earth is the first violet we meet in spring!” and felt

“prompted to ask the relation of these natures to my own” (*JMN* 5:427), but, as he noted less than a year later, after another walk,

sweet & native as all those fair impressions on that summit fall on the eye & ear, they are not yet mine. I cannot tell why I should feel myself such a stranger in nature. I am a tangent to their sphere, & do not lie level with this beauty. And yet the dictate of the hour is to forget all I have mislearned; to cease from man, & to cast myself again into the vast mould of nature (*JMN* 7:74).

The violet may be taken as the earth’s smile for a pretty simile but far better to forget rhetoric and cast off into the vast mould of nature where the occult relation and sympathy manifest. Mould, comprised and sustained by long, sensitive filaments and a key agent in recycling nutrients in ecosystems, is an apt image: a literary figure securely fastened to a literal phenomenon. Later, in “Fate,” Emerson reiterated the value of casting off like a vagrant into such a network of filaments: “Wonderful intricacy in the web, wonderful constancy in the design this vagabond life admits” (*CW* 6:25). “The web of relation” is where one finds, not loses, his or her own humanity (*CW* 6:20). To retreat from sympathies, however strange and unsettling, is to replace the heaving, changing, evanescent, real web of life with a static, sterile, virtual diagram. For Emerson, it signaled devolution from poet-naturalist to sophist.

How we approach this edge of unknowing intimacy is the purview of all ethics. In terms of environmental ethics, Emerson advocates humility in the face of one’s own limited knowledge, respect for the sanctity and purpose of each and all in nature, and the courage to compose, be composed, and decompose throughout lifetime’s relations, exchanges, and encounters. Knowledge and insight are always local. “All the thoughts of a turtle are turtles,” reads a cryptic journal entry from 1855 (*JMN* 13:357), and Emerson reminds us in “Experience” that “we cannot say too little of our constitutional necessity of seeing things under private aspects” (*CW* 3:46). This partiality leaves Emerson grumpy at times, feeling that “Nature does not like to be observed, and likes that we should be her fools and playmates,” but also resolved to own his “poverty, however scandalous” and to respect that local perspective is a universal condition (*CW* 3:29, 46). The ethical import here is two-fold: recognizing ignorance is a precondition of open-mindedness, and recognizing partiality is universal is a precondition of compassion and tolerance. That is not to say that open-mindedness, compassion, and tolerance are certain responses; ethical responses are not givens, but rather affirming choices in response to the surprises, variety, and difference one continually encounters as a matter of course in an Emersonian original relation with the universe. “Every thing is a monster til we know” more about it, he wrote in his journal, couching the example of the lobster in terms natural evolution. “A lobster is monstrous but when we have been shown the reason of the case” we see that

every “habit & condition of the creature” is “perfect & suitable to his sea house . . . A man in the rocks under the sea would be a monster but a lobster is a most handy & happy fellow there” (*JMN* 4:25). In Emerson’s view, ethical choices are consonant with the intrinsic value of nature, and supported by it.

Emerson persists in an original relation with nature because it is the truth of his own essence and the improvisational method whereby he and the world emerge. Original relation with nature sustains “the eternal generation” prized in the essay “Circles” (*CW* 2:188). Only participatory immersion in that “incessant movement and progression which all things partake” affords Emerson any insight into the “eternal generator” that is the “central life” (*CW* 2:188). In *Nature*, he turns to the trees not simply for a metaphor but for a lesson in the sustained and creative partnership between us and nature: “the Supreme Being, does not build up nature around us, but puts it forth through us, as the life of the tree puts forth new branches and leaves through the pores of the old” (*CW* 1:38). We are in a creative relationship as participants who shape growth, who can allow or twist, affirm or deny. When we refuse to own that relation, to bear its fruit, “we degenerate” (*CW* 1:39). At the end of *Nature*, Emerson’s orphic poet names our infidelity and its cost: “We distrust and deny inwardly our sympathy with nature. We own and disown our relation to it, by turns” and as a result “We are . . . dethroned, bereft of reason,” diminished versions of ourselves (*CW* 1:42). For Emerson, feeling the strangeness of nature and his sympathies with it is far finer than betraying nature.

The balance of power of this new relation between “I, naturalist” and the universe is dynamic and intersubjective. Composition is all, and nature is self-composing through the agency of multiple selves. As Emerson would write later in “Fate,” “every creature do[es] its own work and get[s] its living. . . . The planet makes itself. The animal cell makes itself;—then, what it wants . . . there is self-direction, and absorbing and using of material” (*CW* 6:21). In the lengthy journal passage about his visit to the French Cabinet, Emerson does not impose a composition but rather in a single breath inhales a dizzying array, whole and entire, bewildering and upheaving. Instead of arranging, Emerson lists as he sees. Instead of building and establishing, he is moved and feels the force of hidden relations. Instead of finding tidy certainties, he finds glorious upheaval. In that moment, the divides between scorpions and man, centipede and Emerson, even between rock and life forms, lose their exclusively atomizing effect on Emerson’s thought, and their transparency and permeability become obvious to him.

“I will be a naturalist” is not so much a career decision to close a period of indecision as a willingness to be open to the influence of nature (*CW* 1:9), to be changed by it, to be a composer who is part of a composition. His decision is ripe with the openness and self-abandon that he advocates in “Circles”: “to

forget ourselves . . . do something without knowing how or why; in short, to draw a new circle” over and over again (*CW* 2:190). Continually, not finally, he says he will be a naturalist. In laying out such a road and means of transit for himself, Emerson not only owned the unknown risks and surprises ahead but also his painful experiences of family circles pierced by death, isolation, and the decidedly not fine condition of being unrecognized. By the time he wrote *Nature*, he knew well that the condition of being “not alone and unacknowledged” in the universe is continually acknowledging the other, at the risk of suffering the mystery, even violence, of its difference (*CW* 1:10). There is the pleasant sense of companionship he describes in *Nature* with plants who “nod to me, and I to them,” but also the sobering knowledge that “The fox and deer run away from us; the bear and tiger rend us” (*CW* 1:10, 39).

Desire and deference are equally requisite to Emerson’s original relation with nature.⁵ The “clouds, woods, and waters” are a love letter “all there for me” (*JMN* 5:353), and the sweetness of the letter is the boundary it describes: an edge where difference enlarges the limit of possibility, where the real is more strange and compelling than the imaginary. In relation things are finer; in fact, things only emerge in relation. This fact, Emerson argued, must shape our answer to the “practical question of the conduct of life. How shall I live?” (*CW* 6:1). The question is posed thus in “Fate,” the opening essay of *The Conduct of Life* (1860), and his responses throughout the book are couched in relation: “Relation and connection are not somewhere and sometimes, but everywhere and always,” for we are “made of the same atoms as the world is,” and share “the same impressions, predisposition, and destiny” (*CW* 6:17, 128, 128). These relations and connections are not only fated, but also emergent. We, in part, constitute, sustain, and transform them; destiny is a work-in-progress, and we are part of the labor force. What we bring to these relations and connections matters because “the book of Nature is the book of Fate” (*CW* 6:8), or, in Native American writer Linda Hogan’s words, “what happens to people and what happens to the land is the same thing . . . the face of the land is our face.”⁶ By the time Emerson sailed home from Europe, he had begun *Nature*. To his journal he confided, “I like my book about nature & wish I knew where & how I ought to live” (*JMN* 4:237).

ENVIRONMENTAL LITERACY

Environmental literacy is a contemporary term for understanding and addressing a contemporary problem, but the contours of its definition match key features of Emerson’s original relation as a practice of nature literacy: awareness, appreciation, and informed participation in a living, life-sustaining, and dynamic composition. Emerson’s original relation was and remained

with nature, and he, like contemporary environmental literacy educators and advocates, framed the relation in terms the ability to read and write nature accurately and sensitively. Indeed, one meaning of relation is the literary act of telling a story. Brooke McBride and her co-authors trace the twentieth-century evolution of nature literacy, the terms it goes by, and its curricular implementation in response to growing evidence of the disastrous consequences of our environmental illiteracy. They date the term “environmental literacy” from a 1968 article in the *Massachusetts Audubon* by environmental educator Charles Roth. Informed by new theories of complex adaptive systems and ecology, the terms “ecological literacy” and “ecoliteracy” had emerged by the late 1990s.⁷ In 1995, physicist and systems theorist Fritjov Capra co-founded the Center for Ecoliteracy at the University of California Berkeley, now a valuable resource for environmental educators. “Ecoliteracy” is the term he used routinely in his 1997 book *The Web of Life*.⁸ The immediate existential stakes of being able to read and write the environment were arguably lower for Emerson than they are today, though his friend, Henry David Thoreau, well knew a crisis was already in the making, and a recent study led by Australian scientist Nerilie Abram dates human-induced climate warming from the 1830s.⁹ But the necessity of nature literacy Emerson did not doubt.

As Robert Richardson titles his book on Emerson’s creative process, from Emerson’s own journal entry (*JMN* 8:320), “First we read, then we write.”¹⁰ The project of *Nature* is to read “this grand cipher, “The book of Nature,” (*CW* 1:21; 6:8) for its meaning. Emerson had begun the project earlier, starting like a child does with pictures and the alphabet in this 1831 journal entry, written after Ellen’s death.

After a fortnight’s wandering to the Green Mountains & Lake Champlain yet finding you dear Ellen nowhere & yet everywhere I come again to my own place, & would willingly transfer some of the pictures that the eyes saw, in living language to my page; yea translate the fair & magnificent symbols into their own sentiments. But this were to antedate knowledge. It grows into us, say rather, we *grow wise* & not take wisdom; and only in God’s own order & by my concurrent effort can I get the abstract sense of which mountains, sunshine, thunder, night, birds, & flowers are the sublime alphabet. (*JMN* 3:257–258)

The visible cipher, Emerson felt, pointed to its invisible intelligence or meaning, which he called variously the over-soul, world-soul, unity, or spirit. “The visible creation,” he wrote in *Nature*, “is the terminus or the circumference of the invisible world” (*CW* 1:22), and it falls to us to read the signifier for significance. Nature was Emerson’s text and tutorial for any supernatural. In his lecture “Essential Principles of Religion” (1862), Emerson recalled his response to an “ardent missionary” whose proof was set “in the other world”:

“Other world!” answered Emerson, “there is no other world, God is one and omnipresent: here or nowhere is the whole fact” (*LL* 2:269).

In reading nature, Emerson was not climbing up and out of Plato’s cave into blinding light. Emerson’s idea of reading nature is more intimate and more delightful than the painful enlightenment Plato describes. Emerson was reading for the principle that “holds true throughout nature,” a principle of unity “so intimate . . . it lies under the undermost garment of Nature” (*CW* 1:27). For Emerson, reading nature is not ascendant but intimate and “face-to-face,” a phrase that appears twice in *Nature* (*CW* 1:7, 21) and that is consistent with his longing in a later journal entry to “lie level” with nature’s beauty (*JMN* 7:74). The terms and educational method of Plato’s enlightenment are harsh. The prisoner must be forced up and out the cave into light so overpowering it is painful. Once enlightened he pities those remaining in the cave and would risk their murderous fear to bring them to the light. Emerson, however, found delightful release in the embrace of nature, and his behavior as a “lover of nature” suggests tender identification and mutual exchanges rather than pity as a basis for enlightenment and ethics (*CW* 1:9).

Like Plato, however, Emerson conceived knowing as submitting to truth. Emerson defended the power and entitlement to read nature creatively but not falsely. Truth is not the reader’s (or the writer’s for that matter): “we are its” (*CW* 1:18). Later, in “Self-Reliance,” he allowed that in works of genius, readers will “recognize [their] own rejected thoughts” (*CW* 2:27), but in *Nature* he warned against our tendency to read for confirmation, to treat the text of nature as a mirror in which we read only ourselves. “Have mountains, and waves, and skies, no significance but what we consciously give when we employ them as emblems of our thoughts?” he asks (*CW* 1:21). We routinely use “this grand cipher [of nature] to expedite the affairs of our pot and kettle,” but Emerson’s idea of nature literacy goes further, closer to contemporary environmental literacy, when he urges us to consider “whether the characters are not significant of themselves” (*CW* 1:21). “The whole of nature” may be “a metaphor of the human mind” (*CW* 1:21), but Emerson does not say we are the sole authors of the metaphor. First we read it, and “a life in harmony with Nature, the love of truth and of virtue, will purge the eyes to understand her text” (*CW* 1:23). He advocates reading nature with daring, but also with “entire humility” (*CW* 1:39). The illustrator Frank Bellew, who first met and walked with Emerson in the summer of 1855, remembered this humility: “I noticed in our walks that he was exceedingly respectful to all the weeds and insects: nothing was insignificant to him.”¹¹

Both courage and humility are appropriate given the book of nature is always in flux: “There are no fixtures in nature” (*CW* 2:179). The “sublime alphabet” is constantly morphing. So is the reader. Nature literacy can only ever be an ongoing practice, never culminating in a compendium or credential. “This chemistry and vegetation, these metals and animals,” Emerson

argues in “Circles,” “are words of God, and as fugitive as other words” (*CW* 2:186). In “Experience” particularly, the likelihood of reading nature’s cipher for its invisible meaning seems impossibly remote, the gleanings fragmentary. The relative intimacy and clarity of *Nature*’s face-to-face encounters have become the alienation and uncertainty of “globes, which can touch only in a point” (*CW* 3:44). Outward forms and their meanings “swim and glitter” as “[g]hostlike we glide through nature” (*CW* 3:27). The cipher is all surface in “Experience,” a meniscus of meaning that obscures protean depths. All reading is oblique. However, both the exhilaration of “Circles” and the skepticism of “Experience” are intrinsic to what Richardson calls Emerson’s “evergreen view [or read] of the world.”¹²

The flip side of reading is literary expression and advocacy. We read, then write. Here, too, humility and courage are requisite. As Richardson notes, “Emerson urges us . . . to look to nature for language.”¹³ Language severed from nature is no longer “blood-warm” (*CW* 1:68). Tethering language to nature makes it possible for language to be a portal to “reality, for contact with which,” in “Experience,” Emerson “would even pay the costly price of sons and lovers” (*CW* 3:29). A chapter of *Nature* is devoted to explaining that nature is, and engenders, language. Emerson’s explanation circles on nature to loop the invisible (spiritual) into visible nature: words are symbols of nature, which is a symbol of spirit, which is symbolized by nature (*CW* 1:17). Taking a rather literal approach, Emerson argues that etymology shows words are “borrowed from some material appearance,” and further that the material appearances are themselves emblematic of invisible facts: “Who looks upon a river . . . and is not reminded of the flux of all things?” (*CW* 1:18). Analogies like this “are constant, and pervade nature” (*CW* 1:19). The poet does not need to make them but to say them, Emerson suggests several times in “The Poet” (*CW* 3:5, 13). A submissive approach to nature is appropriate to this kind of writing: the poet “is commanded in nature, by the living power which he feels to be there present” (*CW* 3:10). The point of writing, as described in “The Poet,” is to “re-attach things to nature and the Whole,—re-attaching even artificial things, and violations of nature, to nature” (*CW* 3:11). In the poem “Each and All,” Emerson lists the many things in view that others might fail to see as existentially interwoven and yields himself to nature’s “perfect whole” (*CW* 9:15).

Undertaken in humble accord with nature, the re-attachments Emerson called for are nonetheless revolutionary and boldly imaginative; “Poets are thus liberating gods” (*CW* 3:17). The “Orphic poet” braves being “hissed and hooted,” dares to risk uncertainty and surprise, for “blood-warm” writing (*CW* 1:42, 3:23, 1:68). Recalling Emerson’s desire to lay out his own road, another journal entry observes, “The maker of a sentence like the other artist launches out into the infinite & builds a road into Chaos & old Night” (*JMN* 4:363). In the century following Emerson, anthropologist Loren Eiseley

would decry “the appalling poverty of imagination manifested in our descriptions of the world outside.”¹⁴ Steven Fesmire, professor of philosophy and environmental studies at Green Mountain College, points out the important role of imagination in ecological thinking. Like Emerson, Fesmire frames his ideas in terms of literacy and bold analogies. According to Fesmire, to read and write ecology, “we rely on a rich fund of metaphors for ecosystems,” and he lists common ones such as web, network, fabric, community, container, and superorganism. Our metaphors of ecology “do some of our environmental thinking for us and so must be examined, evaluated, and criticized.” A new metaphor may well authorize questions and approaches unavailable within the structure of older, conventional metaphors. Fesmire describes “ecological imagination as a type of relational imagination” daring enough “to engage present circumstances and stretch,”¹⁵ daring enough, in Emerson’s words, to “cast” off, strike “an original relation,” and write “our own works” in concert with the land in which we find ourselves (*JMN* 7:74; *CW* 1:7, 7). Whether Emerson was writing face-to-face as in *Nature* and “Circles,” obliquely as in “Experience,” immediately as in his journals, or painstakingly as in his poetry, nature literacy is paramount to get the words, metaphors, and sentences right.

Part of Emerson’s nature literacy approach stems from European Romanticism’s reattachment of science to philosophy and literature. William Wordsworth, for example, criticized science that distanced itself from its objects of study and entitled itself to “murder to dissect,” and Samuel Taylor Coleridge disparaged the “abstruse research [that] steal[s]/From my own nature all the natural man.”¹⁶ Both advocated instead nature literacy via immersion and poetry, as did the German Romantics, especially Goethe in Emerson’s estimation. Also, as Richardson points out, before writing *Nature* Emerson was taken by “Carlyle’s conviction that nothing is separate” or static, and he was convinced that “the wholeness of nature” could not be ignored by either science or poetry. Emerson distinctly brought “his interest in the methods and materials of science” to the poets’ table.¹⁷ For him, the “flesh and blood” poetic literacy advocated by Wordsworth¹⁸ rightly follows from our “consanguinity” with nature (*CW* 1:38, 2:201). A science of nature conceptually anchored in relational identity and consanguinity would perhaps be less likely to harm for the sake of knowledge than one anchored in the mining metaphor of probing, penetrating, and extracting. It would also, as Romanticism-inflected science is, be more open to the ideas of evolution, ecology, and environmental ethics. These literary bloodlines course from Emerson to Thoreau to John Muir, Loren Eiseley, and Edward O. Wilson.

Emerson’s original relation and his figuring it in terms of literacy also reflect his interest in Hindu and Buddhist texts and his affinity with their natural philosophies of ontological monism and mutual arising. In “Brahma,” for example, Emerson restates Krishna’s lessons to Arjuna in the epic *Bhaga-*

vad Gita on essential identity, relational emergence, and transformational continuity: “If the red slayer think he slays,/or if the slain think he is slain/ They know not well the subtle ways/I keep, and pass, and turn again/ . . . Shadow and sunlight are the same” (*CW* 9:365). This insight reverberates throughout Emerson’s work. For example, “Compensation” states that “appearances indicate the fact that the universe is represented in every one of its particles,” that each “contains all the powers of nature” (*CW* 2:59). The poem “Each and All” suggests the correlative ethics. In a world of birdsong, river, sky, sea, weeds, lovers, pinecones, and acorns, “All are needed by each one” (*CW* 9:14). Literally, each is significant, deserving of respect, attention, and support. Poets are born to express, sustain, and develop that fact. Emerson played a significant role in introducing Asian philosophy to the west, and with regard to environmental ethics his legacy runs to contemporary writers such as Alan Watts and Gary Snyder.

However, Emerson was not one to fall into orbit around other writers. The whole point of the original relation as described in *Nature* is that new lands call for new works, and with its publication Emerson philosophically formalized an American Romantic project of elucidating connections between the natural environment, ethics, and aesthetics. It is the American landscape specifically that informs Emerson’s focus on literacy: “America is a poem in our eyes; its ample geography dazzles the imagination” (*CW* 3:22). The “new yet unapproachable America” he saw in the west was to him “a new and excellent region of life,” beckoning a persistent reader to “arrive . . . and behold” (*CW*: 3:41). To see the landscape as a poem, each “word” vital to the composition’s integrity and effect, informs Emerson’s literary values and his environmental ethics. In “The Poet,” “nature is a symbol” to be read and translated with devotion, deference, and empathy (*CW* 3:8). The poet’s “insight . . . does not come by study, but by the intellect *being* where and what it sees, by *sharing* the path or circuit of things through forms” (*CW* 3:15, emphasis mine). The poet does not guardedly walk the path but instead courts “ravishment of the intellect by coming nearer to the fact” (*CW* 3:16). The invisible “fact” or meaning of nature’s riot of variety for Emerson is its essential unity. But it is only readable in the shells, clouds, pinecones, rhodora, only discoverable by sharing the path, literally walking “wherever snow falls or water flows or birds fly” (*CW* 3:24). Emerson, of course, thought he had at least glimpses enough of that meaning to spend a lifetime writing and lecturing about it, but always with the caveat “I am a fragment, and this is a fragment of me” (*CW* 3:47).

Emerson impressed his convictions about the value of nature literacy on his children strongly enough that they well remembered their childhood walks with him as lessons in literacy, even if they had been recalcitrant students. They all spoke of these walks in the reminiscences they wrote after his death. Ellen wrote,

Whenever we walked with him he told us the name of every flower, and showed us how many pine-needles in each sheath the two kinds of pines had, and how the lichens grew thickest on the north side of every tree. . . . He told us every time what bird it was that was singing, so that we learned the notes of many. . . . We always despised the botanical names, but he never failed to give them, and I still know a good many.¹⁹

Edith wrote of his “intimacy with the river and meadows, the woods and ponds” and their frequent walks “to Walden and his loved pine grove by the Cove,” though as Ellen recalled “Edith . . . did not love the long walks.”²⁰ Edward wrote of Sunday afternoons when regularly “he took them all to walk,” showing them “his favorite plants, usually rather humble flowers” and “the shrines of the wood-gods and the home of Echo in the groves he loved.”²¹ Emerson had apparently imparted similar lessons to Waldo, his firstborn who died in early childhood. In the awful days following Waldo’s death, Emerson wrote in his journal of coming across “the chrysalis which he [Waldo] brought in with care & tenderness & gave to his Mother to keep” (*JMN* 8:205). Emerson ensured that nature literacy would be the context and standard of his children’s educations with methods and aims that anticipate the hands-on, holistic environmental studies programs some schools are implementing today.

Nearly 150 years before philosopher Alan Watts would agree with the biologists who “show us very clearly” humans and their environment “are a single field of behavior,” Emerson identified that field as our “original relation with the universe” (*CW* 1:7).²² For Emerson, an original relation to the universe entailed what is now called ecoliteracy: the sense and sensitivity to listen to the world as it is, the respect and humility to represent the nonhuman in human terms without ego or avarice, the skill and creativity to read and write about nature aesthetically, and the generosity and commitment to advocate such a literacy and the lifestyles that accord with it. One hundred years after Emerson’s efforts, Aldo Leopold described the same moral incumbency to be ecoliterate, to “decipher the hidden meaning” of wolf and mountain, as the basis for a “land ethic.”²³ Thoreau and John Muir were among the first of many to take up Emerson’s call for an intersubjective and receptive way of reading and writing nature, warmer and more sympathetic than “the wintry light of” the “half-sight[ed]” science, more aesthetic than the “unpoetic” expressions of “the savant,” and more moral than the “penny-wisdom” that fails to respect “the miraculous in the common” (*CW* 1:44, 41, 39, 39, 43, 44).

NOTES

1. Robert D. Richardson, *First We Read, Then We Write: Emerson on the Creative Process* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2009), 5.

2. Douglas R. Anderson makes a case for the “origins” and “possibilities” of environmental thought to be found in Emerson’s second essay “Nature,” published in *Essays: Second Series* (1844) (Douglas R. Anderson, “Emerson’s Natures: Origins of and Possibilities for an American Environmental Thought,” in *New Morning: Emerson in the Twenty-first Century*, ed. Arthur S. Lothstein and Michael Brodrick (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2008), 151–160.

3. See Carolyn Merchant’s *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology, and the Scientific Revolution* (New York: HarperCollins, 1990), originally published by Harper & Row, 1980, as one of the groundbreaking feminist analyses of the gendering of nature that shape and facilitate American eco-feminism.

4. Emerson recounted his visit, using material from this journal passage, in “The Uses of Natural History,” a lecture he delivered in November 1833 and his first after leaving the pulpit. Eleven years later he was still sufficiently comfortable with the passage to include substantial sections from it as “A Leaf from a Journal,” published in the popular literary annual *The Gift*.

5. This point is central to the connection I make between Emerson’s original relation and contemporary feminists such as Nancy Chodorow, Hélène Cixous, Luce Irigaray, Jessica Benjamin, and Carol Gilligan in the second chapter of my book (Susan Field), *The Romance of Desire: Emerson’s Commitment to Incompletion* (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1997), 47–57.

6. Hogan. “Creations,” in *Heart of the Land: Essays on Last Great Places*, ed. Joseph Barbato and Lisa Weinman (New York: Vintage Books, 1996), 102, 108.

7. McBride, Brooke, C. A. Brewer, A. R. Berkowitz, and W. T. Borrie, “Environmental Literacy, Ecological Literacy, Ecoliteracy: What Do We Mean and How Did We Get Here?” *Ecosphere* 4.5 (2013): 3, accessed August 25, 2016, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1890/ES13-00075.1>.

8. Fritjov Capra, *The Web of Life: A New Scientific Understanding of Living Systems* (New York: Anchor Books, 1997).

9. Abram, Nerilie, Helen V. McGregor, Jessica E. Tierney, Michael N. Evans, et. al., “Early Onset of Industrial-era Warming Across Oceans and Continents,” *Nature* 536 (25 August 2016): 411–418, accessed August 25, 2016, nature.com.

10. Richardson, *First We Read, Then We Write: Emerson on the Creative Process* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2009).

11. Ronald A. Bosco and Joel Myerson, eds., *Emerson in His Own Time: A Biographical Chronicle of His Life, Drawn from Recollections, Interviews, and Memoirs by Family, Friends, and Associates* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2003), 145.

12. Richardson, *First We Read, Then We Write*, 28.

13. Richardson, *First We Read, Then We Write*, 27.

14. Loren Eiseley, *The Lost Notebooks of Loren Eiseley*, edited by Kenneth Heuer (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002), 86.

15. Steven Fesmire, “Ecological Imagination,” *Environmental Ethics* 32.2 (Summer 2010): 190–193, 198, 183, 188. Lakoff and Johnson’s *Metaphors We Live By* remains the definitive account of how metaphors shape our thought and behavior (George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980]).

16. William Wordsworth, “The Tables Turned,” in *English Romantic Writers*, ed. David Perkins (San Diego, CA: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1967), 209; Samuel Taylor Coleridge, “Dejection: An Ode” in *English Romantic Writers*, 433.

17. Robert D. Richardson, *Emerson: The Mind on Fire* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 174, 142.

18. William Wordsworth, “Preface, Second Edition of the Lyrical Ballads,” in *English Romantic Writers*, 323.

19. Bosco and Myerson, *Emerson in His Own Time*, 159.

20. Bosco and Myerson, *Emerson in His Own Time*, 163, 166, 160.

21. Bosco and Myerson, *Emerson in His Own Time*, 169–170.

22. Alan Watts, *OM: Creative Meditations* (Milbrae, CA: Celestial Arts, 1980), 38.

23. Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac and Sketches Here and There*, special commemorative edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 129, 201. (originally published Oxford University Press, 1949).

Chapter Two

Emerson Valuing Nature

Aesthetics and Ethics

In the fall of 1957, anthropologist and nature writer Loren Eiseley, who was a careful reader of Emerson, walked back and forth through the “Hall of Man” exhibit in a major museum and was disappointed that its “story of man” was reduced to a history of harnessing “the energies of wheat and fire and oil” with “no slightest hint of the most remarkable story of all—the rise of a value-creating animal and the way in which his values had been modified and transformed to bring him to the world he faces today.”¹ Of course, the exhibit Eiseley saw did express a valuing of nature, albeit one limited to nature’s utility and availability to satisfy our own needs and wants. Emerson also valued nature’s utility to us, but, as the brevity of the “Commodities” section in *Nature* indicates, material utility was for Emerson only an initial valuing of nature, “mercenary” and “obvious” (*CW* 1:12). Emerson moved quickly past commodities and instrumental value to lengthy sections on nature’s lessons and intrinsic value with regard to beauty, language, and discipline. As a whole, the discussion in *Nature* is situated in the context of our relation—at once aesthetic, intellectual and moral—to the beauty, truth, and goodness of nature. Emerson closed the short section on nature as commodity by pointing to “a farther good” he described in terms of our obligation: “A man is fed, not that he may be fed, but that he may work” (*CW* 1:12). That work consists in acknowledging, expressing, and creating value. What concerns Emerson (and Eiseley) is the quality and integrity of our values.

It is easy to read and isolate Emerson’s value system with respect to nature as quintessentially romantic with nature as the source and standard of truth, beauty, and ethics, and humans as best advised to return to nature rather than suppress, subdue, or transcend it. From the closing adage of John

Keats' "Ode on a Grecian Urn"—"Beauty is truth, truth beauty,—that is all / Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know"—to Emerson's declaration in *Nature* that "Truth, and goodness, and beauty, are but different faces of the same All" (*CW* 1:17), aesthetic, moral, and truth values form an indivisible trinity in romantic philosophy.² The philosophical legacy of romanticism is its insistence on this three-fold approach. The romantic recovery of philosophy from what Emerson called intellectual "fineries or pedantries" (*CW* 3:34) was a remarkable and consequential achievement, but contemporary appreciation of its influence is unduly limited to literary and philosophy studies. Beginning with the modernist repudiation of romanticism as soft, fond, even a bit irresponsible, both Emerson's opening for romanticism's evolution into diverse contemporary philosophies and his use of it as a philosophical framework for environmental science and environmental ethics have been overlooked. When viewed as a relic, a mood too naïve for contemporary anxieties, or a period in the history of literature and philosophy, romanticism seems to have served its purpose by the mid-nineteenth century, having wrested the standards from the hands of church and king and taken them back to the sacred grove.³ The result is that romanticism has been relegated to nature lovers rather than nature knowers. In today's universities, romantic texts are much more likely to be discussed in humanities departments, defined as poetry and nature writing, and confined by these assessments of discipline and genre. A recent exception is Thoreau's body of meticulous observations that are being used as data points to study climate change.⁴ Within the humanities, romantic texts are more likely to be assigned to literary canons than philosophical ones. Though Stanley Cavell has compellingly read Emerson and Thoreau as key American philosophers, he has described them as the philosophical "inheritance" we have yet to take up sufficiently.⁵ Emerson's writings are not included in environmental ethics anthologies, though his own "iron string" (*CW* 2:28) would have vibrated to the new fields of environmental ethics and studies.

It is much more interesting, warranted, and useful today to read in Emerson the unfolding of romanticism as a philosophical schema relevant to several contemporary philosophical veins and vital to questions of environmental ethics. Emerson read, studied, and met many of his European romantic forebears. He knew that inheritance well and bore some traits forward, but with a primary allegiance to life systems and evolution rather than to the foundational political and artistic revolution that preoccupied much of European romanticism. The "living generation" he speaks for in *Nature* questions the utility, and even reality, of foundations in a natural world so clearly given to "incessant movement and progression" (*CW* 1:7, 2:188). Even when he speaks of the "principle of fixture or stability" in "Circles" and locates it in "the soul" he does so briefly, and change and diversity are still at the forefront: he describes this soul as "the eternal generator" (*CW* 2:188). The

eternal generator sustains, rather than finishes, the process. With respect to values in nature and valuing nature, Emerson never considered the values fixed or the valuing completed. Philosophically (and scientifically) he managed the chaotic aspect of diversity by pointing out its essential unity via the monistic metaphysics I described in the previous chapter. A more difficult challenge was asserting values and a value-driven teleology while at the same time maintaining that values change and vary as we (each and all) create, abandon, and create them anew. Emerson did not use today's vocabulary of self-organizing, complex adaptive systems, but he studied and abided the processes of evolution and amelioration, and his approach to the values of truth, beauty, and morality shares significant ground with contemporary understandings of dynamic, evolving, living systems.

Standard romantic teleology is "back to nature" to achieve human potential. Emerson complicates that trajectory by unfixing its direction and end. He also emphasizes the ongoing creative role we play in defining and constituting the goal or standard. The result is an improvisational and transformative teleology rather than a deontological one. Emerson argued that truth, beauty, and moral law were intrinsic to the material universe, writing in *The Conduct of Life* that the very atoms of the universe sought justice and suggesting that ultimately justice prevails and is required (*CW* 6:116, 11). However, he described that *telos* as protean, not pre-defined, and all courses of fate, or destiny, as becoming, never having become or arrived: "Transition, shooting the gulf, becoming somewhat else, is the whole game of nature" (*LL* 2:92). His response to this flux and fluidity was value creating. Value creating in Emerson's view is not a Sisyphean sentence but the creative license of life, the play of sensitivity and awareness in our encounters with the natural world. What I have elsewhere called his "commitment to incompleteness" yields his conception of values as emergent and evolving practices, not principles, rules, or duties.⁶ He replaces the "back" in "back to nature" with "onward" and insists that the way forward entails abandon.

What Emerson ends up valuing in nature, and what he prescribes in our relationship to the environment, is acute attention and exquisite responsiveness to otherness and change. He urges our honest, aesthetic, and ethical evolution in response to the "series of surprises" that constitutes and sustains life (*CW* 2:189, 3:39). The values are not out there waiting to be discerned, invoked or achieved; they are in the embodied transformations that render diversity and continuity. Here or nowhere values spring, grow, and die "into the same pit that has consumed our grosser vices" (*CW* 2:187). This is not philosophical relativism for Emerson; it is the way life works and the way to sustain it. "People wish to be settled" and to settle what is true, beautiful, and moral, but "only as far as they are unsettled, is there any hope for them" (*CW* 2:189). Only as far as the standards of truth, beauty, and moral behavior are unsettled is there any hope for discerning and creating truth, beauty, and

justice. For all the Platonic and neo-platonic bloodlines coursing through Emerson, values and relationships are not fixed forms for him but enlightenments and responses. Emerson calls his readers to abandon their lives as value-conforming beasts (his images include the “ox” eating grass, the mind “imbruted,” and “selfish” savagery [*CW* 1:42, 43, 43]) and take up their intrinsic power as what Eiseley called “value-creating animal[s].” In Eiseley’s view, the call had not been sufficiently heeded even a century later. He worried that we continued imbruted and selfish, though in the more psychiatric and environmentalist terms of the twentieth-century. In a 1970 letter to Hal Borland, Eiseley wrote, “I am deeply depressed about the human situation. I do not fear our extinction particularly. What I really fear is that man will ruin the planet before he departs.” Like Emerson, he encouraged other possibilities: “We are in a creative universe. Let us then create” instead of desecrate.⁷

In “Plato,” Emerson locates the nascence of creativity in open-ended, mutual relation:

Every great artist has been such by synthesis. Our strength is transitional, alternating, or, shall I say, a thread of two strands. The sea-shore, sea seen from shore, shore seen from sea, the taste of two metals in contact, and our enlarged powers at the approach and at the departure of a friend; the experience of poetic creativeness, which is not found in staying at home nor yet in traveling, but in transitions from one to the other, which must therefore be adroitly managed to present as much transitional surface as possible. (*CW* 4:31–32)

The importance to good composition of presenting maximum transitional surface was a lesson he learned even as a child on the beach. In a journal entry he recalls his boyhood disappointment at bringing shells home only to find them “dry” and “ugly” while on the shore they had lain “wet & social” (*JMN* 4:291). The values one creates and practices are only as generous as the area of that transitional surface, only as efficacious as the degree of the transition, and only as realistic as the number of transitions experienced. In the stark terms of the Grand Canyon’s geology and a feminist language of desire, Margaret Randall describes such contact and transition in her poem “Edge”:

Hermit Shale nudges Coconino Sandstone
One edge against the other . . .
edge is the meeting place,
precise moment
between one and another.
You face your wholeness,
I mine.
The edge between us

is stunning and complex:
product of our geology's desire.⁸

I turn now to desire as it plays into being a lover of nature before considering nature writing as a form of noticing and creating aesthetic and ethical value.

BEING "A LOVER OF NATURE"

An insight of many philosophical systems is that values are essentially subjectively motivated. However, in a bid for the persuasive power of an objective tone, many systems—ranging from humanist to theological, relativist to absolutist, and consequentialist to deontological—attempt to root values in conceptual externalities such as absolute and eternal truths, social contracts, the common good, principles, and divine commandments. The word “philosophy” embeds the relatively objective and chosen love between friends into the very discipline of “western” philosophical investigation, rather than sexually passionate *eros*, unconditional *agape*, or familial *storge*.⁹ The externalities of apparently objective reasons and public pressure can provide common language, practical consensus, and a rationale for enforcement and reward, but values and their practice (behavior) spring from emotions—fear, hate, envy, desire, and love. Romanticism, with its emphasis on subjectivity and individuality, was more prepared than many philosophical schools have been to embrace the role of emotion in value-creation, but it certainly was not the first. Buddhism, for example, named ignorant fear and desire as the basis of flawed value creation and practice.¹⁰

Modern scientists are among the most wary of emotional response and influence in determining the truth-value of scientific claims. However, distortions arise when that wariness prompts defensiveness or resolute denial. Although “among the best scientists, doubt is always present” and “good science . . . remains a deep rebellion against the appearance of things,”¹¹ remaining absolutely open to surprise in the practice of professional science is difficult. The pressure to be right, to develop answers and produce facts, is pervasive, and unconditional openness is difficult to justify in a society that so often privileges instrumental value and measures it quantitatively. Talk of love has been weeded out of the physical sciences until we have arrived at a standard curriculum in which a child might love butterflies or geodes, but by fourth or fifth grade not scientifically. Talk of feelings, aesthetics, or even ethics has little place in scientific discourse. If the writing style required by academic and professional journals in science and technology is any indication, the pressure to appear and sound objective is practically absolute. Students who want to talk about how we feel about nature, how nature feels to us, are directed to humanities disciplines where they might pursue nature writing; those who seek knowledge about nature are directed to the sciences,

although the burgeoning programs in environmental studies are more prepared to bridge this bifurcation.¹² Emerson opposed the bifurcation from its inception.

Many romantic writers followed the scientific developments of their day with great interest and were themselves keen, disciplined observers and analysts of natural phenomena. As Nina Baym has pointed out, Emerson's "excitement about nature had been aroused by science," and he "brought Thoreau to nature through scientific writing."¹³ More recently, Laura Dassow Walls has documented and recovered Emerson's scientific orientations from decades of "two cultures" thinking that named him literary. According to Walls, "modern America owes largely to Emerson its faith in science as the bulwark of truth against the tides of history and the storms of war."¹⁴ Romantic writers, including Emerson, also criticized the negative impact on science of denying emotional attachment for the sake of supposed objectivity. This critique is prevalent in romantic fiction, poetry, and non-fiction: the mad-scientist characters of Mary Shelley and Hawthorne, Wordsworth's pained accusation that "we murder to dissect," Walt Whitman's frustrated student of the stars quitting the learned astronomer's academic lecture for the night sky, and Emerson's dissatisfaction with "this half-sight of science" (*CW* 1:41).¹⁵ Each of these examples investigates the nature of love and asserts its relevance to aesthetic and ethical values. Emerson charged science with "inhumanity" for "hat[ing] the name of love and moral purpose" (*CW* 6:151). He repeatedly named love and sympathy as vital feelings, the absence or denial of which maimed scientists and science. Romantic writers, and Emerson foremost in American romanticism, suggested that love was an extremely powerful in discerning and creating value, including scientific truth-value.

The two aspects of love especially relevant to Emerson's environmental philosophy are desire and empathy, both of which he connected to aesthetics and ethics as well as full-sighted science.¹⁶ Emerson declared he would be a naturalist, a calling he alternatively described in *Nature* as being "the lover of nature" (*CW* 1:9) and which he did not limit to the platonic love between friends. Some of the features of such a relationship are outlined in the much-remarked eyeball passage that soon follows this declaration of love. The passage testifies to an ecstatic experience outside of nominal individual identity and automatic social and domestic interactions. Emerson expands to be "the lover of uncontained and immortal beauty" at the very moment "all mean egotism vanishes" (*CW* 1:10). "The name of the nearest friend sounds then foreign and accidental"; brothers and acquaintances are then "trifles[s] and . . . disturbance[s]" (*CW* 1:10). Also important is that the experience is uncontrived. Emerson is not stalking but walking with his guard down, his head bare to the air, because "beauty . . . comes unsought, and comes because it is unsought" (*CW* 1:16). Emerson's desire is appreciative and engaged but

not greedy or acquisitive. Though he sees all, he casts a pellucid eyeball, not an appropriating or appraising gaze. The experience passes with the “evanescence and lubricity” he will write about in “Experience” (*CW* 3:29). But he is stirred to empathy by the lingering “suggestion of an occult relation between man and the vegetable” and the feeling he is “not alone and unacknowledged” (*CW* 1:10). In recounting the experience, Emerson notes “the power to produce this delight . . . reside[s] . . . in a harmony of both” self and other (*CW* 1:10), in the mutual exchange between lovers.¹⁷

In *Nature*, Emerson is metaphorically frank about the erotic element of love. He locates the unity of nature “under” its “undermost garment” (*CW* 1:27). One might look back at this point to his feeling like “a bridegroom” in the face of the beauty of the French exhibit (*JMN* 4:199) or ahead to the sensual opening of his “Divinity School Address” where he invokes the pleasures of “this refulgent summer” (*CW* 1:76). Much later in “Persian Poetry” he defends the Sufi poets’ erotic metaphors for enlightenment as accurate and warranted. As feminist theorists Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clement observe, knowing is “intense and passionate work.”¹⁸ It is how Emerson produced vivid descriptions based on his direct experience of widely diverse locales including his Concord environs, Florentine gardens, and northern California. *Nature* sounds transcendentalist notes of ascendance from the particular and physical to the “higher” and “final” (*CW* 1:10, 11), and it is marked at the beginning by separating “Nature,” in which Emerson includes his own body, from “the Soul” (which he takes to be “us,” *CW* 1:8). But Emerson never jettisons sight for insight, the physical cipher of nature for its meaning, or embodiment for transparency.

The lover’s eye and body are not only requisite to beauty, but also to moral reality. An “ethical character . . . penetrates the bone and marrow of nature,” but this “unceasing reference to spiritual nature” is possible only by virtue of physical nature and relation: eyes, hands, and bodies (*CW* 1:26, 25). As a lover, Emerson is mindful of the sanctity of otherness in *Nature*, finding his pleasure in “the primary forms, as the sky, the mountain, the tree, the animal, giv[ing] us a delight *in and for themselves*” (*CW* 1:12, Emerson’s emphasis). Corn may “serve” humanity as a commodity, but Emerson identifies with it: “I expand and live in the warm day like corn and melons” (*CW* 1:11, 35). It is in the midst of refulgent summers and embodied experience that “we become sensible [and capable] of . . . [the] sympathy” (*CW* 1:40) and empathy that drive ethical responses to ourselves and to others. A love of nature informs Emerson’s scientific knowledge and environmental ethic, shaping his philosophical views of change, integrity, and moral creativity; his localized views about gardens and orchards, lakes and mountains, technology and use; his walks with Thoreau and his children; and his twinned sense of responsibility and delight. Above all, as a lover of nature, Emerson wants to sustain the relation. Thus, he walks and writes.

BEING A WRITER OF NATURE

Writing as an Emersonian lover of nature is foundational to American nature writing. The lover's interest in nature is not partitioned into separate scientific, aesthetic, and ethical modes, but rather indivisible and coherent. To apply Margaret Randall's words from "Edge" to Emerson, he "face[d]" his "wholeness" vis-à-vis that of nature, registering and savoring the edge as the place and time of meeting. That is how Emerson came to write nature. It is how Thoreau took himself to the woods and why Muir "sallied forth to see what I might learn and enjoy" in a major snowstorm.¹⁹ Thoreau and Muir drew directly from Emerson's model of the lover of nature for nature writing. They are not only examples of Emerson's philosophical approach but also key interpreters and adaptors of it. Their development as writers, naturalists, and environmentalists owed much to their hikes and conversations with Emerson, though Muir's opportunity was limited to the aging Emerson's journey to California in 1871. They desired original, direct relations on nature's turf and terms rather than confining themselves to the map or laboratory, though Thoreau was a surveyor by trade and Muir studied geology, chemistry, and botany at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

Facing a storm in the Sierras with high winds felling trees "at the rate of one every two or three minutes," many hikers would take shelter, as Muir did initially during a December 1874 hike. But Muir then climbs a tall tree "to take the wind into my pulses." Perching at the wind-whipped top, he listens to "The profound bass of the naked branches and boles booming like waterfalls; the quick, tense vibrations of the pine-needles, now rising to a shrill, whistling hiss, now falling to a silky murmur; the rustling of laurel groves in the dells, and the keen metallic click of leaf on leaf—all heard in easy analysis when the attention was calmly bent." Eyes closed, he reads the fragrance of "local sources" with "traces of scents brought from afar," noting that "winds are advertisements of all they touch . . . telling their wanderings even by their scents alone." The "so-called ruin of the storm" is for Muir an invitation to engage in the "original relation" Emerson called for in *Nature*.²⁰

Ten years earlier, Thoreau published an account of a similarly immersive encounter and his own treetop excursion. *The Maine Woods* describes how he and his companions leave settlers and loggers behind and are "soon buried in the woods." On a solo hike, he, like Muir, takes to the trees, "scrambling on all fours over the tops of ancient black spruce-trees (*Abies nigra*)," making his "way over . . . not seeing any path through." Leaving his hiking companions behind and ascending Katahdin, he encounters the earth stripped to its foundational rocks: "The tops of mountains are," he writes, "unfinished parts of the globe." Maine is not the Maine "on the map" plotted by cartographers and surveyors; rather, the land defines itself, and Thoreau must know it not by "political limits" but by "natural" courses as how the bird flies and

how the water runs. Like Emerson suddenly finding his ego vanished in the woods and himself “the lover of uncontained and immortal beauty” (*CW* 1:10), Thoreau is thunderstruck by this encounter with “primeval, untamed, and forever untamable *Nature*, or whatever else men call it.” Echoing the nakedness and transparency Emerson described in *Nature* as requisite to such encounters, Thoreau urges “*Contact! Contact!*” with “the *solid* earth! The *actual* world!”²¹

The result of the nature lover’s encounter, as described by Emerson, Thoreau, and Muir, is not only exhilaration and enlightenment but also the synthesis of aesthetic, ethical, truth, and even market values that is definitional to nature writing. That synthesis requires empathy, imagination, and creativity to be folded into evaluations and expressions of truth. It circumvents what Emerson saw as science’s impoverished relation to nature and what twentieth-century environmentalist Aldo Leopold called a “strictly economic” relation to the land.²² Nature writing characteristically resists the tendency to separate either value assessment or value creation into separate disciplinary paths such as science or art. Emerson declared he would be a naturalist *and* a poet. Thus, nature writing functions as a portal between the distinctions we habitually draw between knowing and loving, between science and poetry, between “fixed facts” and “contingent values,” and between the physical world and the contrastingly inner imaginative, empathetic, and cognitive world of the human mind-heart. These divisions are provisionally convenient and useful, but they betray the “consanguinity” Emerson avowed between each and all (*CW* 1:38, 2:201) and deny what he saw as the “intimate interdependence of intellect and morals” and “the necessity of beauty under which the universe lies” (*CW* 6:115, 26).

As Robin Morgan observes, when disconnection becomes institutionalized we have “intellect severed from emotion. Thought separated from action. Science split from art. The earth itself divided; national borders. . . . Sex divorced from love. The material ruptured from the spiritual. . . . Vision dissociated from reality . . . [and] We are all . . . wounded” as a result. Morgan’s eye is on politics and terrorism, but she invokes nature as validation for “connectivity,” the corrective to separation, for the same reasons Emerson found philosophical and literary recourse in unity and (re)membering. Morgan describes connectivity as “witty and protean, like the dance of nature itself volatile . . . and dangerous to every imaginable status quo, because of its insistence on noticing. . . . Such a noticing involves both attentiveness and recognition, and is in fact a philosophical and activist technique for being in the world, as well as for changing the world.”²³ Her words evoke Emerson’s insistence on “*Whim*,” and his “objection to conforming” in “*Self-Reliance*” (*CW* 2:30, 31), his argument that there is “no enclosing wall” or fixture in “*Circles*” (*CW* 2:181), his poetic attentiveness to “each and all” and unconditional recognition of the rhodora deep in the

woods (*CW* 9:14, 79), and his practical awareness that “The way to mend the bad world, is to create the right world” (*CW* 6:119). Nature writing is born of care and attention and recognition, and it is bent on creating an ethical relation to the environment.

Like all portals, nature writing is neither here nor there but both and between. An airlock might be useful in making the transition, but remaining in the airlock, or on either side of it, denies the portal, and, as Morgan says, “we are all . . . wounded” thereby. For example, Eiseley, by profession an academic anthropologist and paleontologist, found himself “bitterly castigat-ed by those in my own field who resent any attempt to venture into the domain of literature.”²⁴ Similarly Emerson has not been welcomed into the domain of science, though he offers an informed philosophical scaffold for science. Eiseley and Emerson could easily hold forth in a room of scientists or a room of poets, but neither found many rooms where scientists and poets presented much “transitional surface” to each other (*CW* 4:32), let alone rooms where politicians and developers warmly welcomed nature writers. Emerson’s call for engaging in a receptive relation with the universe as a corrective to the “penny-wisdom” of non-empathetic science and the “un-poetic” pronouncements of savants sounded from outside the mainstream tide of progress, expansion, and development (*CW* 1:43, 39). Thoreau, and Muir even more so, were sidelined politically and scientifically as literary defenders of the wilderness and contested as impediments to the economically beneficial development of natural resources. The once howling wilderness of New England was being silenced to the point that Thoreau found himself compelled to speak for it. He wrote of bears and moose “being driven . . . from all sides by the settlements.” Muir wrote about the Sierras for the wide audience of *Scribner’s Magazine* to enlist their understanding and support for saving Yosemite and the Hetch Hetchy valley from similar encroachments. He founded the Sierra Club in 1892 because the encroachments had already occurred, and wrote of Shadow Lake in 1894, “The money-changers are in the temple.”²⁵ In August 1913, Congressman Halvor Steenerson (R-Minnesota) quoted that line to Congress as part of his argument against the bill sponsored by Congressman John Raker (D-California) that would grant San Francisco the right to construct a dam and reservoir in the Hetch Hetchy Valley.²⁶

Steenerson knew what he was up against: the prevailing tide of expansion and its rationalization via a skeptical, dismissive attitude toward nature writing as insufficiently scientific, written by lovers of nature who were incorrigibly impractical and sentimental in their assessments of nature’s value. To counter the reports cited by his opposition, Steenerson invoked Muir as a “naturalist,” not only with relevant and singular expertise but also with sentiment for the land. His preemptive defense of Muir’s sentiment (and that of women suffragists in Minnesota who also opposed the bill) directly chal-

lenged the dismissive attitudes held by the proponents of the bill, but it was unsuccessful.²⁷ The problem sentiment posed for the bill's supporters trumped all of Muir's direct knowledge of the ecosystem in question and his university-level science education. The bill passed, San Francisco got the water, and the repackaging of nature as a recreational adventure park began. The ordinary, daily intercourse with the environment described by Emerson, Thoreau, and Muir came to be entirely a privilege of private property ownership and vacation. The call to value nature beyond the economic value assigned it by the "money-changers" Muir accused would largely wait to be resumed until the second half of the twentieth century, and Emerson would resurface.

Emerson felt his most important tasks as a naturalist *and* a writer were to witness truth, goodness, and beauty as intrinsic values aligned in nature and also to recognize them as incipient and invitational, calling him into a creative and participatory role. He viewed nature as volatile and creative: in nature "there is no sleep, no pause, no preservation" (*CW* 2:188) for nature is not made, but making.²⁸ He also maintained that nature, animate and infused with intelligence, is continually expressing and constituting its values (and in part through our participation as "children" of nature). His vocabulary ranged from theistic to secular, sometimes in the same passage, to explain this idea: "The true doctrine of omnipresence is, that God re-appears with all his parts in every moss and cobweb. The value of the universe contrives to throw itself into every point. . . . Thus is the universe alive" (*CW* 2:60). The value itself is emergent and fluid: spinning out, transformed and constituted by each of many diverse and mortal beings, by each of many diverse and local actions.

Emerson took the improvisational, value-creating propensity of nature's "wild fertility" (*CW* 2:81) as a model for his own writing. While his lectures and published writing continually reference nature and many contain passages of nature writing, some of his best nature writing is scattered throughout the journals that could offer endless pages to an unconstrained writer. The genre of the private journal seems particularly suited to nature writing, turning a new leaf each day, renewing and enacting a commitment to noticing and recognizing with each entry, and always bearing the singular mark of the writer. In its continuity and variation, the private journal mirrors what Emerson saw as nature's trademark unity in variety. Many classics in the field, including *Walden*, Edward Abbey's *Desert Solitaire*, and Annie Dillard's *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*, either began as journals or are styled as such, and many journals such as Thoreau's and Eiseley's, though not intended to be published as works in themselves, have been posthumously published for their merit as nature writing. By its very nature, the personal journal can roam and nurture the "wild fertility" of both writer and reader. Reading Thoreau's journals, Eiseley was struck "that Thoreau's writing is like his own landscape—a vast expanse of weeds, brush, thickets, and just occasion-

ally a singing bird . . . as chaotic as the real world of nature and just as full of trivia, with here and there some remarkable observational nugget.”²⁹ Robert Richardson cites Emerson’s own description of his journals as “full of . . . all manner of rambling reveries, the poor drupes and berries I find in my basket after aimless rambles in woods and pastures” and notes these features are the point, like Thoreau’s sauntering and Whitman’s (extra)vagrancy. As Richardson observes, Emerson used journal writing “to preserve things just as they came to him,” and “this fidelity to the first blush of an idea or a perception makes Emerson’s journals true records of his actual days.”³⁰ It also makes reading his journals a rambling adventure in which at any point one might stumble onto a scene of incredible beauty such as “the most remarkable spectacle of Aurora Borealis . . . the whole landscape below covered with snow . . . crimsoned” in the red light (*JMN* 5:283) or the surprise of a setting sun’s “deposit of *still light*” in “a desert of space” (*JMN* 7:74), or come near to stepping on “the drollest mushroom—tall, stately, pretending, uprearing its vast dome” (*JMN* 7:80).

Writing all of this down affirms and values both noting and what is noted. It is also a form of engaging, of meeting the nonhuman at the edge of human and devising a language that can be, as Eiseley said, “the voice of things other than myself.”³¹ To be sure, writing “a word for nature” is audacious,³² even for one whose mean ego has vanished. One risks translation errors at every metaphor. The transparent eyeball has a strange vision just as, Wallis Wilde-Menozzi notes, “Translation is a strange vision.” But, like Emerson realizing “a better emotion coming over me” (*CW* 1:10), Wilde-Menzotti continues “there are ethics involved” in translation. Starting with words that recall Emerson’s, she argues “At his or her best, a translator is an egoless invisibility. . . . It [translation] involves empathy, so much empathy that one knows and feels lost when, if even for a flicker, one leaves the intent or the rhythm” of what one is translating. “You must furnish some color or shadow,” but keep to the path and pace of the original. Wilde-Menozzi’s description of translating as “like living in someone else’s life”³³ corroborates Emerson’s leaving “far behind all human relations” to live for a while with “water, air, light, carbon, lime & granite. . . . ‘Nature grows over me.’ Frogs pipe; waters far off tinkle; dry leaves hiss; grass bends and rustles; & I have died out of the human world” into “aqueous terraqueous . . . sympathy & existence” (*JMN* 5:496–97). Here Emerson bends human language to new shapes to record an experience as palpably transformative as being “ready to die out of nature, and be born again into this new yet unapproachable America I have found in the West” (*CW* 3:41).

Keeping a personal journal of rambles is a private evaluative practice with public ramifications even if it remains unpublished. Emerson’s quarrel with conformity was its abdication of personal responsibility. Writing what Eiseley calls “our own true notebook” is a critical component of constituting

what Emerson recognizes as “the perfect whole” in “Each and All” (*CW* 9:15). Eiseley, like Emerson, deemed keeping such a notebook obligatory and creative work. In a poem that appears in his journals with the title “Our Own True Notebook,” Eiseley rejects his first assumption that the value of our lifetimes “spent, / amidst leaves, litter, waterfalls and rills” must have been “listed in some book set down beyond the sky’s far reaches” written long before his time. Instead he has determined that “the purpose lives in us and that we fall / into an error if we do not keep / our own true notebook of the way we came, / how the sleet stung, or how a wandering bird / cried at the window.”³⁴ Whether published or not, the personal notebook of a naturalist constitutes a value system rooted in personal responsibility to what Emerson calls “the web of relation . . . shown in *habitat*” (*CW* 6:20). That relation is marked, and is sustained or harmed, by the values of the participants.

Creating value, for Emerson, turns out to be akin to sexual reproduction in that it takes more than one perspective for the diversity and possibility requisite to a sustainable, healthy system. He takes that insight as one of the key lessons to be learned from nature and to be practiced in nature writing. In Emerson’s estimation, value creation relies on relational, sensory experiences with nature. “Our dealing with sensible objects is a constant exercise in the necessary lessons of difference, of likeness, of order of, being and seeming” (*CW* 1:24), in short the things that signal and characterize relation. The exercise is constant because, as Emerson observes, “The world rolls: the circumstances vary, every hour” (*CW* 2:109). The changing contours and configurations of relation continually surprise us and apprise us of who and where we are *now*. Relation is ubiquitous across eons and expanses: “in all the multitude and range of spawning life, there is no unrelated creature” (*SL* 27). It extends to the inanimate as well. In “The Uses of Natural History,” his first lecture upon returning home from the Paris exhibits, Emerson calls attention to the “secret sympathy which connects man to all the animate and to all the inanimate beings around him” (*EL* 1:16). In “The Humanity of Science,” delivered three years later in 1836, he attributes “the great moments of scientific history” to “the perception of these relations” (*SL* 20). In *Nature*, he turns to “the fields and woods” for their suggestion of his relation to them, a relation which would remain hidden if he hid himself away indoors (*CW* 1:10). He experiences and figures the relation as personal in terms of kinship, consanguinity, and shared genes: “One can feel that we are brothers of the oak and of the grass, that the vegetable principle pervades the human nature also” (*SL* 29); he writes of nature as “my beautiful mother” (*CW* 1:36). Nature writing, like a collection of love letters, relates a valued and value-generating relationship. “Our own true notebook” that records the path we walked—through leaves and starlight and birdsong—is true to the extent that its language speaks for all the participants and the community. It is true to the extent that the writer is honest and open to the kin that lie

outside his or her ken and meets them with a love replete with the aesthetic and moral imagination. This is to envision and care about what Aldo Leopold called “the biotic community”³⁵ and about what Emerson called the “web of relation” in the essays “Love” and “Fate” (*CW* 2:108, 6:20). Nature writing is nature valued, writ in drupes and berries by a sincere Rambler.

VALUE CREATING: READING AND WRITING NATURE FAIRLY

Illumination is an old metaphor for describing the experience of suddenly seeing the value of something else, something other. Though any mystic worth his or her salt will tell you that in so doing, incidentally, one discovers the value of oneself, the experience is often associated with ecstasy and moral awakening to the plight and sanctity of others. In “Experience,” Emerson figures illumination as experiencing a magnificent landscape by “persisting to read” it (*CW* 3:41). As in the transparent eyeball passage, he deliberately goes walking and not stalking, this time into a new region. The illumination comes as the “region gives further sign of itself,” uncovering “its profound beauty and repose” as if it were a lover. Instead of a new eye, this time Emerson “feel[s] a new heart beating with the love of the new beauty.” All mean ego has vanished to the extent that it is unclear whether the heart is Emerson’s. It could as easily be the communal heart of “the sunbright Mecca of the desert,” the “future it opens,” or “this new yet unapproachable America.” Equally ambiguous is Emerson’s role as a reader of this region: “I do not make it,” he writes, and in the next sentence “I make” (*CW* 3:41). There are many such moments of beauty in Emerson’s journals. In some, such as the passage cited earlier in which he records seeing the aurora borealis, he is an appreciative, relatively passive observer. In others he is a creative participant, as, for example, when he discovered Walden Pond to be an “ice-harp” when he cast a stone out on a patch of ice. He “was so taken with the music” that he stopped for twenty minutes “throwing stones single or in handfuls on this crystal drum” (*JMN* 5:266). Always he is part and partner in relationship, in light of which aesthetic value is clearly visible.

Aesthetic valuing for Emerson is comprehensive and participatory, but it requires one to drop one’s verbal and conceptual armor, to bare oneself to well-lit scrutiny. Though “The eye is the best of artists” (*CW* 1:12), Emerson notes in *Nature*, “To speak truly, few adult persons can see nature” (*CW* 1:9). His example is the sun, and here he figures the “lover of nature” as the child.³⁶ Using the contrast romanticism draws between adult consciousness stuck in habits of thought and the child’s open, untutored consciousness, he writes, “Most persons do not see the sun. At least they have a very superficial seeing. The sun illuminates only the eye of the man, but shines into the eye and heart of the child” (*CW* 1:9). Adult seers, he suggests, refuse the sun

unrestrained admission. Because adults fail to experience being seen, they fail to see fully. Thus, they see only their names and uses for the sun: its utility to *me*—so useful I'd like to own and leverage it. They do not persist in reading the sun, but instead replay their own words, locked in the closed circle of a habitual limited literacy. Stopping there, they miss an opportunity for enlightenment. The paradox of missing enlightenment in sunlight is staggering and tragic in Emerson's view.

In the essay "Beauty," Emerson finds the origin of this blindness in "the pride of . . . nomenclature" (*CW* 6:150) that he finds everywhere in "textual science" (*CW* 10:413). Using the case of the ornithologist as an example Emerson argues, "The want of sympathy makes his record a dull dictionary. The result is a dead bird" (*CW* 6:150) and compromised ornithology. Emerson suggests the poet's figurative and vehicular language instead of literal and fixative nomenclature, going as far as to declare privately in his journal "All science must be penetrated by poetry. I do not wish to know that my shell is a strombus, or my moth a vanessa, but I wish to unite the shell & the moth to my being: to understand my own pleasure in them; to reach the secret of their charm for me" (*JMN* 16:251). But Emerson's argument ultimately is that all language is originally figurative and none is strictly literal: "every word was once a poem" (*CW* 3:11). In Emerson's view, this understanding of language is liberating, and it could contribute to humanizing science by recognizing aesthetic and ethical creativity (and responsibility) in the practice and expression of science.³⁷ However, non-literal language is problematic in scientific discourse. It authorizes uses of the imagination that science generally does not: metaphor, story, emotional attachment, personification, anthropomorphism. It leads to nature writing out of experience (however scientifically informed it may be) instead of "hard" or "real" science out of experiment by design. Richard Rorty offers a more explanatory version of Emerson's claim that "every word was once a poem." Rorty argues that literal and metaphorical meanings are not two distinct "sorts of meanings" belonging respectively to factual writing and literary writing, but rather "familiar and unfamiliar uses of noises and marks."³⁸ The familiar, literal description is what Emerson calls "retrospective"; it is "the history of" poetry, philosophy, religion, and science (*CW* 1:7). The metaphorical and unfamiliar are what Emerson calls for as the "new" works of imagination, insight, reverence, and discovery appropriate to the nature who "embosom[s] us . . . whose floods of life stream around and through us" (*CW* 1:7).

Emerson's appreciation of beauty was not facile. He understood that beauty is not just a pretty pleasantry but at the core of reality. He took beauty as an indicator that things were right (both true and good) and as a sign that the human eye and mind were accurately aligned with the eye and mind, the sight and intelligence, of the nonhuman. "The axis of vision," he urges in *Nature*, must coincide "with the axis of things"; otherwise, we see, and, even

worse, *make* “ruin” or “blank . . . when we look at nature” (*CW* 1:43). Julene Bair offers the same insights in writing about her native Kansas farmland and the damage caused by overusing the Ogallala aquifer that lies beneath it. Bair notes “Our sense of beauty is a survival instinct, telling us that a place can sustain us for generations to come.”³⁹ Beauty is a mark of sustainable agricultural practice and an ethical relation with the environment for Bair, and it is not just a perk of being a naturalist for Emerson. Within nature, Emerson writes, “not one ornament was added for ornament, but each is a sign of some better health, or more excellent action” (*CW* 6:154). Beauty for the romantics generally, and Emerson particularly, was vital to healthy physical being and the conduct of life. Environmental ethics owes much of its philosophical insight and persuasiveness to aesthetic awareness and capability as Emerson conceived them.

Beauty is not something Emerson hung on a wall; it is something to walk with, to breathe in, to hear in the wind. Even a cursory read of Emerson’s journal during his first trip to Italy makes clear his appreciation for art and architecture, but he measured their beauty by standards he discovered “in the wilderness” (*CW* 1:10), being convinced “[t]he standard of beauty is the entire circuit of natural forms,—the totality of nature” (*CW* 1:17). Thoreau seconded this argument, writing in *Walden* that “a taste for the beautiful is most cultivated out of doors,” and amplified it with a vociferous tirade against the “gewgaws” and “bawbles” displayed by so many in the name of beauty.⁴⁰ Aesthetic value is not in a collector’s curated hoard, though Emerson, like many of us, tried that tactic. The poem “Each and All” extends his disappointing boyhood experience of collecting shells from the beach (*JMN* 4:292) to describe bringing home a sparrow for the pleasure of his music and shells for their delicate beauty only to find the song failed to please without “the river and sky” and the shells “left their beauty on the shore” (*CW* 9:14, 15). Experience taught Emerson that beauty is self-possessed and situational, not an extractable commodity for collecting, owning, displaying. While even “sages” might erroneously assume the rhodora’s beauty “is wasted on the earth and sky,” Emerson essentially offers a *namaste*, a gesture of grateful acknowledgment and greeting, to the blossom—“beauty is its own excuse for Being”—and leaves it “To please the desert and the sluggish brook,” to grace the water with its fallen petals (*CW* 9:79). In “Works and Days” also he urges the ethics of acknowledgment and restraint near to silence: “You must hear the bird’s song without attempting to render it into nouns and verbs. Cannot we be a little abstemious and obedient? Cannot we let the morning be?” (*CW* 7:91).

Comprehending more than flowers and birdsong, Emerson’s sense of beauty is almost startlingly inclusive, sure as he is that when the eye/I lets down its guard, light literally would reveal the beauty of “even the corpse” (*CW* 1:13), something he put to the test in opening the coffins of his first wife

Ellen and his firstborn Waldo. Declaring in *Nature* “There is no object so foul that intense light will not make beautiful,” he describes a bleak winter rendered stunning by “the attentive eye” and the light “of a January sunset” (*CW* 1:12, 14, 13): “The leafless trees become spires of flame in the sunset, with the blue east for their background, and the stars of the dead calices of flowers, and every withered stem and stubble rimed with frost, contribute something to the mute music” (*CW* 1:14). But though beauty is thus comprehensive, he warns that it is “not ultimate,” “not alone a solid and satisfactory good . . . [but rather] a part and not as yet the last or highest expression of the final cause of Nature” (*CW* 1:17). In part, this remark reflects the essay’s structure, which is additive as well as transcendent, and “Beauty” is one of the earlier sections of *Nature*. But it also demonstrates his conviction that nothing is final.⁴¹

Emerson hails the “eternally reproductive” (*CW* 1:16). Beauty itself is poised to unfold, to generate more beauty. Emerson describes it as “the balance of expression, which means among other things, just ready to flow, or be metamorphosed into all other forms” (*JMN* 8:388). Furthermore, beauty moves the beholder to creative action. According to Emerson, “The beauty of nature reforms itself in the mind, and not for barren contemplation [or exhibition] but for new creation” (*CW* 1:16). These arguments turn on the agency and potency of beauty; it reforms itself, and it is essentially fluid and protean. Emerson turns to nature outdoors as the standard of beauty because nature, and consequently beauty, is “not fixed, but sliding” (*CW* 2:186). When he comes indoors to discuss beauty conceptually and abstractly, as in the essay “Beauty,” he admits to being at a loss. In “Beauty” Emerson attempts the apparent task of defining, or fixing, beauty, but the ensuing discussion of beautiful women and mythical figurations of beauty is awkward and unsatisfying in comparison to the descriptions of beauty that arise organically in his nature writing, which in turn arises organically throughout his journals, essays and poems. He soon distances himself from the expected definition of beauty that an essay by that title would seem to promise, writing that he is “warned by the ill fate of many philosophers, not to attempt a definition of Beauty” (*CW* 6:154). Instead, he shifts his attention from the aesthetic object (lovely) to the response of aesthetic imagination (love).

This shift is the basis for the connection Emerson makes between aesthetic and moral values. He concludes “Beauty” with the claim that “All high beauty has a moral element in it” (*CW* 6:163). By Emerson’s argument, aesthetic and ethical values emerge, and are further created, in tandem because beauty connects across individual difference (moving one to new and strange sympathies). Not only are we drawn to beauty, he observes, but also beauty has “a power to suggest relation to the whole world, and so lift the object out of a pitiful individuality” (*CW* 6:161–162). Beauty is and works by relating. It rescues us and all else from the ethical poverties of selfish individ-

uality “since all beauty points at identity” (*CW* 6:162) while at the same time, as Emerson argues in texts such as *Nature* and “Each and All,” existing necessarily in individuated diversity. Concurrent awareness of difference and identity is necessary for empathy to occur. For Emerson, aesthetic and moral imagination are whetted by our experience of unity and variety in nature. This connection of nature literacy with aesthetic and moral imagination pre-figures the “ecological imagination” that Steven Fesmire names as necessary for an ethical relation to the environment to emerge.⁴²

In Emerson’s view, an imagination-phobic approach to reading and writing nature misses huge swaths of other “I’s”/eyes and their chorus of communications and self-descriptions. It misses how other beings name themselves. Like Emerson and Fesmire, Rorty argues the necessity of imagination in moral responses, “the imaginative ability to see strange people as fellow sufferers.”⁴³ Emerson extends that to all of nature’s strange and upheaving variety. As Emerson, Fesmire, and Rorty all point out, that imaginative ability offers what Emerson calls “a point outside of our hodiernal circle” with respect to our language behavior (*CW* 2:185). It enlarges our capacity for environmental literacy. Descriptions of nature are, in fact, re-descriptions of things that are describing themselves. As Rorty warns, re-description is cruel and humiliating when it silences or erases self-description.⁴⁴ Environmental injustice, and indeed injustice of all sorts, relies on the power of re-description to write/speak over another. To silence the familiar re-description for a moment and instead listen, to do so again and again, is a condition of environmental ethics. It enables what Rorty, citing Jürgen Habermas, calls “domination-free communication.” It is under these terms that Thoreau “wish[ed] to speak a word for nature.”⁴⁵ Speaking for nature, translating the book of nature, is already an anthropomorphic gesture, amplified as Muir writes of the little plant people who minister to him in the high Sierra and Leopold says we must learn to think like a mountain.⁴⁶

Empathetic imagination invites anthropomorphism as a way to open ourselves to the biotic community. In so doing, it specifically disinvites anthropocentrism. Eiseley shared Emerson’s belief in the humanizing effects of anthropomorphizing as well as Emerson’s frustration with the science that rejects its value. Eiseley resented having to forge two separate paths as a writer, one as a professional scientist and another as a poetic nature writer.⁴⁷ He complained in his journal with words and ideas recognizably Emersonian:

Anthropomorphizing: the charge of my critics. My counter-charge: There is a sense in which when we cease to anthropomorphize, we cease to be men, for when we cease to have human contact with animals and deny them all relation to ourselves, we tend in the end to cease to anthropomorphize ourselves—to deny our own humanity. We repeat the old, old human trick of freezing the living world and with it ourselves.⁴⁸

Like Emerson's adult who is closed to sunlight that bathes him, we miss illumination; we miss seeing the value of the world and, correlatively, of ourselves. Emerson pursues this point vigorously in "The Uses of Natural History" when he names "the greatest [and least "discharged"] office of natural science" as being "to explain man to himself" (*EL* 1:23). Eiseley's advocacy of anthropomorphizing is a call for ecological imagination and for the figurative language that "transcends the boundaries of species," not to ignore difference but to define and refine it relationally. In his view imaginative anthropomorphizing is essential to being humane. Without it, one risks existential frostbite. Eiseley's sense of what is at stake in speaking a word for nature is clear from the note his editor found on a scrap of paper: "My mind is stuffed with stray teeth, mammoth bones. . . . I write because all these things haunt me and because, in that sense, I am the voice of things other than myself."⁴⁹ The lexicons of anthropomorphism and anthropocentrism have completely different moral valences. Anthropocentric language names "natural resources," "raw materials," "commodities," and "goods," instead of trees, soils, birds, mountains, and certainly instead of any self-descriptions those things might suggest or offer. The anthropocentric vocabulary leaves out the life of things. It invites a purely economic relation even among ourselves. We become "human resources" and, like commodities "go on the job market."

Eiseley closes his journal entry on anthropomorphizing saying "Modern anthropomorphizing consists in miming nature down to its ingredients, including ourselves."⁵⁰ Including ourselves as related, connected, analogous (to use Emerson's words) is an insight into the universe as fractal. Emerson saw fractal relations between systems everywhere, declaring in *Nature* "The laws of moral nature answer to those of matter as face to face in a glass" (*CW* 1:21). He took the ingredients down to the "primordial atoms" that he held to be "in search of justice" (*CW* 6:116). The "analogies" between world and word, matter and model, are for Emerson "constant, and pervade nature" (*CW* 1:19). The contour of one set of relations informs its neighboring configuration as waves arrange sand grains of different weights in like pattern. Emerson's declaration that "man . . . is placed in the centre of beings, and a ray of relation passes from every other being to him" is not boastful so much as it is an acknowledgement of the terms of our existence: "neither can man be understood without these objects, nor these objects without man" (*CW* 1:19). To invest or yield empathy and the love of beauty is to create, or recognize, aesthetic and ethical values as intrinsic to the fractal nature of the "uni" versing. In one sense investing and creating are active as opposed to yielding and recognizing. However, in the face of the one spinning itself into new and various, Emerson overthrows that distinction, and in surprisingly modern terms. Compare Emerson's response in "Experience" of beholding and making a new region (whether geographical, intellectual, or individual,

CW 3:41) with quantum physicists' suggestion of "genesis by observer-ship."⁵¹ Emerson's rejection of splitting recognizing aesthetic and ethical values "out there" from making art and doing good as self-expression is central to his understanding of us as value creators. Recognizing value is tantamount to creating it, and Emerson's reference to the "primordial atoms" is prescient: According to twentieth-century quantum mechanics, "our observations influence the universe at the most fundamental levels."⁵²

Environmental literacy, a term that arose after Emerson's and Eiseley's writing but something they practiced daily, entails observation, imagination, and value-creation. Emerson was not interested in fortifying an anthropocentric position, but rather in availing it as a means of passing through the borders of individual being to the connection, consanguinity, and diversity requisite to beauty and justice. Furthermore, to rephrase a passage from "Self-Reliance," only passing avails, not the having passed (*CW* 2:40). Eiseley "venture[d] to remark that men like Emerson and Thoreau, whose interior thoughts contained a place for muskrats, beanfields, and uninhabited peaks, were closer to an analysis of man's original nature, his soul, if you will, than much that has gone on in laboratories since," closer, because they submitted to ecoliteracy as a condition of self-literacy and to community as a requisite of individuality. Eiseley counted himself with Emerson and Thoreau among those who court the transparent-eyeball moments, who keep the "eye round, open, and as undomesticated as an owl's in a primeval forest."⁵³ Emerson's philosophical offering to environmental ethics is that only in thus fully presenting ourselves within the entire land community can we behold and make aesthetic and ethical value.

NOTES

1. Loren Eiseley, *The Lost Notebooks of Loren Eiseley*, edited by Kenneth Heuer (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002), 103–104.

2. John Keats, "Ode on a Grecian Urn," in *English Romantic Writers*, ed. David Perkins (San Diego, CA: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1967), 1186.

3. For example, Robert Frost's "Directive" looks back to a house, farm, and wagons on land now reverted to wild woods and repossessed by woodland animals and mourns that era of rural childhood, a loss for the individual and for the culture at large. Only broken bits of the family's things remain, but the original water source, a cold brook, continues to flow. Periodically the speaker of the poem steals back as to a sacred grove, to the brook and the broken goblet he has hidden nearby. He returns to drink the water, to drink in the lost wholeness of a life with the land that is no longer possible (in *Steeple Bush* [New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1947], 7–9).

4. Dr. Abraham J. Miller-Rushing, science coordinator at the Schoodic Education and Research Center at Acadia National Park in Maine and Professor Richard B. Primack of Boston University's Biology Department are compiling and analyzing Thoreau's and other naturalists' records to investigate the effects of climate change in the Concord area ("Tracking Climate Change with the Help of Henry David Thoreau: Notebooks of the 19th-century naturalist help show changes to the flowers and fauna of Concord, Massachusetts," June 13, 2013, accessed

April 8, 2017, <https://www.elsevier.com/connect/tracking-climate-change-with-the-help-of-henry-david-thoreau>.

5. Stanley Cavell, *Senses of Walden: An Expanded Edition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 148; Cavell, *This New Yet Unapproachable America: Lectures after Emerson after Wittgenstein* (Albuquerque, NM: Living Batch Press, 1989), 78.

6. Susan L. Field (Dunston), *The Romance of Desire: Emerson's Commitment to Incompletion* (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1997).

7. Eiseley, *The Lost Notebooks of Loren Eiseley*, 104, 210, 130.

8. Margaret Randall, *Into Another Time: Grand Canyon Reflections: Grand Canyon Reflections* (Albuquerque, NM: West End Press, 2004), 93.

9. The choice of *philo* facilitated foundational and persistent caveats related to gender and body. For example, in the *Symposium* (text at classics.mit.edu) Plato connects love to the Good but suggests the higher love is masculine and of the soul rather than the body, positions that Margaret Fuller, for one, questioned directly to Emerson.

10. The second of the Four Noble Truths of Buddhism identifies the cause of sorrow and suffering as “ignorant craving” (Heinrich Zimmer, *Philosophies of India* [Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1951], 467).

11. Wallis Wilde-Menozi, *Mother Tongue: An American Life in Italy* (New York: North Point Press, 1997), 181.

12. Even scientific research with clear environmentalist implications and commitments is expected to avoid the language of emotion. *The New York Times* publicized a recent study by scientists Gerardo Ceballos, Paul R. Ehrlich, and Rodolfo Dirzo, noting “the clear advocacy position the paper has taken, [as] a rarity in scientific literature” (“Biological annihilation via the ongoing sixth mass extinction signaled by vertebrate population losses and declines.” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 114.28 [July 11, 2017] published online before print July 10, 2017, accessed July 11, 2017, [pnas.org](https://www.pnas.org)). Ehrlich is quoted as responding to questions about the advocacy position, “Scientists don’t give up their responsibility as citizens to say what they think about the data that they’re gathering” (Tatiana Schlossberg, “Era of ‘Biological Annihilation’ Is Underway, Scientists Warn,” *New York Times*, July 11, 2017, accessed July 11, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/07/11/climate/mass-extinction-animal-species.html>).

13. Nina Baym, “Thoreau’s View of Science,” revised from original publication in the *Journal of the History of Ideas* 16 (1963): 2221–34, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Department of English, accessed November 24, 2016, <http://www.english.illinois.edu/people-/emeritus/baym/essays/thoreau.htm>, para. 6.

14. Laura Dassow Walls, *Emerson's Life in Science: The Culture of Truth* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003), 4. See also David M. Robinson, “Fields of Investigation: Emerson and Natural History,” in *American Literature and Science*, ed. Robert Scholnick (Lexington: UP of Kentucky 1992), 97–109 and William Rossi, “Emerson, Nature, and Natural Science,” in *A Historical Guide to Ralph Waldo Emerson*, ed. Joel Myerson (NY: Oxford UP, 2000), 101–150.

15. Mary Shelley’s Victor Frankenstein, Nathaniel Hawthorne’s Roger Chillingworth and Giacomo Rappaccini; William Wordsworth, “The Table’s Turned,” in *English Romantic Writers*, ed. David Perkins (San Diego, CA: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1967), 209; Walt Whitman’s “When I Heard the Learn’d Astronomer.”

16. “Empathy” comes from the German *Einfühlung* (in-feeling), introduced by nineteenth-century German philosopher Rudolf Lotze. *Einfühlung* was used in nineteenth-century aesthetics to describe “the act of ‘feeling into’ art and nature” (Amanda Hess, “Is ‘Empathy’ Really What the Nation Needs?” *The New York Times Magazine* November 29, 2016, accessed December 1, 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/29/magazine/is-empathy-really-what-the-nation-needs.html?mcubz=0>).

17. The sexual politics of the transparent eyeball and lover of nature imagery has been interpreted negatively. For example, Eric Cheyfitz frames it as “a complete domestication of the monstrous feminine beast” (*The Transparent: Sexual Politics in the Language of Emerson* [Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981], 58) and R. Jackson Wilson as “laced with hints of the oedipal family melodrama” with Emerson wanting to possess the female

nature for himself and appearing “At the climactic moment . . . to devour the mother, attaining possession and union” (“Emerson’s Nature: A Materialist Reading,” in *Subject to History: Ideology, Class, Gender*, ed. David Simpson [Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991], 136). However, as I have argued in *The Romance of Desire*, Emerson’s own description of the experience seems not to suggest sexual conquest so much as “a mutual exchange of fluids” (168, note 70), as did his actual behavior in relation to nature.

18. Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clement, *The Newly Born Woman*, trans. Betsy Wing (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 78.

19. John Muir, “The Humming-Bird of the California Water-falls,” *Scribners Monthly* 15.4 (February 1878): 545–554, accessed December 3, 2016, <http://scholarlycommons.pacific.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1065&context=jmb>, 546.

20. Muir, “A Wind Storm in the Forests of the Yuba,” *Scribners Monthly* 17.1 (November 1878): 55–59, accessed December 3, 2016, <http://scholarlycommons.pacific.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1069&context=jmb>, 57–59.

21. Henry David Thoreau, *The Maine Woods*, ed. Joseph J. Moldenhauer (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1972), 57–71.

22. Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac and Sketches Here and There*, special commemorative edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 203.

23. Robin Morgan, *The Demon Lover: The Roots of Terrorism* (New York: Washington Square Press, 2001), 51, 53.

24. Morgan, *The Demon Lover*, 53; Eiseley, *The Lost Notebooks*, 217.

25. Thoreau, *The Maine Woods*, 57; Muir, *The Mountains of California* (New York: The Century Co., 1894), 116.

26. Steenerson, U. S. Congress, *Congressional Record*, 63rd Cong., 1st sess., 1913, 3973.

27. *Congressional Record*, 3973–3974.

28. Emerson did not arrive at this view in intellectual isolation. Darwin’s *On the Origin of Species* was published late in 1859, and Emerson, on the lecture circuit, wrote to his wife Lidian in early February 1860 of his frustration in not having been able to “obtain Darwin’s book which I had depended on as a road book You must read it” (*L* 5:195). Years before Darwin published on evolution, Emerson spoke of the French botanist Jean Baptiste Lamarck’s ideas about monism and evolution: “Lamarck aims to find a monad of organic life which shall be common to every animal, & which becomes an animalcule, a poplar-worm, a mastiff, or a man, according to circumstances” (*EL* 2:24).

29. Eiseley, *The Lost Notebooks of Loren Eiseley*, 98.

30. qtd. Robert Richardson, *First We Read, Then We Write: Emerson on the Creative Process* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2009), 91, from Ralph Waldo Emerson and Thomas Carlyle, *The Correspondence of Emerson and Carlyle*, ed. Joseph Slater (New York: Columbia University Press, 1964), 272; Richardson, *First We Read, Then We Write*, 21.

31. Eiseley, *The Lost Notebooks of Loren Eiseley*, 80.

32. Henry David Thoreau, *Excursions*, ed. Joseph J. Moldenhauer (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007), 185.

33. Wilde-Menozzi, *Mother Tongue*, 39.

34. Eiseley, *The Lost Notebooks of Loren Eiseley*, 224–225.

35. Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac*, 204.

36. Thoreau also wrote of enlightenment in terms of the sun: “the sun shall . . . shine into our minds and hearts, and light up our whole lives with a great awakening light” (*Excursions*, 222). Audre Lorde begins her essay “Poetry Is Not a Luxury” with reference to light and value: “The quality of light by which we scrutinize our lives has direct bearing upon the product which we live, and upon the changes which we hope to bring about through those lives. It is within this light that we form those ideas by which we pursue our magic and make it realized. This is poetry as illumination” (*Sister Outsider: Essays & Speeches by Audre Lorde* [Freedom, CA: The Crossing Press, 1984], 36). For more on the unexpected confluence of Lorde and Emerson, see my article Susan Field (Dunston), “Emerson and Audre Lorde on Loss,” *American Transcendental Quarterly* 19.1 (March 2005): 5–22.

37. “Something is wanting to science until it has been humanized” (*CW* 4:7).

38. Richard Rorty, *Contingency, irony, and solidarity* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press: 1989), 17.
39. Julene Bair, *The Ogallala Road: A Story of Love, Family, and the Fight To Keep the Great Plains from Running Dry* (New York: Penguin Books, 2015), 4.
40. Henry David Thoreau, *Walden*, ed. J. Lyndon Shanley (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1971), 38.
41. Emerson is very clear that the power of knowledge lies in knowing it is never final. Immediately before turning to the problem of diminished beauty, he invokes the power of “morning knowledge” in *Nature* (*CW* 1:43). As Aldo Leopold has observed of the “land organism,” “Only those who know the most about it can appreciate how little we know about it,” how little has dawned on us (*Round River: From the Journals of Aldo Leopold*, ed. Luna B. Leopold [New York: Oxford University Press, 1993], 146).
42. Steven Fesmire, “Ecological Imagination,” *Environmental Ethics* 32.2 (Summer 2010): 183.
43. Rorty, *Contingency, irony, and solidarity*, xvi.
44. Rorty, *Contingency, irony, and solidarity*, 89–90.
45. Rorty, *Contingency, irony, and solidarity*, 66; Thoreau, *Excursions*, 185.
46. John Muir, *My First Summer in the Sierra* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1911), 23; Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac*, 129.
47. However, as Kenneth Heuer, who edited Eiseley’s private journals, observes, Eiseley’s literary voice “grew increasingly assertive, his vision increasingly clear. He became a master nature writer on the order of Henry David Thoreau” (Eiseley, *The Lost Notebooks of Loren Eiseley*, 79).
48. Eiseley, *The Lost Notebooks of Loren Eiseley*, 200.
49. Eiseley, *The Lost Notebooks of Loren Eiseley*, 80, 79–80.
50. Eiseley, *The Lost Notebooks of Loren Eiseley*, 200.
51. Tim Folger, “Does the Universe Exist if We’re Not Looking?” *Discover*, June 2002, 46.
52. Folger, “Does the Universe,” 44.
53. Eiseley, *The Lost Notebooks of Loren Eiseley*, 138, 138.

Chapter Three

Emerson and Contemporary Environmentalism

“Onward” is one of Emerson’s signature words, characteristic of nature’s creativity and therefore human creativity in his view. He very much wrote to the future in the belief that “each generation” writes “for the next succeeding” with abandon and enthusiasm, not imposition or authority (*CW* 1:56). For Emerson, creating is always onward, never final, and, to paraphrase what he writes about art, its “highest effect” is to make new creators (*CW* 2:216).¹ Just as “[i]n nature, every moment is new; the past is always swallowed and forgotten; the coming only is sacred,” so in human creative endeavors there is “[n]o truth so sublime but it may be trivial tomorrow in the light of new thoughts,” no value or “virtue which is final” (*CW* 1:189, 189, 187). All that is created is “initial” (*CW* 2:187), rightfully eclipsed by new circles of thought and being. This is why Emerson argues in “The American Scholar” the “right use” of all books is “to inspire,” not to instill (*CW* 1:56). So it is not surprising that Emerson unconditionally offered up his own work in whatever ways it could be useful to readers, encouraging them to build their own worlds and write their own books, that he advised readers “not [to] set the least value on what I do . . . I unsettle all things . . . I simply experiment” (*CW* 2:188).² Nor is it surprising that his “reverential sympathy for everything that was nature,”³ its web-like intricacy, and dynamic onwardness would resonate with so many subsequent formulations of environmental ethics. But, given that Emerson’s nature writing presents not so much abstract theory as the record of a relationship and that all of his writing largely predates environmental activism, the extent to which Emerson anticipated contemporary environmental philosophy and activism, three varieties of which that are not typically considered in relation to him I will consider here, is striking.

ECOFEMINISM

Emerson is not usually the writer contemporary feminists cite as foundational to feminism, though many feminists of his own day took him as an inspiration and supporter of their cause, including Margaret Fuller, Julia Ward Howe, Paulina Wright Davis, and Lucy Stone.⁴ Moreover, they found him relatively receptive and empathetic to women's perspective and experience. Armida Gilbert notes Margaret Fuller's "formative influence on his thinking on women's issues from the beginning of his public identification with the movement—indeed, from before the beginning of the movement."⁵ As Gilbert's comment suggests, Emerson's feminism, though ahead of the cultural curve, was nascent, quickened through conversation and vicarious experience. Philosophically, however, Emerson shared women's views about the operative conceptual structure behind racism and sexism and their vehement opposition to slavery and the disenfranchisement of women, noting publicly in 1855 at a Boston convention for women's rights that all of his "points would be sooner carried in the state, if women voted" (*LL* 2:26).⁶ He was an invited honorary member of the New England Women's Club from its inception in 1865.⁷ In his 1867 Phi Beta Kappa address at Harvard, he named "the new claim of woman to a political *status*" first in reference to the "ethical quality of the innovations urged or adopted" (*CW* 8:109). Upon addressing the New England Woman's Suffrage Association in May 1869, he was invited to serve as one of the Association's vice-presidents and accepted.⁸ In 1903, Caroline Hazard, president of Wellesley College, publically expressed "The affection and gratitude which I have—which all women must have—for the work which Mr. Emerson did for women" and named "his splendid message of the dignity of the person" as particularly empowering "to the young women of to-day."⁹ Writing quite recently of Emerson as an inspiration for creative writers, Christine Mary McGinley notes "As for the assault on our twenty-first century ears, hearing the word 'man' used [by Emerson] so exclusively—as a woman, I must say this: Emerson said two important things about women as far as I'm concerned. And one of them said it all for me—'Women see better than men.' He believed that all genius has a feminine element within it."¹⁰ It is worth noting that throughout her groundbreaking environmentalist work *Silent Spring*, Rachael Carson used "man" just as Emerson (and Eiseley) did. And although the figuring of nature as female has a long and troubling history (signaled well by Annette Kolodny's title *The Lay of the Land*), when Emerson figured nature as female, he did so emphasizing nature as free and protean, intelligent and moral, and himself her pliant lover or nurtured child.

The confluence of Emerson's views on nature's sanctity and women's rights shares significant ground with contemporary ecofeminism. Like ecofeminists, he too linked all forms of oppression and exploitation as based on

what Audre Lorde called “that cruel refusal to connect” and the “total denial of the creative function of difference in our lives.” Lorde’s primary focus is the injustice perpetrated by racism and sexism, but she speaks to existential urgency as well: “our future survival is predicated upon our ability to relate within equality.”¹¹ In general, as Karen Warren notes, ecofeminism holds that “sexism is intimately connected in conceptualization and in practice to racism, classism, and naturism.” Patronizing, condescending, and exploitative attitudes and behaviors link “all forms of oppression” including abuses of the environment.¹² What is remarkable about Emerson is that he, like ecofeminists, recognized the sanctity and relational selfhood of each and all in the land community, he freely abandoned himself to the runaway creativity of nature and its “series of surprises” (*CW* 2:189), and he honored the parity of the feminine *because* of its association with nature, despite the ubiquity of nineteenth-century America’s institutional sexism and its explosion of industrialization and westward expansion and exploitation.

Emerson’s ethics in general share ground with the feminist ethics of care and embeddedness in relation.¹³ Like Emerson did, “[r]adical ecofeminist philosophy embraces intuition, an ethic of caring, and weblike human/nature relationships.”¹⁴ Karen Warren’s argument that ethical theory is a “process which will change over time” as circumstances and participants do is in keeping with Emerson’s declaration that the “same law of eternal procession” obtains in nature, circumstances, people, and “all that we call the virtues” (*CW* 2:186). Warren is describing an ethical relation that Emerson would have called “original,” alive to the moment and proximity rather than searching retrospectively for the dry bones of moral principles. As Emerson included “each and all” as vital to the web, so Warren describes feminist environmental ethics as “structurally pluralistic” and “rejects the assumption that there is ‘one voice’ in terms of which ethical values, beliefs, attitudes, and conduct can be assessed.” She describes the generalizations of feminist ethics as “themselves a pattern of voices within which the different voices emerging out of concrete and alternative descriptions of ethical situations have meaning.”¹⁵ Those voices add dimensions of truth and of aesthetic and moral value. One does not have to look hard within that pattern to find the voice of Emerson’s rhodora (or Muir’s blustery wind).

Key to discerning and responding within that pattern of voices are listening, empathy, attachment, love, and ecological imagination—in short being “moved by strange sympathies,” feeling “the centipede in me—cayman, carp, eagle, & fox” (*JMN* 4:200). Such emotions and proximities are why Emerson expressed the same concerns about “the wintry light of the understanding” (*CW* 1:44) that Val Plumwood does about rationalism’s proclivity for “(masculine) universalization, moral abstraction, and disconnection.”¹⁶ Emerson vowed as a naturalist to be a “lover of nature” with the same sense of epiphany that Lorde describes in realizing the possibility of “an emotional

sentence.”¹⁷ Emerson held that nature is intrinsically moral, its very atoms tending to justice; ecofeminism is sharply critical of any claim, even as formulated in the name of deep ecology, that humans are morally superior to the nonhuman. Emerson would not in his own writing have crafted the language Warren uses in stating her aim “to reconceive environmental ethics in ways that are feminist” or that Merchant uses in urging an “ecological revolution” based on “new gender relations between women and men and between humans and nature,” but he would likely have been able to follow the evolution of thought and language from his to theirs.¹⁸

Nineteenth- and early twentieth-century women naturalists also had much in common with Emerson’s conception of empathetic natural science. Many of these women also anticipated ecofeminism, often out of personal experience and more sharply than Emerson. Indeed, caring and worrying about the effects of failing to have an ethical relation to the land were central to nineteenth-century women’s nature writing while many of their male counterparts were focused on westward exploration and expansion. In 1850, Susan Fenimore Cooper published *Rural Hours*, her account of Cooperstown, New York and the rapid environmental change wrought by settlers, to such acclaim that it stayed in print for forty years.¹⁹ Cooper’s rigorous observations and warnings are framed in the context of a loving, caring relation with the land in which we are listeners and learners. Emerson had written of nature as his “beautiful mother” whom he loved unreservedly and in whose woods he found solace and enlightenment (*CW* 1:36, 9–10). In a similar vein, Cooper writes of her “gratitude and admiration” for the forest, where, “within the bosom of the woods the mind readily lays aside its daily littleness, and opens to higher thoughts.”²⁰ Cooper’s environmental ethic and conservationist warnings predate Thoreau’s in *Walden* by four years and anticipate Muir’s concerns about profiteering. Cooper warned of those “whose chief object in life is to make money,” who rashly turn “timber into bank-notes with all possible speed . . . without any attempt at cultivation, or any endeavor to foster new wood.”²¹ Botanist Katharine Dooris Sharp (1846–1935) studied nature with Emersonian warmth, delight, and passion. In her view, a woman will be a botanist “because within her is the heaven-imparted kinship with Nature which is the open sesame to that kingdom of delight.” An active suffragist, Sharp added “But she will do it under difficulties.” As editor Marcia Myers Bonta notes, Sharp’s contributions to the field of plant ecology, though “substantial,” were “largely unrecognized” as scientific. Sharp was primarily familiar to readers of her day as a literary writer, but she brought “at least 447 specimens to the State Herbarium of Ohio” and wrote pointedly about the need to conserve habitat for native species. In her *Summer in a Bog* (1913) she hoped “that women may be imbued with a love of science for its own sake, and pursue it in spite of obstacles” as well as a call for conservation in “each city, town or college” as “a duty to posterity.”²²

Ornithologist Margaret Morse Nice (1883–1974), who enjoyed greater acceptance from the scientific community (though at the expense of her desire to be a popular writer) described an awakening much like Emerson’s transparent eyeball experience, writing “Under the great elms and cottonwoods” along the bank of the Canadian River, “the glory of nature possessed me.” As with Sharp, Nice’s scientific investigations led her to conservation work.²³

Many contemporary women nature writers also reflect an Emersonian stance toward nature and bring it to intersect fruitfully with contemporary feminist philosophy and ecofeminism while calling additional attention to aesthetic value by virtue of their chosen genre. As Ann Woodlief, English professor at Virginia Commonwealth University and coordinator of the American Transcendentalism Web, has written, “the developing genre of nature writing” has “its roots firmly in a world-view adapted from Emerson’s *Nature*” and takes Thoreau’s *Walden*, so deeply intertwined with Emerson’s friendship and mentoring and so much a part of daily life at the Emerson household, as a literary model.²⁴ The work of a host of women nature writers including Mary Austin, Barbara Kingsolver, Kathleen Dean Moore, Leslie Marmon Silko, Annie Dillard, Sharman Apt Russell, and Terry Tempest Williams, attests to the importance to environmental ethics of that influence, of writing out of what Martha Nussbaum has described as “love’s knowledge”²⁵ rather than rationalistic analysis, of narrative and literary writing rather than analytic and theoretical writing. They frequently connect their personal experience as women and mothers to their observations of their environments, forming their own true notebooks (to use Eiseley’s term²⁶) that shed light simultaneously on their environment, themselves, and the consanguineous relationship they share. They use ecological imagination to create texts that twin metaphorical and scientific language and join aesthetics and ethics to say a word for nature, for themselves.

Barbara Kingsolver, for example, directly compares her motivation for moving to the desert to Thoreau’s in moving to Walden Pond: “I went, like Thoreau, ‘to live deliberately.’”²⁷ She mentions Emerson and his wife casually and familiarly as if her readers would have no need for further identification or context.²⁸ I cannot imagine Emerson christening a hermit crab “Buster,” as Kingsolver does in “High Tide in Tucson,”²⁹ but he would recognize his own experience of “strange sympathies” (*JMN* 4:200) with, for example, a lobster (*JMN* 4:25) as discussed in chapter 1, in her discovery and exploration of the connection she shares with Buster through their personal experiences of relocation. Imaginatively and empathetically considering Buster’s surprise at his sudden and involuntary move from shore to desert adds context and value to her reflection on her own move and on migration and change generally. Like Emerson, Kingsolver defines Buster’s and her own difference relationally; they occupy different points on a continuum that signals and affords their connection. Together they evince what Emerson

called the “Unity in Variety” (*CW* 1:27). As Eiseley would have it, she transcends the boundary of her species³⁰ as the means to the ethics and aesthetics of her essay. Like Emerson, Kingsolver understands the mutual value imparted between science and literature, between the literal and the figurative. Her novel *Flight Behavior*, which explores the effects of climate change on the migration patterns of monarch butterflies through untrained eyes of a fictional woman to show that the butterflies’ story is interwoven with ours, is richly informed by Kingsolver’s own graduate education in ecology and evolutionary biology. Like Emerson, she abandons pride in nomenclature for what she describes by two different phrases in the same sentence: “that pointed endurance” of life and “the poetry of hope.” The final words of Kingsolver’s essay are “High tide! Time to move out into the glorious debris. Time to take this life for what it is.”³¹ They echo Emerson’s call at the end of “Circles” for enthusiastic wading into new circles and his sureness that abandon is “the way of life” (*CW* 2:190).

SYSTEMS THINKING

Systems thinking is another contemporary theoretical approach that, when applied to environmental ethics, shares significant philosophical ground with Emerson, especially on two points: first, in considering webs of relation as elemental and second, in viewing change as evolving through interconnected relations rather than as determined through linear chains of events. Contemporary systems thinking has arisen in contexts we typically do not think of as part of Emerson’s world—for example, organizational management, computing, complex adaptive systems theory, and mathematical modeling—but as leading systems thinker Donella Meadows noted, for all its connection to computing and equations, “modern systems theory . . . traffics in truths known at some level by everyone.”³² Emerson’s fluency with them shaped his ideas about nature and his relation to it. Two scientists who have brought systems thinking to bear on environmental ethics are Meadows, a biophysicist at MIT and later Dartmouth, author of *Thinking in Systems*, lead author of the pioneering *Limits to Growth*, and founder in 1996 of the Donella Meadows Institute, now the Academy for Systems Change, and University of California physicist Fritjov Capra, author of *The Web of Life* and *The Hidden Connections*, co-author of *The Systems View of Life: A Unifying Vision*, and cofounder in 1995 of the Center for Ecoliteracy, now housed in the David Brower Center, the Bay area “home for the environmental movement.”³³ The language of their book titles would immediately resonate for Emerson: thinking, web, hidden connections, unifying vision.

The main propositions of systems thinking are:

- We live within systems of myriad creative interconnections that define their structures as well as offer leverage points for restructuring.
- Life is not a fixed state, but a dynamic system in which transience and mortality mark what Emerson calls its onward way. This premise is central to environmental ethics and ecology.
- Living systems are self-organizing, and, like all systems, they “produce their own pattern of behavior over time” such that a system’s responses to external forces are “characteristic of itself.”³⁴
- Living systems learn, producing their own patterns of learning (and learned) behavior: “you can never direct a living system; you can only disturb it.” As a self-organizing thing, “a living system,” whether a single cell or an entire ecosystem, “specifies its structural changes” and “*which disturbances from the environment trigger them.*”³⁵ Capra argues such specifying is a cognitive act, a claim which is supported by, for example, recent research in the emerging field of plant neurobiology.³⁶
- Causality is nonlinear (often modeled as a loop or circle) and reciprocal. Meadows overtly stops her readers to “THINK ABOUT THIS: If A causes B, is it possible that B also causes A?”³⁷ An implication of this understanding of causality is that cause and effect are, as Emerson writes, “two sides of one fact” (*CW* 2:186), much as the inside and the outside of a Möbius strip are a single continuous strip.
- It is possible and morally incumbent to “be creative and courageous about system redesign” when a system exhibits undesirable or self-destructive behaviors, because we are in the system, not external to it³⁸; hence Emerson’s combination of hope and effort.

Meadows’s language and sentiment are strikingly similar to Emerson’s. The Academy for Systems Change (formerly the Donella Meadows Institute) is dedicated to “designing systems for a sustainable and *desirable* world” using “whole-system analysis, combined with *careful listening, truth telling, and visioning*” (emphasis mine).³⁹ Her introductory note to the posthumously published *Thinking in Systems* explains her interdisciplinary approach, drawing on the work of scientists, “corporate executives, and . . . ancient wisdom, from Native Americans to the Sufis,” to describe systems thinking as something which “transcends disciplines and cultures, and when it is done right, . . . overarches history as well.” Emerson pursued a similar interdisciplinarity, also sharing an interest in Sufi and other ancient wisdom as well as science. Like Emerson who was interested in being useful and building the right world, Meadows is “interested in analysis only when I can see how it helps solve real problems,” particularly social and environmental problems. Like Emerson, who cautioned that his essay was only “a fragment” (*CW* 3:47), Meadows warns that her book, “like all books, is biased and incomplete.”⁴⁰ Her views are consonant with Emerson’s descriptions of nature as a

set of relations and our own consanguinity with it, of life as a series of surprises, values as emergent, and the appropriateness of being a lover of nature to environmental ethics. Emerson's aesthetic and moral valuing of each and all and his self-restraint find similar, though possibly more urgent, expression in Meadows's advocacy of biodiversity as essential: "All species fit together in an intricate, interdependent, self-sustaining whole."⁴¹ This "whole" is an open-ended, self-organizing, resilient system bound to surprise us, perhaps to surprise itself. Meadows likens living in this whole, this system, to kayaking rough waters or gardening: it "require[s] one to stay wide awake, play close attention, participate flat out, and respond to feedback."⁴²

Given the complexity of the biotic community (which necessarily includes and relies on nonliving members as well), Meadows, like Emerson, considers western preferences for "science, logic, and reductionism over intuition and holism" to be overly simplistic and falsely emboldening. While Meadows freely acknowledges the benefits of these methodologies to western society, she also names the downside: conceiving of cause and effect in compartmentalized, simplistically chronological terms that cater to our wish to "assume that the cause of a problem is 'out there,'" rather than in the systems we inhabit and co-constitute. She reasons this compartmentalized cause and effect reasoning makes it easy "to shift responsibility away from ourselves, and to look for the control knob . . . the technical fix that will make a problem go away." Meadows rejects this conceptually and morally convenient approach for the same reasons Emerson did. First, it abdicates our moral and aesthetic responsibility for the conduct of our "consentaneous and far-related" lives (*CW* 6:20). Second, it denies the way "fate slides into freedom, and freedom into fate" (*CW* 6:20). Third, as Meadows writes, the problems "most rooted in the internal structure of complex systems, the real messes, have refused to go away" no matter how sophisticated our cause and effect explanatory chains are. She offers a long, sad list of examples starting with "hunger, poverty, environmental degradation." Emerson's list included slavery, disenfranchisement, materialism, and religious corruption. These are problems that do not readily submit to locating blame on external agents; they are, as Meadows says, "undesirable behaviors characteristic of the system structures that produce them." Sounding a lot like Emerson saying "The way to mend the wrong world is to create the right one," Meadows points out that systems problems "will yield only as we reclaim our intuition, stop casting blame, see the system as the source of its own problems, and find the courage and wisdom to *restructure* it."⁴³

Emerson frequently used figurative language to describe systems, and Meadows often turns to pictures. Indeed literal language is too linear and discursive to intuit systems. That is why Emerson and a host of nature writers employ ecological imagination and metaphor. Meadows's pictures or diagrams identify "stocks" (for example, "wood in living trees") and the actions

that sustain or deplete them, using circular arrows to indicate the feedback loops that accurately show the mutuality of what we typically separate into cause and effect. She names the feedback loop as “the basic operating unit of a system.” Though it registers as a noun, at least in English, a feedback loop is a process of information exchange enabled by connective threads, the same process described by Emerson as “transitions from one to the other” along a “thread of two strands” (*CW* 4:32, 31). A feedback loop keeps things in touch with each other. “On planet Earth there are . . . no ultimate boundaries,” Meadows writes: “Everything physical comes from somewhere, everything goes somewhere, everything keeps moving”⁴⁴ in the nature Emerson describes as “intricate, overlapped, interweaved, and endless,” a “knot so well tied, that nobody was ever cunning enough to find the two ends” (*CW* 6:20). Meadows’s diagrams highlight processes, not components, much in the same way that Emerson spends “Circles” on reform, change, evolution, germination, bursting over, springing forth, unsettling, seeking, abandoning, drawing, not on virtues or facts or granite towers.

Interestingly, Meadows shares Emerson’s awareness of the paradox of enlightenment: requisite to comprehensive insight is the understanding that we might not be seeing everything. It is not an enlightenment that sticks, but that requires repeating over and over again. Meadows aptly quotes environmentalist Wendell Berry’s take on this paradox: “the acquisition of knowledge always involves the revelation of ignorance—almost *is* the revelation of ignorance.” Berry continues, “Our knowledge of the world instructs us first of all that the world is greater than our knowledge of it. To those who rejoice in the abundance and intricacy of Creation, this is a source of joy, as it is to those who rejoice in freedom. . . . To those . . . who hope for knowledge equal to (capable of controlling) the world, it is a source of unremitting defeat and bewilderment.”⁴⁵ Emerson and Meadows clearly fall into the former camp. Words are insightful insofar as they take flight just as the reader casts a cognitive net, insofar as they facilitate the reader casting off the net. Diagrams are insightful insofar as they intrinsically convey their limit, that “all system diagrams are simplifications of the real world.”⁴⁶ Thus, Emerson closes “Circles” by unsettling all its conclusions—“Do not set the least value on what I do” (*CW* 2:188)—and Meadows advocates “transcending paradigms,” by which she means getting “at a gut level the paradigm that there are paradigms, and to see that that itself is a paradigm, and to regard that whole realization as devastatingly funny to let . . . go into non-knowing, into what the Buddhists call enlightenment.”⁴⁷ There is something extremely satisfying about this paradox, something that answers to the demands of truth seeking, aesthetic desire, and moral reform. It accepts our enlightenment for what it is: fragmentary, evanescent, and lubricious to recall Emerson’s words (*CW* 3:29). It frees us to let go of the knowledge we so often jealously guard and defend so that we can, as Kingsolver resolves, “move out” and “take this

life for what it is.”⁴⁸ The paradox speaks the possibility inherent in ambiguity, uncertainty, and contingency.

Fritjov Capra names “the systems view of life” as an enlightened paradigm which itself embraces the transcending of paradigms. For Capra, systems thinking is the “conceptual watershed” that provides the “unified conceptual framework” we need “to build ecologically sustainable communities” that “do not interfere with nature’s inherent ability to sustain life.” He explicitly links the mathematically grounded “theory of living systems,” sometimes called “complexity theory” or “nonlinear dynamics,” with deep ecology.⁴⁹ Like Meadows, Capra’s language and conceptual approach are confluent with Emerson’s. Capra writes similarly of the “sense of oneness with the world” and, like Emerson, terms it a scientifically valid sense “fully borne out by the new scientific conception of life.”⁵⁰ Capra, too, holds that “nothing is meaningful in itself.”⁵¹ He takes Emerson’s observation that things are finer in composition a step further, defining composition as essential to existence: “No individual organism can exist in isolation.”⁵² Capra’s description of the single living cell in relation to its environment maps to Emerson’s “original relation” (*CW* 1:7) and being open to the influence of what is nominally one’s “environment.” The two characterizations also share the same understanding of boundary as permeable. Emerson hails the possibilities afforded by permeability; for Capra life is impossible without permeability. As Capra explains, when we consider the cell as a system, we note the boundary, or membrane, that “discriminates between the system—the ‘self,’ as it were—and its environment.” But the salient feature of that boundary is its permeability; that is the “essential condition for cellular life.”⁵³

For Emerson, all boundaries are sites of exchange, influence, influx, and purification: nominal and conceptual boundaries, species boundaries, and even the boundary between animate and inanimate. Thus, boundaries enable healthy, healing creativity. Capra’s view and language also highlight this creativity: “living networks [e.g., cells, humans, ecosystems] continually create, or re-create, themselves by transforming or replacing their components.” Permeable boundaries are the means by which this creativity occurs. Capra’s description of systems as “organizationally closed [that is, self-organized] . . . but materially and energetically open” is what Emerson means when he describes himself as “expanding in the warm sun like corn and melons” (*CW* 1:35). Furthermore, a system transcends itself, creating new forms of species or new forms of aesthetic and moral value, because it can be disturbed, can register influx, and can create new structures and behaviors in response. Capra and others call this capacity “emergence.” Emerson would recognize his own thoughts in Capra’s statement that “creativity—the generation of new forms—is a key property of all living systems.” This generative influx and response is not adequately represented by cause and effect analysis (in existential terms) or in stimulus and response analysis (in cognitive

terms). Capra speaks not of cause and effect but of “symbiogenesis.”⁵⁴ Influx and a system’s response to it are not ontologically or chronologically distinct; they arise mutually, interdependently, simultaneously. As Emerson said, they arise intimately in original relation.

Citing the Santiago Theory of Cognition developed in the 1970s by Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela, Capra connects emergence and sybiogenesis to learning and the development of mind and consciousness. Maturana’s and Varela’s foundational assertion was that “living systems are cognitive systems.” They connected cognition to survival, noting that a cognitive system acts “with relevance to the maintenance of itself.” They defined living as a cognitive process, whether or not the living system has a nervous system.⁵⁵ With similar evolutionary enthusiasm to Emerson’s in *Nature*, Capra suggests that cognition begets cognition in increasingly complex forms, gradually resulting in the emergence of consciousness. Significantly, Capra recognizes that though linking cognizing and living may be new to science, “it is one of the deepest and most archaic intuitions of humanity.”⁵⁶ It is the intuition that drives Emerson’s sympathies, Eiseley’s anthropomorphizing, Muir’s ear for the wind’s knowledge, Kingsolver’s respect for Buster the crab’s ability to calibrate himself to high tide in the desert, and Indigenous environmental philosophy and science. The understanding that the process of living is the process of (re)cognizing, for all living systems and at all system levels, is the seat of human aesthetic and moral value creation. Meadows’s advice at the end of her “primer” on systems thinking thus includes recommendations to “listen to the wisdom of the system” and “stay a learner” as well as to “expand the boundary of caring.”⁵⁷

INDIGENOUS ENVIRONMENTAL PHILOSOPHY

On October 29, 1887, the Seattle *Sunday Star* published a piece by Henry Smith titled “Scraps from a Diary—Chief Seattle.” In it, Smith, a white settler, reported his experience of more than thirty years earlier having heard Seattle (an anglicized version of Seal’t’h) respond to United States encroachment on Salish lands. Smith included a full “translation” from his notes of Seal’t’h’s words. As Smith recalled it, Chief Seattle had compared Indian and Euro-American traditions and said, “There is little in common between us.”⁵⁸ Even those words themselves are not held in common, the accuracy of Smith’s memory and the authenticity of his translation being questionable at best and a more recent representation of the words much in vogue among environmentalists in the 1970s having been exposed as a fiction misattributed to Chief Seattle.⁵⁹ But the reality of having little in common remains, as Apache philosopher Viola Cordova attests to in her book *How It Is*, edited and published by colleagues after her death in 2002. As noted in the bio-

graphical introduction to the book, Cordova “was one of the first, if not the first, American Indians to earn a PhD in philosophy in the United States.” As a Jicarilla Apache/Hispanic woman well-schooled in classical western philosophy, Cordova asserts with authority that “the Native American and the Euro-American see the world from two different perspectives” with little in common between their world views or languages. It is difficult to bridge such a wide divide. The “Euroman” worldview described by Cordova rides roughshod with its philosophical commitment to singularity in human life and its sociopolitical commitments to eradicating difference.⁶⁰ From an Indigenous perspective, it is critical to protect the knowledge essential to survival. When Leslie Marmon Silko published her novel *Ceremony*, some members of her Laguna pueblo community criticized her for sharing tribal stories with outsiders. According to Paula Gunn Allen, of Laguna Pueblo and professor of Native American and ethnic studies at the University of California Berkeley, the poem-story embedded in Silko’s novel “is a clan story and is not to be told outside the clan.” Perplexed that Silko chose to include the story, Allen writes, “she must have been told what I was, that we don’t tell these things outside.”⁶¹ Silko, however, apparently found such secrecy counterproductive in an age of shared existential threats and has explained that she had “some kind of responsibility to make sure” the body of stories she had heard from her family and clan “wasn’t just put away or put aside,” but offered more widely as a way of better understanding and repairing our relation to the land.⁶² Similarly, Cordova pursues “bridges” that fruitfully connect difference while nourishing it, and, as Linda Hogan writes, she goes “beyond Euro-Western philosophy into the heart of the indigenous knowledge system and philosophy, as far as the limits of English will allow.”⁶³

That English has limits seems not to have occurred to “Euroman” who, in so many voices and times, speaks and writes over Indigenous languages, hearing only his own English. As Silko’s novel depicts, Indian identity became “entangled with European names” as “all of creation suddenly had two names: an Indian name and a white name,” including the people.⁶⁴ Collective terms such as “Native American,” “American Indian,” and “Indigenous people” do not arise as self-descriptions. As Cordova writes, “there were no such things as ‘Indians’ on the American continents” before Europeans arrived (or, for that matter, such a thing as “America”). Instead, “there were as many as five hundred different cultural groups with their own languages, practices, and geographical groundings.” Even if similarities existed, she notes, they had nothing to do with the views European colonists held about Indians. But we are here and now, and, as Cordova writes, “If, at the beginning of the colonization of the Americas, there was no such thing as the singular notion of . . . ‘Indians,’ there is now such a thing,” and there was when Emerson was writing. Furthermore, she argues, regardless of whether a body of Indigenous beliefs was widely shared before colonization, there are now numerous “con-

ceptual commonalities shared by Native Americans,” many of which are relevant to contemporary environmental ethics, because “Native Americans find . . . they have more in common with other indigenous groups regardless of their obvious differences, than they do with the conceptual framework of the European colonizer.”⁶⁵ These are the entangled circumstances and terms in which Indigenous philosophers now write, and in which non-Natives have ever only been able to write, about “Native American environmental philosophy.” The hope is to write bridges rather than to settle on one “side.”

As a result of the history Cordova explains, contemporary environmental ethics exhibits confluences, some relatively smooth and others troubled, between Indigenous philosophy and Emerson’s. In terms of metaphysics, both Indigenous and Emersonian environmental philosophy view “each and all” as intrinsically sacred, as having agency, and as interconnected in a web of relations that is dynamic and emergent and in which humans are participants with responsibilities and choices of consequence. Because the interconnected web is dynamic and emergent, and because individuals are always some place and at some time in that system and not everywhere and always, the individual’s knowledge is always partial. People make mistakes. Both Indigenous philosophy and Emerson’s include cautionary tales about the dangers of trying to know too much or trying to act without sufficient knowledge. However, both also acknowledge the naturalness and importance of human curiosity. Given chronic epistemic limitations and curiosity, it is therefore appropriate for us to behave toward the land and all in it with “the caution and attention that constitute respect,” as Silko writes,⁶⁶ with “entire humility,” as Emerson writes (*CW* 1:39). For both Emersonian and Indigenous philosophy, ethical behavior is that which respects each and all, nurtures the intricate connections, and sustains creation. No hierarchies, no exceptions.

There are also disingenuous and forced convergences of Indigenous and Emersonian philosophies in contemporary environmental ethics such as the invocation by environmentalists in the 1970s of the fictional representation of Chief Seattle’s 1854 oration penned by University of Texas English professor Ted Perry. Perry framed his text as a letter to President Pierce for a film about ecology and environmentalism titled *Home*. Perry’s text addresses white worries and guilt, shifting the defeatist mood from those wounded and displaced by colonizers to the descendants of the colonizers and their intrinsic cultural flaws. It conflates Emersonian and presumed Indigenous ideas about the relationship of humans and the land into a “web of life” trope to address twentieth-century belated concerns about the environment:

We are part of the earth and it is part of us . . . the rivers are our brothers. . . . We know that the white man does not understand our ways. . . . His appetite will devour the earth and leave behind only a desert [but] All things are connected like the blood which unites one family. . . . Man did not weave the

web of life; he is merely a strand in it. Whatever he does to the web, he does to himself. . . . The whites too shall pass; perhaps sooner than all other tribes. Contaminate your bed, and you will one night suffocate in your own waste.⁶⁷

Over Perry's protests, the movie's producer reportedly opted not to credit Perry on the grounds that "the words sounded 'more authentic' presented as Chief Seattle's," and, as religious studies professor William Young notes, "Perry's Chief Seattle" became "an eloquent spokesperson for the philosophy of the environmental movement emerging in the 1970s," with Perry's text "circulat[ing] in the environmental community as the authentic words of the Duwamish chief" for some twenty years.⁶⁸ Understandably, the sentiments appealed to environmental activists, but the reign of the text as a rallying cry was deeply flawed, ethically and historically.

Emerson was painfully aware of the gap between philosophical ideals and the cultural realities of unjust hierarchies and harmful exceptionalism. He passionately protested the Cherokee removal in his widely published and well-informed letter of 1838 to President van Buren and included the treatment of Indians in a list of ethically charged political questions (*CW* 1:173). But there is little evidence of direct Indigenous philosophical influence on Emerson, or on Transcendentalism generally despite Thoreau's interest in Indigenous culture and history.⁶⁹ Rather, Emerson came to insights similar to those in Indigenous philosophies primarily through his own experience of his environs and, secondarily, as a thoughtful critic (and beneficiary and sometimes admirer) of the science and industrial developments of his era as well as other philosophical traditions such as Hinduism. His reading of Hindu texts, for example, confirmed his own philosophical monism. The congruity with Indigenous American philosophy is only apparent much later in Cordova's words: "The American Indian is a *monist*."⁷⁰ Emerson's few references to Indigenous value systems include a patronizing comparison of Goethe to an Indian in the "wilderness, a piece of pure nature . . . virtuous as a briar-rose" (*CW* 3:142). It is a romantic conflation like Perry's and contributes to the tradition that enabled Perry's. However, Emerson was also, for example, markedly aware of the dual names of places and of the losses incurred when the reverence implicit in Indigenous place names was lost in English names (*CW* 1:189). The confluence to be found between Emerson and Indigenous philosophy in America today is the product of the entangled identities and lexicons Silko and Cordova refer to, of shifting cultural values and exchanges. It offers an opening for discussion *now* rather than represents a deep and extensive conversation between the two during Emerson's lifetime. With that purpose and caveat in mind, the language and approaches of Emerson and Indigenous writers exhibit some significant similarities with respect to environmental ethics.

In his 1933 book *Land of the Spotted Eagle*, Luther Standing Bear described the Lakota as “a true naturalist—a lover of Nature,” coming “literally to love the soil” itself as “a mothering power,” words remarkably like Emerson’s in *Nature*. But Standing Bear further defined “a lover of Nature” as having “the Indian point of view” and observed with disapproval “few white men approach nature in the Indian manner.” His observation is borne out by the difference between Emerson’s delight in the “suggestion of an occult relation” between himself and nature (*CW* 1:10) and Standing Bear’s sense of obvious “kinship with all creatures” as “a real and active principle.” Standing Bear recalls that certain relationships between Lakotas and animals were “so close . . . that in true brotherhood they spoke a common tongue” whereas Emerson describes mutual but mute acknowledgment between himself and the woodland plants: “They nod to me and I to them” (*CW* 1:10). But like Eiseley after Emerson, Standing Bear describes this degree of empathy and community as “humanizing” and instilling “reverence for all life.” He takes the same ethics lesson Emerson did from the concept of original relation and his transparent eyeball experience: “it made a place for all things in the scheme of existence with equal importance to all . . . for all were of one blood” and “filled with the [same] essence.” Standing Bear’s description of the world as “a library” whose “books were the stones, leaves, grass, brooks, and the birds and animals” joins Emerson’s as a conceptual basis for ecoliteracy, for reading what nature writes in its own terms and by its own means. As for Emerson, for Standing Bear beauty is part and particle of truth, and it is “only the student of nature” who learns “to feel beauty.” Muir would have confirmed the wisdom Standing Bear avers in “never rail[ing] at the storms, the furious winds, and the biting frosts and snows.”⁷¹ In some ways, however, Standing Bear’s life history and lessons learned mirror the textual history of Chief Seattle’s oration and bear the mark of the forceful American army incursions into Sioux country during 1850s, the decade before his birth, and the government policies that followed. Standing Bear experienced firsthand the mix of opportunity and erasure characteristic of assimilation policies, graduating from the Carlisle Indian School in Pennsylvania, joining Buffalo Bill’s Wild West Show, and later starring in Hollywood’s early western movies.⁷² Standing Bear’s *Land of the Spotted Eagle* described, and even prescribed, Sioux wisdom tradition to a white American readership.

Gregory Cajete’s *Native Science* is a more recent kindred text. Cajete, who is Tewa from Santa Clara Pueblo and Director of Native American Studies at the University of New Mexico, positions Native environmental knowledge as a vital component of the scientific understanding and “ecophilosophy” needed to address the environmental degradation and contamination that threatens our health and survival today.⁷³ Leroy Little Bear’s forward to Cajete’s book lays out the features of an Indigenous paradigm in which Emerson would recognize his own thoughts as well as encounter new

expressions, a paradigm “comprised of and includ[ing] ideas of constant motion and flux, existence consisting of energy waves, interrelationships, all things being animate, space/place, renewal, and all things being imbued with spirit.”⁷⁴ Cajete describes Native science as “a metaphor” for an entire set of “processes of perceiving, thinking, acting, and ‘coming to know’ that have evolved through human experience with the natural world.” Much as Emerson characterized humans as analogists (*CW* 1:19) who by nature discover and create correspondences and connections, Cajete cites “the metaphoric mind” with which we “story” the world as inherently human.⁷⁵ His discussion of our “thinking in metaphors” corroborates Steven Fesmire’s assertion that our “metaphors for ecosystems . . . do some of our environmental thinking for us.”⁷⁶ Emerson turned to nature as the first and instructional symbolic language just as Cajete looks to nature as “the greatest source of metaphor” and respects its “gifts of information.” Cajete’s incorporation of “ecological empathy” as foundational to scientific understanding parallels Emerson’s, though Cajete, citing Edward O. Wilson’s concept of biophilia, grounds empathy even more firmly in our physical relationality than Emerson did.⁷⁷ Like Emerson, Cajete finds creativity at the heart of the universe, both an “ordering principle and process” as well as instructive to human creativity. He frames science as a procreative activity, “born of a lived and storied participation with the natural landscape.”⁷⁸

The environmental ethics of scientific creativity, indeed of all human creativity, is a central concern for Cajete and Emerson. For both writers, as for Eiseley, the ethics and aesthetics of human endeavor hinge on empathy that transcends the boundary of species. That empathy can provide a counterweight to our proclivity for anthropocentrism and its damaging consequences for the environment. Cajete and Emerson, like Meadows and Capra, claim a certain centrality for humans in that human actions propagate, like ripples in a pond or cracks in granite. Cajete sees humanity as central and rejects proprietary anthropocentrism in his powerful statement of who and what we are: “We are the Earth becoming conscious of itself . . . the Earth’s most highly developed sense organ.”⁷⁹ The single apostrophe challenges the notion that the earth belongs to us. Emerson likewise boldly claims centrality and rejects anthropocentrism: we are “placed in the centre of beings” but we cannot be understood, or understand ourselves, apart from all else (*CW* 1:19). Take the human out of relation and the essence of humanity is lost along with the possibility of humaneness. As for Emerson, for Cajete the centrality and consciousness of humans bespeak human agency rather than entitlement or superiority and thus render us accountable—morally, aesthetically, and truthfully. A truth without moral and aesthetic values has gaps. It is a half-sight in which we attribute, as Emerson says, “the ruin or the blank” we see to nature rather than to the insufficient light of our understanding (*CW* 1:43). We are too often likely to fill in the gaps with a selfish and shortsighted anthropocen-

tricism that eventually poisons the entire system, literally. We end up propagating the ruin or blank we see. Cajete's explanation of the physical analog to the perceptual error is similar to Rachel Carson's warnings about pesticides and herbicides in *Silent Spring*. He writes, "as toxins enter the food chain . . . all parts . . . become more toxic. The clouds become toxic, the rain becomes toxic, the corn becomes toxic, and even our tears and our bodies become toxic."⁸⁰ We are central the way a point on a circle is central: the rest of the circle extends from and returns to that point. We are the focal point of what Emerson calls "the ray of relation . . . from every other being"; however, it is not self-aggrandizing centrism that logically or ethically follows but opening ourselves to the "influence" of "all natural objects" (*CW* 1:19, 9). Systems thinking advocates a similar view. According to Meadows, we are "part of an interdependent biological community" and "All species fit together in an intricate, interdependent, self-sustaining whole." We belong to the system and participate in it, but "we can't control systems or figure them out."⁸¹ That is why, as Cajete observes, "humans have no special authority over the natural world"⁸² and why Emerson knows "the world I converse with in the city and in the farms, is not the world I think" and has "not found that much was gained by manipular attempts to realize the world of thought" (*CW* 3:48).

As Cajete notes, "the immature Faustian individual is experiencing final self-indulgence. The era of the 'ecological individual' is by necessity dawning."⁸³ Cajete is writing out of the same deep respect and affinity for western science and the same critique of its blind spots as Emerson did. With words that recall Emerson's, Cajete describes western science as presenting "a kind of 'freeze-dried' description of the natural." "Western science *needs* Native science," according to Cajete, for the moral and aesthetic valuing that happens when science is defined and applied within the cultural context of kinship with the earth,⁸⁴ that is, with the attention, empathy, and respect with which we would want our own bodies to be treated. Like Emerson's scientific philosophy, "Native scientific philosophy reflects an inclusive and moral universe," Cajete writes. Within this philosophical framework, "no body of knowledge exists for its own sake outside the moral framework of understanding," he emphasizes.⁸⁵ For example, Cajete explains that Native science understands plants as "an integral part of the earth's system of respiration" and "essential partners in the evolution of life on Earth." A culture that ruthlessly exploits the partnership for its own benefit is ultimately not as sustainable (or as valuable) as one that also yields itself in the relationship, that realizes "plants have their won destinies separate from humans," their own "volition."⁸⁶ Consider the difference, and consequent differences, between Cajete's culture that holds that "animals have always served as humanity's mentors in coming to know the nature of the world" and the one Emerson criticized for its "patient naturalists . . . [who] freeze their subjects under

the wintry light of the understanding” (*CW* 1:44), the one that Wordsworth accused of murdering to dissect.⁸⁷

Another consonance between Emerson and Indigenous traditions is the spirituality folded into their scientific and philosophical approaches. Talk of spirituality makes the self-proclaimed secular world of contemporary business, research, technology, and public education uneasy. Emerson’s oversoul is difficult to characterize or quantify in the language and numbers economy of secular transactions. As a unity expressed in variety, it is a form of metaphor, an apparent contradiction melded into an arresting form that reveals its resolution. In addition, the personal nature of an original relation to the universe as described by Emerson seems antithetical to the consensus, conformity, and countability (not necessarily accountability) required in socio-economic systems. But for both Emerson and Indigenous philosophy, there is no sensible talking about nature without also speaking of spirit. For Emerson, “visible nature” inherently has “a spiritual and moral side” (*CW* 1:23). As Silko explains, “the old-time people believe that all things, even rocks and water, have spirit and being.” Being, spirit, and word are aspects of the same reality: the natural universe. Emerson understands nature as “the symbol of spirit,” (*CW* 1:17), and, as Cajete emphatically writes, “[f]or Indigenous people around the world, *SPIRIT IS REAL*. It is physically expressed in everything that exists in the world.” Thus, Emerson describes “prayer” as “a study of truth” in *Nature* (*CW* 1:44), and Cajete explains “the focus of Native traditions on prayer to bring about and perpetuate life” as intrinsic to “Native science [which] applies the principle that we humans bring our reality into being.”⁸⁸

Emerson’s use of “symbol,” Cajete’s reference to expression, and their practices of prayer are representative instances of the many times each urges the value (and value-creating capacity) of metaphor—poetry, story—in coming to know the universe as a web of relations and developing an environmental ethic. Metaphoric language weaves a web that stands in relation to reality without reducing reality to words. Cajete explains that Indigenous story-science helps people remember to behave in environmentally ethical ways by reminding people that “they and the place” they live are “equal partners in life.”⁸⁹ Ecofeminist Karen Warren recounts the story a Sioux elder told her. He sent his young son to live with grandparents so that he could learn traditional ways. Warren repeats the story as an ecological lesson:

As I heard the story, the boy was taught, ‘to shoot your four-legged brother in his hind area, slowing it down but not killing it. Then, take the four-legged’s head in your hands, and look into his eyes. The eyes are where all the suffering is. Look into your brother’s eyes and feel his pain. Then, take your knife and cut the four-legged under his chin, here, on his neck, so that he dies quickly.

And as you do, ask your brother, the four-legged for forgiveness. . . . Offer also a prayer of thanks to your four-legged kin for offering his body to you just now, when you need food to eat and clothing to wear. And promise the four-legged that you will put yourself back into the earth when you die, to become nourishment for the earth. . . . It is appropriate that you should offer this blessing and, in due time, reciprocate in turn with your body in this way.⁹⁰

But, as one of Silko's characters in *Ceremony* points out, "people forget . . . people misbehave."⁹¹ Coming to know is an iterative process. Minding the world requires the re-minding that stories do.

Paula Gunn Allen writes of the "All Spirit" as a mirror reflection of "the natural state of existence" which is "whole," and not divided or fractured. "Thus healing chants and ceremonies," she writes, "emphasize restoration of wholeness."⁹² Division and fracture are the illnesses Emerson sees in his world as well: "the world lacks unity, and lies broken and in heaps" (*CW* 1:43). The upshot of humans being the analogists Emerson says we are is not simply that we can make metaphors, but that we *are* metaphors of the world, that the world is a metaphor of us. "The reason why the world lacks unity," Emerson writes, is "because man is disunited with himself" (*CW* 1:43). Silko's character Tayo is such a man. His "memories were tangled," his heritage mixed and marked by orphanhood, his world fractured by war and racism, the land he returns to cracked by drought.⁹³ According to Allen, Tayo needs "a story that will take the entire situation into account." The only cure for such disharmony and disease is to thread the multiple strands, precisely Emerson's image of (re)generative art in "Plato" (*CW* 4:31).⁹⁴ The inclusive story, like the art of life, is ecologically oriented, and it requires ecoliteracy. It is a chapter from the text of Cajete's *Native Science*, which "is about creating the inner sensibilities of humans, or the inner ear, which hears the subtle voice of nature,"⁹⁵ and from Emerson's "book of Nature," which turns its "gigantic pages,—leaf after leaf" (*CW* 6:8). The dominant response to contaminated nests in Emerson's day was to move west. The mode of moving was most often shortsighted, wasteful, and greedy. Emerson worried about it even in such blatant salutes to progress as "The Young American" out of convictions that are consonant with Indigenous philosophy: that all are needed by each one, that relation is everywhere and always and reciprocal, that the fate of the system is the fate (and doing) of those whose lives and times play out within it. In Silko's words, "the people and the land are inseparable."⁹⁶

PHILOSOPHY AS ACTIVISM

Emerson's turn to "the method of nature" is at the heart of the unity across a wide variety of activist movements that link social and environmental justice

and sustainability (*CW* 1:123). Ecofeminism, systems thinking, Indigenous environmental philosophy, and Emerson's orientation of philosophy to nature are of a piece, philosophically and practically, to a significant degree. All of them are inclusive, synthesizing approaches that begin and end with reference to nature as a self-organizing life system in which we originate, on which we depend, and to which we are as morally and aesthetically obliged as we are existentially indebted. Emersonian and Indigenous philosophies turn explicitly to nature for confirmation of its intrinsic moral order and for instructive examples of systems and behaviors that sustain and evolve that order. However, neither is a quite a form of moral naturalism; both explicitly take the visible world as inspirited. Taking the reverent turn to nature as axiomatic, whether or not nature is a species or expression of divine spirit, ecofeminism links gender ethics to environmental ethics, and Meadows and Capra link systems thinking to ecosystems. Emerson, ecofeminism, systems thinking, and Indigenous philosophy all aim at taking everything and everyone into account, at each and all being accountable. However, attempting to finish such accounting is at odds with sustaining possibility; thus, each embraces transcending itself via surprise, free play, and improvisation. Furthermore, no strictly literal language or analytic description can make such an account. Thus, conscious of the limitations inherent in word choice and of our problematic tendency to equate word with world, each embraces metaphor, narrative, and revision without erasure. In this way the aesthetic of one's expressed and lived relation to nature becomes equally important to the enjoyment and preservation of natural beauty.

Philosophy is doubly representational: a matter of saying a word for a thought for the world. The relevant question is the accuracy, aesthetic quality, and ethicality of the word. Emerson, ecofeminism, systems thinking, and Indigenous philosophy all only accept as effective philosophy that which they read in nature, and they insist on reading that is accurate, creative, and unstintingly mutual. Initially, this sounds like a correspondence theory of truth, but it vastly complicates the notion of correspondence, locating truth as equally, and materially, "out there" and within oneself, the without and the within being consanguine and viscerally connected. But distributed and material truth is not the same thing as identity. If it were, variety and difference would disappear, either merged or mirrored. There would no system or composition, and nothing to figure out: the question of ethics would never surface. Truth is everywhere in the universe, but people are not lobsters or centipedes. Thus, Emerson speaks of truth in terms of coincidence (occupying the same space) and alignment (position) rather than correspondence or identity (cognitions), as when he attributes mistakes and blanks to the times when our "axis of vision is not coincident with the axis of things" (*CW* 1:43) and when he describes the true naturalist as one "whose inward and outward senses are . . . truly adjusted to each other" (*CW* 1:9). Aligning and adjusting

are ongoing tasks in a world of “incessant movement and progression,” and the stakes are not only epistemological but also ethical (*CW* 2:188). Theories of truth are often interested in *determining* accuracy as foundational (and like this sentence trade largely in nouns and adjectives). But, to borrow from the title of Stanley Cavell’s essay on Emerson’s “Experience,” Emerson is interested in *finding* truth, beauty, and goodness equally—inseparably—as *found-ing*, say founding a more just nation that no longer trades in slavery, that tolerates “no sale of indulgences, no massacre of heretics, no female slaves, no disfranchisement of woman, no stigma on race” (*CW* 10: 460; verbs in their present participle form to express continuous, ongoing action). Getting to truth, like Cajete’s “coming to know,” is not only a matter of the right words for Emerson, but also of right practice and action.⁹⁷

Philosophy without practice is, as Emerson writes, a self-absorbed game of “fineries or pedantries” (*CW* 3:34). If a philosophy is to be helpful, that is, if it is part of the progressive reality of nature, it wants “muscular activity” (*CW* 3:34). Like contemporary environmental activists do, Emerson yoked theory and philosophy to reformist practice in all aspects of all lives. As his list of what we might find in a society indicates, for Emerson, injustice anywhere is blight everywhere: “Weal does not exist for one, with the woe of any other” (*CW* 10:449). In pulling his convictions and lectures about social and religious reform together to be published in 1860 as *The Conduct of Life*, he sought answers to the “practical question of the conduct of life” (*CW* 6:1). *The Conduct of Life* keeps practical reform in sight, even—perhaps especially—in the essay “Worship” where Emerson urges effective action: “task . . . performance. . . . You must do your work” (*CW* 6:127). Among the social ills Emerson skewered in *The Conduct of Life* were American “superficialness,” “slave-holding and slave-trading religions,” and “the immense material[istic] activity” of the times (*CW* 6:2, 110, 111). Thought and imagination are crucial—much of the injustice we settle for as natural and inevitable is a set of ideas and practices “not yet passed under the fire of thought,” but “The way to mend the bad world, is to create the right world” (*CW* 6:17, 119). The only philosophy, or thinking, worth considering is that which is practical, creative, and generous.

The beginning of thinking is seeing and being struck by *what is* as opposed to *what we think* is the case. This is not to suggest that *what is* is absolute, only that it is different from what we think or assume it to be, that it is an expression, perception, or experience from a different perspective. That kind of seeing entails also being seen and understanding what it is that others see when they look at you. It is not observational and detached but conversational and empathetic, intimate and disconcerting. At every turn, thinking is a form of caring about what is different from oneself, about what Emerson called the not-me. As feminist philosopher Nel Noddings observes, “caring is always characterized by a move away from self.” “At bottom,” she contin-

ues, “all caring involves engrossment” in the nature, needs, and wellbeing of the one cared for.⁹⁸ In Emerson’s terms, to care for nature (including human nature and one’s own nature) is a move away from “mean egotism” (*CW* 1:9, 10).

One of Emerson’s key contributions to contemporary environmental ethics and activism is his leveraging of caring toward a more complete, humane, and empathetic science in speaking an enlightened word for nature, a word that sheds the light of scientific knowledge and lightens the heavy presence of injustice. The ethical answers to the practical and chronic question raised in *The Conduct of Life*—“How shall I live” in a just and ethical manner?”—are to be found in the scientific appreciation of nature’s unified web of difference, that is, the “Beautiful Necessity, which secures that all is made of one piece; that plaintiff and defendant, friend and enemy, animal and planet, food and eater, are of one kind” (*CW* 6:1, 26). When Emerson argues for “religious revolutions” he wants ones that will return us to a nature-given “science of ethics” (*CW* 10:459). It is the physicality of the universe that pressures us morally: “The weight of the Universe is pressed down on the shoulders of each moral agent to hold him to his task” (*CW* 6:127). “The primordial atoms” (*CW* 6:116) that so interested the physicist Capra in his landmark *The Tao of Physics* are to Emerson “prefigured and predetermined to moral issues, are in search of justice” (*CW* 6:116).⁹⁹ Though Emerson himself invokes the Christian God as having delegated “his divinity to every particle” (*CW* 6:118), he openly anticipates and endorses the nontheistic and materialist models of morality that characterize much contemporary environmentalist ethics and activism, declaring “’Tis indifferent whether you say, All is matter, or, All is Spirit, and ’tis plain, there is a tendency in the times to an identity-philosophy. Once, we were timorous at allowing any dignity to matter” but “if there be but one substance or reality, and that is body . . . then I have no objection to transfer to body all my wonder and allegiance” (*LL* 2:97–98).

The common ground shared by Emerson and contemporary environmentalisms is also inhabited and enriched by differences. While Emerson’s linkage between environmental health and social justice is nascent, ecofeminism and environmental systems thinking explicitly link environmental exploitation to social injustice. Meadows, for example, lists social justice as one of “Four Not-So-Easy Things You Can Do To Save the Planet” and explains “We know that we will never have peace or environmental balance or pride in our collective selves while anyone still lives in poverty.”¹⁰⁰ While Emerson, contemporary ecofeminists, and systems theorists work out of a tradition that has split eco- and human systems philosophically, technologically, and socially, Indigenous philosophy begins without any such separation between eco- and human systems and carries that undivided model forward to contemporary environmental crises.

Another important difference is in the direction of logic. Emerson and systems thinking tend to universalize before moving to particulars that substantiate, while ecofeminism and Indigenous environmental philosophy speak from concrete difference, moving provisionally, warily, toward universal common ground. Emerson moves from the composition to each and all, from unity to variety. In similar fashion, systems theorists use abstract mathematical equations and diagramming to understand particular effects, processes, and individuals. However, ecofeminists and Indigenous environmental activists use historical and personal experience to understand the processes that inflict the same exploitative and abusive practices on the land and on specific human communities. For example, the unity statement issued by the activist group Women and Life on Earth, formed in 1979 after the Three Mile Island nuclear plant accident, cites the “connections between the exploitation and brutalization of the earth and her people and the physical, economic, and psychological violence that women face every day” and embraces a vision based on “a growing understanding and appreciation of racial, sexual, and ecological diversity and an end of militarism.” Underscoring the group’s practical intentions, the unity statement notes that the principles of “interdependence, self-reliance and other basic ecological principles . . . are not abstractions. They are conditions for our survival.”¹⁰¹ Similarly, Indigenous environmental activism references a history of invasion, resettling, and colonization and focuses on survival. For example, in a conversation about an article Silko was writing, her aunt pointed out that the question of what a Reagan presidency means “is different for us Indians than it is for other Americans.” The history Auntie Kie recites to Silko starkly quantifies that difference: “On the day the pilgrims washed up on the East Coast shore, the tribal people of this continent had 1,905,000,000 acres of land. By 1871 the Indians had 140 million acres left. And today, we have ninety-two million acres, forty million of which are in Alaska. That’s about 5 percent of what we started with.”¹⁰² When the fraction of that five percent that is the Laguna Pueblo land where Silko was raised includes things like the Jackpile-Paguate uranium mine, environmental ethics is deeply personal and political.

The Jackpile-Paguate mine was for many years the largest open pit uranium mine in the world. It operated from 1953 until 1982, and at its peak fourteen hours a day, seven days a week, ultimately removing four hundred million tons of earth and about fourteen million tons of ore. The United States Environmental Protection Agency reported sampling and site inspecting in 2010 that corroborated years of water data documenting “elevated levels of isotopic uranium in surface water and ground water across the site.”¹⁰³ The mine was listed on the EPA’s national priorities list in 2013, qualifying it for cleanup financed by the federal Superfund program.¹⁰⁴ After considering various alternatives, including a functionally anti-reclamation plan called the “No Action Alternative” which would have left the site “envi-

ronmentally unsuitable for any productive land use except for mining,” the Bureau of Land Management’s final environmental impact report on the site, completed in 1986, proposed to “approve a reclamation plan” which would aim to “restore the minesite to productive land use (primarily livestock grazing), reduce radiological and physical hazards, blend the visual characteristics of the minesite with the surrounding lands, and provide short-term employment for the Pueblo of Laguna.”¹⁰⁵ The report includes a transcript of comments made at a Laguna Public Hearing in the fall of 1985.

The hearing was chaired by John Rampton, administrative law judge with the Department of the Interior, and panel members included the team leader of the Environmental Impact Statement Mike Pool, area environmental protection specialist Bill Allen, and EIS technical coordinator John Andrews.¹⁰⁶ The first speakers represented Anaconda Minerals, the company that operated the mine, followed by legal counsel to Laguna Pueblo and numerous tribal members, many of whom had worked at the mine. Also represented were the people of the Seboyeta Land Grant. Laguna Pueblo Governor Chester T. Fernando chronicled a long history of impacts and unfulfilled moral and technological obligations on the part of the Atlantic Richfield Company and its subsidiary Anaconda Minerals Company, ending with the rueful observation that after years during which “Anaconda . . . has submitted six reclamation plans and withdrawn five of them,” “I think we are leaning towards a messy divorce.” Victor Sarracino described extensive environmental, cultural, and health problems left in the wake of the mine and was critical that “absolutely nothing has been done to this date in any way of reclamation in what has been known as restricted area.” Wil Lente, a tribal member from Paguete, pointed out “no livestock owner in his right mind will water what he owns there. As a farmer, I won’t water my crops with that water for fear every plant will die out on me.” In addition to citing moral and legal obligations to clean up the site, the aesthetic aspect of the land was clearly a concern. Robert Thomas concluded his remarks saying, “We want that land to look beautiful again, like it used to.” Resonating acutely with Julene Bair’s insight that “Our sense of beauty is a survival instinct,” Lente called for restoring “the aesthetics, the appearance of that area” now a “big, gaping hole” full of exposed contaminants “that could be proven to be hazardous to our people.” The tribal understanding that the state of their land has effects far beyond Pueblo borders was deep. For example, Lente emphasized, “this is not confined or restricted to the Pueblo of Laguna. It has far-reaching impact, and I believe we will see the consequences for many years to come.” Larry Garcia pointed to the understream that comes “down through the Jackpile Mine and the dust from explosions: “I don’t know how anybody can say that there wasn’t any pollution in the air” that drifted over Albuquerque and beyond. After describing damage to the land and water, Conrad Lucero called for basic empathy:

I implore Anaconda to use some common sense. Put yourselves in my place, in my people's place. . . . What kind of feeling would you have?
 . . . You have wounded my mother, because as an Indian I have different values of land that you, the white man, do.
 Your value is dollars. My value is far deeper. It comes from the heart. Use your mother as an example. . . . Take into consideration if a wound was opened on your mother somewhere, face disfigured, dismembered, by an act of man. Again, you the Anglo people, have a different perspective of how to repair it. All you ask is: What is it going to cost me to repair my mother? You don't, a lot of times, think: Is she ever going to be of sound mind, of sound body?¹⁰⁷

The words of Lucero and the others illustrate the deep roots of tradition sustaining a perennially relevant environmental ethic.

The ability of a tradition, and of its stories and practices, to remain vibrant and illuminating lies in the capacity to improvise without loss, to play without deriding, to create without eradicating. Emerson's stark first line of *Nature* criticizes the "retrospective" character of the age (*CW* 1:7), but he roots his call for new thoughts and works in a tradition of original relation, essentially saying "our forebears did, why should we not?" Robert Richardson praises the passage as "one of the best . . . in all of Emerson" because it illustrates and urges a "fundamental, evergreen view of the world, a way of looking at life equally available to me and to Marcus Aurelius."¹⁰⁸ Living traditions carry old insights forward, transforming them through the acts of thoughtful individuals into practical, progressive change. For the sake of efficiency, effectiveness, and evocative power, the carrying device is often deliberately narrative and metaphorical. The effectiveness of people's participation is often a matter of literacy, beginning with ecoliteracy. Capra is quite clear on this point: "ecological literacy, or 'ecoliteracy,' must become a critical skill for politicians, business leaders, and professionals in all spheres, and should be the most important part of education at all levels."¹⁰⁹ Ecoliteracy, learning the cipher of nature, reading nature, and saying a word for nature are not hollow metaphors. Emerson read "the book of Nature," its "gigantic pages,—leaf after leaf,—never re-turning" yet indelible (*CW* 6:8), for insight into rectifying the cultural errors of mid-nineteenth century America. Ecofeminists recollect the storied "age-old association" between women and nature¹¹⁰ to generate a new analysis of the exploitation and oppression of both as systemically connected. Capra points out that the "new knowledge" of ecological science (and systems thinking) "is also ancient wisdom." Indigenous Americans invoke the stories and ceremonies that are, as Paula Gunn Allen describes them, the "communication device of the land and the people."¹¹¹

In writing of virtue, the unity of a person's life, and tradition, Alisdair MacIntyre attributes the possibility of intelligibility, meaning, and transformative power to a person's narrative ability. "Narrative history of a certain

kind turns out to be the basic and essential genre for the characterization of human actions” as either good, bad, useful, aesthetically significant, intelligible, or absurd. MacIntyre focused on ethics in human interactions, but his framing of intelligibility and morality in terms of conversation, narrative, and cultural literacy is also relevant to listening and saying a word for nature, writing the record of a relation with the environment, and ecoliteracy. MacIntyre’s conclusion that “we are never more (and sometimes less) than the co-authors of our own narratives” describes precisely the realities of Emerson’s original relation as a lover of nature.¹¹² The realities of co-authorship explain Emerson’s experiences of surprise, wild abandon, and onwardness. Aldo Leopold’s shock at realizing the dying wolf and the mountain are his co-authors jolts him into understanding how remiss he has been as an ecologist in not having “learned to think like a mountain.” The complex and fragile restoration of the parched world in Silko’s novel comes as Tayo sees “the way all the stories fit together . . . to become the story that was still being told” of “the world as it always was: no boundaries, only transitions.”¹¹³ One of the oldest stories in this vein, and the subject of the next chapter, concerns the transitions between garden and wilderness.

NOTES

1. The line from the essay “Art” is “Art should exhilarate, and throw down the walls of circumstance on every side . . . and its highest effect is to make new artists” (*CW* 2:216).

2. Lawrence Buell pegged Emerson “the sage as anti-mentor,” a writer so generous he “invites you to kill him off if you don’t find him useful” (*Emerson* [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003], 292).

3. Frank Bellew in Ronald A. Bosco and Joel Myerson, *Emerson in His Own Time: A Biographical Chronicle of His Life, Drawn from Recollections, Interviews, and Memoirs by Family, Friends, and Associates* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2003), 144. Bellew met Emerson in 1855 in Concord and recalled his delight in accompanying Emerson “in his afternoon rambles through the woods and field” (143).

4. Davis and Wright invited Emerson to speak at the 1850 and 1851 National Women’s Rights Conventions. Emerson declined, on the first occasion questioning the suitability for women of a public rather than private venue and on the second citing the urgency of the memoir of Fuller he was then writing (to Davis, *L* 4:230; to Stone, 8:288–289). However, he assured Davis they were “at liberty if you wish it to use my name as one of the inviters to the convention” (*L* 4:230). He spoke at the 1855 Woman’s Rights Convention in Boston, describing women’s vote as “the remedy at the moment of need” and recognizing, with qualified support, their demands for equal rights to “education, . . . avenues of employment, . . . property . . . the exercise of the professions . . . suffrage” (*LL* 2:19).

5. Gilbert, “Emerson in the Context of the Woman’s Rights Movement,” in *A Historical Guide to Ralph Waldo Emerson*, ed. Joel Myerson (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 212.

6. However, as Phyllis Cole notes, on that occasion “he evoked no concrete sense of injustice” having been perpetrated and “settled for an unelaborated, liberal gesture of permission” instead (“Pain and Protest,” in *The Emerson Dilemma: Essays on Emerson and Social Reform*, ed. T. Gregory Garvey [Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2001], 84).

7. T. Gregory Garvey, *The Emerson Dilemma: Essays on Emerson and Social Reform* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2001), 107.

8. Albert J. von Frank, *An Emerson Chronology*, second edition (Albuquerque, NM: Studio Non Troppo, 2016), 992.
9. Bosco and Myerson, *Emerson in His Own Time*, 221–222.
10. Christine Mary McGinley, *Detecting the Gleam of Light: Thoughts for the Aspiring Creative Writer* (Lakeland, MI: Gleam of Light Press, 2017), 139. McGinley continues, “The other statement he made was on the subject of whether women should be given the right to vote, which he was asked at a time when such ideas were just a glimmer in the minds of the most progressive few. He said, ‘Certainly all my points would be sooner carried in the state if women voted’” (140).
11. Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays & Speeches by Audre Lorde* (Freedom, CA: The Crossing Press, 1984), 159, 111, 122.
12. Karen Warren, “The Power and the Promise of Ecological Feminism,” *Environmental Ethics* 12.2 (Summer 1990): 139, 132.
13. See Nel Noddings, *Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education*, second edition (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003) and Carol Gilligan, *In A Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women’s Development* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993).
14. Carolyn Merchant, “Ecofeminism and Feminist Theory,” in *Reweaving the World: The Emergence of Ecofeminism*, second edition, ed. Irene Diamond and Gloria Feman Orenstein (San Francisco, CA: Sierra Club Books 1990), 101.
15. Warren, “The Power and Promise,” 139, 140, 139, 139.
16. Val Plumwood, “Nature, Self, and Gender: Feminism, Environmental Philosophy, and the Critique of Rationalism,” *Hypatia* 6.1 (Spring 1991): 7. Emerson’s critique of rationalist science anticipates Carolyn Merchant’s rejection of the assumption widely held by the scientific community that modern science is “objective, value-free, and context-free knowledge of the external world” and her observation that the assumption masks and abets degrading and destructive “mechanistic assumptions about nature” (Merchant, *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology, and the Scientific Revolution* [New York: HarperCollins, 1990], 228, 291).
17. Lorde, *Sister Outsider*, 85.
18. Warren, “The Power and Promise,” 133; Merchant, in *Reweaving the World*, 100, 100.
19. Marcia Myers Bonta, *American Women Afield: Writings by Pioneering Women Naturalists* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1995), 2.
20. Bonta, *American Women Afield*, 3.
21. Bonta, *American Women Afield*, 7.
22. Bonta, *American Women Afield*, 55–59.
23. Bonta, *American Women Afield*, 192.
24. Ann Mathews Woodlief, *American Transcendental Web*, Virginia Commonwealth University, 1999, accessed December 16, 2015, <http://archive.vcu.edu/english/engweb/transcendentalism/roots/legacy/leg-lit.html>.
25. Martha Nussbaum, *Love’s Knowledge: Essays on Philosophy and Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990).
26. Loren Eiseley, *The Lost Notebooks of Loren Eiseley*, ed. Kenneth Heuer (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002), 224.
27. Barbara Kingsolver, *High Tide in Tucson: Essays from Now or Never* (New York: HarperPerennial, 1996), 23.
28. Barbara Kingsolver, *Flight Behavior* (New York: Harper, 2012), 388; *Small Wonder: Essays* (New York: Harper, 2002), 117.
29. Kingsolver, *High Tide in Tucson*, 1–16.
30. Eiseley, *The Lost Notebooks of Loren Eiseley*, 80.
31. Kingsolver, *High Tide in Tucson*, 16.
32. Donella H. Meadows, *Thinking in Systems: A Primer*, ed. Diana Wright (White River Junction, VT: Chelsea Green Publishing, 2008), 3.
33. David Brower Center, accessed February 2, 2017, Browercenter.org. *The Limits to Growth*, by Donella Meadows, Dennis Meadows, Jorgen Randers, and William Behrens III, was originally published in 1972 (New York: Universe Books) and is now posted on the Donella Meadows Institute website. A cutting-edge and formative report for The Club of

Rome's Project on the Predicament of Mankind, it became widely known and cited. The Club grew out of an international meeting of "scientists, educators, economists, humanities, industrialists, and national and international civil servants" at the Accademia dei Lincei in April 1968 (*The Limits*, 9). The updated version is Donella Meadows, Jorgen Randers, and Dennis Meadows, *Limits to Growth: The 30-Year Update* (White River Junction, VT: Chelsea Green Publishing Company, 2004). Fritjov Capra, *The Web of Life* (New York: Anchor Books, 1996) and *The Hidden Connections: A Science for Sustainable Living* (New York: Doubleday, 2002); Fritjov Capra and Pier Luigi Luisi, *The Systems View of Life: A Unifying Vision* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

34. Meadows, *Thinking in Systems*, 2.
35. Capra, *The Hidden Connections*, 36.
36. Capra, *The Hidden Connections*, 36. See Eric Brenner, Stefano Mancuso, František Baluška, and Elizabeth Van Volkenburgh, "Plant neurobiology: an integrated view of plant signaling," *Trends in Plant Science*, 11.8 (August 2006): 413–419. The authors outline a new field of study, plant intelligence, that is, plants' "intrinsic ability to process information from both abiotic and biotic stimuli that allows optimal decisions about future activities in a given environment" (414). For a general overview of the emerging (and contested) field, see Michael Pollan, "The Intelligent Plant," *New Yorker*, December 23 & 30, 2013, 92–105. The learning capacity of systems is also fundamental to the development of artificial intelligence.
37. Meadows, *Thinking in Systems*, 34.
38. Meadows, *Thinking in Systems*, 7.
39. The Donella Meadows Project/Academy for Systems Change, accessed January 12, 2017, donellameadows.org.
40. Meadows, *Thinking in Systems*, ix, ix, ix, ix.
41. Meadows, "What is biodiversity and why should we care?" Donella Meadows Archives, March 9, 1989, accessed January 15, 2017, <http://donellameadows.org/archives/what-is-biodiversity-and-why-should-we-care/>.
42. Meadows, *Thinking in Systems*, 170.
43. all Meadows quotations in this paragraph from Meadows, *Thinking in Systems*, 4.
44. Meadows, *Thinking in Systems*, 19, 19, 5, 96, 96.
45. Berry qtd. in Meadows, *Thinking in Systems*, 87; Wendell Berry, *Standing by Words: Essays* (Berkeley: CA: Counterpoint, 1983), 65.
46. Meadows, *Thinking in Systems*, 28.
47. Meadows, *Thinking in Systems*, 164.
48. Kingsolver, *High Tide in Tucson*, 16.
49. Capra, *The Hidden Connections*, xvii–xix.
50. Capra, *The Hidden Connections*, 68.
51. Capra, *The Hidden Connections*, 84.
52. Capra, *The Hidden Connections*, 5.
53. Capra, *The Hidden Connections*, 7, 8.
54. Capra, *The Hidden Connections*, 10, 13, 14, 21.
55. Capra cites Maturana and Francisco, *The Hidden Connections*, 34; Humberto R. Maturana and Francisco. J. Varela, *Autopoiesis and Cognition: The Realization of the Living* (Dordrecht, Holland: D. Reidel, 1980), 13. Recent studies in the emerging field of plant neurobiology corroborate these ideas—see note 36.
56. Capra, *The Hidden Connections*, 37.
57. Meadows, *Thinking in Systems*, subtitle, 178, 180, 184.
58. Chief Seattle. "1854 Oration" as it appeared in a column by Henry A. Smith, *Seattle Sunday Star*, October 29, 1887, "Version 1," in Nancy Zussy, State Librarian, "Letter," Washington State Library, 1993, accessed February 24, 2016, <http://www.synaptic.bc.ca/ejournal/wslibrry.htm#.WXuBcK2ZM8Y>.
59. William A. Young, *Quest for Harmony: Native American Spiritual Traditions* (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 2002), 335–337.
60. Viola F. Cordova, *How It Is*, ed. Kathleen Dean Moore, Kurt Peters, Ted Jojola, and Amber Lacy, foreword by Linda Hogan (Tucson, AZ: University of Arizona Press, 2007), 6, 69, 51.

61. Paula Gunn Allen, "Special Problems in Teaching Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony*," in *Leslie Marmon Silko's Ceremony: A Casebook*, ed. Allan Chavkin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 88.

62. Leslie Marmon Silko, *Conversations with Leslie Marmon Silko*, ed. Ellen L. Arnold (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2000), 178.

63. Cordova, *How It Is*, 9; Linda Hogan, in Cordova, *How It Is*, vii.

64. Leslie Marmon Silko, *Ceremony* (New York: Viking Penguin, 1977), 68.

65. all Cordova quotations in this paragraph from Cordova, *How It Is*, 102.

66. Leslie Marmon Silko, *Woman and a Beauty of the Spirit: Essays on Native American Life Today* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996), 40.

67. Ted Perry, "Letter," in "Versions of Chief Seattle's orations," presented by Nancy Zussy. Washington State Library, 1993, accessed February 24, 2016, <http://www.synaptic.bc.ca/ejournal/wslibrry.htm#.WXuBcK2ZM8Y>.

68. Ann Medlock, "Chief Seattle's Screenwriter," *Huffington Post*, updated November 17, 2011, accessed February 24, 2016, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/ann-medlock/chief-seattles-screenwrit_b_72510.html; Young, *Quest for Harmony*, 336. Perry's is one of four versions collated by Nancy Zussy. None of them, as she points out, is a reliable representation of the original words or occasion. William Arrowsmith's text, written in the late 1960s, simplifies and modernizes Smith's language, and the fourth, part of a 1974 exhibit in Spokane, Washington, condenses Perry's script, maintains Perry's fictional letter to President Pierce frame, and highlights the environmentalist call to respect the earth as our kin while referring briefly to the demise of Indigenous life.

69. Emerson's letter was "soon broadcast to the nation by the newspapers" (Ralph Rusk, *The Life of Ralph Waldo Emerson* [New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1949], 267. According to Robert Sayre, the letter demonstrates "that he was well informed about the changes in Cherokee life and the appeals they had made in Congress" (Sayre, *Thoreau and the American Indians* [Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2016], 24). Even Thoreau's interest was not an effective avenue for Indigenous influence on Transcendentalism. In a study of Thoreau's interactions with Penobscot guides during his trips to the Maine woods, Namie Ozawa describes Thoreau's purpose "to seek the secret of wildness and native people's symbiotic attitude with nature" and his "sincere desire to meet indigenous people and try to learn from their language, culture, and wisdom" but notes that only "in his last journey" did he "began to grow out of the colonial concept of 'vanishing noble savages'" (Namie Ozawa, "The Maine Woods: What Thoreau Learned about the Penobscot People," in *Thoreau in the 21st Century: Perspectives from Japan*, ed. Masaki Horiuchi [Tokyo: Kinseido, 2017], 42).

70. Cordova, *How It Is*, 114.

71. Luther Standing Bear, *Land of the Spotted Eagle* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1933), 192–196.

72. "Luther Standing Bear Ota K'Te (Plenty Kill)," Akta Lakota Museum Cultural Center and St. Joseph's Indian School, accessed February 19, 2017, <http://aktalakota.stjo.org/site/News2?page=NewsArticle&id=8883>.

73. Gregory Cajete, *Native Science: Natural Laws of Interdependence* (Santa Fe, NM: Clear Light, 2000), 61.

74. Little bere in Cajete, *Native Science*, x.

75. Cajete, *Native Science*, 2, 28.

76. Cajete, *Native Science*, 45; Steven Fesmire, "Ecological Imagination," *Environmental Ethics* 32.2 (Summer 2010): 190, 198.

77. Cajete, *Native Science*, 30, 21, 40, (Cajete cites Wilson) 24. Edward O. Wilson is well versed in Emerson and his circle of naturalists and was the keynote speaker at the 2012 Thoreau Society Annual Gathering. See his *Biophilia* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984). The term "biophilia" was first used by Erich Fromm, who defined it as "the passionate love of life and of all that is alive . . . the wish to further growth" (Fromm, *The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness* [Greenwich, CT: Fawcett Crest, 1973], 406).

78. Cajete, *Native Science*, 15, 2. Cajete's emphasis on story appears different from Emerson's turn to poetry until one recalls the poetic form of oral tradition.

79. Cajete, *Native Science*, 55. Emerson, of course, understood the cultural norm of property ownership on paper. He protested the Cherokee removal on the principle of their lawful ownership of land. But he understood ownership of the earth as illusory in an ultimate sense. In *Nature*, he acknowledges that the landscape he saw “this morning, is indubitably made up of . . . farms. Miller owns this field, Locke that . . . *But none of them owns the landscape*” (*CW* 1:9, emphasis mine) That ownership is illusory runs deep for Emerson, personally and philosophically, as Stanley Cavell suggests in his reading of “Experience” and the death of Emerson’s son Waldo. Cavell notes the reciprocal reality of owning as belonging: “the implication that for something to belong to me I must, whatever men think, found it, belong to it” (*This New Yet Unapproachable America: Lectures after Emerson after Wittgenstein* [Albuquerque, NM: Living Batch Press, 1989], 104). Unilateral ownership, of sons, farms, or woodlands, is antithetical to systems thinking just as it is to Aldo Leopold’s land ethic and Cajete’s eco-philosophy.

80. Cajete, *Native Science*, 301.

81. Donella Meadows, “What is biodiversity and why should we care?” The Donella Meadows Project/Academy for Systems Change, March 9, 1989, accessed July 25, 2017, <http://donellameadows.org/archives/what-is-biodiversity-and-why-should-we-care/>; *Thinking in Systems*, 170.

82. Cajete, *Native Science*, 292. Indigenous American philosophy shares other premises of systems thinking as well. Cajete’s forthright observation that “the survival of any self-organizing system depends upon its ability to keep itself open to the flow of energy and matter through it” (18) echoes Capra’s discussion of the permeable boundaries of living systems.

83. Cajete, *Native Science*, 59.

84. Cajete, *Native Science*, 306, 307.

85. Cajete, *Native Science*, 76.

86. Cajete, *Native Science*, 108–110.

87. Cajete, *Native Science*, 151; William Wordsworth, “The Tables Turned,” in *English Romantic Writers*, ed. David Perkins (San Diego, CA: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1967), 209.

88. Leslie Marmon Silko, *Yellow Woman and a Beauty of the Spirit: Essays on Native American Life Today* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996), 64; Cajete, *Native Science*, 278, 73.

89. Cajete, *Native Science*, 204.

90. Warren, “The Power and the Promise,” 145–146.

91. Silko, *Ceremony*, 46.

92. Allen, *The Sacred Hoop: Recovering the Feminine in American Indian Traditions* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1986), 60.

93. Silko, *Ceremony*, 6.

94. Allen, *Sacred Hoop*, 124. Interestingly, Silko uses the image of thread multiple times in *Ceremony*. She describes Tayo’s memories and the present as “tangled up like colored threads from old Grandma’s wicker sewing basket” (*Ceremony*, 6), and “he had to sweat to think of something that wasn’t unraveled or tied in knots” (7). The reality of the world is a thread spun out by “Thought-Woman, the spider” (1). A medicine man tells Tayo “this world is fragile,” and the word he uses for “fragile” “was filled with the intricacies of a continuing process, and with a strength inherent in spider webs” (35).

95. Cajete, *Native Science*, 73.

96. Silko, *Yellow Woman*, 85.

97. Cavell, *This New Yet Unapproachable America*, 77; Cajete, *Native Science*, 2.

98. Noddings, *Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education*, 16–17.

99. Fritjof Capra, *The Tao of Physics: An Exploration of the Parallels between Modern Physics and Eastern Mysticism*, 25th anniversary edition (Boston: Shambhala, 2000).

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108. Robert D. Richardson, *First We Read, Then We Write: Emerson on the Creative Process* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2009), 28.

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111. Capra, *The Hidden Connections*, 232; Allen, *The Sacred Hoop*, 120. Capra specifically references ancient Hindu wisdom, noting its contemporary inflection in the environmental and anti-globalism of activists such as Vandana Shiva, also a physicist and author of *Stolen Harvest: The Hijacking of the Global Food Supply* (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2000) and *Biopiracy: The Plunder of Nature and Knowledge* (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1997).

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Chapter Four

The Garden and the Wilderness

One of the first and most dramatic stories of the Old Testament is the banishment of Adam and Eve from the garden into the wilderness. It pointedly shaped the experience of Emerson's Puritan forebears. But the tension between garden and wilderness began with the first human enclosure of land. The sequestered food supply and shelter is a statement of "mine" to all others, the prototype of Emerson's initial division between himself and "NOT ME" in possessive case (*CW* 1:8). However, as Emerson quickly came to understand, a "garden" does not exist as such without "wilderness," and a garden wall is a permeable boundary. Stories of the transitions between garden and wilderness are many and, interestingly, they often hinge on conceptions of gender, fertility, and freedom. Female characters such as Rapunzel's mother, Hawthorne's Hester Prynne, and sometimes Laguna's Yellow Woman are punished when they transgress the garden boundary, whereas a code of masculinity steers Natty Bumppo and Huckleberry Finn into the wild as a natural, even moral, course.¹ In the nursery rhyme when Peter Pumpkin Eater's wife strays, he double-walls her in pumpkin shell and garden.

Emerson's ideas about the garden and the wilderness reflect his convictions about the creativity of nature and of the artist, specifically the poet. In the passage from "Plato" discussed earlier in chapter 2, Emerson names the strength of an artist as "transitional" and the method of art as "synthesis" (*CW* 4:31). He explains further that poetic creativity is experienced not at home nor abroad, "but in transitions from one to the other, which must therefore be adroitly managed to present as much transitional surface as possible" (*CW* 4:32). The "high sort of seeing" or enlightenment Emerson values in "The Poet" (and that he wants his writing to generate) happens when he breaches the edge of himself to share "the path, or circuit of things . . . making them translucid to others" (*CW* 3:15). Emerson's poetic

and philosophical creativity grows not here or there, not in “me” or “not-me,” but in transit, shields down, “face to face” (*CW* 1:7). His environmental ethic accords with that account of creativity and blossoms in the transitions and exchanges between garden and wilderness. Michael Pollan, Knight professor of Science and Environmental Journalism at the University of California Berkeley, observes that normative American attitudes toward the land are deeply divided along “either/or” lines between cultivation and natural wildness, an opposition that he calls “particularly fierce and counterproductive in this country” and which “deserve[s] much of the blame for the bankruptcy of our current approach to the environment.”² Emerson disregarded this conventional disconnect in order “to make a new road to new and better goals” (*CW* 2:189–190), choosing transition and transparency at the edge, or boundary, rather than conformity or egotism, as a means of engaging difference and sustaining diversity. What Emerson offers environmental ethics in his embrace of transition and synthesis is an “all/and” alternative to “either/or”: a story that takes everything into account, a systems approach that sees the functional structure of the gossamer web, and a philosophy of values aligned with the morphological and self-organizing character of cells and atoms, life and ecosystems.

THE POLITICS OF GARDEN AND WILDERNESS IN AMERICA

Michael Pollan sketches out the politics of landscape in America in a 1998 *Harvard Design Magazine* article that he names “the front lawn and the wilderness preserve” as “the two most important contributions America has made to the world history of landscape” and notes both arose together around 1870 in response to the advent of affordable lawn mowing machines and growing awareness that wilderness was disappearing. Both landscape developments were explicitly related to national pride and character. Pollan’s insight is that the apparent contradiction between cultivated lawn and wilderness preserved actually signals their interdependent and mutual arising, that has set up an interminable struggle between developers and preservationists, narrowly framed in political terms of winning or losing (a case in point being the congressional debate on the Hetch Hetchy dam, discussed in chapter 2). The mechanics of political survival, however, have little in common with biological evolution and continuity. Lawns may have signaled political ideals of egalitarianism and civic responsibility, and Pollan, though he finds them an “egalitarian conceit,” concedes they “are one of the minor institutions of our democracy, symbolizing . . . the common landscape that forms the nation.”³ However, lawns as a monocultural habit are now increasingly seen in terms Emerson set down more than 150 years ago: “imitation is suicide” (*CW* 2:27). Wilderness also signifies political ideals: freedom and, in Thoreau’s

words, the corrective opportunity “to witness our own limits transgressed.” Urging federal protection of wilderness, Wallace Stegner, who served as assistant to Secretary of the Interior Stewart Udall during the Kennedy administration, described “the wilderness idea as something that has helped form our character” and “shaped our history as a people.”⁴ Pollan supports wilderness preservation (and certainly rejects the lawn as environmentally unsound in huge tracts of America), but he worries that what he calls the “wilderness ethic” will not by itself solve the problem created by so many of us living day after day, one way or another, on the land. Instead, he looks for an environmental ethic in “some middle ground” between cultured lawn and untouched wilderness: the ecological garden. What Pollan wants in a garden is what Emerson appreciated in his garden: its incipient wildness and the transitions between garden and wild. The true gardener, in Pollan’s view, forges an original relation of “give-and-take” with the land, is sensitive to the site, and, most significantly in terms of Emerson’s creative and civic goals, “must be able to approach the land not as a vehicle of social consensus . . . but as an arena for self-expression.”⁵ Pollan names a middle *place*, however, whereas Emerson names continual transition, that is, not remaining in a place. More than grammatical, the difference is conceptual and practical. Pollan’s emphasis is on environmentally sustainable *productivity*; Emerson’s is on environmentally responsive and mutually creative *process*.

Pollan briefly acknowledges the early influence of American landscape architect Andrew Jackson Downing, whose 1845 *The Fruits and Fruit Trees of America* Emerson read with great interest regarding his own orchard. Downing’s discussion of cultivating and cross-breeding varieties for specific traits appealed to Emerson, whose orchard numbered more than a hundred fruit trees including varieties of apples, peaches, quince, plums, and pears.⁶ In his biography of Emerson, Robert Richardson explains the significance of Downing’s book to the Concord transcendentalists in teaching them “the working vocabulary of Darwin’s great book of 1859.” Indeed, Richardson declares, “Downing could have called his book ‘The Origin of Domestic Varieties.’”⁷ Though Downing’s immediate purpose in *Fruits* is wholly horticultural, both he and Emerson saw a lesson in political and cultural improvement in the “gradual amelioration, and the skillful practice of the cultivator” having “filled our orchards and gardens with good fruits.”⁸ In his notes to his father’s *English Traits*, Edward commented on the “especial pleasure” Emerson took in Downing’s account in *Fruits* “of the theory and successful experiments in the amelioration of fruits” to which account “should be credited a share in strengthening Mr. Emerson’s faith in Compensation and in Ascension.” Edward observed that “All through Mr. Emerson’s works crop out allusions to this hopeful theory of Amelioration, to him symbolic.”⁹ “America is a *young orchard*,” Downing writes, and “[t]he process of amelioration begins with a new generation,” culturally as well as

agriculturally.¹⁰ “How much better when the whole land is a garden,” enabling the “bare and bald” character of America to approach “a new and more excellent social state than history has recorded,” Emerson had written in his 1844 lecture “The Young American,” a year before Downing’s book was published (*CW* 1:229, 243, 244).

Emerson’s ideas in “The Young American,” delivered to a youthful Boston audience on the cusp of industrialization and westward expansion, are also similar to those expressed earlier by Downing in his 1841 *Treatise on the Theory and Practice of Landscape Gardening, adapted to America*. For Downing, the garden was all; it encompassed, personalized, and cultivated the wild. It would make America and complete the promise of the land. The American garden would be a democratic phenomenon because, Downing averred, in the United States “the rights of man are held to be equal” and we have “a larger class of independent landholders, who, in many respects, are intelligent and well educated, than any other country in the civilized world can at present boast.” According to Downing, a well-designed garden “not only augment[s] his [the owner/cultivator’s] own enjoyment, but strengthen[s] his patriotism and mak[es] him a better citizen.”¹¹ In “The Young American,” Emerson similarly connects moral and aesthetic sentiment with civic and patriotic work. Emerson cites the combination of “the moral sentiment” that infused the nation’s founding with the “invitations of natural wealth” proffered by the vast continent as driving “active young men to withdraw from cities, and cultivate the soil” (*CW* 1:227). He calls for “the adorning of the whole continent” and “public gardens . . . which might well make the land dear to the citizen and inflame patriotism” (*CW* 1:227).

Downing outlined basic design principles in his *Treatise* “to encourage a taste among general readers” for the beauty of a landscape cultivated in the “modern and natural style,” of which the well-kept lawn was an important mitigation of the “slovenly degree of keeping” and haphazard improvements often found across rural America. He hoped the well-designed garden would become a steadying counterpoint to “the restless spirit of emigration, which form[s] part of our national character.”¹² Emerson advocated onwardness, but not restlessness or greed. In “The Young American,” he acknowledges the “rage for road building is beneficent for America” (*CW* 1:223), but it raises aesthetic and ethical concerns for him about “the character of the work itself, which so violates and revolutionizes the primal and immemorial forms of nature” and evinces “wrongs . . . in the contracts that are made with the laborers” (*CW* 1:224).¹³ He celebrates the expansiveness and acquisitiveness of the age: “the bountiful continent is ours . . . to the waves of the Pacific sea” (*CW* 1:226), but he insists our relation to the land requires “a sentiment . . . with a view to the values of land” (*CW* 1:226). In describing those values in “The Young American,” he walks a fine line between a land-grabbing, profit-oriented society and his earlier “uses of nature” discussion in

Nature where he had quickly glossed over land as commodity to concentrate on aesthetic and moral values. His attempt to combine the language of *Nature* with nationalism in “The Young American” falls short for environmentalists today in lines such as “Any relation to the land, the habit of tilling it, or mining it, or even hunting on it, generates the feeling of patriotism” (*CW* 1:229).

“The Young American” is full of contradictions and statements that are problematic for contemporary environmentalists. For example, Emerson speaks approvingly of the swift advances in engineering, scientific agriculture, mining, and logging that concerned Thoreau and Susan Fenimore Cooper, but he also maintains “[t]he land is the appointed remedy for whatever is false and fantastic in our culture” and that under its influence we are brought “into just relations with men and things” (*CW* 1:226), relations that elsewhere he describes in terms of sympathy and restraint, not productivity and development. With regard to wilderness and national character, he crosses Thoreauvian lines he elsewhere respects, insisting, for example, that the “well-laid garden” of “alleys, woodlands, orchards, and river” will render what lies outside the garden wall “of no account” (*CW* 1:228). His assertion that “the nervous, rocky West” may engender “an American genius” (*CW* 1:229) of the sort he calls for scientifically in *Nature*, socially in “Self-Reliance,” artistically in “The Poet,” and, politically in his 1851 fugitive slave law address seems more wishful than realistic. The persistent enthusiasm for cultivation, expansion, and development throughout “The Young American” compromises his declaration that with respect to creating a more just society, “the *land* as a commanding and increasing power on the American citizen, the sanative and Americanizing influence, . . . promises to disclose new virtues for ages to come” (*CW* 1:229). In turning to American citizenry, Emerson walks another fine line riddled with contradictions. Like Downing, Emerson relates economic class to landscaping, resulting in some of his most elitist language. He finds the American countryside to be “cultivated by a so much inferior class” that it “looks poverty-stricken . . . plain and poor” (*CW* 1:228). In Europe, he and Downing both note, aristocratic privilege and taste inform countryside gardens and buildings that can then serve, Emerson writes, as “a constant education to the eye of the surrounding population” (*CW* 1:229).

Emerson found the process by which to resolve such contradictions in the “*amelioration in nature*” (*CW* 1:231), the topic of Downing’s *Fruits and Fruit Trees of America* that so interested him. He typically welcomed contradiction as “a new element” and entrusted apparent contradictions to time and natural processes (*CW* 3:40). For example, in “Experience” he urges himself and his readers to “bear with these distractions, with this coetaneous growth of the parts” that appear now to contradict one another logically and practically, for “they will one day be *members*” whose compositional significance

is clear just as the embryo coalesces from multiple points of origin (*CW* 3:41). In “The Young American,” he demonstrates the same faith that nature improvises with newly introduced elements to improve. He stakes everything on “the unceasing effort throughout nature at somewhat better than the actual creatures” and systems at hand: amelioration in nature “*alone* permits and authorizes amelioration in mankind” (*CW* 1:231, emphasis mine).¹⁴ Amelioration in nature is the agent of the social and cultural evolution he imagines from despotic rule toward “beneficent socialism” (*CW* 1:235), and it works through variety and diversity. Emerson’s observation that humans are “a conditional population” whose fate and quality of life are contingent on “the existing state of soils, of gases, animals, and morals” is of value to environmental ethics as a foundational insight. His sense that nature will ameliorate itself is of less value for contemporary environmentalists who have not Emerson’s confidence that nature “resists our meddling” (*CW* 1:231), nor the sense that patience is an adequate response. Nonetheless, an Emersonian politics of garden and wilderness tends toward fluid pluralism in which each and all are important participants and influences in an ameliorative process that cannot sustainably exclude wildness, and in his own gardening Emerson did not implement or aspire to Downing’s relentless vision of meticulous cultivation.

EMERSON’S GARDEN

1836 was a momentous year for Emerson as he began new and lifelong commitments in his recent marriage and his new environs. He and Lidian were newlyweds working on their home and garden together, and Emerson was pleased to record his “contrite wood life” in a book that “should smell of pines & resound with hum of insects” (*JMN* 5:183–4). 1836 was also the year his brother Charles died, *Nature* was published, and his first child was born. In April he bought fifteen apple trees and had them planted (*JMN* 8:544). In May he wrote, “I found my garden & trees doing very well at home” (*L* 2:16). In November he “scramble[d] in the woods . . . [and] got six hemlock trees to plant in my yard which may grow whilst my boy is sleeping” (*JMN* 5:241). In April 1838, he added “42 white pines, 2 hemlocks, 1 white maple & 2 apple trees, in my lot” (*JMN* 5:481). In 1846, he planted grapevines sent by his brother William.¹⁵ A small notebook he used from 1843 to 1847 lists the dozens of varieties of fruit trees he kept adding and a note on using guano for fertilizer (*JMN* 8:518, 534–549, 559). The Emerson home and garden were featured in the October 1923 issue of *Fruit, Garden and Home* as part of a series on the homes of famous Americans. The series was intended to provide “intimate glimpses into the home-life of our great men and women.”¹⁶ The article, by Chesla Sherlock, emphasizes Emerson’s ideas and

cultural influence and includes photographs of the vegetable and flower gardens. Sherlock was an early and formative editor of the magazine, soon renamed *Better Homes and Gardens*, and he sought, in Downing's footsteps, "to encourage families to settle down . . . to get their roots down deep into the soil."¹⁷ According to Sherlock, "Had there been no Emerson, there would be no today—and if he were just looming up over the horizon, we would be living in a world we know not."¹⁸ To this day, there is a rear garden on the property, but as Richardson writes, Emerson's garden and orchard have largely gone wild. Richardson mourns especially the "lost orchard . . . since it stands for everything that was common and lively and is now unrecoverable in Emerson's life."¹⁹

A garden is "a permanent impermanence," as Marta McDowell observes in writing of Beatrix Potter's riotous garden, because it harbors wildness. As Downing noted, though fruit varieties "are the artificial productions of our culture" and tend to improve, "they have also another and a stronger *tendency to return to a natural or wild state*."²⁰ Architect Christopher Alexander and his colleagues move in an Emersonian vein to circumvent any such distinction between cultivated and wild. Cutting a garden off from the wild would kill it. What "brings a garden to life," they write, is "wilderness, tamed, still wild."²¹ Certainly that is the sort of garden Emerson abided and cultivated. In his journal, October 1848, he recorded walking past new and tidy farms to

a country made up of vast orchards where the apple grows with a profusion that mocks the pains taken by careful cockneys who come into the country & plant young trees & watch them dwindle. . . . Here were varieties of apple not found in Downing. . . . The ground was strewn with them in red & yellow heaps. They grew for their own pleasure; they almost lost price. . . . The apples were of the kind which I remember in boyhood each containing a barrel of wine & half a barrel of cider,—Touch-me-if-you-dare. (*JMN* 10:360)

This orchard is all wild joy and abandon, *and* nourishing. These "touch-me-if-you-dare" apples taste good beyond the range of taste supplied by Downing's extensive catalog of varieties. They supply "the sight of inexhaustible vigor" Thoreau had earlier prescribed in *Walden* as "the tonic of wildness" we need. However, Emerson's tone differs strikingly from Thoreau's. Thoreau gravely diagnoses our "need to witness our own limits transgressed" and describes nature's medicinal power with images of shipwrecks and flooding. He rather grimly avers our "cheer . . . when we observe the vulture feeding on the carrion which disgusts and disheartens us" and salutes nature's profusion, which is such "that tender organizations can be so serenely squashed out of existence like pulp . . . tortoises and toads run over in the road."²² In comparison, Emerson's touch-me-if-you-dare apples seem playful, offering more a child's playground game than the stern and existential

challenge of Thoreau's wilderness. Emerson's apples signal wilderness as also domicile. He acknowledges the limits of our capacity for nonhuman wildness. His apples "almost" escape from the tedious and unlovely reduction of life to market value. But, like the rhodora, these apples are their own excuse for being. They grow for their own pleasure. Emerson discovers them almost as if entering a secret garden.

It is the contradictions inherent to gardening that attract Emerson, beginning with its permanent impermanence, because contradiction, even the painful contradictions engendered by the deaths "of sons and lovers" (*CW* 3:29), affords fruitful transformation. Thus "[w]e thrive by casualties," and "[t]he way of life . . . is by abandonment" (*CW* 3:39; 2:190). Progressive change is possible because "every action admits of being outdone" (*CW* 2:179). Emerson embraces the ambivalence and uncertainty that attend contradictions, convinced that though contradictions might appear to be distractions they are essential "*members*" of a unified and ongoing web of varieties (*CW* 3:41) and that contradiction sustains life. Creating a garden, like creating art in Emerson's view, entails participating in contradiction through "transitional, alternating" movement (*CW* 4:31)—through life cycles, between curated cultivars and wild variants, between being a domestic gardener and a free roamer. We live "by pulses," not in repose (*CW* 3:39). Not a static balance or stance, but an alternating between—a life-giving, wise, and sympathetic countering as that between inhaling and exhaling—marks Emerson's gardening, practically and philosophically.

So the gardener must keep his garden and also let be: "Put a good fence round it & then let it alone a good deal. Fence it well, & let it alone well," Emerson advises (*JMN* 10:92). Emerson the cultivator also advises neglect: "In the garden a most important treatment is a good neglect. It must be a capital care that will make tomato or apple or pear thrive like a lucky neglect" (*JMN* 10:91–92). There is creative submission as well as creative will in growing crops. The farmer's "glory" is that "it is his part to create," but he does by "bend[ing] to the order of the seasons, the weather, the soils and crops" (*CW* 7:70). With good humor, Emerson points out the irony that "[i]f a man own land, the land owns him" (*CW* 6:62). Walling gardens is itself a contradiction and one that prompts his "long free walks, a circuit of miles" (*CW* 6:62) well past his own fence line. In Emerson's view, wilderness and garden, like wild and domestic, are of a piece with a heaving, flowing, onward stream of diverse marvels. He fairly worships the "Earth Spirit, living, a black river like that swarthy stream which rushes through the human body . . . demoniacal, warm, fruitful, sad, nocturnal" (*JMN* 8:329). The whole continuous superfluity tends to "tomorrow's creation" (*JMN* 8:384), and Emerson characteristically looked to tomorrow's creation.

Amelioration is, according to Emerson, a significant aspect of the creative process, and improvement is the "end," or tendency, of nature's onward flow

(*CW* 1:7). Thus, another of Marta McDowell's remarks about gardens also explains Emerson's interest in gardening as a practice and as a metaphor. She writes, "A garden always gives another chance, an opportunity for a make-over."²³ Fruitful metamorphosis was paramount for Emerson because it sustains possibility, and he put his hope and effort there as both gardener and poet: "The interest of the gardener & the pomologist has the same foundation as that of the poet, namely, in the metamorphosis: These also behold the miracle, the guided change, the change conspicuous, the guide invisible; a bare stick studs itself over with green buds which become again leaves, flowers, & at length, the most delicious fruit" (*JMN* 10:137–138). The eighteenth-century literary critic Samuel Johnson described the metaphors of the metaphysical poets in terms of metamorphic contradiction. "The most heterogeneous ideas are yoked by violence together," Johnson wrote, though he dismissively concluded that the discordant metaphors only "sometimes" bore the fruit of "unexpected truth." However, as Emerson would find "occult relation" across species and "Unity in Variety" throughout nature (*JMN* 4:200; *CW* 1:27), Johnson agreed that metaphysical poets' "Wit . . . may be more rigorously and philosophically considered as a kind of *discordia concors*; a combination of dissimilar images, or discovery of occult resemblances in things apparently unlike."²⁴ Emerson favored the surprise and contradiction of such discord, sure that its apparent disharmony concealed relations and that its tendency was ameliorative.

Yet, Emerson did not envision a fixed outcome of amelioration, in either wild nature or garden or society, for several reasons. First, a fixed outcome limits the diversity Emerson prizes in, for example, *Nature* and "Each and All" as well as the endless experimenting he celebrates in "Circles." Second, the desired outcome of ameliorative cultivation, whether of apples or civil government, inevitably changes as a function of the process (hence, our efficacy and accountability as participants and decision makers in the process). Third, while Downing may have aimed at perfect pears and the market may clamor for them, Emerson aimed at sustaining amelioration itself. A garden is not a thing one finishes. In Emerson's view, the possibility of "tomorrow's creation" rests on the fact that "there is no end in nature" (*JMN* 8:384; *CW* 2:179). The motivation for participating in that creation rests on the insight, central to his understanding of nature, that "[p]ermanence is but a word of degrees" (*CW* 2:179). That insight comprehends "the moral fact of the Unattainable, the flying Perfect, around which the hands of man can never meet" (*CW* 2:179), a fact which Emerson takes as the reason to open one's hands and let go, let be. As Stanley Cavell has noted, the unhandsome in Emerson's observation from "Experience"—the "evanescence and lubricity of all objects, which lets them slip through our fingers . . . when we clutch hardest, . . . [is] the most unhandsome part of our condition" (*CW* 3:29)—is our clutching and grasping at a world alive and in motion.²⁵

Emerson approached the luxuriant, wild procession of his garden with mixtures of gratitude and self-satisfaction, empathy and scientific interest, tolerance and perfectionism, seasoned with a bit of self-deprecating humor. An endless experimenter as much in the garden as in philosophy, he relocated trees, rearranged plants, experimented with varieties, and observed the incursions of worms and weeds. The essay "Wealth" includes an amusing account of losing morning and writer's momentum to weeding when all that was intended was a garden walk: "[h]e stoops to pull up a purslane or a dock that is choking the young corn, and finds there are two: close behind the last, is a third; and he reaches out his hand to a fourth; behind that, are four thousand and one" (*CW* 6:62). He wryly admitted in "Prudence" "whoever sees my garden, discovers that I must have some other garden" (*CW* 2:131). His biographers comment on his middling productivity as a gentleman gardener. Edward Emerson humorously recounted the time a delegation of the Massachusetts Horticultural Society visited and his father's "modest pride at having his little orchard thus honored," though, as the chairman explained, the committee came "to see the soil which produces such poor specimens of such fine varieties."²⁶ Ralph Rusk remarks "as there was slight competition" at the 1861 Concord Cattle Show, Emerson "was for once a successful competitor" with his fruit, and Richardson writes Emerson "never had much luck growing things."²⁷ Edward suggested his father's unexceptional harvests owed not entirely to deference to the wild harbored within his garden, but also to inclination and the press of other commitments. He recalled "[m]y father soon found that his personal handling of hoe and spade was too expensive, and willingly laid them down, and although, if rain threatened, he would come out to the hayfield to rake, his gardening was confined, within my recollection, to pruning his trees and picking up pears and apples." But Emerson kept gardening after his own values. Edward makes clear that "ears and apples were to him more than so many barrels of sweet and perfumed pulp to eat or sell."²⁸

Emerson did not cultivate for perfectly profitable productivity, for reasons that run directly to a core value in contemporary environmental ethics. Emerson valued the trees in his wood lot, for example, for revealing the poverty of a market-value-only orientation. During one of many walks with Ellery Channing, Emerson objected to valuing the woods in mere economic terms, recording in his journal that he told Channing "My wood lot has no price. I could not think of selling it for the money I gave it. It is full of mysterious values" (*JMN* 11:29) of its own. The wood lot, like the touch-me-if-you-dare apples, escapes pricing under Emerson's watch, and it helps him escape the marketplace as a point of reference. As with the apples, the escape is "almost." The woods were priced at least once, and their current escape from price relies on Emerson's decision to reject the social norm of a merely economic relation to the land. Emerson's words to Channing anticipate Aldo

Leopold's criticism that we still view land as property and our "land-relation is still strictly economic, entailing privileges but not obligations." Emerson says to Channing, "let us value the woods; they are full of solicitation," and invite us to open ourselves without reservation to their "forms . . . colors . . . powers" (*JMN* 11:29). Leopold also encourages such receptivity. "Recreational development," he writes, "is a job not of building roads into lovely country, but of building receptivity into the still unlovely human mind."²⁹

Emerson's call for patience, respectful relation, and openness to influence rather than expedience or force is a precursor to contemporary ecoliteracy and environmental ethics. Yield requires yielding. "Let the tree instruct you how to prune it," advises Emerson, notably to himself (*JMN* 10:101). Why yield thus? Because "My garden is an honest place. Every tree & every vine are incapable of concealment" (*JMN* 8:398); all that is needed is a willing learner. He yields himself repeatedly, usually without a set learning objective or agenda. For example, "Oct. 30 [1841]. On this wonderful day when Heaven & earth seem to glow with magnificence & all the wealth of all the elements is put under contribution to make the world fine as if Nature would indulge her offspring it seemed ungrateful to hide in the house" (*JMN* 8:59), and "April 10 [1843] . . . yesterday the warm south-wind drew me to the top of the hill . . . I greeted the well known pine-grove which I could not reach; the pine tops seemed to cast a friendly gold-green smile of acquaintance toward me" (*JMN* 8:381), and in 1868, writing of his wood lot, "My spirits rise whenever I enter it . . . I fancy the birds know me, & even the trees make little speeches or hint them" (*JMN* 16:126). He is characteristically careful not to presume entitlement. It is "as if" nature is indulging her offspring, the pine-grove "seems" to smile on him, he "fancies" the birds know him and the trees speak to him. He knows deference is due. In language that would have rung true for Muir, Emerson salutes "the one-legged race of trees" (*JMN* 10:27). He sheds his presumptions and opens himself to the woods. Though the woods are "null, it is true, to our ignorance," they "inestimably" open and reveal their "mysterious values . . . to human wit" (*JMN* 11:29). Emerson's approach to letting the tree instruct him how to prune is what Cavell has called "acknowledging" as opposed to knowing. Acknowledging entails accepting separateness. It facilitates sympathy across difference and what Emerson calls "tomorrow's creation" (*JMN* 8:384). As Cavell writes, "leaving the world as it is—to itself, as it were—may require the most forbearing act of thinking . . . to let true need, say desire, be manifest and be obeyed; call this acknowledgment of separateness." Cavell sees acknowledging as larger, more responsive and generous, than knowing: "Acknowledgment goes beyond knowledge . . . in its requirement that I *do* something or reveal something on the basis of that knowledge."³⁰ For Emerson, the acknowledgment of separateness is a necessary condition of having an "original relation" to the world and of being moved by "strange sympathies" for its diverse mem-

bers (*CW* 1:7; *JMN* 4:200), and pruning the tree as the tree itself suggests is more likely to support its health and fruitfulness than crassly topping it.

This defense of difference also drives an aspect of Emerson's philosophy and gardening which surfaces in contemporary calls for recycling and composting. Emerson respected greatly that the whole continuous superfluity of nature has purpose and that nothing in it goes to waste; every thing matters. He writes admiringly in his journal, "Nature is the strictest economist, wastes not a crumb . . . & works up all that is wasted today into tomorrow's creation . . . she snatches at the shred & appropriates it to the general stock," and includes parts of this passage in "The Young American" (*JMN* 8:384; *CW* 1:231). He took the lesson of generative recycling not only to his garden compost pile, but also to the piles of his journals that fed into his public lectures and published work. Emerson's observation that crumbs and waste feed into the new is amplified by Leslie Marmon Silko's attention to the obligation people have to facilitate nature's economy. Describing native Laguna views on death, decay, and waste, Silko writes that when a thing dies "Nothing is wasted. . . . What cannot be eaten by people or in some way used must then be left where other living creatures may benefit. What domestic animals or wild scavengers can't eat will be fed to the plants." Like Emerson, she begins with respect: "The remains of things—animals and plants, the clay and stones—were treated with respect, because for the ancient people all these things had spirit and being."³¹ Their value for tomorrow's creation was appreciated and deliberately made available. Even though Silko uses the past tense to signal the loss of valuable understanding, she carries the understanding forward via her essay to a contemporary audience in need. As a gardener, Emerson was similarly thoughtful and took a long view. On cutting hemlocks with Alcott and Thoreau for arbor posts in his garden he reflected, "And these have been growing when I was sleeping, fenced, bought, & owned by other men, and now in this new want of mine for an ornament to my grounds, their care and the long contribution of the great agents, sun & earth, rain & frost, supply this rich botanic wonder" (*JMN* 10:116–117). Both as gardener and as writer, being respectful, not discounting difference, contributing to such economy, and transcending the limitations of "me" and "mine" to "each and all" were matters of ethical and aesthetic responsibility for Emerson.

That was before uranium mines, desertification, and deforestation. Overuse and overproduction outstrip the time frame of nature's economy, and, of course, by Emerson's reasoning toxic waste, too, gets worked up into "tomorrow's creation." Emerson did not create these problems, but neither did he address them beyond expressing the desire to love and not harm nature and counseling a radical and realistic patience with the processes and time frame of nature's economy.³² In "The Young American," Emerson advised patient, ameliorative effort, with the rather optimistic view that "The history of commerce" demonstrates our "beneficent tendency": "We plant trees, we

build stone houses, we redeem the waste, we make long prospective laws, we found colleges, hospitals, but for the many and remote generations” (*CW* 1:232). Others expressed more urgency and alarm. Thoreau stood early in firm opposition and railed against haste, waste, consumerism, materialism, and the exploitation of the environment—in short, against too much. Impatiently he declared that “We do not ride on the railroad; it rides upon us,” that we “think that it is essential that the *Nation* have commerce,” but “we live meanly, like ants.”³³ Some years later, Muir warned about the environmental consequences of the extensive logging required by the railroads and mining. In travel notes of fall 1878, Muir wrote, “The railroad consumes immense quantities for fuel. So do the mines. Every pine & fir within reach of the locomotives . . . will eventually be called on to literally ‘help push the car of progress.’” Muir “found a purchase in the middle ground of progressive conservation” according to Ronald Limbaugh, who cites Muir’s argument that ruthless logging had so ransacked forests that even “settlers, lumbermen and miners alike call out for reform.”³⁴ The views Emerson, Thoreau, and Muir held on progress directly informed, complemented, and challenged each other. Contemporary organizations and movements concerned or tasked with environmental ethics contend with quite similar challenges and conflicts, as the organizational structure and language of the Forest Service, for example, suggests. The Forest Service is an agency of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and its motto is “land of many uses.”

Emerson understood the biological necessity of diversity to require not only patience and forbearance, but also care and nurturing. Though clearly indebted to philosophical romanticism, Emerson revised the traditional romantic stance of being a child, pupil, friend, or lover of nature who receives (and takes, a post-romantic might add) to also include being a parent who gives and nurtures and understands that it will take years for a child to mature. One of the most significant aspects of his environmental philosophy is that he poses “mother earth” as also “child earth,” and thus rounds out a relational and ethical reciprocity important to environmental ethics. His early thinking figures nature as nurturing and female, himself as child or lover. He writes of his “child’s love” for nature who is his “beautiful mother,” observes that “In the woods” a man “is always a child,” and recommends “the heart of the child” (*CW* 1:35, 36, 10, 10, 9). Alternatively, as a “lover of nature” he seems familiar with the “Unity” that “lies under the undermost garment of nature” (*CW* 1:9, 27). Ten years later, in his journals, he shows a paternal, but definitely not paternalistic, attitude:

How attractive is land, orchard, hillside, garden, in this fine June! Man feels the blood of thousands in his body . . . Here is work for him & a most willing workman. He displaces the birch & chestnut, larch & alder, & will set oak & beech to cover the land with leafy colonnades. Then it occurs what a fugitive

summer flower papilionaceous is he, whisking about amidst these longevities. Gladly he could spread himself abroad among them; love the tall trees as if he were their father, borrow by his love the manners of his trees." (*JMN* 10:80)

As Emerson comes suddenly to see his planning and arranging as so many displacements and the reach of his arboreal organizing as ephemeral, he moves from a child's love of nature to a love for it "as if he were" a father—not an overreaching patriarch, but a father for a season, as fleetingly as the butterfly-like bean or pea flower, whose language and feelings are full of living limitations: "could," "as if," "borrow by." There is beauty and ethical humility in the sort of fathering imagined, but not claimed or realized, in this journal passage. A few weeks and pages later, he records, as if a daily pleasure, the delight he takes in the sturdy resilience of his orchardly offspring: "24 July. Peartrees this morning in high prosperity. Hardly a tough, dry, wormy dwarf in all the garden but is forced to show a bud or a shoot today" (*JMN* 10:118). Outstripping reproduction, the generative quality of parenting is in acceding in generous, good faith (and in humble knowledge of a parent's limits) to the wild and intrinsic path of the child's life. This perspective leads Emerson to leave "the woodpaths as they were, which no art could make over" and to admire the trees' self-arrangement as he watches the sun set "behind terraces of pines, disposed in groups unimaginable by Downings, or Loudons, or Capability Browns," that is, horticulturists and landscape gardeners (*JMN* 11:36). In fostering the child nature, Emerson fosters his own wildness and cultivates a taste for the freedom of the "rudest woodland landscapes, unknown, undescribed, & hitherto *unwalked* by us Saturday afternoon professors" (*JMN* 11:36). There is no hint of patriarchal presumption, just the astonishment familiar to a parent observing his child's imagination take physical form, as he stands in wonder at "how many ages . . . that pretty wilderness of White Pond received the sun & clouds into its transparency, & [has] woven each day new webs of birch & pine, shooting into wilder angles & more fantastic crossing of these coarse threads" (*JMN* 11:38). Always weaving, always wilder, always crossing, always reflection: these are the modes of Emerson's creative nature—both the "not-me" nature he wishes to read and his own moral and aesthetic creativity as a writer in and of nature.

In positioning himself, and potentially others, as cultivator *and* harbinger of wild, Emerson's environmental ethic is more instinctive than the land ethic Aldo Leopold urges us to adopt. Leopold writes to an audience accustomed to daily economic relations to the land, an audience that reserves relations entailing sympathy and aesthetics to designated recreational time and place and relations designed at ascertaining truth to science and scientists. In many ways Leopold's audience has resigned itself to being another resource; their "employee relations" offices have become "human resources"

departments. Before they can learn to think in terms of membership and citizenship in what Leopold calls the “land-community” and a “land ethic,” the readers Leopold wants to persuade must first unlearn a social system far more estranged from the environment than Emerson’s had yet become. In some respects, Emerson’s environmental literacy came more easily than it can for the readers Leopold wants to change. Leopold traces an evolution of ethics from a primitive (and unethical) practice of owning people, the land, and its so-called resources to a new, as yet unrealized, level of universal emancipation and a “land ethic” that “enlarges the boundaries of community” to include the entire biotic community.³⁵ But the evolutionary line is arguably complicated with switchbacks and eddies. Emerson assumed the community Leopold says we have not yet acknowledged. Emerson took social conscience to be an outgrowth, and outpouring, of “nature conscience,” by which I mean the intrinsic moral order he viewed nature as evincing and his own practice of acting toward, and in accord with, nature out of his conscience. Leopold astutely observes, “We can be ethical only in relation to something we can see, feel, understand, love, or otherwise have faith in.” Leopold says we must develop that affinity for the biotic, or land, community; Emerson begins with it. Had Emerson’s views become the prevailing social, economic, and political practice, Leopold might not have needed to urge a land ethic to guide us in co-creating the environment. We might have more widely developed what Leopold calls an “ecological conscience.”³⁶ We might have incorporated to a much greater extent aesthetic and ethical values into our agriculture, architecture, and technology, into our own homes and gardens and original relations with our environs.

CREATING WITH AN “ECOLOGICAL CONSCIENCE”

Spiders build webs, fungi build networks, clouds build thunderstorms, and people also build. Emerson’s concern is the quality of our creations and of their relation to all the others. In exploring his original relation to nature in terms of parental responsibilities and limitations, Emerson offers a increasingly nuanced understanding of (pro)creativity, one that addresses our role as co-creators of the environment and members of what Leopold calls the “biotic community.”³⁷ In the *Nature* of 1836, Emerson is the child and lover of nature, and at the end of the essay, in terms more prophetic than explicitly practical, he urges his readers to build, to create, their worlds. His first child Waldo was born a month after *Nature* was published. Emerson and Lidian were building their own world and viscerally experiencing the separation between creator and creation. Creating and building, like a pregnancy, set something in motion that runs its own course. Many of Emerson’s journal entries about his children illustrate his delight in their own discoveries and

creative endeavors, their unpredictable self-arrangement, and their inventive self-justification. For example, he notes with some admiration and eye rolling “Waldo’s diplomacy in giving account of [his younger sister] Ellen’s loud cries declares that she put her foot into his sand house & *got pushed*” (*JMN* 8:44). In Waldo’s death a few years later, Lidian and Emerson experienced the bitterest of contradictions to that budding world and the severest lesson in a parent’s inability to control the life course of the child she or he has begotten.

It is from this parental stance that Emerson sought to restore “to the world original and eternal beauty” and “to mend the bad world . . . [and] create the right world,” (*CW* 1:43; 6:119). His understanding of aesthetic and ethical contributions—whether they are made through gardening or writing or activism—is reflected in the words of Christopher Alexander, professor emeritus of architecture at the University of California Berkeley College of Environmental Design and founder of the Center for Environmental Structure, and his colleagues. They write, “when you build a thing, you cannot merely build that thing in isolation but must also repair the world around it, and within it, so that the larger world at that one place becomes more coherent, and more whole; and the thing which you make takes its place in the web of nature, as you make it.”³⁸ Alexander’s philosophy of integrated values and his organic approach to architecture and landscape owe much to the same romantic and transcendental philosophy that Emerson developed, in part, through his investigation of Asian philosophy and his significant role in introducing it to American readers. Through a lens romantic and sentimental, Alexander invokes rambling English gardens and old European town centers as self-organizing living systems that have arisen organically to sustain and respect life and the death it entails. He writes, “A building must be made of those materials which age and crumble.” A living community evidences reclamations by nature, “fading coats of paint, canvas which has been bleached a little and torn by the wind, . . . fruit, dropping on the paths, and being crushed by people walking over it, grass growing in the cracks between the stones.” Recalling Waldo’s death, it is interesting that according to Alexander “the character of nature can’t arise without the presence and the consciousness of death.”³⁹ Like Emerson, Alexander also references Asian philosophy, and it informed his landscape aesthetic, as in this description of a fishpond he saw in a Japanese village.

A farmer made it for his farm . . . a simple rectangle, about 6 feet wide, and 8 feet long; opening off a little irrigation stream . . . there were eight great ancient carp . . . the oldest one had been there eighty years. . . . Every day the farmer sat by it for a few minutes. I was there only a day and I sat by it all afternoon. Even now, I cannot think of it without tears . . . It was so true to the nature of the fish, and flowers, and the water, and the farmers, that it had sustained itself for all that time, endlessly repeating, always different.⁴⁰

Alexander's conception of nature, even his word choice, is distinctly Emersonian. He turns to trees to describe "the balance of the repetition and variety" that vivify nature: "In a forest which is alive, it would be impossible for all the trees to be identical; and it would be impossible for one tree itself to be alive, if its leaves were all the same. No system whose component parts are so unresponsive to the forces they are subject to, could maintain itself successfully; it could not be alive or whole."⁴¹ Alexander's value system, like Emerson's before him, twines truth, beauty, and good as inseparable if one is to have an ecological conscience when it comes to creating one's immediate environment.

What is our immediate environment? "Where do we find ourselves?" asks Emerson in the opening line of "Experience" (*CW* 3:27). He suggests that the question and the need to orient ourselves, to find our bearings, are chronic, welling up again and again by virtue of "[t]he book of Nature . . . turn[ing] the gigantic pages,—leaf after leaf,—never re-turning one" (*CW* 6:8). We keep finding that we are at a somewhat different, often unanticipated, point in the story of the earth. We keep finding we are in a world other than the one we had expected as we inscribed our presence, needs, and wants on the face of the land. Thus, environmental ethics and environmentalism are always afterthoughts and adjustments. First, we have to find ourselves. My expression here is abstract, and Emerson's in "Fate" is scaled to the globe, but Emerson wrote "Experience" out of his particular bearings. By the time of writing the essay, he had substantially built his Concord world of home, family, garden, woodlot, and paths. And, as he writes in the essay, Waldo had died two years earlier, an onward yet irretrievable unmaking that Emerson did not let go to waste. A great deal has been written about Emerson, grief, and skepticism in the wake of "Experience." But Emerson's measure in the essay continues to be nature. We find ourselves "in a series," which is essentially an evolutionary sequence with the same improvisational creativity in play at the level of individual, species, or the planet itself, "of which we do not know the extremes" (*CW* 3:27). Yet for all our ignorance, and it is profound, Emerson's claim continues to be that we are also world-builders and as such accountable morally, aesthetically, and truthfully. The choices we make in digging and stocking ponds, in conserving or preserving wilderness, in drilling and mining and transporting, in architectural and municipal development, are creative of our environment, of where we find ourselves. The intent and consequence of those choices concerns Emerson deeply. His first principle is that we not harm.

NOTES

1. On Yellow Woman stories, see Patricia Clark Smith and Paula Gunn Allen, "Earthly Relations, Carnal Knowledge: Southwestern American Indian Women Writers and Land-

scape,” in *The Desert Is No Lady: Southwestern Landscapes in Women’s Writing and Art*, ed. Vera Norwood and Janice Monk (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1987), 174–196.

2. Michael Pollan, “Beyond Wilderness and Lawn,” *Harvard Design Magazine* 4 (S/S 1998), accessed April 2, 2017, <http://www.harvarddesignmagazine.org/issues/4/beyond-wilderness-and-lawn>.

3. Pollan, “Beyond Wilderness and Lawn.”

4. Henry David Thoreau, *Walden*, ed. J. Lyndon Shanley (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1971), 318; Wallace Stegner, *The Sound of Mountain Water* (New York: Penguin, 1997), 108. Stegner wrote his “Wilderness Letter” in 1960.

5. Pollan, “Beyond Wilderness and Lawn.”

6. Robert D. Richardson, *Emerson: The Mind on Fire* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 434–435.

7. Richardson, *Emerson: The Mind on Fire*, 433.

8. Andrew Jackson Downing, *Fruits and Fruit Trees of America; or the culture, propagation, and management, in the garden and orchard, of fruit trees generally* (New York: Wiley and Putnam, 1845), 1.

9. Edward Waldo Emerson, ed., *The Complete Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, vol. 5 (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1903), 336–337.

10. Downing, *Fruits and Fruit Trees of America*, v–vi, 3.

11. Andrew Jackson Downing, *A Treatise on the Theory and Practice of Landscape Gardening Adapted to North America; with a view to the improvement of country residences* (New York: Wiley and Putnam, 1841), 19, iii.

12. Downing, *A Treatise*, iv, 2, 401, ii.

13. However, Emerson reckons the immigrant laborers’ overall gain in escaping from “squalid despair . . . into the unlimited opportunities” of America (*CW* 1:225).

14. “The Young American” expresses Emerson’s belief that nature tends to ameliorate itself, and thereby humanity, but it is worth noting his private doubts as he had confided them earlier to his journal in 1841: “O protean Nature whose energy is change evermore, . . . tell me, art thou only such a creator as bards & orators? is thy power only for display? or canst thou change the form of this waste & unnecessary day into an hour of love and fitness?” (*JMN* 8:4).

15. Richardson, *Emerson: The Mind on Fire*, 433.

16. Chesla C. Sherlock, “Emerson’s Home,” *Fruit, Garden and Home*, October 1923, 14.

17. Sherlock, quoted by Carol Reuss, “Chesla C. Sherlock as First Editor of *Better Homes and Gardens*,” *Books at Iowa* 17 (November 1972): 27–33, accessed April 7, 2017, <http://digital.lib.uiowa.edu/bai/reuss.htm>.

18. Sherlock, “Emerson’s Home,” 14.

19. Richardson, *Emerson: The Mind on Fire*, 435.

20. Marta McDowell, *Beatrix Potter’s Gardening Life: The Plants and Places that Inspired the Classic Children’s Tales* (Portland, OR: Timber Press, 2013), 244; Downing, *Fruits and Fruit Trees of America*, 4.

21. Christopher Alexander, Sara Ishikawa, Murray Silverstein, et. al., *A Pattern Language: Towns, Buildings, Construction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 802.

22. Thoreau, *Walden*, ed. J. Lyndon Shanley (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1971), 317–318.

23. McDowell, *Beatrix Potter’s Gardening Life*, 244.

24. Samuel Johnson, *The Lives of the Most Eminent English Poets; with critical observations on their works*, vol. 1 (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 200–201.

25. Stanley Cavell, *This New Yet Unapproachable America: Lectures after Emerson after Wittgenstein* (Albuquerque, NM: Living Batch Press, 1989), 86.

26. Edward Waldo Emerson, *Emerson in Concord: A Memoir* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1889), 130.

27. Ralph Rusk, *The Life of Ralph Waldo Emerson* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1949), 412; Richardson, *Emerson: The Mind on Fire*, 315.

28. Edward Emerson, *Emerson in Concord*, 129, 130.

29. Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac and Sketches Here and There*, special commemorative edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 203, 176–177.

30. Stanley Cavell, *Must We Mean What We Say?*, updated ed. (Cambridge, UK: University of Cambridge Press, 1976), 238; Cavell, *This New Yet Unapproachable America*, 45; Cavell, *Must We Mean What We Say?*, 257.
31. Leslie Marmon Silko, *Yellow Woman and a Beauty of the Spirit: Essays on Native American Life Today* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996), 26.
32. Today (March 18, 2017), virtually no climate scientists and environmental ethicists are suggesting patience as an appropriate approach to environmental issues while the present administration has made extensive budget cuts to the Environmental Protection Agency, and federal judges have ruled against the Standing Rock and Cheyenne River Sioux Tribes, meaning oil could soon begin flowing through the contested Dakota Access Pipeline.
33. Thoreau, *Walden*, 91–92.
34. John Muir, *September-October 1878, Notes of Travel on the East Side of the Sierra*, accessed April 13, 2017, <http://digitalcollections.pacific.edu/cdm/compoundobject/collection/muirjournals/id/1415/rec/1>; Ronald H. Limbaugh, “John Muir and the Mining Industry,” *Mining History Journal* (1996): 65, quoting Muir, “The New Forest Reservation,” *Mining and Scientific Press* 74 (3 April 1897): 283.
35. Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac*, 204.
36. Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac*, 214, 221.
37. Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac*, 210.
38. Christopher Alexander, Sara Ishikawa, Murray Silverstein, et. al., *A Pattern Language*, xiii.
39. Christopher Alexander, *The Timeless Way of Building* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 153.
40. Christopher Alexander, *The Timeless Way of Building*, 38.
41. Christopher Alexander, *The Timeless Way of Building*, 148.

Chapter Five

Emerson and *Ahimsa*

Ahimsa, the Sanskrit word meaning nonharm, is a fundamental moral precept of Indian philosophy, predominant in both Hindu and Buddhist ethics. Emerson recognized his own commitments to *ahimsa*, and to its related concepts of monism and mindfulness, in the Asian philosophy he assimilated. As Alan Hodder notes, Emerson's turn to Asian philosophy was part of "the first collective effort to affirm the spiritual and cultural value of certain Asian traditions" as "complement and corrective" to western Judeo-Christian tradition. It was a trans-Atlantic enterprise, increasingly mutually so, with, as David Robinson and others have noted, "important intellectual . . . consequences" for the twentieth century.¹ In Emerson's case, it was inflected by Transcendentalism and natural philosophy. Emerson's read of Asian philosophy lent clarity not only to his own version of Transcendentalist spirituality, his critique of Christian religious formalism, and his call for religious reform and syncretism, but also to his nature writing and environmental ethic. He inscribed his "Orientalist" notebook "*Ex oriente lux*," light from the east that, as Ronald Bosco explains in his editorial introduction, Emerson believed could "nourish otherwise impoverished individuals and nations and . . . transmute . . . the crime of materialism into wisdom" (*TN* 2:14, 14), including the wisdom requisite to an ethical, not merely economic, relation to nature. Emerson's wide reading in Asian philosophy included European translations of Hindu and Buddhist texts, the Confucian classics (*CW* 3:xxii), and the Sufi poetry of Sanai, Attar, Rumi, Saadi, Hafiz, and others (*TN* 2:11 and *CW* 6:191*n*) as well as the work of scholars such as Max Müller. His interest was kindled early and never waned. In 1822, he wrote to his Aunt Mary Moody Emerson that he was "curious to read your Hindu mythologies" (*L* 1:116). His Orientalist notebook is undated but estimated by Bosco as likely begun in the 1850s and used through the 1870s (*TN* 2:37). Bosco describes as it as

“a veritable library of information about Oriental history, philosophy and philology” (*TN* 2:37). It also contains Emerson’s translations of Persian poetry (from German translations), and working drafts of several of his own poems including “Brahma.” Emerson’s philosophical method was characteristically syncretic, and from this record he drew what he saw as universal tuitions and truths with diverse origins. For example, the Sufi poets’ attention to nature resonated with him, and he praised Hafiz for adding what was missing in much of western poetry: “the insight of a mystic, that sometimes affords a deeper glance at Nature” (*CW* 8:129). In one of his translations of a Persian verse, he connects Persian enlightenment to Indian *ahimsa*: “Wilt thou see light,/Do no harm to living wight” (*TN* 2:66).

Despite reading these texts in translation through the lenses of American Transcendentalism and his own experience as well as toward his vision of American cultural values, Emerson was instrumental in introducing Asian philosophies in America with enough accuracy and clarity to facilitate the direct exchanges and philosophical outreaches that soon ensued. His understanding of Hinduism, for example, was unreservedly endorsed by Protap Chunder Mozoomdar, who traveled to Concord from Calcutta to speak at Bronson Alcott’s Concord School of Philosophy two years after Emerson’s death. Mozoomdar declared, “Amidst this ceaseless, sleepless din and clash of Western materialism, this heat of restless energy, the character of Emerson shines upon India serene as the evening star. He seems to some of us to have been a geographical mistake.” Mozoomdar specifically attributed Emerson’s reputation in India to his regard for nature: “Perhaps Hindoos were closer kinsmen to him than his own nation, because every typical Hindoo is a child of Nature.” Mozoomdar’s familiarity and affinity with Emerson are evident throughout his talk. He spoke of Emerson’s “sense of homogeneity with the woods and wilderness. The tranquil landscape and the distant line of the horizon [that] gave him that perception of occult relationship between man and all things which is the key to the sublime culture known as *Yoga* in the history of Hindoo philosophy.”² On the same occasion in Concord, American philosopher William T. Harris was quick to celebrate Emerson’s rendition of Hindu philosophy as authoritative. Harris’s comment that “Perhaps nowhere in our literature may one find so complete a characterization of the East Indian philosophy as is contained in [Emerson’s] short poem ‘Brahma’” and his description of the poem as a “wholly admirable epitome, or condensed statement” of the *Bhagavad Gita* overstep Mozoomdar’s approval and suggest that American readers need seek no further than Emerson for an understanding of East Indian philosophy.³

Emerson’s essays are sprinkled with references to Asian philosophies, “Compensation” and “Plato” particularly so. He published translations of Chinese texts in the *Dial* with Thoreau (the “Ethnical Scriptures”). He wrote about Persian poetry in his preface to the American edition of Saadi’s *Guli-*

stan explicitly to introduce and explain the tradition to inexperienced American readers unfamiliar with this “paradise of poets.” The preface asserts profound “moral and intellectual” convergences between east and west “just as, from geographical position, the Persians attribute to the east wind what we say of the west.”⁴ He participated as a founding member of the eclectic Free Religious Association and the Radical Club, leading lively discussions of Asian spirituality and philosophy in the latter. His writing has also played a part in subsequent trans-Pacific cultural exchanges and intersections such as the work of D. T. Suzuki, the Japanese writer and teacher who read Emerson avidly and greatly contributed to introducing Zen Buddhism to the west in the first half of the twentieth century. Emerson is part of the story of American interest in, familiarity with, and adaptation of Asian philosophy today. However, much of what has been written of Emerson and Asian philosophy has not focused specifically on environmental ethics.⁵

Contemporary visions of environmental ethics often incorporate the present-day Americanized aggregate of Asian philosophy that stems from Emerson’s engagement with “the light from the east.” That aggregate is thus a context in which Emerson’s relevance to environmental ethics has emerged and is identified and deployed. Within the context of that aggregate, for example, Lao Tzu gets read alongside Emerson and Lao Tzu’s sentiment compares with Emerson’s with respect to nonharm, environmental ethics, and sustainability:

Know what is enough—
Abuse nothing.
Know when to stop—
Harm nothing.
That is how to last a long time.⁶

Emerson, too, held that too much grasping, like gardening for profit, is a harmful and self-delusional enterprise, warning that “The hunger for wealth, which reduces the planet to a garden, fools the eager pursuer” (*CW* 3:110). He often enough left “the woodpaths as they were” (*JMN* 11:36) and his garden “alone a good deal” (*JMN* 10:92), knowing that too much of anything reduces, rather than augments, the whole living system.⁷

The connection today between Emerson’s affinity for Asian philosophy and environmental ethics thus is diffuse and concrete. It is apparent in the romanticism-inflected words of architect Christopher Alexander I quoted in concluding the last chapter and, with similar attention to building, in philosopher Alan Watts’s matter-of-fact language about the flawed relation to nature and ethos of western culture. Like Emerson, Watts trained for a professional life in the Christian church he eventually left, was convinced of the corrective value of Asian philosophy to western culture, and was part and product of an American aggregate of Asian philosophy with especial attention to

nature and environmental ethics. In 1942, Watts sent his father a complete works of Thoreau, recommending him as “one of the greatest nature writers” and “like Emerson . . . a lover of Vedanta and Taoism.”⁸ By 1980, Watts was accusing that western culture produces a developer who will

scrape off the top [of a hill] until it is perfectly flat and then scrape off terraces all the way down. It will upset the ecology of the hill, and then eventually all the houses will fall down, but by then the payments will have been made. Of course, a good architect would design a house to fit the hill. Why does the developer not hire such an architect? Essentially it is because the developer does not feel that the external world is his own body. It is.⁹

Watts identifies the error in the developer’s thinking as a failure to understand what is a fundamental tenet in Southeast Asian metaphysics: monism, expressed in the *Upanishads* as the essential identity that runs through variety, “*tat tvam asi*” or “That Art Thou.” It is a metaphysical principle Emerson intuited and then recognized as his own in reading passages from Hindu texts such as the *Vedas* and the *Bhagavad Gita*. He also gleaned it from a poem by Sufi mystic Attar, which he reproduced in his essay on Persian poetry: “This in that and that in this” (*CW* 8:147). Emerson could have sympathized with Watts’ mistaken developer; he had begun his *Nature* splitting the world conceptually and naming his own body as part of the category “NOT ME” (*CW* 1:8). But Emerson would not have condoned the developer’s error, and he did not settle for it in his own thought and practice, the test and standard of which he sought in nature. *Nature* amends ‘me and not-me’ with the monistic “Unity in Variety” (*CW* 1:27) as a fact of physical nature. *Ahimsa* is its ethical correlative.

ONTOLOGICAL MONISM

According to Anne Klein, in her study of Buddhism and feminism, ontological monism “has three significant elements: the mutual pervasion or co-extensiveness of conventional and ultimate phenomena, the dependence of each on the other, and the assertion that one does not in any way contradict or cancel out the other.”¹⁰ All three figure prominently in Emerson’s thought, and he viewed and disseminated them as characteristic of Asian philosophy and corroborative of his understandings of identity, variety, and causality. For instance, his assertion in “The Over-Soul” that “within man is the soul of the whole . . . the eternal One” (*CW* 2:160) paraphrases the fundamental lesson of the *Upanishads* that *atman*, local and embodied, is *Brahman*, eternal, ubiquitous, and inspiriting (in religious parlance), energetic (in the scientific language of Capra and Leopold), and generative (the aesthetic and moral terms, in Emerson’s view, of evolution and amelioration). His conception in

“Circles” of reality (and therein “selves” or any thing selves make) as a single vast and protean flow reflects his sense that identity varies. For Emerson, unity is embodied in the universe’s physical, natural variety. Material variety is what unity *is* and what it *does*. Thus, a fundamental unity flows like a river throughout the universe, as its nature, cause, process, and expression. As Emerson explains in “Poetry and Imagination,” “everything is in flight”:

[In] chemistry . . . we have the same avoirdupois matter in an alembic, without a vestige of the old form; and in animal transformation not less, as in grub and fly, in egg and bird, in embryo and man; everything undressing and stealing away from its old into new form, and nothing fast but those invisible cords which we call laws, on which all is strung. Then we see that things wear different names and faces, but belong to one family. (*CW* 8:2)

Nature’s variety is the elaboration continuously spun out by One, not a diaspora of multiple substances into irretrievable difference and isolation. “All is made of one piece, that plaintiff and defendant, friend and enemy, animal and planet, food and eater, are of one kind,” he reiterates in “Fate” (*CW* 6:26), even the most seeming opposites and antagonists. In “Brahma,” Emerson transcribes Krishna’s lesson to Arjuna of the essential identity of slayer and slain as told in the *Bhagavad Gita*. Enlightenment is experiencing this lesson directly, typically and paradoxically as relinquishing presumed identity, as de-individuating into, for example, the “perfect exhilaration” Emerson experienced in his “transparent eye-ball” state: “The currents of the Universal Being circulate through me; I am part or particle of God” (*CW* 1:10). For Emerson, monism is a fact of the physical world; understanding it is visceral (“*so to be is the sole inlet of so to know*” [*CW* 2:189]); consciously experiencing it is rapture and enlightenment. None of this is foreign to western philosophy in his view (Plato being his primary example), but, he noted, this “conception of the fundamental Unity . . . finds its highest expression in the religious writings of the East, chiefly in the Indian Scriptures, in the Vedas, The Bhagavat Geeta, and the Vishnu Purana” (*CW* 4:28).

Contrary to the suggestion of Christopher Pearce Cranch’s famous cartoon depicting a head-in-the-clouds Emerson as an outsized eyeball perched on two spindly legs and bare feet, Emerson’s monism reflects his deep footing in the physical world and his eye to practical reform. While Buddhist and, to a lesser degree, Hindu philosophies warn often enough against being deluded by appearances in the physical world and steer the seeker toward introspection, they do so out of careful attention to physical nature’s flux and flow. Emerson related their attention to his own turn to the succession of appearances in the natural environment as the way of things. He wrote in “The Transcendentalist” “if there is anything grand and daring in human thought or virtue, any reliance on the vast, the unknown . . . the spiritualist adopts it as most in nature,” noting that “[t]he oriental mind has always

tended to this largeness” and that the “Buddhist” . . . “is a Transcendentalist” (*CW* 1:205). The bewildering and mercurial array does not contradict the reality of One for Emerson but rather confirms it. The very transience and variety of appearances indicates to him the Over-Soul in action as it “looketh steadily forwards, creating a world before her, leaving worlds behind her” (*CW* 2:163). Emerson’s fused vision of the onward flow of reality and its unity in variety anticipates Christopher Alexander’s sense of organic architectural design. Drawing on Asian philosophy as Emerson did, Alexander writes, “an organic whole could only be created by a differentiating process” and, equally in the opposite direction, “the whole gives birth to its parts.”¹¹ Both Emerson and Alexander write in the wake of Coleridge’s romantic philosophy of organic creation as the “identity of two opposite elements—that is to say, sameness and variety.” For Coleridge, “This unity in multiteity” is fundamental to aesthetic creation and pleasure; it is “the principle of beauty.”¹² Emerson applied these ideas to all creative work including geological, biological, and artistic.

However, whereas Coleridge argued in *Aids to Reflection* (which Emerson was reading in 1830), that the unity is “antecedent,” the “cause and principle of each union” and in *Biographia Literaria* (which Emerson had borrowed from the Harvard library in 1827) outlined the poet’s “power” ideally to unify and “balance . . . opposite or discordant qualities,” Emerson’s Indian-inflected monism intertwines unity and variety in what Buddhist philosophy describes as mutual arising.¹³ Instead of conceptually and chronologically separating cause and effect as discrete, the model of mutual arising sees the two as Emerson did: “Cause and effect are two sides of one fact” (*CW* 2:186). Emerson also formulates a version of mutual arising in “Compensation,” this one consonant with the second chapter of the *Tao Te Ching* that affirms the simultaneous emergence of apparent opposites:

Polarity, or action and reaction, we meet in every part of nature; in darkness and light; in heat and cold; in the ebb and flow of waters; in male and female; in the inspiration and expiration of plants and animals . . . in the systole and diastole of the heart . . . in the centrifugal and centripetal gravity; in electricity, galvanism, and chemical affinity. . . . An inevitable dualism bisects nature, so that each thing is a half and suggests another thing to make it whole. (*CW* 2:57)

The one “suggests,” rather than causes the other. Recognize one, and the other “is born” to borrow from Lao Tzu.¹⁴

Mutual arising is a correlative of ontological monism. In “Compensation,” Emerson explains that “Cause and effect, means and ends, seed and fruit, cannot be severed; for the effect already blooms in the cause, the end preexists in the means, the fruit in the seed” (*CW* 2:60). Together, the ideas of ontological monism and mutual arising result in a conceptual leveling or

pluralism that is essential to environmental ethics, casting a clear light on the moral status of the earth as a community. As Leopold argues, the aggressive dualism of conqueror-agent-cause and conquest-object-result with respect to land is erroneous, unethical, and “eventually self-defeating.” Having no scientific, moral, or existential grounds, it is unsustainable.¹⁵ As Watts points out, “biologists show us very clearly that there is no way of definitively separating a human organism from its external environment. The two are a single field of behavior.”¹⁶ Instead of separate takers and resources, and instead of causes and “their” effects, there is, as Emerson says, an evolving “composition” in which “all are needed by each one” (*JMN* 4:198; *CW* 9:14), a “land community,” as Leopold terms it. As Klein describes the Buddhist account, the environment “embodies the collective actions of innumerable living beings.” She cites the Tibetans, who “live in a cosmos they co-create, and that is itself alive and . . . sometimes even speaks,” experiences Emerson and Leopold would corroborate.¹⁷

In Emerson’s estimation, “every thing in nature contains all the powers of nature” because “the universe is represented in every one of its particles” (*CW* 2:59). Every thing has agency and the power to shape the ongoing elaboration. Ontological monism is thus, for Emerson, a philosophical platform for change and broad participation. He stakes creativity and moral development on it. Unity is not a state but a process, the “eternal procession” (*CW* 2:186). “Eternal” has often been conceived in western monotheism and philosophy as one unchanging—the creator or unmoved mover or “watchmaker.” But for a writer as attentive to nature as Emerson is, “eternal” is more plausibly conceived as change itself, and was so by Heraclitus as “change is the only constant,” by St. Augustine as “the generation of generations,”¹⁸ by Charles Darwin and Alfred Russel Wallace as evolution, by contemporary biologists and environmentalist systems thinkers as complex adaptive systems, and by Emerson as the soul-world becoming. The cognition of a static eternity tends to causal determinism and apocalyptic narratives, but the recognition of eternity as incipience, a “germ” (as in Max Müller’s translation from the *Rig Veda*),¹⁹ or a “vast-flowing vigor” (Mencius quoted by Emerson, *CW* 3:42) tends to ongoing, participatory and ameliorative creation.

The creation is sustained and the ameliorative possibilities unconstrained, as Emerson sees it, by virtue of the mutual pervasion of matter and thought: “Nature is the incarnation of a thought, and turns to a thought again, as ice becomes water and gas,” that, as meteorologists and Emerson well know, will rise to condense again (*CW* 3:113). Emerson leans (as does Hindu philosophy) toward prioritizing the thought, whether a recognition or an intention, as informing the physical incarnation. However, the twinned frameworks of romantic philosophy and physical nature so central to Emerson’s intellectual orientation mitigate that tendency. Both romanticism and nature

suggest to Emerson that the “invisible” (creative intention, that is, or a thought) and its “terminus” (embodied expression) are a single field of behavior and mutual response, “two sides of one fact” (*CW* 1:22, 22; 2:186). Emerson had a philosophical foot in spiritual and idealist philosophy, but he understood the physicality of knowledge and sympathy. He eyed a horizon that opened on today’s physiological and evolutionary understandings of mind, consciousness, and emotion. Emerson names thinking “the hardest task in the world” (*CW* 2:196) because it is full and ongoing body-to-body engagement; it entails listening, receptivity, and agility.

Thinking is also hard because it is never finished in Emerson’s estimation. There is no thought that cannot “be turned to-morrow . . . that may not be revised and condemned” (*CW* 2:183) by surprising events. To stop thinking is to conclude prematurely, incorrectly, and unethically, and it is disempowering: “Power ceases in the instant of repose” (*CW* 2:40). To stop thinking is to trade life for “the having lived” (*CW* 2:40), a move that does not bode well for the environment or biodiversity. As Aldo Leopold notes, stopping at the thought of ourselves as the ones who “know . . . just what makes the [land] community clock tick, and just what and who is valuable, and what and who is worthless” is inadequate and arrogant. According to Leopold, the inadequate thinking, or truncated engagement, is merely a rationale for an anthropocentric, environmentally unsustainable preference, namely, to be “conqueror of the land-community.”²⁰ Thought is everywhere dissolved in matter, not just in our own gray matter. In a world where “every thing in nature contains all the powers of nature” (*CW* 2:59) we are necessarily not the only knowers or the only evaluators of what, or who, is valuable. Thinking entails ranging broadly and without reservation in what Emerson calls “strange sympathies” and “occult relations” to a sense of the “web of relations,” the “series,” in which we find ourselves. It requires the self-undoing anthropomorphism Loren Eiseley defends.²¹ It requires the humility Emerson evinces in “Experience” in admitting what knowledge he has is by “reception,” not by getting, and that he has “not found that much was gained by manipular attempts to realize the world of thought” (*CW* 3:48). The word “thought” appears nineteen times in Emerson’s “Circles,” but always as a matter of risk and daring, upheaval and abandon, not of getting, planning, or imposing. For Emerson (as for Eiseley) this way of thinking is not a diminishment but rather the possibility of humanity and humaneness. Donella Meadows figures the kind of thinking Emerson has in mind as dancing. She advocates “Dancing with Systems” given the unpredictability, hence inherent possibilities, of “self-organizing, nonlinear, feedback systems” such as eco- and social systems.²² For Emerson, thinking abides that unpredictability, and he too invokes dance to describe the transformative act of thinking when “all that we reckoned settled, shakes and rattles; . . . and dance[s] before our eyes” (*CW* 2:183, 184). In the light of such thinking, behaviors arise that

refrain from harming what Watts calls “the whole thing” or the “cosmos,” and what Emerson means by the “way of life” (*CW* 2:190).²³

HUMAN PLACES, HUMAN PERSPECTIVE

Environmental ethics happens, conceptually and practically, with humans in place and from a human perspective. The need for an ethically responsible relation to the environment arises mutually with the evolution of humans and human culture experienced as an instance of what eighth-century Chinese Ch’an (Zen) Buddhist philosopher Shih-t’ou called “the coincidence of opposites” that interact and “permeate one another.”²⁴ In Emerson’s monistic view, we are nature’s doing. Nature “is flesh of our flesh, and bone of our bone” through “the work of a great and beneficent and progressive necessity which, from the first pulsation of the first animal life . . . has advanced thus far” (*CW* 1:123, 193). Alan Watts, persuaded like Emerson by science and Asian philosophy, advanced a similar argument: “it is completely absurd to say that we came into this world. We didn’t, we came out of it.”²⁵ As does a newborn infant, we instantly begin to stake our claim in the world. “We are” thus, Emerson writes of nature, “parties to its existence” (*CW* 1:123) with moral and creative roles. The urgency for an environmental ethic is born with us, and Emerson included the question of ethical relations with the environment as one of “the always interesting topics of Man and Nature” (*CW* 1:122). His prototype of environmental ethics assumes the natural inevitability of human life and also the responsibility of human beings to live up to the moral standard of nature, to be as good as nature itself. His is not a call for wilderness preservation but rather for what Michael Pollan identifies as the “even more important” environmental ethics that guides our behavior with respect to “all those places we cannot help but alter, all those places that cannot simply be ‘given back to nature,’ which today are most places.”²⁶ In contrast to Thoreau’s, or Wallace Stegner’s and Edward Abbey’s, focus on preserving pristine wilderness, Emerson considered, as for example in “The Young American,” direct “relation[s] to the land, the habit of tilling it, or mining it, or even hunting on it” as, at least potentially, “directly tending to endear the land to the inhabitant” (*CW* 1:229). Emerson’s integration of the Enlightenment-driven American adaptation of Confucian humanism²⁷ with Indian monism suggests an environmental ethics centered on human engagement rather than human withdrawal. The challenge is developing a sufficient perspective within the confines of the only perspective we have: the human perspective.

William James, who in his infancy met Emerson and whose pragmatism owes much to his extensive reading of Emerson, observed the impossibility of “purely objective truth” and concluded “[t]he trail of the human serpent is

thus over everything.” Stanley Fish’s argument that we cannot escape from interpretation bespeaks the same dilemma. As Fish says, “we are never not in a situation”; our perspective is always limited.²⁸ Before Fish and James is Emerson writing of our eye-limited perspective “[t]he eye is the first circle” which forms “a horizon” in its image (*CW* 2:179) and Emerson concluding “inevitably does the universe wear our color, and every object fall successively into the subject itself” (*CW* 3:45). The world seems to fan out from when and where we are, from a point we experience as central and significant. How that experience of centrality is understood and deployed has significant ramifications for environmental ethics. When “central” is parsed as singular and “most important,” indifference and harm to the environment ensue. Seeking an inclusive middle ground, Emerson writes boldly of the centrality of humanity and also in aversion to anthropocentrism. The integrity in Emerson seeking that middle ground is that he is seeking his own actual (rather than preferred or assumed) position. He invites his readers to undertake the same search, asking, “Where do *we* find ourselves?” at the beginning of “Experience” (*CW* 3:27, emphasis mine). His answer there and elsewhere is in the middle, “on a stair” (*CW* 3:27), at the “middle point” (*CW* 2:81), “in the midst of the objects of nature” (*CW* 3:87). The middle is where we are; it is the ground for our claims and conduct. Though middle from one perspective is a creative center (agent) in a sphere (the sphere of our knowledge or influence, say), in Emerson’s view the middle we inhabit is at least equally a point on a “surface” which is “not fixed, but sliding” (*CW* 2:186). The ethical implications of “middle” for Emerson thus include “patience,” “reception,” “humility,” and being “moved” as by “strange sympathies” (*CW* 3:48, 48; *CW* 1:39; *JMN* 4:200). “Experience” names the “middle region of our being . . . the temperate zone,” the “mid-world . . . the best” (*CW* 3:36, 37). The middle is where Emerson suggests we can “accept the clangor and jangle of contrary tendencies,” that is, the variety and diversity of others, with the patience and commitment to “all justice” he expresses at the end of “Experience” (*CW* 3:36, 49).²⁹

With respect to the environment, in Emerson’s view, we humans are never not in the middle of it, but our presence, like our perspective, is as necessarily limited as it is central. *Nature* suggests man “is placed in the centre of beings” not as an apex, but as a point on “a ray of relation,” the placement being by virtue what he is: “an analogist” (*CW* 1:19). In “Fate,” Emerson owns that human “power is hooped in by a necessity,” that “[w]e cannot trifle with this reality, this cropping-out in our planted gardens of the core of the world” (*CW* 6:11). In fact, he welcomed such outcroppings as signs of nature’s health and vigor. Recall his pleasure in the “touch-me-if-you-dare” apples “not found in Downing” (*JMN* 10:360). His characteristic enthusiasm for new technologies is tempered by values other than monetary. In “The Method of Nature,” delivered in 1841 as part of the commencement

ceremonies of Waterville College in Maine, he does “not wish to look with sour aspect at the industrious manufacturing village, or the mart of commerce” but, he argues, “We hear something too much of the results of machinery, commerce . . . Avarice, hesitation, and following, are our diseases” (*CW* 1:120). Some fifteen years later, in “Works and Days,” a lecture later published in his *Society and Solitude*, he warns that “Machinery is aggressive. The weaver becomes a web, the machinist a machine” (*CW* 7:83). Technology itself generates a slim middle ground in which we must find ourselves: “All tools are in one sense edge-tools, and dangerous” (*CW* 7:83). In the gap between edges is the brief possibility of choice: “Whilst thus the energy for originating and executing work, deforms itself by excess, and so our axe chops off our own fingers,—this evil is not without remedy. . . . Shall he [“man”], then renounce steam, fire, and electricity, or shall he learn to deal with them” (*CW* 6:36). With respect to technology also then, we are never not in the middle of it, too often caught by a “monster” of our own making that “has proved, like the balloon, unmanageable, and flies away with the aeronaut” (*CW* 5:95). Like Muir, Emerson blames this destructive excess on the failure “to resist and rule the dragon Money” (*CW* 5:95).

Emerson shared Thoreau’s views on the human sin of materialism, but he nevertheless regarded the human perspective—his own perspective—as innately capable of being a luminous and transcendent force, because of (not in spite of) its particularity and partialness. At its wide-eyed best, Emerson saw particularity as a portal, the only portal an individual has, to the universal. His understanding of the larger possibilities of particularity is a version of the lesson of the traditional Hindu story of Indra’s jewel net, included by scholars Stephanie Kaza and Kenneth Kraft in their anthology of sources of Buddhist environmentalism. Indra has a net made of jewels. The clarity of each is such that each contains reflections of all the others. One’s own place affords multiple perspectives: “If you sit in one jewel, then you are sitting in all the jewels in every direction, multiplied over and over. . . . Because in one jewel there are all the jewels.” Furthermore, “it is precisely by not leaving this one jewel,” by keeping to your place, “that you can enter all the jewels.”³⁰ With the same insight, Emerson named himself a “fragment” (*CW* 3:47), but one who posits “the infinitude of the private man”; in fact, he declares that the “one doctrine” he has taught “in all my lectures” (*JMN* 7:342). The monistic and elaborative character of the universe is natural for Emerson, and it means that “the universe is represented in every one of its [material] particles” (*CW* 2:59), including humans: “Man carries the world in his head . . . [b]ecause the history of nature is characterized in his brain” (*CW* 3:106). This “charactering” is a capacity for ecoliteracy, for a perspective sensitive beyond anthropocentrism. Though Emerson writes frankly about the limits of human perspective, notably in “Experience,” he also claims its possibilities in two ways. One is passive, and the other is active, modes often described as *yin*

and *yang* in reference to traditional Chinese philosophy. In the passive direction, human perspective is receptive and thus potentially enlarged. Such is Emerson's mode in, for example, "The Rhodora," "Each and All," and in experiences he recounts in *Nature* such as "expand[ing] and liv[ing] in the warm day like corn and melons" (*CW* 1:35).³¹ The other direction is active, as that which he encourages throughout "Circles," and we can purposefully enlarge our perspective. In either case, Emerson aims for language that releases rather than encapsulates.

LIBERATING WORDS

In a sentence that defends the creative role and place of humans, Emerson also calls our attention to the pitfalls of the language we use to speak a word for monistic, mercurial nature and to describe and prescribe our relation to it: "We talk of deviations from natural life, as if artificial life were not also natural" (*CW* 3:106). Emerson is here critical of nomenclature, not of human artifice. He was particularly critical of "wintry" nomenclature as antithetical to environmental sensitivity and empathy (*CW* 1:44). Such language eviscerates life, his example being the ornithologist's nomenclature that renders a dead bird (*CW* 6:150). Instead he urged "blood-warm" language as more consonant with our "consanguinity" with nature (*CW* 1:68, 38). A verbal analogue to nature, itself a cipher, requires a willingness to abandon words when the time is right, an insight Emerson held in common with the Asian philosophies he read and even figured similarly as a ferryboat. His declaration that for the poet "all language is vehicular and transitive, and is good, as ferries and horses are for conveyance" (*CW* 3:20) is strikingly similar to the Buddhist parable of the ferryboat, which likens enlightenment to crossing a river. Once the river is crossed, the vehicle of texts and teachings is no longer necessary; one leaves those words behind on the shore. For Emerson, as for Thoreau, Loren Eiseley, Alan Watts, or the Sufi poets Hafiz and Saadi whom Emerson so admired, the way to abandon words is not to quit writing but to keep writing. A story told by Taoist philosopher Chuang Tzu, here translated by Thomas Merton, the Trappist monk singled out by the Dalai Lama "as having a more profound understanding of Buddhism than any other Christian he had known,"³² captures the essence of this point:

The purpose of a fish trap is to catch fish, and when the fish are caught, the trap is forgotten.

The purpose of a rabbit snare is to catch rabbits. When the rabbits are caught, the snare is forgotten.

The purpose of words is to convey ideas. When the ideas are grasped, the words are forgotten.

Where can I find a man who has forgotten words? He is the one I would like to talk to.³³

Both philosophical traditions—Emersonian and Asian—understand the risk of over-attachment to language already written or spoken, of resting our thought and perception on nomenclature and thus becoming trapped in what Emerson repeatedly calls the “prison” of our own expressed thought (*CW* 2:201; 3:19, 31; 5:2). With somewhat less hope than Emerson, Eiseley used the same image to describe the liabilities of twentieth-century nomenclature. According to Eiseley, “valuable though language is to man, it is by very necessity limiting, and creates for man an invisible prison.” Eiseley feared our use of words to excise bits of nature and render them “no longer part of the unnamed shifting architecture of the universe” cuts us off from the flow and vitality of the world.³⁴ The remedy, in Emerson’s view, is to set language free, to set it in motion through paradox, metaphor, contradiction, and relation, qualities he prized as poetic language and as writerly commitments. His commitment to words that abandon themselves was unbounded. Cavell points to “Emerson’s (and Thoreau’s) delirious denunciation of books” and “their own books that dare us to read them and dare us not to,”³⁵ books as sweet and wild as the “Touch-me-if-you-dare” apples that so delighted Emerson (*JMN* 10:360). In his notebook “Orientalist,” Emerson names “the office of the poet as the office of instructor of his people” (*TN* 2:55). For him, poets are “liberating gods” whose language enables, or incites, the “emancipation . . . dear to all men” (*CW* 3:18, 19). In “The Poet,” Emerson issued a call for such a poet. Alan Watts, an astute reader of Emerson’s “Self-Reliance” and Buddhist philosophy, described his own twentieth century as endangered, having missed the call: “What we have forgotten is that thoughts and words are *conventions*, and that it is fatal to take conventions too seriously,” tantamount to the “suicide” Emerson warns about in “Self-Reliance” (*CW* 2:27).³⁶

Emerson, Eiseley, and Watts all advocate a turn to nature for language liberated. They point to ecoliteracy as a condition of liberating words. In “Circles,” Emerson figured and celebrated words as fugitives. He called the “words of God,” that is, nature’s vocabulary of “manifold tenacious qualities, this chemistry and vegetation, these metals and animals . . . as fugitive as other words” (*CW* 2:186). One of the most insightful comments about Emerson’s writing is Richard Poirier’s in *Poetry & Pragmatism*. Poirier writes, “Emerson is forever trying to liberate himself and his readers from the consequences of his own writing.”³⁷ Writing to liberate is consistent with nature’s incessant procession in which “the past is always swallowed and forgotten; the coming only is sacred” (*CW* 2:189). The digestive metaphor is important, and it is not his only connection of digestion with creativity. Recall the journal entry, “First we eat, then we beget; first we read, then we write; have

you a better appetite? Then you will do well" (*JMN* 8:320). The past is swallowed by nature, and words are swallowed and forgotten by readers writing. Digested words nourish and energize the next turn in a way that sustains the unity and variety whose mutual arising are the hallmark of ontological monism. Emerson read and then quoted in "Persian Poetry" Hafiz's line "according to my food I grow and I give" (*CW* 8:137). By way of digestion, nothing lasts in its original form, but nothing is lost, or, as Emerson comments on another of Hafiz's lines, "sometimes his feasts, feasters and world are only one pebble more in the eternal vortex and revolution" (*CW* 8:133). Emphasizing the fecundity of this variety and change, Emerson notes the abundance of "pregnant sentences" in Hafiz's poetry, stemming from "the rapidity of his turns" (*CW* 8:129).

Emerson began *Nature* by describing the great divide, philosophically speaking, between nature and the soul, defining "soul" as not nature, art, other men, or his own body (*CW* 1:8). Interestingly, his definition is in the style of the Buddhist and Hindu process called "*neti neti*," "not this, not this." This process of definition liberates what is being defined from word after word, concept after concept. Leaving this ferryboat of dualistic mind/body nomenclature behind at the shore, Emerson then spent the rest of *Nature* and his philosophical career demonstrating the unreality, or merely nominal reality, of that divide, believing as Buddhist philosophy does in Klein's words that "physical and mental processes are not two halves of a whole, but two avenues of access into the fully integrated complex in which they participate . . . if you follow either far enough, it brings you to the other,"³⁸ just "as ice becomes water and gas" (*CW* 3:113). By "The American Scholar" Emerson was defining "[t]he world,—this shadow of the soul," as the "*other me*" (*CW* 1:59). Monistic all the way through, he aspired to his own language that would be an *other nature*, blood-warm, muscular, and protean in the same ways as nature itself. That sort of language is not "out there" in dictionaries or canonical texts. Each writer who wishes to speak a word for nature, who wishes to kindle an ecological conscience, must write out of particular perspective characterized by time and place and individual identity—literally out of that perspective into a wider one. Ethically speaking, a word for nature entails writing a way out of the prison, or blinders, of anthropocentric (and egocentric) conceptions, values, priorities, and language. To be moved by "strange sympathies" across ecologically and scientifically unfounded divides requires an enthusiasm for the abandoning that is, as Emerson says, "the way of life" (*CW* 2:190).

Silence, therefore, also plays an important role in Emerson's sense of language, in the same ways and for the same reasons it does in the Asian philosophy he gravitated toward. Silence is more than listening compliantly to words; in fact, Emerson worries that "[i]n this our talking America, we are *ruined* by our good nature and listening on all sides" (*CW* 3:47, emphasis

mine). Silence is forgetting words, letting them go as easily as they well up and wander in our minds and behaviors. That is why Emerson suggests it as a way of escaping the verbal contours and commitments of “mean egotism” (*CW* 1:10) and why he looks to the “sanity” he can find “in the solitude to which every man is always returning” (*CW* 3:49). It is why Alan Watts affirms the teaching of Zen Buddhism that “we must suspend our words, suspend our descriptions, and be alert to the actual happening . . . it is as simple as that.” But, Watts warns, “you cannot force your mind to be silent. That would be like trying to smooth ripples in water with an iron. Water becomes clear and calm only when left alone.”³⁹ Letting things be is difficult. As Cavell remarks, leaving things as they are, to themselves, “may require the most forbearing act of thinking.”⁴⁰ The silence Emerson and Watts describe abandons words for being because, as Emerson writes, “*so to be* is the sole inlet of *so to know*” (*CW* 2:189). As Evelyn Barish writes, Emerson turned for enlightenment and the “true mystery” to tangible being, to the “accessible and sensuous—food barely taken from nature, bodies one can hear, see, touch,” and she describes his language that issues from that turn as having “the rebounding energy of the coiled spring.”⁴¹ For Emerson, silence is a way of abandoning descriptive words for experience, prescriptive language for inspiration, the prison of an expert’s names and categories for the freedom of what Shunryu Suzuki calls “beginner’s mind.”⁴² From that experience, in light of that inspiration, and in that freedom to experience, retrospective words are swallowed and forgotten; they give way to prospective words.

Emerson’s conception of language extends what I have called his “nature literacy” beyond the usual concerns of literacy that entail finding the right words for expression or translation, ensuring the integrity and transfer of the message, and seeing that the necessary reciprocity for communication actually occurs. Emerson extends ontological monism to the relationship between language and being, not only in that all is “made of one piece” (*CW* 6:26), but also as a standard of literacy and a guide for ethical conduct. Emerson always, and specifically with respect to the environment, yoked philosophy to practice, writing to activism, speaking to work, and love to respectful and protective behaviors. He practiced this *yoga*—the union—of environmental awareness and posture toward nature, achieving *samadhi*-like experiences such as becoming a “transparent eye-ball,” “expand[ing] . . . in the warm sun like corn and melons,” and yielding himself “to the perfect whole,” (*CW* 1:10, 35; 9:15), and also toward achieving the practical “education and a sentiment commensurate” to “[t]he task of planting, of surveying, of building upon this immense tract” (*CW* 1:226) with “a child’s love to it” (*CW* 1:35).⁴³ As that child, he does “not wish to fling stones at my beautiful mother, nor soil my gentle nest” (*CW* 1:35–36). *Ahimsa* is an intention to be practiced and embodied.

Emerson intimates an environmental ethics that is an interactive, open-ended practice of generous and generative behaviors directed at sustaining creative and ameliorative capacity at multiple levels. It entails the paradox of “all mean egotism” vanishing as coincident with “see[ing] all” (*CW* 1:10). Being a lover of nature, a naturalist moved by empathy and beauty, hinges on self-abandon, on losing “I” as the sole and controlling agent in the relationship. That is why Inayat Khan, the Sufi teacher from India who lectured widely in the United States and Europe during the early twentieth-century, suggested “‘I’ is the very enemy of love.”⁴⁴ Emerson gleans a lesson from nature about amelioration without expectation of private gain, either for himself or for his species, and he frames it as a direct quote. To questions about nature’s methods and aims,

nature replies, “I grow, I grow” . . . [and] seems further to reply, “I have ventured so great a stake as my success, in no single creature. I have not yet arrived at any end. The gardener aims to produce a fine peach or pear, but my aim is the health of the whole tree,—root, stem, leaf, flower, and seed,—and by no means the pampering of a monstrous pericarp at the expense of all the other functions.” (*CW* 1:126)

His words “convey” nature’s reply to humanity’s “I am.” Nature’s reply, as Emerson has it, reminds us not only that “All are needed by each one” (*CW* 9:14), but also that each one is swallowed to nourish the next, that sustainable practices are those conceived not in self-interest, but in the light of an ethical relation to the land and to life. The new yet unapproachable America Emerson surmised in the west was conceived to a significant degree in the light of the east. His reading of Asian philosophy for, and as, an American audience opened a path toward contemporary fusions of Asian and western aesthetic and environmental values, by now traveled from both directions as well as a framework for reading Emerson vis-à-vis contemporary environmental ethics, as illustrated by following interwoven passages from Emerson, Muir, Leopold, the thirteenth-century Buddhist monk Dōgen, and poet-essayist-environmentalist Gary Snyder.⁴⁵

MOUNTAINS

I begin with Emerson, whose highest literary sights were set on poetry, writing in his journal “Mountains are great poets, and one glance at this fine cliff scene undoes a great deal of prose” (*JMN* 8:405). He owned that mountains have something of their own to say, for “we cannot avoid the question, whether the characters are not significant of themselves. Have mountains, and waves, and skies, no significance but what we consciously give them?” (*CW* 1:21). “The mountain-ridge,” like “the sea . . . and every flower-bed,”

sounds its “pre-cantations . . . and when any man goes by with an ear sufficiently fine, he overhears them, and endeavors to write down the notes without diluting or depraving them” (*CW* 3:15). Muir, a consummate listener of mountains, described his high regard for Emerson’s ear for them: “During my first years in the Sierra I was ever calling on everybody within reach to admire them, but I found no one half warm enough until Emerson came. I had read his essays, and felt sure that of all men he would best interpret the sayings of these noble mountains and trees. Nor was my faith weakened when I met him in Yosemite.” Though Muir was disappointed that Emerson, “too near the sundown of his life,” did not abandon his party of concerned companions to run for long with Muir in the mountains, their meeting confirmed Muir’s sense of Emerson’s desire and ability to listen to a mountain.⁴⁶ While Muir and Emerson read the mountain for the sake of human interest in understanding glaciers, geography, granite, and ore, they also understood mountains as saying more, as being more, than human knowledge or names or needs. Leopold, who read Emerson and Muir, came to understand this as well. In “Thinking Like a Mountain,” Leopold famously described his own coming to listen to the mountain, to “wolf country,” beyond the limits of the lexicon of wildlife management. He had “thought that because fewer wolves meant more deer, that no wolves would mean hunter’s paradise,” but he changed his mind irrevocably as he looked into the eyes of a hunted, dying wolf and “sensed that neither the wolf nor the mountain agreed with such a view.” The experience profoundly shaped his views on wilderness ecology and environmental ethics: “I now suspect that just as a deer herd lives in mortal fear of its wolves, so does a mountain live in mortal fear of its deer,” and that one who does not have a sense of the complete ecological system “has not learned to think like a mountain.”⁴⁷ It is important to notice that Leopold was humbled by the experience. He does not claim expertise (“I . . . suspect,” he writes, not “I know”), and thus he learns and knows more. Furthermore, the possessive pronouns acknowledge the nonhuman relationships: the herd has *its* wolves, the mountain *its* deer.

Farther west from the mountains Leopold and Muir knew well, across the Pacific, so far as to be the “East” to Emerson, and centuries before Emerson or Muir or Leopold was listening to mountains, Dōgen, founder of the Sōtō school of Japanese Zen Buddhism, taught his “Mountains and Waters Sutra” at Kannon-dori Kosho Horin Monastery. He spoke of mountains and their mountain nature as akin to the quality of Buddha-nature, or, enlightenment, with words that suggested the subject/agent status of mountains: “Mountains do not lack the qualities of mountains. Therefore they always abide in ease and always walk . . . do not doubt mountains’ walking even though it does not look the same as human walking. . . . Those without eyes to see mountains cannot realize, understand, see, or hear this as it is.”⁴⁸ The right line of sight, the right attunement of ear to cantation, the capacity to imagine a

mountain thinking and expressing itself, concerned Emerson as well. Having read Dōgen, Emerson,⁴⁹ Muir, and Leopold, Snyder draws the final arc in this circle with the words “it is rare and marvelous to know . . . that mountains are constantly walking.”⁵⁰ Snyder, as Emerson, was attracted to Asian philosophy, especially Zen Buddhism. In *The Practice of the Wild*, Snyder writes about Dōgen’s Sutra and notes the nexus of the religious sentiment evinced by the many peaks in Japan sacred to Buddhist and Shinto tradition, the philosophical austerity of the “no-nonsense meditation view of Buddhism,” and the “wilderness” status of the highest terrain that leaves it relatively “independent of the control of the central government.”⁵¹ Elsewhere in the same book he also loops Muir and Leopold, whom he describes as “politicized” by “the abuses of public land,” into his call to environmental literacy, ethics, and activism.⁵² But to return to Dōgen, according to Snyder,

Dōgen is not concerned with ‘sacred mountains’—or pilgrimages, or spirit allies, or wilderness as some special quality. His mountains and streams are the processes of this earth, all of existence, process, essence, action, absence. . . . They are what we are, we are what they are . . . plain thushness. Roots, stems, and branches are all equally scratchy. No hierarchy, no equality. . . . No wild and tame, no bound or free, no natural and artificial. Each totally its own frail self. Even though connected all which ways; even *because* connected all which ways.⁵³

Snyder’s words lead back to confluences in Emerson’s philosophy that are basic to environmental ethics. Each member of the entire land community is self-reliant, and its merits are their own excuse for being. Each needs and is needed by the others. All boundaries are sites of permeability and exchange. Emerson saw this interconnected diversity as true not only of nature, but also as necessary to nature literacy: “whilst the laws of the world coexist in each particle, they cannot be learned by the exclusive study of one creature . . . [nature’s] secrets are locked in one plant; but she does not unlock them in any one” (*EL* 2:26). Each has something enlightening to say and teach.

NOTES

1. Alan Hodder, “Asia,” in *Ralph Waldo Emerson in Context*, ed. Wesley T. Mott (New-York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 41; David Robinson, “Emerson, the Indian Brahmō Samaj, and the American Reception of Ghandi,” in *A Power to Translate the World: New Essays on Emerson and International Culture*, ed. David LaRocca and Ricardo Miguel-Alfonso (Lebanon, NY: Dartmouth College Press, 2015), 43. Though Hodder describes Transcendentalist interest in Asian philosophy as “a provincial manifestation of a larger cultural trend” led by European colonizers and scholars, he too notes the significance of this “first collective effort . . . for later generations of Americans” (41).

2. Protap Chunder Mozoomdar, “Emerson as Seen from India,” in *The Genius and Character of Emerson: Lectures at the Concord School of Philosophy*, ed. F. B. Sanborn (Boston: James R. Osgood and Co., 1885), 367.

3. William T. Harris, "Emerson's Orientalism," in *The Genius and Character of Emerson*, ed. F. B. Sanborn, 373. Harris quotes from Emerson's "Plato," "If the East loved infinity, the West delighted in boundaries" and observes that Plato was to Emerson "the balanced soul who sees the two elements and does justice to each" (372).

4. Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Preface to the American edition," in *The Gulistan or Rose Garden* by Saadi, trans. Francis Gladwin with a biographical essay by James Ross (Boston: Ticknor and Fields, 1865), xi, vii.

5. Recent scholarship that extensively investigates the mutual and evolving influences between Emerson and "eastern" philosophies includes Lawrence Buell's remarks on "The Asian Difference" in his *Emerson* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 169–198. Buell notes the influence of Hindu philosophy on Emerson's ideas about illusion, unreality, and skepticism (174–175) as well as the impact of Emerson's philosophy on D. T. Suzuki (196). See also David M. Robinson, "Emerson, the Indian Brahmo Samaj, and the American Reception of Ghandi," in *A Power to Translate the World*, 43–60 (Lebanon, NY: Dartmouth College Press, 2015). Robinson traces the evolution of Emerson's views on Hinduism from his college assignment on "Indian Superstition" to his becoming one of "a strand of American religious thinkers . . . whose dialogue with Indian religions evoked a desire for religious syncretism" that was shared and responded to by Brahmo Samaj Hindu reformers in India (43). Robinson situates Emerson's interest in Indian philosophy within a "transcultural reconception of religion in the nineteenth century, with important intellectual and political consequences" for the twentieth century (43). On Emerson and the Islamic Sufi poets, see Susan Dunston, "East of Emerson," in *Emerson for the Twenty-First Century: Global Perspectives on an American Icon*, ed. Barry Tharald, 107–130 (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2010) and Roger Sedarat "Middle Eastern-American Literature: A Contemporary Turn in Emerson Studies," in *A Power to Translate the World: New Essays on Emerson and International Culture*, 310–325. In "East of Emerson" I trace Emerson's attraction to and identification with the Sufi poets, especially Hafiz and Saadi, and his explanatory introduction of Sufi poetry to an American audience. Sedarat's topic is "Emerson's early appropriation of Persian poetry and then . . . the later return of Emerson as an influence on Middle Eastern-American writers like Rihani" (310). He argues books such as Ameen Rihani's *The Book of Khalid* problematize terms like "Middle Eastern" and "American" (310). To established overlaps between Emerson's writing and Chinese Taoism, Buddhism, and Confucianism, Neal Dolan and Laura Jane Wey add the influence of Emerson on "the lurching course of Chinese political and social history in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries" ("Emerson and China," in *A Power to Translate the World*, ed. David LaRocca and Ricardo Miguel-Alfonso, 236). Naoko Saito reads Emerson cross-culturally to advocate "the Emerson who is urgently needed today in Japan—in a Japan still to be achieved," namely "the American philosopher who provides an alternative concept of the human subject and who thus reveals a way of *becoming* cosmopolitan in the age of globalization" ("Emerson and Japan: Finding a Way of Cultural Criticism," in *A Power to Translate the World*, ed. David LaRocca and Ricardo Miguel-Alfonso, 218). According to Alan Hodder, "no one did more to foster a sympathetic interest in classical Asian cultures than Emerson" and "his closest Transcendentalist friends," but Hodder also suggests the compromised beginnings of Americanizing Asian philosophy by pointing out that "this heady new contact with Asian cultures [which he alternately describes as the "Transcendentalist appropriation of Asian sources"] depended entirely on the growing European colonial presence in Asia" ("Asia," 41).

6. Lao-Tzu, *Tao Te Ching*, trans. by Stephen Addiss and Stanley Lombardo (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1993), 44. The contemporary melding of Emerson and Taoism is also evident in Emerson scholarship. For example, Neal Dolan and Laura Jane Wey comment that though Taoism is the Chinese philosophy with which Emerson's "work had most in common," it is the one he "knew least" ("Emerson and China," 236). For an example of a side-by-side reading, see Richard Grossman's *The Tao of Emerson: The Wisdom of the Tao Te Ching as Found in the Words of Ralph Waldo Emerson* (New York: Modern Library, 2007).

7. Emerson applied the same prudence to the other extreme. Too much asceticism was also problematic in his view, and he did not emulate the severe economies of Thoreau or Alcott though he admired both men. As the Buddha counseled the Middle Way, Emerson suggests in "Experience," that "[t]he mid-world is best" (*CW* 3:37). Though the middle is often dismissive-

ly identified with a nondescript norm or average, the middle way of thinking and behaving avoids the either/or thinking and exclusion that characterizes extremism.

8. Alan Watts, *The Collected Letters of Alan Watts*, ed. Joan Watts and Anne Watts (Novato, CA: New World Library, 2017), 109.

9. Alan Watts, *OM: Creative Meditations* (Milbrae, CA: Celestial Arts, 1980), 28.

10. Anne Carolyn Klein, *Meeting the Great Bliss Queen: Buddhists, Feminists, & and the Art of the Self* (Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion Publications, 1995), 152.

11. Christopher Alexander, *The Timeless Way of Building* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 491, 370.

12. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, "On Poesy or Art," in *English Romantic Writers*, edited by David Perkins (San Diego, CA: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1967), 495.

13. On Emerson reading *Aids to Reflection*, Albert J. von Frank, *An Emerson Chronology*, second edition in 2 vols. (Albuquerque, NM: Studio Non Troppo, 2016), 69; Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Aids to Reflection*, seventh edition, ed. Derwent Coleridge (London: Edward Moxon, 1854), 45; on Emerson borrowing *Biographia Literaria* from Harvard library, von Frank, *An Emerson Chronology*, 20; Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria; or Biographical Sketches of My Literary Life and Opinions*, vol. II (London: Rest Fenner, 1817), 12.

14. Lao-Tzu, *Tao Te Ching*, 2. The first lines of Lao Tzu's passage in Addiss's and Lombardo's translation are "Recognize beauty and ugliness is born. / Recognize good and evil is born. / Is and Isn't produce each other" (2). Buddhism came to China through traders and traveling monks as early as the first century CE. It found support in the Taoist community, in part, through distinctively Taoist interpretations of Buddhist scripture. The Buddhist ideas about nature, change, and monism that I have been describing are consonant with the Taoism of Lao Tzu and Chuang Tzu.

15. Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac and Sketches Here and There*, special commemorative edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 204.

16. Watts, *OM: Creative Meditations*, 38.

17. Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac*, 210; Klein, *Meeting the Great Bliss Queen*, 38–39.

18. Heraclitus reportedly said "all things are in process and nothing stays still" and "you would not step twice into the same river," in *Reality*, ed. Carl Levenson and Jonathan Westphal, (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1994), 10; St. Augustine, "Reality is God" from *Enarrationes in Psalmos*, in *Reality*, 54.

19. Max Müller, trans., *A History of Ancient Sanskrit Literature so far as it illustrates the primitive religion of the Brahmans*, second edition, revised (London: Williams and Norgate, 1860), Mandala 10, hymn 129, 564.

20. Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac*, 204, 204.

21. Loren Eiseley, *The Lost Notebooks of Loren Eiseley*, ed. Kenneth Heuer (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002), 200, discussed in chapter 2.

22. Donella Meadows, "Dancing With Systems," The Donella Meadows Project/Academy for Systems Change, accessed April 20, 2017, <http://donellameadows.org/archives/dancing-with-systems/>.

23. Watts, *OM: Creative Meditations*, 25. Interestingly Alan Watts also uses the metaphor of dance to describe ontological monism and change: "The cosmos dances with infinite variety. But every single dance it does, that is to say you, is what the whole thing is doing" (*OM: Creative Meditations* 25) and "the only way to make sense out of change is to plunge into it, move with it, and join the dance" (Watts, *The Wisdom of Insecurity: A Message for an Age of Anxiety*, second ed. [New York: Vintage Books, 2011], 43).

24. Shih-t'ou, Stephanie Kaza and Kenneth Kraft, eds. *Dharma Rain: sources of Buddhist Environmentalism* (Boston: Shambhala, 2000), 61.

25. Watts, *OM: Creative Meditations*, 6.

26. Michael Pollan, "Beyond Wilderness and Lawn," *Harvard Design Magazine* 4 (S/S 1998), accessed April 2, 2017. <http://www.harvarddesignmagazine.org/issues/4/beyond-wilderness-and-lawn>.

27. See Mathew A. Foust, *Confucianism and American Philosophy* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2017) and Foust, "Confucius and Emerson on the Virtue of Self-Reliance," in *A Power to Translate the World*, ed. David LaRocca and Ricardo Miguel-Alfonso, 249–264.

28. William James, *Pragmatism* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1975), 37; Stanley Fish, *Is There a Text in this Class?: The Authority of Interpretive Communities* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980), 276.

29. Echoing Emerson's words, Alan Watts defines human as a middle: "Man simply means the middle position; that is the whole idea of man. The middle, the middle way, the mean" (*Om: Creative Meditations*, 51). Middle is also an important concept in the Buddhist guide for human conduct, known as the middle path or middle way.

30. Stephanie Kaza and Kenneth Kraft, eds. *Dharma Rain: Sources of Buddhist Environmentalism* (Boston: Shambhala, 2000), 59. Kaza and Kraft's source for "The Jewel Net of Indra" is Thomas Cleary's *Entry into the Inconceivable: An Introduction to Hua-yen Buddhism* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1983), 66–68.

31. Without reference to Asian philosophy, Stanley Cavell has drawn attention to Emerson's passivity as an epistemological strength, admiring Emerson's understanding of the error in identifying thinking and knowing as "grasping" or "clutching" (Cavell, *This New Yet Unapproachable America: Lectures after Emerson after Wittgenstein* [Albuquerque, NM: Living Batch Press, 1989], 86). Cavell sees the same passivity in Heidegger's conception of thinking as "letting truth happen" (*This New*, 3) and in Wittgenstein's sense of philosophical thinking as (in Cavell's words) "leaving the world as it is" (*This New*, 45).

32. "Thomas Merton's Life and Work." The Thomas Merton Center at Bellarmine University, accessed April 25, 2017, <http://merton.org/chrono.aspx>. The Dalai Lama and Merton met in 1968, not long before Merton died in an accident. In a 2013 interview filmed by Morgan Atkinson, The Dalai Lama spoke of Merton as "a close friend, most spiritual friend or spiritual brother," and considered himself responsible for carrying Merton's vision and hope forward: "So logically, two persons, very similar sort of concept. Now one has passed. Now the only remaining person logically has more responsibility" ("Video: 'A Real spiritual bond'—Dalai Lama recalls Thomas Merton," *Shambhala Sun*, May 27, 2013, accessed April 25, 2017, <https://www.lionsroar.com/video-a-real-spiritual-bond-dalai-lama-recalls-thomas-merton/>).

33. Thomas Merton, *The Way of Chuang Tzu* (Boston: Shambhala, 2004), 179.

34. Loren Eiseley, *The Invisible Pyramid*, Bison Books ed. (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1998), 31.

35. Stanley Cavell, *Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome: The Constitution of Emersonian Perfectionism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 57.

36. Watts, *The Wisdom of Insecurity*, 44–45.

37. Richard Poirier, *Poetry & Pragmatism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), 27.

38. Klein, *Meeting the Great Bliss Queen*, 72.

39. Watts, *Om: Creative Meditations*, 129; Alan Watts, *Om* (Berkeley, CA: Celestial Arts, 1995), 2.

40. Stanley Cavell, *This New Yet Unapproachable America*, 45.

41. Evelyn Barish, *Emerson: The Roots of Prophecy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 245.

42. Shunryu Suzuki, *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind* (New York: Weatherhill, 1970).

43. Dieter Schultz describes Emerson eventually coming "to abandon his privileging of the ecstatic, visionary moment in favor of a more livable attitude that would nevertheless hold on to the concept of transcendence" (*Emerson and Thoreau or Steps Beyond Ourselves: Studies in Transcendentalism* [Heidelberg, Germany: Mattes Verlag, 2012], 138). Certainly Emerson seems to have intertwined the ecstasy of mutual transparency with the pragmatism of a naturalist and a gardener.

44. Khan in *The Hand of Poetry: Five Mystic Poets of Persia*, trans. Coleman Barks, Lectures by Inayat Khan (New Lebanon, NY: Omega, 1993), 70. Khan saw this dexterity "to give up 'I' and gain All" in Rumi (*Hand*, 70).

45. Such fusions are also evidenced by recent anthologies published by and for western readers, for example, Stephanie Kaza's and Kenneth Kraft's collection of original texts in translation, *Dharma Rain: Sources of Buddhist Environmentalism* and J. Baird Callicott's and James McRae's collection of scholarly essays, *Environmental Philosophy in Asian Traditions of Thought* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2014).

46. John Muir, *Our National Parks* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1901), 131, 132.
47. Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac*, 129–132. Curt Meine notes Leopold read Emerson and Muir with the understanding that they shared his “sense of a living earth” (Meine, *Aldo Leopold: His Life and Work*, [Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1988], 214).
48. Dōgen, Kaza and Kraft, eds., *Dharma Rain*, 66.
49. For example, Snyder quotes from Emerson’s journals (“wisdom & berries grew on the same bush, but. . . only one could ever be plucked at one time” [*JMN* 8:50]) in *Earth House Hold* (New York: New Directions, 1969), 37.
50. Gary Snyder, *The Practice of the Wild* (Berkeley, CA: Counterpoint, 1990), 66.
51. Snyder, *The Practice of the Wild*, 66, 107, 108.
52. Snyder, *The Practice of the Wild*, 32.
53. Snyder, *The Practice of the Wild*, 110.

Coda

Emerson is always to be found in the middle, in a series, in the crossing, *en croisement* to use the term he quotes from Fourier (*JMN* 9:50 and 296). “The mid-world is best” (*CW* 3:37) for the mixing and alternating, reforming and culturing that Emerson admired in nature and adopted as his own creative practice. Emersonian philosophy advises a middle way, not of compromise to produce stability, but of promise toward “that rushing stream” of nature (*CW* 1:124). His promise is an allegiance to each and all, here and now, and also to “tomorrow’s creation” (*JMN* 8:384). He makes that promise from a moving, protean center, the only place in which he finds himself, over and over again. From the center—“me”—if one looks outward far and deep enough, “center” is both infinitesimally small and also, like a jewel in Indra’s net, a private infinitude of analogs, reflections, sympathies, and influences. In the middle, between a “head bathed by the blithe air” and feet “on the bare ground,” the heart of Emerson pulses, impelling a flow of moral sentiment and strange sympathies “demoniacal, warm, fruitful, sad, nocturnal” (*CW* 1:10; *JMN* 8:329) for nature. Emerson is an amalgam of abstraction and corporeality. Where else would the notion and taste of touch-me-if-you-dare apples materialize? That mixture of thoughtfulness and musing with embodiment and embeddedness is requisite to environmental ethics. The foundational aspects of Emerson’s philosophical stance toward nature that carry forward as traits of environmental ethics are all figuratively hybrids or crossroads, whether actively, pursued as crossing one with another toward an amelioration or convergence, or passively, as finding, or offering, oneself in the middle or at a crossroads.

One foundational aspect of Emerson’s philosophy significant to environmental ethics is his synthesis of aesthetics with ethics and his yoking of both with physical being and behavior. Emerson does not simply add aesthetics to

ethics as if mixing the pleasure of sugar into the spoonful of medicinal duty. He never really separates them in the first place. He makes, or takes, them as fully and mutually available to each other in a system and performance of aligned, integrated values. To be valuable, to have the practical power Emerson calls for at the end of “Experience,” values must be embodied. Aesthetic valuing entails action in the same degree that ethical valuing does. A line from Rumi, translated by Coleman Barks and quoted by Inayat Khan, captures Emerson’s suggestion: “Let the beauty we love be what we do.”¹ Furthermore, in Emerson’s world, bodies change, move, morph, slide, and surprise. Thus values are as evanescent and lubricious as the objects and life forms of nature, and aesthetic valuing entails responsiveness and adjustment just as ethical valuing does. The various approaches to contemporary environmental ethics stem from diverse corners (centers), but in their shared orientation to ecology as a paradigm and as a priority, aesthetics and ethics are intertwined. Emerson would have been sympathetic to deep ecology’s sensitivity to the threat culture poses to nature, but he was also convinced that leaving human ameliorative agency and potential out of “the book of Nature” (which he equated to “the book of Fate” [*CW* 6:8]) was impossible, given humans, and moreover an abdication of the aesthetic and moral responsibility we are capable of imagining and achieving. Philosophically Emerson is more in keeping with “urban political ecology”² and its adaptation of Gregory Bateson’s idea of ecological aesthetics as a participatory, dynamic, and nonlinear system of culture and nature. Emerson could not leave technology and culture out of “the book of Nature.” He considered them human products and agents of nature and, like children, bound by humane love and a desire not to harm their “beautiful mother” (*CW* 1:36) but, also like children, bound to build new worlds, not sepulchres to old ones. Emerson’s take on this responsibility is similar to Bateson’s ecological vision of aesthetics as “responsiveness to the pattern which connects . . . [to the] meta-pattern which defines the vast generalisation that indeed it is patterns which connect,”³ patterns we choose, create, from which we originate, and by which we are defined. The fallout of such responsiveness is far-reaching yet rebounding.

Another trait contemporary environmental ethics inherits from Emerson is its focus on literacy, not simply as a means of crossing between reader and writer, but as a way of navigating the divide between human and non-human. Emerson’s nature literacy and nature writing are far different from the mapping, charting, characterizing, and resources assessment that filled the expedition reports of earlier periods. The writers in his wake such as Thoreau, Muir, Edward Abbey, Terry Tempest Williams, and Annie Dillard write as lovers of nature, intimates of place, not as roving, flag-planting conquerors. Nature writing has been a successful enough genre to inspire high sales and critical debate. Interestingly, some critics have panned some recent nature writing for veering from speaking an ecoliterate word for nature to instead

say a self-literate word for the author, as if environmental degradation goes hand-in-hand with the degeneration of nature writing. In a review of Cheryl Strayed's *Wild* for the *Los Angeles Review of Books*, Jim Hinch acknowledges that it is "the most commercially successful work of nature writing in decades," but he argues that in using "an encounter with wildness" as "an opportunity for self-expression," the memoir signals "the demise of nature writing" which he calls a "profound loss." Though "nature writing may be on the wane, . . . nature isn't," Hinch argues, and "we need to be told about more than ourselves."⁴ Mark Cocker makes the same point in reviewing British author Helen Macdonald's popular *H Is for Hawk* for *The New Statesman*. He faults the "new nature writing" as "tame" and accuses it of moving away from the wild to individual human "grief and the pain of loss." He worries that nature writing is becoming "a literature of consolation that distracts us from the truth of our fallen countryside, or . . . a space for us to talk to ourselves about ourselves, with nature relegated to the background as an attractive green wash."⁵ *The New Statesman* published a response to Cocker's review by prize-winning British nature writer Robert Macfarlane. Though Macfarlane argues from his title onward "we need nature writing," he absolutely rejects an overly rigid distinction between nature and culture to the point of declaring "'Nature writing' has become a cant phrase, branded and bandied out of any useful existence, and I would be glad to see its deletion from the current discourse." Citing Bateson's framework of ecological aesthetics and Lucy Neal's argument that "artists can be 'agents of change,'" Macfarlane defends this self-focused bent in nature writing. In an Emersonian vein, he argues that "natural good, cultural activity and human well-being are mingled rather than separable categories," that humans and the environment meet "as an 'ecotone'—the biological term for a transition zone between biomes, where two communities meet and integrate." He maintains that "powerful writing can revise our ethical relations with the natural world" offering as evidence his conversations with "serious conservationists": "I . . . ask them what switched on their passion for protecting nature and the answer is almost always the same: an encounter with a wild creature and an encounter with a book."⁶ Regardless of critical assessments of the ratio of human-centric to nature-centric content in nature writing, Emersonian nature literacy remains a shared priority in environmental ethics. The foundational focus on literacy has propelled burgeoning environmental education programs in ways that share and respond to Aldo Leopold's frustration in 1953, for example, at the failure of "our education system . . . to encourage personal amateur scholarship in the natural-history field" and the "eviction of outdoor studies from the schools."⁷ Emerson's walks with his children and his preference for empathetic and experiential natural philosophy conveyed to broad audiences rather than academic laboratory science shared between specialists, for example, facilitated nature literacy in ways that anticipate

contemporary hands-on school programs in environmental science, garden to cafeteria initiatives, and the teaching modules offered by the Center for Ecoliteracy.

Emerson's interdisciplinary method and non-academic turn serve environmental ethics in other ways as well. Contrary to the increasing intellectual specialization that developed during the nineteenth century, Emerson embraced interdisciplinarity, not as an academic buzzword, but as the practice it can be: generous and egoless, generative and restorative, innovative and practical, integrative and enriching. His style led him not only out of the church, but also out of the academy, which went on fragmenting increasingly into specializations, driving Leopold to re-sound the call for interdisciplinary understandings of nature in the mid-twentieth century. "From our tenderest years we are fed with facts about soils, floras, and faunas that comprise the channel of Round River (biology), about their origins in time (geology and evolution), about the technique of exploiting them (agriculture and engineering)," Leopold charged, but what we need is "a reversal of specialization; instead of learning more and more about less and less, we must learn more and more about the whole biotic landscape." But because we are part of "chains of dependency,"⁸ knowing about the whole complex and evolving system is not a matter of mastering. A key aspect of learning more and more is realizing that we know less than we credit ourselves with, that there always, as Emerson writes, "remains much to learn" of our "relation to the world" (*CW* 1:39). In *Nature*, Emerson points out the necessity of "entire humility" if one is to be learning (*CW* 1:39); later in "Experience," he adds the necessity of receptivity (*CW* 3:48). Because we are in (and seen by) the environment, knowing about the whole living system is an ethical matter of self-mastery.

Emerson's philosophy of nature emphasizes the interconnectedness and active feedback central to the paradigm of ecology. The ways of knowing interconnectedness from our position within it include the oblique, intuitive, and imaginative as well as our analytic repertoire. Emerson often figured the interconnectedness of nature as a web, a metaphor Steven Fesmire includes in his list of our "rich fund of metaphors for ecosystems."⁹ Other ways Emerson handles connection anticipate contemporary understandings of fractal patterns in nature, Möbius relatedness of apparent difference, and ecosystems. In "Compensation," he suggests the fractal quality of dualistic patterns: "Whilst the world is thus dual, so is everyone of its parts" (*CW* 2:57). The image of his warning "we can no more halve things and get the sensual good, by itself, than we can get an inside that shall have no outside" is essentially a Möbius strip (*CW* 2:61). "All are needed by each one" is a tale of ecology, told by Emerson in concrete terms of seashells, pinecones, heifers, sextons, neighbors, acorns, sparrows, and himself.

Emerson's advocacy of vision as a nexus of seeing and being seen also plays to contemporary environmental ethics. Truly seeing the sun, he argued, is a matter of the sun seeing into the seer, of the seer's receptivity, just as seeing all—the whole context—happens when “all mean egotism vanishes” (*CW* 1:10). Such a seer, Emerson argued, feels his or her environment and quickens to the intimation of occult relations and consanguinity. Seeing all, as in the transparent eyeball passage, can afford enlightenment beyond the personal level even to species and communal levels, and with practical outcomes. For example, a journal entry, “It is the blue sky for background that makes the fine building” (*JMN* 8:25), brings the all-enveloping context or environment into view by “vanishing” the builder's ego. Christopher Alexander cites that same egoless vision as fundamental to good architecture: “we can only make a building live when we are egoless.” He advocates buildings that nurture “health and life in our surroundings” and describes them as those “made by a process which allowed each part to be entirely one with its surroundings, in which there is no ego left, only the gentle persuasion of the necessities.”¹⁰

As a crossroads himself at which many authorial paths have converged, Emerson pursued, and his texts invite, further convergences via ongoing and creative “side-by-side” reading, not dutiful, bookwormish reading. Emerson loved the companionable, fertile *croisement* of reader and writer sharing path and circuit. He practiced it in reading nature and composed his texts to invite it because it is fruitful philosophically and practically as well as integrative socially, culturally, and politically. It is a form of what Audre Lorde has described as the “deep participation” that is often “the forerunner for joint concerted actions not possible before.”¹¹ It results in unexpected, fruitful meetings such the Dalai Lama's conferences with leading scientists (which have led to books such as his *The Universe in a Single Atom*). The same pairing informs peace activist Thich Nhat Hanh's teaching that “In our former lives, we were rocks, clouds, and trees. We have also been an oak tree. This is not just Buddhist; it is scientific. We humans are a young species. We were plants, we were trees, and now we have become humans. We have to remember our past existences and be humble. We can learn a lot from an oak tree.”¹² These meetings are important to environmental ethics as a broad, cross-cultural, transnational necessity. Reading for, or at, convergence reveals, and can further develop, shared conceptual approaches such as the organic world-view at work in Asian philosophy, romanticism, and Indigenous science without losing sight of the differences. Paula Gunn Allen, for example, explains clearly that “the basic assumptions about the universe and, therefore, the basic reality experienced by tribal peoples and by Western peoples are not the same,” but there is common ground with Emerson in her “enduring sense of the fluidity and malleability, or creative flux, of things,” her assertion that “the fragility of the world is a result of its nature as

thought,” and her belief that the quality of communication between “the land and the people” determines the health and wellbeing of both.¹³ Emersonian literacy, which for Emerson is fundamentally nature literacy, is a walk with difference and diversity, with receptivity and a readiness for the convergence that can only occur when each arrives at, to borrow Margaret Randall’s words, the “edge,” “the meeting place.”¹⁴ Without difference there is no convergence, no awareness of ecological system and pattern, no being moved to be a naturalist, and no empathy, all of which are critical to the compositional design and distributed implementation of an environmental ethic.

NOTES

1. *The Hand of Poetry: Five Mystic Poets of Persia*, trans. Coleman Barks, Lectures by Inayat Khan (New Lebanon, NY: Omega, 1993), xiii.

2. Jon Goodbun, “Gregory Bateson’s Ecological Aesthetics—an addendum to Urban Political Ecology,” *field: a free journal for architecture* 4.1 (January 2011): 35, accessed August 26, 2017, <http://field-journal.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/3-Gregory-Bateson-Critical-Cybernetics-and-Ecological-Aesthetics-of-Dwelling-Jon-Goodbun.pdf>.

3. Quoted by Goodbun, “Gregory Bateson’s Ecological Aesthetics,” 44, as transcribed from unpublished November 1977 manuscripts of ‘Mind in Nature’ by Peter Harries-Jones, “Gregory Bateson’s ‘Uncovery’ of Ecological Aesthetics,” in Jesper Hoffmeyer, ed., *A Legacy for Living Systems—Gregory Bateson as a Precursor to Biosemiotics* (Copenhagen: Springer, 2008), 158.

4. Jim Hinch, “Lost on the Pacific Crest Trail,” *Los Angeles Review of Books*, July 25, 2013, accessed June 22, 2017, <https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/lost-on-the-pacific-crest-trail>.

5. Mark Cocker, “Death of the Naturalist: why is the ‘new nature writing’ so tame?,” *New Statesman*, June 17, 2015, accessed June 22, 2017, <http://www.newstatesman.com/culture/2015/06/death-naturalist-why-new-nature-writing-so-tame>.

6. Robert Macfarlane, “Why we need nature writing,” *New Statesman*, September 2, 2015, accessed June 22, 2017, <http://www.newstatesman.com/culture/nature/2015/09/robert-macfarlane-why-we-need-nature-writing>.

7. Aldo Leopold, *Round River: From the Journals of Aldo Leopold*, ed. Luna B. Leopold (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 60, 61.

8. Leopold, *Round River*, 159, 162.

9. Steven Fesmire, “Ecological Imagination,” *Environmental Ethics* 32.2 (Summer 2010): 190.

10. Christopher Alexander, *The Timeless Way of Building* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 535, 524, 525.

11. Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays & Speeches by Audre Lorde* (Freedom, CA: The Crossing Press, 1984), 59.

12. The Dalai Lama, *The Universe in a Single Atom: The Convergence of Science and Spirituality* (New York: Morgan Road Books, 2005); Thich Nhat Hanh, *Essential Writings*, ed. Robert Ellsberg (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2001), 68.

13. Paula Gunn Allen, *The Sacred Hoop: Recovering the Feminine in American Indian Traditions* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1986), 55, 68, 125, 120.

14. Margaret Randall, *Into Another Time: Grand Canyon Reflections* (Albuquerque, NM: West End Press, 2004), 93.

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