

6-8-2012

In Search of the Self, In Search of the Land: Toward a Contemporary American Poetics of Place

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IN SEARCH OF THE SELF, IN SEARCH OF THE LAND: TOWARD A
CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN POETICS OF PLACE

A Dissertation

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies and Research

in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

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May 2012

Indiana University of Pennsylvania
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There is inherent cultural value in the poetry of place. Following current trends in ecocriticism and cultural geography, this dissertation constructs a framework through which to investigate various ways that post-WWII American poetry represents and reimagines places. Seeking to expand current definitions of “ecopoetry,” I propose three modes of place poetics—landscape, contemporary pastoral, and ecohistorical—all three of which examine differing orientations toward place and a range of anthropocentric and ecocentric worldviews.

As an introduction, the first chapter constructs this tripartite framework and suggests that such a place-based approach can aid in expanding our current understanding of ecopoetry as a poetry that contemplates not simply nature, but also the complex relationship among culture, self, and nature, and, as such, participates in the ongoing composition of place. Chapter two discusses the landscape mode through an analysis James Wright’s and Richard Hugo’s work that is firmly grounded in the experience of their hometown regions. Chapter three considers Gary Snyder and John Haines as poets of the contemporary pastoral who exemplify the mode’s power to critique contemporary life ways in favor of more traditional ones. Chapter four defines an ecohistorical place poetics through examining the work of Leslie Marmon Silko and Ray Young Bear as poets whose work speaks from a rooted, transcultural perspective. The concluding

chapter provides a synthesis toward my place-based analysis of contemporary ecopoetry, attempting to validate the place-mode framework as a valid approach to contemporary place poetics.

Ultimately, the broad vision of this dissertation is guided by examining the following: poetry's contribution to the ongoing process of place, its participation in the social construction of concepts such as landscape, nature, culture, and wilderness, its capacity for providing a voice for nature as well as raising the reader's consciousness toward the divisions between human and nature, and the effectiveness of poetry as a genre to express various orientations toward place. Ultimately, I argue that the three modes of place poetics proposed by this dissertation allow us to examine more fully the poetry of place as a valuable linguistic, artistic, and imaginative expression of one's "sense of place."

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Special thanks are due to committee members Dr. Cahalan and Dr. Craig, whose input and guidance helped fuel this dissertation going back to the comprehensive exams phase. Many thanks are due to my dissertation director, Dr. Sherwood. If not for my taking two of his graduate seminars in poetry in 2007 and 2008, the seeds and inspiration for this dissertation may not have been planted. I am grateful for his meticulous commentary on several early drafts that opened up my analysis toward new theoretical possibilities.

I would be remiss not to thank a handful of teachers whose encouragement and instruction throughout various stages of my academic career have guided me, finally, to this point: Mrs. Karen Moore of Wheeling Park High School; Dr. David J. Thomas, Dr. Jack Hattman, and Dr. Rich Lizza of West Liberty University; Dr. Nancy Lang and the late Dr. Katherine Rodier of Marshall University.

Unquestionably, this dissertation would not be possible without the unflinching support of my wife, who is solely responsible for urging me to pursue this degree. No less do I value the importance and inspiration provided by the rest of my family throughout this process. For my own sense of place, I owe due homage to my home region of the Upper Ohio Valley, whose cultural landscape has taken on new meaning and significance after my cross-country journey via the poetry discussed in this dissertation.

Additionally, I'd like to thank my son and daughter, who remind me daily of the power of language and imagination. I hope one day to instill in them the same kind of appreciation and love for poetry and places that I have come to develop through the reading, research, and writing process of this dissertation.

Finally, I'd like both to thank and to dedicate this dissertation to my favorite teachers ever, my parents, who, more so than anyone else, have inspired me from a young age to follow my own path. Time and again, that path never fails to lead me home. I truly hope that they understand their foremost influential role in my life.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION: TOWARD A POETICS OF PLACE

The Foundations of Home

This dissertation finds its roots in the river valley between West Virginia's Northern Panhandle and eastern Ohio. My hometown of Wheeling, West Virginia lies just across the river from Martins Ferry, Ohio, the hometown of contemporary poet James Wright. Every day, barges still push coal up and down the Ohio River, and the stacks of the few remaining steel mills belch plumes of smoke. On the ridge above the river, bulldozers strip-mine the hills, and coal is transported in massive iron conveyor tracks that caterpillar up and down the hills. Today, as in Wright's time, the landscape of the Ohio River Valley features the collision of nature and industry. From the highest ridges above the river, one can see the smokestacks that line the river valley, a constant presence in the landscape, as well as a consistent reminder that industry both economically sustains the culture that inhabits the valley and also participates in the gradual and consistent alteration of the natural environment.

Not until I was an undergraduate English major did I become aware of Wright's work and the fact that a Pulitzer Prize-winning poet had grown up on the banks of the same river where I spent so much time as a boy and now reside. My enthusiasm for Wright's work continued throughout my pursuit of graduate degrees, especially as that pursuit took me away from the Ohio Valley to reside temporarily in other Appalachian places, allowing me, as Wright did in his poetry, to view home from afar. Wright's poems were always able to transport me home to the river valley, and it was this inherent

quality of place poetry that led to my desire to pursue a full dissertation on Wright. This pursuit, however, ultimately blossomed into interest in and research on other poets for whom place, as it does in Wright's work, also forms a significant foundation of cultural identity and poetics.

So, for me, Wright's work signifies home, and from that home, the pursuit of an understanding of contemporary place poets has led me westward. As a result, the regions covered by the representative poets discussed in this dissertation span from Wright's Ohio Valley to Richard Hugo's Pacific Northwest, from John Haines' Alaska to Gary Snyder's California, and from Leslie Silko's Laguna Pueblo to Ray Young Bear's Mesquakie Settlement. While I began this project with a focus solely on James Wright, I quickly discovered a need to expand my exploration of place poetics based on various theoretical approaches offered by current ecocriticism and place studies. James Wright's work presented only one of several variant orientations toward place. Exploring the possibilities of a poetics of place led to a list of more than twenty possible poets from Gloria Anzaldua to Charles Olson, representing a diverse range of poetic schools and multicultural scope of contemporary American poetry. I was then faced with the arduous task of reducing this list to a handful of poets who would be the focus of this project. The ultimate decision about which poets to include, then, was less about adequate coverage of specific, cultural backgrounds and genders, than it was the result of selecting a group of poets that I felt best illuminated the range of place poetics characteristics and could, therefore, aid in my constructing a theoretical framework within which the concept of place in contemporary poetry could be explored.

The task of mapping an American place poetics and devising a framework within which to read its representative poets resulted in a journey of discovering places through poetry as well as an understanding of both the subtle and overt ways in which specific cultural backgrounds and bioregions shape the variant ways in which poets construct specific places through poetry. The theoretical lenses that ecocriticism and place studies provide has allowed me to build a conceptual framework of three distinct yet overlapping modes of place poetics, which, in turn, has afforded me the opportunity to corral this disparate group of poets who are the focus of this project into a discussion that investigates the variant ways poetry contributes to the construction of place. For places in poetry to have meaning beyond simply a backdrop or setting, and to legitimize a contemporary “poetics of place,” the poems must participate in a reciprocal relationship with the ongoing process of place. As Tim Creswell importantly notes, “Places are never finished but always the result of processes and practices. As such, places need to be studied in terms of the ‘dominant institutional projects’, the individual biographies of people negotiating place and the way in which a sense of place is developed through the interaction of structure and agency” (37). The experience of place, as Creswell suggests, is impacted by constantly shifting institutional, ideological, and historical forces; at the very heart of place poetry is an expression of the meaningful exchange between the individual and these multidimensional aspects of place.

Conceiving place as a complex web of meaning woven from these influences is central to my discussion of a place-centered approach to contemporary poetry and demands attention to the layers of cultural past and present that shape both the places and people who populate them. Such an approach follows Lawrence Buell’s call for a

“landscape-oriented ecocritical work” that would potentially “give a far richer account than we now have of the placial basis of human and social experience, conceiving ‘place’ not simply in the light of an imagined descriptive or symbolic structure, not simply as social construction, not simply as an ecology, but all three simultaneously” (“Ecocritical Insurgency” 707).

These connections among cultural history, the land, and the poet are the immediate concerns of a place-based analysis of poetry. Many contemporary place poets are highly attuned to these multi-dimensions of place experience, and that experience manifests itself on the page. In *Black Mesa Poems*, for example, Jimmy Santiago Baca, a New-Mexico-born poet with both Hispanic and Native American roots, writes in the poem “Invasions” of an early morning fishing excursion:

6:00 a.m.
I awake and leave to fish
the Jemez.
Coronado rode
through this light, dark
green brush,
horse foaming saliva,
tongue red and dry
as the red cliffs. (70)

As the action in this landscape is infused with both the present and the poet’s sense of the past, the poem continues in a chronology of historical references. Ultimately, the speaker reaches the river and casts in his line:

I wade in
up to my thighs
in jeans,

throw hooked,
salmon egg bait
out in shadowy shallows
beneath overhanging cottonwood, and
realize
I am the end result
of Conquistadores,
Black Moors,
American Indians,
and Europeans,
bloods rainbowing
and scintillating
in me... (71)

Here we find the speaker in a moment of realization incited by a connection not only with the natural surroundings, but also with the long history of cultural struggle that has played itself out over the years. Through a sense of his own personal heritage, the speaker defines himself in relation to both the past and the present, culture and nature, and the long history of conflict that shaped the landscape. Now in the present, Baca's speaker concludes the poem by pushing his realization one step farther into the contemporary moment:

I clamber up an incline,
crouch in bushes
as my ancestors did,
peer at vacation houses
built on rock shelves,
sun decks and travel trailers—
the new invasion. (72)

Baca's poem weaves together centuries of landscape history and transformation culminating in his personal perspective of an ancestry linked directly to the geopolitical conflicts of the region and the present commoditization of the land in the form of vacation homes and camping sites. Playing on the noun "invasions" of the title, Baca reminds readers of the various ways in which human culture alters the landscape. As a richly textured place-poem, "Invasions" demonstrates three variations of place poetics that this dissertation seeks to explore—first, an identification with a landscape in which nature and culture intersect; second, a retreat from the human-built world of home into a space characterized by wilderness; and third, a recognition of the layers of history that have taken place upon the land to which he is personally linked. This interconnection among cultural history, landscape transformation, and personal identification with place forms the center of this dissertation.

In order to more fully explore the relationship among these connections in American poetry, I have formulated a tripartite, place-centric approach around three modes—*landscape, contemporary pastoral, and ecohistorical*—stemming from ecocriticism's fundamental premise that along with race, gender, and culture, place plays an equally important role in literary criticism, and from cultural geography's notion that place studies is a growing and legitimate theoretical pursuit that may be applicable to how the experience of physical places is reconstructed and re-imagined through poetry. In the context of the contemporary American moment, after more than 400 years of multicultural history and geopolitical struggle, and in the wake of our current technological revolution, an effective place-based ecopoetics can provide a map toward a

more attuned understanding of self in place, whether that place is urban or rural, city or country, culture or wilderness, or somewhere in between.

The process of arriving at the terminology to represent the three categories presented significant challenges. The use of the term *pastoral* was easily applicable because there has been much recent ecocritical work with the concept by critics such as Glen A. Love and Terry Gifford. While there has been a fair amount of critical discussion of the concept of landscape, my use of the term here necessitates a few qualifying remarks. Leonard Lutwack asserts, “The term *landscape* once referred to all that could be seen of the earth’s surface from a single vantage point, but now has been extended to include unseen things, such as a configuration of ideas or a set of conditions, or the psychological make-up of an individual” (28). It is with this expansion of the ways in which we now use the term *landscape* that I ultimately settled upon it as representative of a kind of poetry that features both the external and internal worlds of the poet. As is discussed at greater length in chapter two, the landscape mode takes much of its theoretical grounding from cultural geographers who currently recognize the experience of landscape as one that is a fluid, subjective process in continual flux.

The most difficult challenge in formulating the place modes came in naming the third mode and ultimately necessitated my constructing a word that would sufficiently encompass the inherent characteristics of the mode. A term of my own invention, or at least applied originally here to literary study, *ecohistorical* takes its meaning from the prefix “eco-” as dwelling place, and the root “historical.” Essentially compounding to mean “place-history,” the *ecohistorical* mode, as will be discussed in greater depth later in this introduction and at length in chapter four, is one that considers the rich

relationship among the land, history, and the cultures that inhabit it. While I have chosen two Native American poets as exemplary of this mode, it is not a mode that is exclusive to race or ethnicity. Though I have placed Silko and Young Bear at the end of the discussion, this configuration is not one that marginalizes these writers as ethnic minorities. Rather, the arrangement of the chapters is such to suggest a trajectory from the transience, uprootedness and inwardness of the landscape mode to the more grounded and rooted sense of place inherent in the ecohistorical mode.

In addition to constructing this tripartite framework as a categorical measure of place poetics, my dissertation is guided by some broader questions inspired by current work in ecopoetics. How can a place-centric analysis of poetry enhance our understanding of how we as human beings understand and process our individual relationships with places and spaces? In what ways can current trends in cultural geography and landscape theory be adapted toward a useful tool for the analysis of contemporary poetry? Does poetry, then, possess a power to alter our perception based on how we view and understand our relationship with the land, the environment, nature, home, and culture, potentially leading us toward a reevaluation of the boundaries between the cultural and natural world? Can ecocriticism and place poetry shift our perspective of these binaries toward an understanding of these forces as intrinsically related elements of a balanced whole of which humans are a small part, since occidental Euramerican perspectives continue to construct reality through binary oppositions such as nature / culture and wilderness / civilization?

Ecocriticism and the Poetry of Place

As Buell and Cresswell suggest, any consideration of place as a concept must be attuned to how past events have contributed to the present shape, condition, and cultural make-up within it. The cultural history of human-occupied places can be viewed as a complexity of geopolitical and social struggles, the root cause of which, in part, is the development and occupation of space by one dominant group over another. Given the make-up of American culture as an amalgamation of multiple European and native cultures vying for territory and control, the history of the American landscape is bound up in such continual ideological struggles. The earliest European settlers, whether motivated by religious freedom or economic gain, sought an uninhabited place within which to ground and grow their communities. Representative writing of this time reveals the tendency to view reality in oppositional terms—the white European settler as “us” and the indigenous American as “them,” towns or cities as cultivated, refined and civilized, and the wilderness as savage, primitive, pagan, and evil (Nash 27-30).

These orientations toward civilization and wilderness continue to present themselves in accounts of the gradual settling and development of the East Coast, followed by the constant push westward in the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries—all of which are narratives of the occupation and appropriation of land that go well beyond the scope of this study to discuss. Yet the result of this drive westward is not only a historical narrative of the development of American culture, but also the story of the shaping of the American landscape, geographically and metaphorically, and a predominant consciousness that tends to perceive human culture in direct opposition to nature and the

wilderness, an anthropocentric consciousness that conceives of nature as separate from human.¹

Early colonial-period settlement and travel narratives depict the wilderness of America in two seemingly opposed ways—one as a new Eden, a utopian landscape ripe with the potential to provide religious safe-haven or economic prosperity. Opposed to this idyllic vision of the American wilderness as a garden is the view that represents the wilderness as an untamed, unknown space of potential danger and death. By the mid-nineteenth century the growth of the American town and city, as a result of increased industry and technology, drastically altered American culture, as well as the ways in which the resources provided by the land were used. Throughout this transformation of both the cultural landscape and conceptions of wilderness, the desire to retain wilderness spaces as sites of retreat and renewal persist; such a drastic alteration of the land over a short period of time has allowed Americans, asserts Annette Kolodny, “the unique ability to see themselves as the willful exploiters of the very land that had once provided an escape from such necessities” (8). Because of the continued increase of mechanization and industry, what Kolodny refers to as the “pastoral impulse” strongly persists today as an inherent desire to question, critique, and contemplate humans’ “place” in nature (8).

In its short history, ecocriticism as an approach to literary studies focuses on the interplay between anthropocentric and eco-centric ways of thought; as such, it is a theoretical approach that is as much about humans’ perceptions of, responses to, and

¹ Foundational readings for the evolution of the ideas of “wilderness” and “nature” in America are Leo Marx’s *The Machine in the Garden* (1964), Roderick Nash’s *Wilderness and the American Mind* (1967), and Annette Kolodny’s *The Lay of the Land* (1975), which considers feminist approaches to ideas of landscape and wilderness. More recently within the growth of ecocriticism, Michel Lewis’ *American Wilderness: A New History* (2007) collects current essays that discuss the shifting views of the wilderness concept in America.

daily activities in the environment as it is about nature itself. As many definitions of ecocriticism as there are in its ever-expanding and cross-disciplinary development, most of them share common fundamental characteristics. In the groundbreaking *Ecocriticism Reader*, Cheryl Glotfelty provides what is now an oft-cited fundamental definition, "... ecocriticism is the study of the relationship between literature and the environment.... As a critical stance, it has one foot in literature and the other on land; as a theoretical discourse, it negotiates between the human and nonhuman" (xviii-xix). A more current and one of the most succinct definitions of ecocriticism is offered by Michael Choen: "Ecocriticism focuses on literary (and artistic) expression of human experience primarily in a naturally and consequently in a culturally shaped world: the joys of abundance, sorrows of deprivation, hopes for harmonious existence, and fears of loss and disaster" (10).

As Choen makes clear, the relationship between culture and nature is a central focus of most ecocritics, and while in its beginnings ecocriticism tended to focus mainly on nature writing, it has expanded its critical approaches toward reading varieties of works across a variety of genres. Sven Larsen asserts that an ecocritical approach "deals with the way literature contributes to the articulation, interpretation, and transformation of the boundary between nature and culture or, even broader, between the non-human and human" (352). Additionally, Terry Gifford's recent work on the post-pastoral questions the stretching of these boundaries and the significance of consciously recognizing that human and non-human environments should be considered one in the same—that nature and culture are one in the same ("Terrain" 90). Such recent claims posited by ecocritics have opened up a variety of paths toward re-exploring the ways in which writers render

and relate to their natural environments. Both Larsen and Gifford emphasize the fluidity of the theoretical boundaries between the human and non-human, and from these notions my construction of a contemporary place poetics takes shape in an attempt to further the possibilities of viewing literary texts as linguistic representations of places in flux, as merging points between human and non-human.

Some ecocritics such as Leonard Scigaj go so far as to call for a kind of literature that provides a voice *for* nature, “Nature must have its own voice, separate and at least equal to the voice of humans, in a quest to create a balance where both humans and nature can survive into the next century...” (5). Questioning Scigaj’s notion and the implausibility of language to represent nature accurately, Serpil Opperman asserts, “Representations of nature both in environmental and traditional literature project an effect of reality but do not merely represent the *real* material condition of nature. In fact what they do is create a model of reality that fashions our discourses and shapes our cultural attitudes to the natural environment” (112). As Opperman notes here, the subjectivity of perception, representation, and language raises challenges concerning some ecocritics’ calls for a literature that provides a voice for nature. My place-centric approach to contemporary eco-poetics is one that considers the possibility of viewing poets not as a mouthpiece for nature, but as occupying a place from which they can raise our awareness toward tensions between wilderness and civilization, country and city, and nature and culture. As such, I posit that an ecocritical and place-based approach to poetry can potentially lead us toward what ecocriticism, according to Robert Kern, “may or should” lead to “a more lasting state of heightened awareness of the world beyond ourselves, and as an outlook, both philosophical and ethical, in which we approach what

we imagine to be a more ‘natural’ perspective on experience and a greater attunement to the place in which our experience happens to unfold” (426).

Although ecopoetry may not ultimately become *the* voice of nature, poets of place can occupy a place somewhere between culture and nature, acting as mediators even if not as the representative voices to the degree which Scigaj wishes. Thus, the contemporary place poet works from the overlapping boundaries where culture and nature intersect, moving us as readers toward the “greater attunement” toward place to which Kern alludes. An effective poetics of place recognizes that an individual’s experience of a specific place intensively shapes his or her perspectives of the self and the rest of the natural world. Tim Creswell comments that “place is not just a thing in the world but a way of understanding the world.... Place is how we make the world meaningful and the way we experience the world. Place, at a basic level, is space invested with meaning in the context of power” (11-12). One’s individual experience in a place, then, influences the ways in which he or she perceives not only that particular location, but also how he or she understands and interprets all other places and spaces. Leonard Lutwack has commented upon this reciprocal relationship between writer and place: “A place may inspire, but a balance must be maintained between object and subject. In the relationship between place and person, the person cannot come off second best, for what counts is the subjective flow set in motion by the place, the amount and intensity of inwardness that external stimuli can arouse” (14).

Despite an increased interest in place studies via ecocriticism, writers for whom place, locale, and setting are immediate and important concerns often suffer under such pejorative critical tags as “regionalist” or “local colorist”; works associated with

“regionalism” and “poetry of place” are often devaluated by literary critics who privilege language and experimentation with form, assuming that these monikers suggest a poetry of provincial limitations toward audience, as well as varying degrees of sentimentality, and is, therefore, of little cultural relevance. This trend of negativity toward the regional, William Barillias contends, stems from the holdover effects of high modernism “which valorizes time over place, abstraction over the concrete, form over content, culture over nature, city over province, the machine over the garden” (14). A further result of this effect is that “pastoralism and regionalism have been conflated with nostalgia and conservatism” (Barillias 14).

Despite such criticism, a positive shift is underway as more and more critics attempt to champion the poetry of the local and as recent frames of ecocritical thought are re-shaping the ways in which we value the local, breaking down the reductive stereotypes that define regionalism as sentimental and nostalgic. The poetry of place, despite how localized it may be, explores how particular locales within natural and cultural landscapes may be processed, responded to, internalized, shaped, re-conceptualized, and metaphorized by poetic representations. In 2002 Bill Siverly and Michael McDowell launched the journal *Windfall: A Journal of Poetry and Place*, and in the first issue’s afterword they write, “In its fullest sense, the term ‘place’ in poetry includes not only the geographical location and natural environment, but the history of human presence and before. ‘Place’ includes people living there now, and, as in all poetry, the voice of the speaker of the poem.” The poetry of place participates in communicating the cultural importance of place stemming from an awareness that places signify both the present and the past, the human and non-human. Siverly and McDowell continue on to stress that

however localized a poem may be, it can still bear relevance for a reading audience not familiar with the specific locale. Such an understanding of place and place in poetry can potentially incite a “glocal” perspective, as James Cahalan has applied the term in his work on hometown literature to stress the fact that in the contemporary world “every place on the globe is also local” (251).

This increased interest in place studies through the lens of ecocriticism, or what Glen Love refers to as “the revaluation of place” (5), as well as continued developments in ecocritical thought have led to critics’ attempting to define specifically what “ecopoetry” is and does. These definitions, as noted by several ecopoetry theorists, still tend to be somewhat elusive, as Bryson urges that any such definition should “remain fluid” because of the newness of ecopoetry as a field (*Ecopoetry* 5). Rather than attempting to lay down a precise definition, J. Scott Bryson, in his 2002 *Ecopoetry: A Critical Introduction*, asserts that ecopoetry is a “subset of nature poetry” that displays the three following characteristics: an “ecocentric perspective,” a humility toward human and nonhuman nature, and an “...indictment of an overtechnologized modern world and a warning concerning the very real potential for ecological catastrophe” (5-6). Leonard Scigaj emphasizes a dialogic aspect of ecopoetry by asserting that ecopoets “present nature in their poems as a separate and equal other in dialogues meant to include the referential world and offer exemplary models of biocentric perception and behavior” (11). And expanding on his earlier conceptions, Bryson furthers his definition of ecopoetry in *The West Side of Any Mountain: Place, Space, and Ecopoetry*, claiming that ecopoetry seeks “(1) to create place, making a conscious and concerted effort to know the more-than-human world around us; and (2) to value space, recognizing the extent to

which that very world is ultimately unknowable” (8). These definitions suggest a poetry engaged in a conscious process of investing meaning within and contributing to the overall sense of the places it constructs.

My project strives to expand this notion of ecopoetry by establishing three modes of a contemporary poetics of place. Looking at the term *ecopoet* based on its etymological roots—“eco” from the Greek *oikos* meaning “dwelling place” or “home” and “poet” from the Greek meaning “to make” or “to compose”—the term can be understood as one that means “place composer,” or one who “makes” place in poetry. Contemporary place poets “compose” place in several ways. Thus, the *landscape*, *contemporary pastoral*, and *ecohistorical* modes function as interrelated subsets of a contemporary place poetics that explores, and at times problematizes, how we view the function of the poet as a “place composer” within the cultural spaces that poetry occupies—artistic, political, social.

These modes, as explained in the following section, are designed to outline a set of fluid characteristics that might open up a way of seeing a given poet’s work within a web of what constitutes the broad scope of contemporary place poetry. Although a specific poet’s work may be more reflective of one particular mode than the other, what I do not do is rigidly compartmentalize James Wright as a “landscape” poet or Gary Snyder as a “contemporary pastoral” poet, for example. Instead, each mode provides a set of characteristics by which we may analytically consider a poet’s or poem’s construction of place as an interplay of anthro- and eco-centric forces. As a result, we may see a given poet’s work or an individual poem as spanning across characteristics between modes; thus, the modes open up ways to view these poets’ works in a more flexible and fluid

dynamic that considers each as fulfilling various degrees of what constitutes practicing a contemporary poetics of place.

The Place Modes: Landscape, Contemporary Pastoral, and Ecohistorical

“Places,” Douglass Powell writes, “are not things to be found out there in the world; they are ideas about spaces that are constructed by people, in acts of observation and interpretation, and more durably in writing, in visual arts, in the built environment” (67). Such an approach brought to contemporary poetry allows us to consider more fully the culture / nature dichotomy that dominates the Euramerican consciousness. Further, a place-centered analysis can potentially work toward deconstructing the binaries that so often form conceptions of nature in Western thought: civilization and wilderness, culture and nature, city and country.

Informed by theoretical foundations in ecocriticism and, by extension, place studies, this dissertation follows place theorists such as Powell, Creswell, and Buell who have maintained that place is a multi-layered concept impacted by a variety of historical, political, social, and ideological forces. From these theoretical constructs and for the purposes of this study, I have fashioned a place-based analysis of contemporary poetry that centers around and is guided by three terms: *landscape*, *pastoral*, and *ecohistorical*. I list the terms in this order as the inherent meaning of each suggests a progression from a self-oriented anthropocentrism toward a more rooted and biocentric of awareness the individual’s relationship to his or her cultural and historical ties to a specific place. As several ecocritical perspectives are that a fractured relationship between humans and nature results from an overly anthropocentric worldview, these modes suggest a

conceptual and theoretical shift from a gaze that turns from the land *inward* to the self (landscape) to one that turns from the self *outward* toward the land and the cultural history that has invested meaning within it (ecohistorical).

With the onset of modern environmentalism in the early 1960's that sparked a shifting understanding of humans' relationships with nature, poets have expressed multifarious orientations toward American places and spaces. An important inciting force behind this shift was Aldo Leopold's *A Sand County Almanac* in which his notion of the "land ethic" urges a recognition that the boundaries of a community "include soils, waters, plants, and animals, or collective: the land" and a relationship between humans and nature that "changes the role of *Homo sapiens* from conqueror of the land-community to plain member and citizen of it" (Leopold 171). Don Scheese in *Nature Writing: The Pastoral Impulse in America* identifies the publication of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* in 1962 as both the beginning of modern environmentalism² and the beginning of a major transition in nature writing to "include radicalization; expansion of its focus to include rural (agricultural), suburban and urban environments; adoption of postmodern theories about the nature of knowledge; and renewed attention (since Thoreau and Austin) to aboriginal peoples as a model of how to interact with nature" (35).

Inspired by these turns in American "nature" writing and environmental thinking, some poets urge environmental activism by seeking redemption in nature while lamenting the destruction of environment at the hands of human activity; some re-situate the context of the history of specific places; some question the complex relationship

² Other ecocritics, such as Glen Love, while giving due credit to Carson, also see a major turn in environmental thinking prompted by the success of the first Earth Day in 1970 (21).

between the self and the places in which that self has experienced the world; and some explore the relationship between the self and the cultural pasts and presents that inhabit particular geographic regions. Contemporary place-poets writing within these changing attitudes toward the environment in the second half of the twentieth century not only reflect these tensions within the human-nature dynamic, but they also illustrate a variety of ways in which poetry becomes an artistic space that mediates the experience of the poet within his or her environment. My reading of these poets within the suggested modes of place poetics explores these multiple ways in which poetry re-imagines and constructs “place”: as a physical and geographical reality, as an ontological site of being and identity, as a symbol of larger cultural issues concerning the environment, and as the location of cultural history and perception.

Ecocriticism sharpens our focus toward the local, bioregional details of place. Within my conception of the following three distinct, yet closely related, modes of place poetry I have attempted to narrow that focus further toward the varying ways that poets imagine, re-imagine, construct, and reconstruct the places from which their poetry is written. Briefly, the three modes are as follows: 1) *landscape*, in which the poet specifically reconstructs landscapes that signify the intersection of culture, nature, and personal identity; 2) *contemporary pastoral*, in which the poet attempts to negotiate the boundaries between himself or herself and the natural world by retreating, physically or conceptually, from “civilization” to nature; and 3) *ecohistorical*, in which the poet expresses a rootedness to a particular place resulting from a personal and communal connection to its cultural history and geography. These three modes of place poetry provide a set of characteristics within which to consider the complex layers of the

relationship between poetry and place. Likewise, these modes provide a way to view several poets who may suffer critically under the weight of such pejorative labels as “regional poet” or “nature poet.”

First, the landscape mode holds the specificity of location as a primary site of human experience and identity, as it suggests that in addition to a physical geographical location, place is also a phenomenological and perceptual experience that serves as the impetus for creative invention. Whether the rendered locations are rural, urban, suburban, or wilderness spaces, the subjective experience of being in a place, whether positive or negative, affects the internal landscape of the poet. The landscape mode expresses the following relationships between poet and place: 1) Place functions as a determinant of the poet’s creation, not as simply an aesthetic backdrop, but as a place conceptualized and invested with meaning; 2) the interplay among place, individual identity, and the subjective experience of landscape reflects an interchange between the external landscape and the internal psychological landscape of the poet; 3) through its symbolic and metaphoric construction, the rendering of landscape functions as a potential cultural critique.

Next, the contemporary pastoral mode takes its foundation from a more romantic or neo-romantic view of nature as a site of retreat from society and a potential source of spiritual redemption. Complicating these traditional assumptions, however, are complex and contemporary environmental issues that have emerged in the second half of the twentieth century signifying a shift in the ways in which poets tend to work within the pastoral mode. As such the contemporary pastoral mode is more overtly environmentally conscious than the landscape mode, asking the reader to rethink how humans live in

nature. The contemporary pastoral mode most commonly exhibits the following: 1) Place functions as a determinant of the poet's creation, not as simply an aesthetic backdrop, but as a place conceptualized and invested with meaning; 2) the poem or poet's work follows the pastoral pattern of retreat from civilization to wilderness and ultimately reflects the variety of ways the process of retreat and return shapes the poet's view of the relationship between humans and the environment; 3) the poem or poet through an expression of the pastoral retreat engages in an environmental politics that seeks to promote a more harmonious relationship between humans and the environment.

Thirdly, the ecohistorical mode situates the poet within his or her cultural present while maintaining a strong communal relationship with tradition and the land resulting in a cultural perspective firmly grounded in place. Concepts of landscape depiction and the importance of geographic specificity still persist in this mode, yet notions of how cultural aspects occupy and are connected with specific geographies are at the forefront, specifically language, oral history, and storytelling. Here, in contrast to the idealism of the contemporary pastoral mode, or the self-centric view of the landscape mode, the ecohistorical mode demonstrates the following: 1) place functions as a determinant of the poet's creation, not as simply an aesthetic backdrop, but as a place conceptualized and invested with meaning; 2) a communication of an individual historical connection to cultural tradition through place; 3) the relationship between the contemporary present and an ongoing sense of traditionalism as they are connected through language, landscape, and the continual transformation of cultural space; 4) an ecocentric rootedness informed by cultural, philosophical, religious, or spiritual perspectives that run counter to Euramerican anthropocentric views of place.

Recognizing that the representative literatures from any age and culture reflect the ideological and geopolitical struggle therein, I contend that the poetry of place, read through these three modes, focuses, either overtly or covertly, on these tensions and allows us to situate them in the context of current ecocriticism. Whether the conflict be an internal struggle, as is the case with Wright and Hugo, or external struggles with socioeconomic and political forces that shape the landscape and the poets' relationships with it, as in the work of Gary Snyder, or the struggle between a man alone in the wilderness, as in the work of John Haines, or struggle between tribal customs of the past and the contemporary culture of American-ness, as in the work of Young Bear and Silko, these points of conflict give rise to a poetry that can be read as cultural texts that come from and participate in the process of place.

Following this brief introductory chapter, my dissertation turns toward individual poets. Each chapter begins with a discussion of the theoretical underpinnings of each mode respectively: chapter two on landscape, chapter three on the contemporary pastoral, and chapter four on the ecohistorical. Forming a more complete conceptual framework for each mode than this brief introduction provides, the individual chapter introductions also revisit the characteristics inherent in each mode. After laying this conceptual groundwork, I read the work of two poets in each of the chapters, focusing on the aspects of their work that typify the characteristics of each respective mode. Chapters two through four are organized to reflect a progression from a post-World War II individual, uprooted, anthropocentric search for self, to a more culturally grounded, rooted perspective, and eco-centrally attuned sense of place.

Chapter two begins with a consideration of the concept of cultural landscapes and the theoretical applications of the term *landscape* itself to poetry. After defining various critical positions on landscape, I again pose the interrogative framework of the landscape mode. With these questions informing my reading of Richard Hugo and James Wright, I focus on Hugo's cultural landscapes of the Pacific Northwest and Wright's Ohio poems. I read Hugo's use of landscape as a poetic site through which he identifies personal inner landscapes. I consider the various ways in which Wright constructs the Ohio Valley landscapes of his youth as a metaphor of and commentary on life in industrial small-town America. An underlying question throughout this chapter is whether a term such as *landscape* is itself an inherently anthropocentric term that therefore limits the potential for poems by Wright and Hugo to be viewed as a fully developed place poetics, or if whether the kind of poetics practiced by Wright and Hugo is constricted by the various deep image and confessional poetry influences that factored into their poetic methodologies.

The third chapter moves from the industrial landscapes of the West and Northern Appalachia one step closer to a fully realized ecocentric poetics of place in the discussion of the contemporary pastoral mode. While aspects of Hugo's and Wright's poetics might certainly be considered through the inquiries of the contemporary pastoral mode, an anthropocentric barrier prevents their poems from achieving a full expression of the spirit of place. In exploring the desire to escape the contemporary world of buildings and machines expressed through the poetry of John Haines and Gary Snyder, I consider Haines's and Snyder's work that results from both a literal and conceptual pattern of retreat and return. Haines is a poet who becomes a poet *because* of a particular place

more so than one who writes about a place. Because he lived through and experienced what Don Scheese refers to as the “hard pastoral” (7-8)—the farthest possible retreat from civilization to wilderness—Haines’ *Winter News* is a contemporary Thoreauvian text situated in the Alaskan wilderness. I then turn to Gary Snyder’s *Turtle Island* as a text that, when considered as a conceptual pastoral retreat, functions as what I have termed “pastoral resistance.” In its overt political aims, the text not only informs readers of the current and potential environmental problems incited by American consumer culture, but it also asks the reader to join in the struggle against such forces by re-examining the ways humans live in nature.

In the fourth and final body chapter, I discuss the ecohistorical mode applied to the works of Leslie Marmon Silko and Ray Young Bear. Stemming from the etymological root of “eco-” meaning “home” or “place,” the ecohistorical mode explores most fully what it means to be “placed.” Here I consider Silko’s and Young Bear’s cultural affiliations with Native American tribes as significant contributing factors to their ecohistorical poetics, namely through the influence of oral storytelling, tribal history, and language. As writers mediating between traditional tribal culture and contemporary American culture, their poetry wrestles with deep-seated issues of land appropriation and tensions that result from centuries of Native American-Euramerican conflict. Silko’s multiple verse forms in *Storyteller* evoke the oral song and storytelling of her Laguna-Pueblo upbringing. Calling upon the oral, musical, and linguistic history of his people, Ray Young Bear re-imagines his Meskwaki homeland in the fictional Black Eagle Child settlement, which he writes about in several of his works. By challenging typical genre conventions, both Silko’s and Young Bear’s work constructs a vision of

their respective home-places from a perspective rooted simultaneously in the cultural landscapes of past and present.

The final chapter concludes with an examination of further possibilities that a place-based analysis might provide in a contemporary America where there is growing interest in local and regional studies. I also situate my place-based theoretical approach to poetry within some critics' current calls for what the goals of ecocriticism *should* be as it relates to our understanding of the anthropocentric / ecocentric dichotomy. Finally, arguing for a further validation of ecocriticism and cultural geography as tools for the continued exploration of how poetry contributes to the ongoing process of place, I suggest further theoretical and analytical possibilities offered by my concept of the three modes of place poetry.

CHAPTER 2
(RE)CONSTRUCTING THE LANDSCAPES OF HOME: RICHARD HUGO
AND JAMES WRIGHT

Defining the Landscape Mode

Whenever we look upon a landscape, we see the confluence of both nature and human culture and of the past and present. Symbolic markers of this confluence lie within any given landscape, and the interpretation of such symbols is a highly individualized and subjective process that revolves around one's perspective and perception. It is within the symbolic power of landscape representation that this kind of poetry transcends the limitations of the provincial or previous pejorative labels such as "regional" and "sentimental." The place poets who consciously focus on landscape practice a degree of eco-poetics through symbolically constructing landscape representations that reveal the impact of contemporary human culture on the natural world. Dennis Cosgrove further solidifies this point by suggesting that "the impact of human agency in altering the physical environment reminds us that landscape is a *social* product, the consequence of a collective human transformation of nature" (14). *Cultural landscape*, then, comprises both the natural and human-made environments. One's response to such landscapes depends upon the personal meaning and value invested within such places.

Within the framework of the three modes of contemporary place poetics, the landscape mode suggests that the specificity of location is a primary site of human experience and identity, as it suggests that in addition to a physical geographical location, place is also a phenomenological and perceptual experience that serves as the impetus for creative invention. Lacking the overt ecological activism of the contemporary pastoral

mode, the landscape mode is more concerned with the relationship between individual identity and place than it is with espousing overt environmentalist attitudes. Such a relationship between poet and place echoes the inherent and extreme anthropocentrism of British Romantic poets such as Wordsworth and Coleridge, who emphasized the inspirational connection between nature and imaginative self-expression. While landscape as a concept and approach to poetry may draw our attention to various ways in which the human and natural world intersect, its inwardness and focus on the self at times impedes such poetry from achieving a fully realized ecopoetics when compared to the contemporary pastoral and ecohistorical modes. Yet, through its revelation of the symbolic, the landscape mode, at its best, looks from the local and moves outward towards the national and global.

A general dynamic of contemporary place poetics is that the poetry within each mode, on some level, informs or calls the reader's attention to the complexities of the relationship between human culture and nature. As a specific framework of place poetics, the landscape mode expresses the following relationships between poet and place: 1) place functions as a determinant of the poet's creation, not as simply an aesthetic backdrop, but as a place conceptualized and invested with meaning; 2) the interplay among place, individual identity, and the subjective experience of landscape reflects an interchange between the external landscape and the internal psychological landscape of the poet; 3) through its symbolic and metaphoric construction, the rendering of landscape functions as potential cultural critique.

J. B. Jackson, one of the leading twentieth-century thinkers on the topic of landscape, addresses three fundamental aspects of landscape theory throughout his

works: 1) that landscape is an idea and not just a thing; 2) that landscape is an individual subjective experience; and 3) that the idea of landscape inherently involves a temporality resulting in not only changes within landscapes themselves, but also shifts within the ways in which humans perceive them. “Each age,” Jackson contends, “sees the world in its own manner and has its own notions of beauty; each of them rediscovers the landscape....No landscape has ever changed so profoundly and so swiftly as ours; not merely within the recent past but from its very beginning” (*Landscapes* 43). That a landscape is dynamic and constantly in flux is not only a central principle of landscape theory, but also a concept that deeply informs the following study of landscape representation in American poetry. In addition to familiar forms of artistic landscape representation such as photography or painting, poetry possesses the ability to reflect this sense of dynamism and flux, or, as Jonathan Holden states, “a sense of process and of thing not immediately, physically present or visible” (“Landscape” 161).

In paraphrasing the central theses of Jackson’s theories, Pierce Lewis writes, “Human landscape is a document wherein cultures unwittingly reveal their present and their past in a kaleidoscopic array of things, patterns, and symbols” (248). Jackson’s work is a reflection of his foreseeing and responding to the correlation between environmental concerns and the way human culture interacts with the places that it inhabits. Directly linked with these fundamental concepts within place studies and cultural geography, the study of landscape interpretation and representation has gained recent momentum within the burgeoning field of ecocriticism. As such, one key position within place studies relevant to the following discussion of poetry is that individuals experience places not as static objects, but as highly subjective spaces imbedded with intense meanings and

symbolisms; therefore, the meanings and interpretations of specific locales are fluid and dynamic rather than being purely objective and static. A place-based poetry often aspires to translate that fluid relationship through the artistic representation of individual responses to the landscape.

For the poets in the following discussion, a poem begins in a place. Establishing that place early in the poem, either through the title or the first line, allows the poet to situate the speaker in a very specific geography, thus allowing the reading audience to begin making its own place-associations with the text. These place-specific poems more effectively evoke the characteristics of the local, rather than a poem situated in an anonymous location. For Wright, these beginnings are in the Ohio of his childhood or the towns in the Midwest, where he fled from his hometown. “In Ohio,” “From a Bus Window in Central Ohio, Just Before a Thunder Shower,” “The Old WPA Swimming Pool in Martins Ferry, Ohio” are a few of several titles by Wright that immediately evoke specific places. For Hugo, many poems begin in any small mill or factory town in the Northwest: “Degrees of Gray in Phillipsburg,” “In Dixon,” “The Milltown Union Bar.”

By evoking specific places as the starting points for poems, both poets then reconstruct the cultural landscape of such places centered on a psychological and emotional exchange among the landscape, poet, and poem. In his work on place, Leonard Lutwack asserts that “poetry transforms place by making it serve subjective and imagistic needs” (17). The landscape mode takes this observation by Lutwack one step further and considers the transformation of place through representation not only into subjective imagery, but additionally considers the possibility of how place poetry effectively metaphorizes certain landscapes, thereby allowing the poetic representation to transcend

any place-specific limitations by which a reader might initially respond to it. Richard Hugo's towns and James Wright's Ohio, whether readers are familiar with the place-specific details or not, are transformed into metaphoric locales through which they effectively critique contemporary American culture and society.

In order to follow through with the interrogations of the landscape mode of place poetics, some clarification must first be provided for what the term *landscape* currently connotes. Anne Whiston Sprin notes that the terms *place* and *environment* seem to have recently replaced *landscape*, and yet they are insufficient terms for transmitting the same ideas. *Place* and *environment* "are abstract, disembodied, sacrificing meaning, concealing tensions and conflicts, ignoring the assumptions landscape reveals. Landscape connotes a sense of the purposefully shaped, the sensual and aesthetic, the embeddedness in culture" (17). As noted by Sprin, the term *landscape* must not be confused with *nature*. J. B. Jackson makes the point that the term in English originally meant a picture or artist's recreation of a particular view (*Discovering* 3). Both Jackson and Sprin emphasize that the word *landscape* implies a conscious shaping by the viewer, thus marking a strong distinction from the terms *environment* and *nature*. In his *Discovering the Vernacular Landscape*, Jackson provides one of the more effective definitions of the way the contemporary world defines landscape when he writes that it consists of "a composition of man-made or man-modified spaces to serve as infrastructure or background for our collective existence" (8). This contemporary definition implies the presence of human culture within a natural space, and following Jackson's definition, we can more clearly comprehend the notion of *cultural landscapes* as the result of the ongoing process of human culture's using, manipulating, and inhabiting the land.

These distinctions between *landscape* and *nature* echo issues at the heart of ecocritical theory that contemplate the culture/nature divide. Most contemporary definitions of *landscape* tend to suggest some degree of human presence and agency within the scene. As such, the study of landscape focuses as much on *how* the viewer responds to and processes a particular scene as it does on *what* he or she sees. Tim Creswell points out three interpretations of landscape: “the material expression of the (seemingly unified) group of people who lived in that region”; as “a way of seeing” that considers how individuals imaginatively process landscapes; and as “material productions within which there were coded particular ideologies” (270).

The poetic representation and interpretation of these types of culturally modified spaces are foregrounded through the characteristics of the landscape mode. The landscape poem typically narrates living in and experiencing a particular cultural landscape as a highly subjective and phenomenological process. Often, as is the case with Wright and Hugo, that representation leads from external observation of a landscape to an internal representation of the speaker’s response to it. *Landscape*, as Dennis Cosgrove writes, “denotes the external world mediated through subjective human experience...Landscape is not merely the world we see, it is a construction, a composition of that world” (13). The landscape mode explores this complicated exchange between external and internal landscapes as it is represented in the language of a particular poem.

This relationship between inner and outer landscapes suggests a typical, long-standing use of landscape for aesthetic purposes, but from an ecocritical and place-studies perspective, it also suggests a kind of appropriation of nature to aid in the human artistic interpretation of self and place. Thus, contemporary understandings of landscape often

center on the individual as much as interpretations of what that individual perceives from his or her vantage point. Paul Kane clearly delineates this reciprocal relationship between outer and inner landscapes:

...outer landscapes not only provide us with the metaphors we use to construct or discover inner landscapes, but they also clearly influence our inner worlds directly. This is perhaps our most common notion of how we experience landscape.... But there is always a counter movement outward whereby we imbue the scene with value; it becomes saturated with a significance we give it, no matter how culturally determined our responses might be. When that saturation occurs we can glimpse the process entailed in the construction of inner landscapes, for at such moments there is a double movement simultaneously outward and inward. (213)

While this may seem a similar move made by many Romantics in their association with landscape and a transcendental connection to nature through it, the result in contemporary American poetry is often not as optimistic. What results, rather, is a heightened sense of isolation and dislocation on the part of the poet, contrasted to the striving toward a oneness or connectedness to nature. Landscape as a way of seeing, then, tends to focus on the individual's gaze and his or her response, thus perpetuating an anthropocentric view of the human-nature relationship.

Bonnie Costello recognizes a shift in worldview and sense of self as a result of the cultural transitions from the nineteenth century into the modern and contemporary world. If we consider poetry as an artistic response to one's surroundings, the modern and post-modern conditions of isolationism and disillusionment affect the relationship between the

poet and his or her environment. Citing this shift, but also noting that a fundamental universality exists in the interaction between humans and landscapes, Costello suggests the following:

If we no longer read in nature the Puritans' typology or Emerson's metaphors of the human spirit, we nevertheless respond to a set of signs and even a grammar. We encode natural form, and manipulate the physical world in language-like structures. Even if we maintain our sense of the complexity and distinction of landscape and language as human arrangements of meaning and experience, we may see how their interplay and analogy stimulate the literary imagination. (*Shifting* 10-11)

While the idea of landscape as artistic inspiration is nothing new to the contemporary world, the post-war and industrial landscapes to which those artists and writers are responding is vastly different, as is their contemporary understanding of humans' relationship with the natural world.

As indicated by various critics such as Cosgrove, Jackson, Costello, and others, the multiple ways of viewing landscape suggest that the artistic reproduction of landscape is therefore a singular and subjective reinterpretation of a culturally constructed space. All of these definitions emphasize the individual's agency over the landscape and the ways in which individual perception constructs and reinterprets landscape from a singular vantage point. The poem or the painting, or whatever medium, adds then a layer of meaning and interpretation to the landscape itself. Once this is transmitted to the reader, the reader is then subject to the poet's "way of seeing" that particular landscape. Because of these degrees of subjectivity, a landscape poem is the re-interpretation of a culturally

constructed space, and as Costello emphasizes, landscape “is a figure for our real and symbolic entanglement with the earth as we take the view of it. Landscape is something we build as well as see, inhabit as well as escape to, put meaning into and take meaning from” (*Shifting* 10).

Several poets of the late twentieth century may easily be read through the landscape mode, some perhaps more readily than others. What sets these poets apart, however, from other prominent schools of the post-World-War-II era such as Confessional or L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E, is a poetics that explores the relationship between humans and their geographic surroundings. As such, the interpretation of geographic space and place provides a vehicle toward an understanding of the self and the self’s place within the larger cultural landscape of America. Poets such as Theodore Roethke, especially his “North American Sequence,” Midwest poets William Stafford and Lorine Niedecker, Ed Dorn, Charles Olson, as well as Ray Young Bear and Leslie Silko, discussed at length in the next chapter, N. Scott Momaday, and other Native Americans all practice a poetics centered on or heavily influenced by interpretations of landscape.

The following analysis, however, focuses on the cultural landscape poetry of Richard Hugo and James Wright, and inquires as to whether their work is able to achieve an eco-centric perspective, or whether the kinds of landscape poetics they practice reveals an overly anthropocentric perspective. Hugo has been critically celebrated as one of America’s foremost landscape poets, and the following analysis serves to test that acclaim by considering a number of Hugo’s poems within the construct of the landscape mode. Because Wright has been hailed as an important place-poet and because my

dissertation grew out of a personal geographic connection with his poetry, I seek to examine his poetry of the Ohio Valley through the inquiries of the landscape mode. Additionally, both Hugo and Wright construct poetic landscapes from a shared Anglo-European, lower-working-class perspective. Pursuing the idea of landscape as metaphor, regardless of whether these poets achieve a fully realized ecopoetics, the discussion that follows posits that reading place poetry through the various inquiries of the landscape mode validates poets who are typically labeled as regionalist and as culturally significant voices among late twentieth-century poets.

My intent here is not to provide an all-encompassing examination of Wright and Hugo, but to consider a handful of poems from each poet that most fully exemplify the characteristics of the landscape mode. Reading a given with the characteristics of the landscape mode in mind, however, may reveal that although a given poem may aspire toward certain landscape aesthetics, it may not necessarily achieve them. The term “landscape” traditionally evokes images of nature and countryside. Wright and Hugo tend to challenge the notion that a landscape is typically an aesthetic depiction of a place; rather, they suggest that landscape can be a negative response to place as much as a positive one—Hugo’s images of mill town ruins and Wright’s images of the polluted Ohio River become powerful symbols in the cultural landscape that draw our attention as readers to how American culture has used and transformed the landscape, and how that landscape may shape one’s sense and perception of a place.

Richard Hugo: The Temporality of Landscape

One's native ground is the place where, since before you had words for such knowledge, you have known the smells, the seasons, the birds and beasts, the human voices, the houses, the ways of working, the lay of the land, the quality of the light. It is the landscape you learn before you retreat inside the illusion of your skin. You may love the place if you flourished there, or you may hate the place if you suffered there. But love it or hate it, you cannot shake free. Even if you move to the antipodes, even if you become intimate with new landscapes, you still bear the impression of that first ground. (Sanders 12)

~ Scott Russell Sanders

Landscapes of home lie at the heart of the work of both Richard Hugo and James Wright. As students of Theodore Roethke at the University of Washington in the mid-1950s, Wright and Hugo met and became lifelong friends. Through Roethke's influence and the zeitgeist of the post-World-War-II years, both poets developed a style that is a fusion of place-based and confessional poetics. While one hailed from outside of Seattle, Washington, and the other from eastern Ohio, both were born into and grew up in similar middle- to lower-class industrial-centered communities—communities that had profound effects on both their lives and their poetic perspectives. In a later poem directly addressed to Wright titled "Last Words to James Wright," Hugo encapsulates how the notion of home registers within both of their work:

You need every laugh you get
when your home town's stocked with broken souls.
You left and could never leave that dirty river town
where every day the dirty river rolls. (423)

Hugo's emphasis of home epitomizes both his and Wright's poetics as being bound up in the notion that the influence of one's home is so powerful that it constantly remains an indelible part of one's identity. In the case of Wright and Hugo, home signifies both positive and negative experiences, as their body of poetry transforms the physicality of specific geographic locales in Wright's Northern Appalachia and Hugo's Northwest into

symbolic representations of their emotions and associations with both the present and the past. This transformation of physical places into figurative expressions allows each poet to critique, re-construct, and reinterpret the cultural landscapes of their pasts and presents.

For Wright and Hugo, their physical place in the landscape and their place within the culture that occupies it mark the starting points for several of their poems. Echoing Sanders' notion that one "cannot shake free" of the landscapes of home, much of their work can be read as expressing the desire to escape from the places which laid the foundation of their identities and which harbor painful memories of the past. This searching reveals a sense of isolation and displacement within their representation of landscapes, and based upon their respective middle-class, working-class backgrounds, the desire for escape and uprootedness comments on their respective generation's sense of restlessness, isolation and detachment. Through these landscape representations, the land becomes a metaphor not only for the individual's identification with himself and his hometown, but also for the larger landscape of contemporary America. For both poets, the search leads inevitably home.

Because both Hugo and Wright emerged as poets from small industrial towns, each poet seems to treat his hometown landscapes with a blend of reverence and disdain—reverence toward the value instilled in the natural landscapes and physical geography of the locales, but disdain toward the socioeconomic conditions of the cultures that inhabit those places. The corollary of this dynamic is their tendencies in many poems to focus on negative images within the cultural landscape—polluted rivers, crumbling factories, steel mills, and deserted towns. At the same time, however, each poet comes to recognize a sense of selfhood embedded within the landscape. This association allows

each poet's work to function as significant commentaries on the relationship between human culture and the natural spaces that it occupies.

The landscapes rendered in their poetry, then, become more than simply places on a map. Their inner experiences and the subsequent act of representation through poetry transform the physical space into a place which now contains significant internal meaning. Potter addresses this transformative process in the following way:

Places constitute space as centers of human action and significance; they are always more than points or locations on the land because they have distinctive meaning and values for people: "Place is both 'internal' and 'external' to the human subject, a personally embedded center of meanings and a physical locus of action" (Tilley 1994:18). Much of landscape construction is the creation of "special places," those spaces on the land where meaning is greatest to its inhabitants because of the events and actions they witness, partake in, name, and remember. (322-323)

Representing specific landscapes through poetry, then, can be considered part of this process of landscape construction whereby the poet is attempting to evaluate and reevaluate his or her experience in a specific place.

From within the spaces and places he lived and visited over his life, Richard Hugo reconstructs landscapes full of dirty rivers and broken souls similar to the imagery in "Last Poem to James Wright" cited above. As Jonathan Holden has suggested, Hugo arguably stands as "America's most accomplished poet of landscape" ("Landscape" 169). Although Hugo has been labeled by Holden as such a significant voice in American poetry, the body of scholarship on his work is relatively small. Most studies tend to

recognize Hugo's development toward a specific formula of landscape representation—the establishment of a specific setting, followed by the projection of the poet's inner self onto the landscape, thereby metaphorically connecting the self with the landscape's emptiness, decline, and decay. The landscape, then, becomes a space upon which the poet's subjective experience is projected, as the selective concrete details in these landscapes represent abstractions such as loneliness, emptiness, desperation, and depression. Hugo admittedly appropriates places as sites upon which he may project his sense of personal emotional state. Such a formula-driven poetry ultimately limits Hugo's work, as its rendering of landscape reveals little more than surface interpretations of the land impeded by a self-driven, anthropocentric gaze.

Born and foster-raised by his grandparents in White Center, a suburb of Seattle, Hugo admits to the long-lasting effects of being fatherless and abandoned by his mother and ultimately raised by harsh grandparents. After serving in World War II as a bombardier, he returned to Seattle and earned his BA at the University of Washington, where he studied under Theodore Roethke. His subsequent travels back to Europe and across the Pacific Northwest form material for a multitude of poems over his long publishing career. The impact of these places on his work and his sense of self lie at the heart of most his work in his nine books of poetry.

Because place and landscape are so overtly featured in his work, considering Hugo's poetry through the first two queries of the landscape mode is fairly direct and obvious, as a number of critics have recognized his tendency to connect internal and external landscapes in his poems. While it is virtually impossible that any reading of Hugo's poetry would not consider this relationship between the internal and external

landscapes, my intention here is to question how effectively that relationship expresses a central metaphor that comments not only upon the individual, but also on the transformation of the cultural landscape. This dynamic is expressed primarily through the temporality inherent in many of Hugo's landscapes. For Hugo, many landscapes signify the past; implied through several of his better landscape poems is the idea that landscape is a continual process, and the poems reveal the narrative of that particular landscape through the juxtaposition of past and present. These images often reflect the passage of time, typically from a place thriving with possibility to a place reduced to a state of decline and decay.

The following stanza from "Duwamish Head" in Hugo's second book, *Death of Kapowsin Tavern*, illustrates the effect Hugo is able to achieve by recreating landscapes in a state of temporal flux:

With salmon gone and industry moved in
birds don't bite the water. Once this river
brought a cascade of color to the sea.
Now the clouds are cod, crossing on the prowl
beneath the dredge that heaps a hundred tons
of crud on barges for the dumping ground. (65)

River images dominate much of Hugo's work, and here, the river is shown as the central symbol of the transformation of the landscape. What used to be an untouched waterway is now transformed literally into a polluted waterway, and symbolically into a landscape that represents the conversion of an ideal, pristine natural space into one tarnished by the blight of industry. The place is significant to the speaker on another symbolic level as well, as he draws the connection between place and an important childhood experience: "My vision started at this river mouth, / on a slack tide, trying to catch bullheads / in a

hopeless mud” (65). The speaker here may be referring to his poetic vision or simply to his ability to comprehend and be aware of the intricacies of the landscape. The connection between place and early childhood experience within the natural setting evokes images of both the self and the land in an idyllic state of unspoiled and untainted innocence. The poem’s association of literal transformation of the river with the speaker’s own transformation from innocence to loss adds symbolic value to the landscape and deepens the poet’s sense of place that, in turn, intensifies the present negative response to the now-polluted river.

Hugo’s body of work includes an expansive portion of the American landscape and is not simply limited to his home region of Seattle, as the above poem is. His landscapes expand across many small towns of the American Northwest. Despite the location, what remains consistent in Hugo’s landscapes is imagery of the passage of time and its effect on altering the landscape. As a genre of landscape representation, writing, more so than painting or photography, has this ability to transfer the notion of temporality. As Jonathan Holden notes, a landscape poem can transmit “a sense of time, a sense of process and of things not immediately, physically present or visible” (“Landscape” 161). These landscapes reveal the effects of time and human culture on places, viewing the land as a transformed space resulting from various stages of American culture from the gold rush to the modern and post-modern eras. Used for its potential yield, the land is then abandoned, represented in Hugo’s poems not as the West of boundless opportunity and potential fortune, but a failed West, reflecting the changing attitudes of the idea of the West in the post-war years, not even a century removed from the gold rush. These landscapes of decay and economic decline comment directly upon

the ways in which human culture has affected the places it occupies. In this way, Hugo's landscapes become doubly symbolic as they at once reflect the economic and industrial decline, as well as his own self-deprecation, inner emptiness, and sense of personal failure.

This movement from the imagistic representation of the landscape to the subjective inner self is typical of landscape poetry and follows the second characteristic posed by my conception of the landscape mode. As Holden notes, "...most landscape poems tend to be conspicuously more psychological than other kinds of poems" (159). For Hugo, landscapes are representations of both the physical objects as seen through the speaker's gaze, as well as projections of the inner world of the poet. The concept of the inner landscape, however, remains an abstract and nebulous one. In his exploration of inner landscapes, Paul Kane, in noting that external landscapes metaphorically construct or lead one toward inner landscapes (213), suggests three variations of inner landscapes: first, ones that "rely on an image of a real place, perhaps one encountered in childhood or at times of especial joy or trauma, or just through extended acquaintance or travel"; second, "Inner landscapes that are largely imaginary places, though they might be composites of actual places. And here I would include deep images or archetypes that emerge in dreams or waking visions," and finally, "inner landscapes that constitute visionary fields where there is a spatial sense of inwardness that is like a landscape but without necessarily calling one forth" (213-14).

Where Hugo's poems (as well as Wright's as will be discussed later) seem to reside is in the first and second variations of the inner landscape according to Kane. An

early landscape poem titled “Duwamish” after the river in Hugo’s hometown, indicates Hugo’s attempting to negotiate this relationship between self and landscape:

On the short days, looking for a word,
knowing the smoke from the small homes
turns me colder than wind from
the cold river, knowing this poverty
is not a lack of money but of friends,
I come here to be cold. Not silver cold
like ice, for ice had glitter. Gray
cold like the river. (45)

Here, the speaker actively seeks an inward sensation through situating himself in a landscape that accentuates it—the coldness is associated both with the physical characteristics of the landscape as well as the inward loneliness of the speaker.

This preoccupation with landscape has often garnered for Hugo the classification as “regionalist.” As early as 1971, three books into Hugo’s publishing career, Frederick Garber commented, “It is comforting to say that Hugo is a regional poet, a celebrator of place....the region in which he is located is as much within him as without, and most often in both places at once” (223). Garber notes that Hugo’s regionalism goes deeper than the surface of places, and despite the pejorative connotations of such a label, Hugo embraced it. In an interview with David Dillon in 1976, Hugo was asked to speak about the relationship between place and imagination in his poetry; his response follows:

First of all, you can hang “regionalist” on me if you want. I don’t consider it a bad thing. As a matter of fact, I think it’s a very good thing. Most good writers are regionalists in that they lay emotional claim to the base of operations of their work. There are different kinds of regions, of course.

Regions of the blood as well as the world...Once you're working from a particular place, there's no limit to where you can go, as long as you start out in a particular place. (295-96)

Hugo continues in the interview to talk about the way places function within his poems and serve as the beginning of a process of internalization: "So the places in my poems generally aren't the actual places themselves. I know almost nothing about most of the places that are in my poems.... I just see the place briefly, sort of internalize it, then my imagination converts it to what the poem needs, and I simply appropriate it" (296).

Hugo used locations as starting points for his poems, or what he called the "triggering town" or "triggering subject." To look at Hugo's life's work is to look at a catalogue of place names and locations ranging from the Pacific Northwest of his home to Scotland and Italy, all of which provide for him the triggering subject for his poems. The progression from exterior setting to internal revelation is a recurring one in Hugo's work. As Nicholas O'Connell points out, "Hugo begins by describing the details of his neglected landscape and ends by transforming the landscape and himself through writing about it" (120).

While the diversity of places Hugo wrote about is quite expansive, his original home and his adopted hometowns become focal locations in much of his work. In *The Lady in Kicking Horse Reservoir*, both Montana and Italy serve as his settings. In earlier collections, other towns, cities and spaces in the Pacific Northwest are the main subjects. Yet as Michael Allen observes, "...not until his sixth book of poetry, *White Center* (1980), was Hugo able to entitle a poem and book after his hometown, a working-class suburb of Seattle" (15). Several critics have pointed out the effect of Hugo's harsh

upbringing on his poetry—that he was abandoned by his father, left by his mother, and raised by neglectful grandparents.¹ This, and spending his formative years and much of his adult life in working-class and small towns in the West, moves one to consider these biographical facts as the impetus for recurring images of desolation, isolation, and despair in much of Hugo’s writing.

Much of Hugo’s poetry, then, becomes reflective of the notion in phenomenology that all truth and knowledge is bound up in experience, as the poems detail a speaker’s attempt to process his subjective reaction to the places and spaces he occupies and has occupied. As a poet, then, he accordingly shapes and directs his landscapes to effectively reflect his own sense of self. Even while many Hugo poems are about places other than his hometown, Simeon Dreyfuss argues that the idea of home is at the center of Hugo’s work. Despite the geographic location of the setting, the construction of the poems themselves is a search for home: “Hugo’s vivid and relentless stress on the places in his poems was to ease the pain of not belonging anywhere” (Dreyfuss 127). His use of place in this manner, Dreyfuss contends, leads toward a process of self-healing (127).

While these locales may be divergent, most share the commonalities of being places whose landscapes symbolize the past—towns whose more prosperous days are now well gone, the result of the transition of America into the contemporary world of mass industry, suburban sprawl and shopping malls. Michael Allen equates the towns Hugo represents with other famous literary representations of the twentieth-century small town in American writing—Robinson’s *Tilbury Town*, Anderson’s *Winesburg*, and Faulkner’s *Jefferson in Yoknapatawpha*. These writers, Allen argues, all present a

¹ Hugo’s unhappy childhood and the details of his abandonment are well documented in his autobiography *The Real West Marginal Way*.

variation on the same theme: "...the same American problem of people living together in their self-made culture with various degrees of failure in their sense of community" (16). These communities are the center of what Allen calls the "Hugo town"—a place that developed over the course of his poetry through which Hugo shows the connection between the psychological and the social, and where the characters who populate these towns "come to psychological disaster in great part because they live in a deteriorating society and are unable to make the necessary connections to a changing world. In Hugo's town the speaker inhabits a deteriorated society of fixed isolation" (17).

This sense of failure pervades in the speaker of Hugo's early poems, not only individual failure, but also the anticipation of the failure and demise of the small town as a result of modernization. In "What the Brand New Freeway Won't Go By" the speaker describes the landscape of a ruined town: "The block is bare except for this five-story / ugly brick hotel. Perhaps the bulk / frightened stores and homes away" (86). And later the speaker generalizes from the perspective of a local:

To live here you should be a friend of rain,
and fifty with a bad job on the freights,
knowing the freeway soon will siphon
the remaining world away
and you can die unseen among your photos—
swimmers laughing but the day remembered cold. (86)

Here is a typical Hugo landscape, or rather in this case "townscape." The rendering of place not only draws attention to the immediate and the present state of decline, but it also anticipates a future that is even worse than the present—a future of despair, isolation, and eventual death.

Hugo's early collections often focus on this deterioration of the town and economic decline, or polluted waters resulting from industrial activity. Even the title of his third collection, *The Death of Kapowsin Tavern*, emphasizes the notion of change and the transformation of landscape over time. From that collection, imagery in the poem "Port Townsend" stresses the emptiness of change and the passage of time:

The Keystone ferry sails without a car,
a passenger, not even trailing gulls.
The pulp mill shoots bad odor at the sun.
Arriving here is feeling some old love—
half a memory—a silly dream of how
a world would end, a world would settle down
with time for hair to gray before you die. (93)

As well as representing the temporality of the landscape, Hugo here effectively transforms the landscape into metaphor, equating the aura of the place with an intense human emotion of lost love and isolation. The town evokes feelings of the past as the speaker equates the sensation of arriving in the town with memories of a past love. Time passes toward an end of desolation and loss and is further reflected in the conversation in the local bar where "The talk gives way / to memories of elk, and elk were never here" (93). As the locals reminisce about a past that was not as prosperous as their stories might seem to suggest, outside "Freighters never give this town a second look" (93). Ultimately, when the landscape has something to offer, the opportunity has already been missed, as even sea gulls have moved on looking to feed elsewhere: "...and when the tide comes glittering with smelt / the grebes have gone to look for meaty ports" (93).

This continual tension between the present state of the cultural landscape in relation to its past is an essential quality of Hugo's use of place as a poetic device. Across

Hugo's corpus his depictions of the Pacific Northwest create a portrait of ruins of a bygone era during which the potential of the American Dream still existed, while the present action in a Hugo landscape typically represents that dream as lost. "The Death of Kapowsin Tavern," for example, in describing the destruction of Kapowsin Tavern as the result of an explosion and subsequent fire, the speaker questions where everyone will now go. An example of one of Hugo's interior landscapes, the poem describes the ruins of the bar and the now nearly deserted town and shifts to the speaker's memory of the interior of the tavern when it still stood:

Nothing dies as slowly as a scene.
The dusty jukebox cracking through
the cackle of a beered-up crone—
wagered wine—sudden need to dance—
these remain in the black debris. (102)

While these earlier poems suggest Hugo's working out a relationship among his poetry, his craft and the manner in which place and landscape are represented within it, I would argue that his collection *The Lady in Kicking Horse Reservoir* contains poems that more fully construct the relationship among poet, place, and nature. Separated into three sections, all of which are based on geography, the poems of this collection most clearly register Hugo's use of space and place as the starting point for a poem. The book transmits a sense of both rootedness and transience, as the first and last sections are titled "Montana with Friends" and "Montana," and the middle sections are titled "Touring" and "Touring with Friends." Though these sections detail Hugo's travels in Italy and elsewhere, the poems are still firmly grounded in the experience of place and space.

The collection begins with a poem that suggests a universal connection among all places. “A Map of Montana in Italy” details the speaker’s musings about Montana while considering its representation on a map: “On this map white. A state thick as a fist / or blunt instrument. Long roads weave and cross / red veins full of rage” (165). While in Italy, the speaker comments upon the socioeconomic aspects of certain locations of his home state:

The two biggest towns are dull deposits
of men getting along, making money, driving
to church every Sunday, censoring movies and books.
The two most interesting towns, Helena, Butte,
had the good sense to fail. (165)

As the speaker gazes at the physical object of the map, the cartographic representations of known places of his past conjure up particular associations as well as specific cultural tendencies within those places: “With so few Negroes and Jews we’ve been reduced / to hating each other, dumping our crud in our rivers, mistreating the Indians” (165). The speaker attributes the ultimate failure of the town to the community’s mistreatment of each other and of the environment. The map serves as a symbol of both the physical geographic space of America and also the culture that inhabits it. The map triggers the speaker’s memory of his home state and becomes the vehicle through which he expresses his cynical view of American culture contrasted Italian culture. The concluding lines offer the poem’s most dramatic cultural comparison: “No one fights / in the bars filled with pastry. There’s no / prison for miles. But last night the Italians / Cheered the violence in one of our westerns” (166).

While distanced from Montana, Hugo's European landscape poems often draw upon images of the American West in comparison, suggesting that one's perception of a particular cultural landscape depends essentially on comparing and contrasting it with other, more familiar landscapes. In most of these European landscapes, then, Hugo uses the familiar places of his home region to contrast, or more likely compare, the physical space, the culture that inhabits it, and also his inner response to it. In "Walking Praed Street" the speaker makes connections between the space in which he finds himself—a street in London—and the known places of his own experience. Suggesting the universality of spatial experience, the speaker states in the first line, "I've walked this street in far too many towns" (182). And later in the fifth stanza, the speaker makes the connection between his hometown streets and Praed Street:

You live this road forever and no love comes by.
The weather, fondly: in your home town, hurt.
The weather, happily: the same old dirt
you came from: in Seattle, you.
I've walked this street in lots of towns,
always foreign weather at my throat.
Same paper blown, same broken man
begging me for money and I overgive. (183).

Although the physical space occupied by the speaker is not native to his experience, the visceral, mental, and emotional response to the place remains the same. Hugo once remarked in an interview that "all towns you look at could be your hometown" (Mathews xix). Regardless of the setting, Hugo still focuses on the loss and failure in his own life and of the people who reside there. As William Mathews points out in his introduction to Hugo's autobiography, this view of the universality of the small town

suggests a simultaneous sense of homelessness and belonging. “[It] is not only to say you are homeless,” Matthews writes, “but that you are potentially home anywhere. It is to say along with Whitman that you can, by continuous imaginative appropriation, belong to America, however beautifully and terrifyingly vast it is” (xx). The American towns Hugo obsesses over in his poems become one town, the “Hugo town,” to borrow Allen’s term. Hugo’s perception and composition of the Hugo town, while metaphorizing townscapes and inner landscapes, becomes a poetic strategy from which Hugo could not break free. The sameness that he purported to feel in his experience of place translates into a formulaic and repetitive re-construction of landscape and self.

The notion of appropriating specific places for imaginative inspiration and his formula of projecting himself onto the landscape of a “Hugo town” is perhaps nowhere more evident than in one of Hugo’s better-known poems. General critical praise of “Degrees of Gray in Phillipsburg” shares the view that this poem typifies the way place is registered in Hugo’s work—or this poem as the culmination of his overall poetic philosophy and use of place to symbolize the inner landscape of the self. In this closing poem of *The Lady in Kicking Horse Reservoir*, Hugo makes use, as is his tendency, of the second-person point of view. The ambiguity this establishes opens up several narrative possibilities: internal dialogue, direct address to the reader, or direct address to an unknown. These various possible antecedents to the ambiguous pronoun add perceptual layers to the poem. The ambiguous pronoun could be read as an apostrophe to an ambiguous acquaintance of the poet, as the creation of an internal dialogue with a tortured and searching self, or finally as the poet’s directly addressing his reader. The latter possible interpretation tends to enhance the effect of the poem as it effectively

transforms the experience of the landscape and place into a collective and universal one with which the reader may be able to identify.

In “Degrees of Gray in Philipsburg” the ambiguous “you” seems to be both self-referential and a direct address to the reader. The poem opens with the three following lines: “You might come here Sunday on a whim. / Say your life broke down. The last good kiss / you had was years ago” (216). The tone and sensation immediately establish the uprootedness and transience of the speaker. The opening lines invite the reader directly into poetic landscape recreated by the poem, while the use of the conditional tense creates a universalizing effect, essentially asking the reader to compare his or her life with the post-industrial deterioration of Philipsburg’s landscape.

The poem’s second stanza draws attention to economic and geographic morphology of the landscape and describes Phillipsburg’s transition from the once-thriving mill town to its present state:

The 1907 boom, eight going silver mines,
a dance floor built on springs—
all memory resolves itself in gaze,
in panoramic green you know the cattle eat
or two stacks high above the town,
two dead kilns, the huge mill in collapse
for fifty years that won’t finally fall. (216)

Here the memory of the better past is dominated by the decline and reality of the present, both symbolized by the details Hugo provides of the landscape. The central symbols are the ruins of the dilapidated mill and the two smoke stacks that still loom above the town. From these post-industrial symbols, signifiers at once of the economic prosperity of the past and the decadence of the present, the poem makes a turn to project that same

sensation upon both speaker and reader: “Isn’t this your life? That ancient kiss / still burning out your eyes? Isn’t this defeat / so accurate, the church bell simply seems / a pure announcement: ring and no one comes?...” (216-217).

While the speaker projects his life onto the scene, the ambiguous “you” allows the poet to remain at a curious distance from the scene while lamenting it at the same time. Supplanting the “you” with the personal “I” dramatically alters the effect of the poem and its use of place to construct a metaphor between cultural and socioeconomic decline and human suffering and loss. The distance Hugo the poet achieves in his recreation of the scene could primarily result from the aesthetic and artistic relationship Hugo establishes with a place. “I use it,” Hugo stated referring to place in his poetry (Myers 296). In fact, Hugo had been to Philipsburg only once in his life, but the experience resulted in a poem that, to several critics and to Hugo himself, represents the kind of landscape poem toward which all of his previous poems had been evolving. Hugo made the following comments about the poem and his appropriation of places in an interview with Thomas Gardner:

...the Philipsburg poem was actually the culmination of a kind of writing. It was the poem I had been trying to write for twenty years. Of course, these things aren't neat and you don't realize that at the time you write the poem. You try to keep writing that way, but eventually that was the best of all those poems, "West Marginal Way," "Duwamish." Everything just fell into place one day, all within four hours, from five in the morning until nine. I had been in Philipsburg only three hours the day before, and that was the only time I'd been there. (149)

This process of appropriation applies not only to the places, but also to the people who populate them, as many of Hugo's landscapes move from an observation of the cultural landscape to the locals within them.

In the poem "Dixon" after Dixon, Montana, Hugo illustrates the connection between human loss and despair and the landscape. The poem begins with an impressionistic image of the setting and time of day: "Light crawls timid over fields / from some vague source behind the hills, / too gray to be the sun" (213). Here the first two lines establish an image of daybreak not as bright and promising, but as gray and foreboding. The speaker continues:

Any morning
brings the same, a test of stamina,
your capacity to live the long day out
paced by the hesitant river (213).

The anonymous "you" of the poem here seems represent a male, long-time resident of Dixon, living through the repetition of day after day in a town that has passed its prime. Embodied in the individual is the same aspect of the town: "your wife left decades back / when the train still ran" (213).

These sometimes anonymous, sometimes properly named locals appear throughout Hugo's landscapes. As Julian Gitzen notes: "... uppermost in Hugo's thoughts were not the locales but the lives of their human inhabitants, to whom he felt bound by the experiences of his childhood" (75). "Degrees of Gray in Philipsburg" closes with an identification with one such inhabitant: "The old man, twenty when the jail was built, still laughs / although his lips collapse. Someday soon, / he says, I'll go to sleep and not wake up" (217). For Hugo, these individuals are so intimately connected to the places

they inhabit that they inevitably symbolize the same kind of deterioration, decline, isolation and temporality as the landscapes themselves.

If “Degrees of Gray” stands as Hugo’s self-proclaimed *tour de force* and the culmination of his poetically constructing his personal relationship with disparate places across the Southwest, then his 1980 collection *White Center* represents a poetic and psychological homecoming. Rather than the ambiguous “you” used in “Degrees of Gray,” “Dixon,” and several other poems in *Lady in Kicking Horse Reservoir*, the personal “I” is more dominant in many of these poems. In “Doing the House” the speaker seemingly revisits his childhood home and is allowed entrance by the current resident: “He is the man I would have become” (325) the speaker observes. Noting the changes in the exterior and surrounding landscape, the speaker moves inside and expresses the desire to compare his poems “with poems / I left here, never to be written” (326). Seemingly inseparable with the speaker of this poem, Hugo speculates about what his life would be like had he never left his home region and how that would ultimately have affected his poems.

The titular poem “White Center,” so named after the area of suburban Seattle where Hugo was raised, opens, “Town or poem, I don’t care how it looks. Old woman / take my hand and we’ll walk one more time these streets / I believe marked me weak beneath catcalling clouds” (373). This poem evokes the variation of Kane’s inner landscape that “rel[ies] on an image of a real place, perhaps one encountered in childhood or at times of especial joy or trauma” (213). Cataloguing a series of childhood memories and directly addressing the grandparents who raised him, the speaker states, “It all comes back but in bites. I am the man / you beat to perversion” (373). Later in the poem the

speaker comments, “It’s all beginning to blur / as it forms. Men cracking up or retreating. / Resolute women deep in prayer” (374). The poem suggests the powerful impact of place on memory, the slow process of specific recollections triggered by specific locales, and questions the reality of specific memories stimulated by revisiting the sites in which they occurred.

The final stanza of the poem is also the final one of the collection and seemingly leads toward a degree of catharsis and reconciliation between the poet and his past. The speaker acknowledges the indelible mark that his home region has left upon him: “And it isn’t the same this time. I hoped forty years / I’d write and not write this poem. This town would die / and your grave never reopen. Or mine” (375). The “you” is not ambiguous here, as it functions as an apostrophe to Hugo’s grandmother, the “old woman” of the first line. The final lines, and the overall representation of White Center, suggest a curious blend of bitterness and reverence:

...I walk this past with you, ghost in any field
of good crops, certain I remember everything wrong.
If not, why is this road lined thick with fern
and why do I feel no shame in kicking the loose gravel home? (375)

The poem ends, however, with the speaker in a state of flux, wondering how a place, which for him signified painful memories and associations, is at the same time a place for which he can feel a degree of affection.

Here is Hugo at his most confessional, yet this closing poem of *White Center* represents the complex dynamics of the landscape of home—a highly subjective place imbued with intensely personal meanings and associations. Though many of Hugo’s poems make this turn from landscape representation to the personal, the emphasis of

setting and geography allows his body of work to transcend the “confessional” label. (75). Nicholas O’Connell maintains that Hugo’s use of the landscape permits him to avoid some of the self-indulgent and sentimental tendencies of confessional poetry that attract the most criticism. “Instead of addressing his personal and subjective sense of loss,” O’Connell suggests, “he objectifies these feelings by finding the physical equivalent of them in the rundown West Marginal Way, the objective correlative to his inner psychological state. This allows him to gain a critical distance on such feelings, permitting him to write about them without sentimentality” (121). As Hugo writes in *The Triggering Town*, “...the true or valid triggering subject is one in which physical characteristics or details correspond to attitudes the poet has toward the world and himself” (5). This process of projecting the inward onto the materiality of the landscape lies at the heart of Hugo’s work and at its larger symbolic significance as a portrait of post-World-War-II America.

Dobberstien succinctly summarizes these themes that function at heart of Hugo’s poetry when he states that it reveals that “American life, however it delivers on the promises of reclamation and rescue made by the emblems of prosperity, is indelibly marked by failure, defeat, and suffering” (416). Hugo’s collected works relay the loose narrative of a transient poet who, whether at home or abroad, constantly seeks a sense of self that is mediated and negotiated through a sense of place. E. D. Blodgett suggests that Hugo’s poems collectively tell a “singular story of the self seeking its nature, its convictions, its reality. This is the zigzagging search for home, a home which at times appears to be the wilderness of Nature, at times the society of bars, at times the sleepy afternoons of remote towns in the west” (282). But what Hugo’s work does provide at its

artistic best is a portrait of the American West and a singular perspective of the relationship between the individual, place, and culture.

Read as exemplary of the landscape mode, and particularly exemplary of landscapes as fluid and metaphoric, regardless of the specific place depicted in the poem, Hugo's work effectively portrays the landscapes of the American West and his personal experience within them. Where Hugo's poems are most effective to this end are in depictions of landscapes in flux, emphasizing the temporality inherent in any landscape. "If I painted, I'd paint landscapes" (244) Hugo writes in a poem titled "Landscapes." In imagining himself painting a scene, he later states, "In no time I have aged the barn stark gray" (244). Like his landscape poems, the author of the imagined painting deliberately chooses to convey imagery that reflects the passage of time. By taking this kind of control over the scene, Hugo deliberately shapes the gaze of the reader, manipulating the setting to focus on these temporal images. Across the span of Hugo's landscapes, whether cultural, natural, interior, exterior, familiar or unfamiliar, we see this effective use of landscape metaphor and temporality to convey the degree of human impact on the shape of the landscape. While his obsession with rendering place so often symbolizes his own personal sense of failure, it also symbolizes the failure of economic fortune once promised by the American West.

However, Hugo's preoccupation with the self often impedes his ability to communicate an authentic sense of the places about which he writes. Although Hugo's poems draw the reader's attention to dilapidated cultural landscapes of economic failure and industrial ruins, the poems themselves are never able to break from the formulaic, surface, and at times static representations of landscape. Hugo's use of the landscape as a

conduit for his own personal sense of failure becomes redundant and self-centered when one reads his overall body of work. While a handful of Hugo poems make strides toward communicating the multilayered complexities of place, most fall short in constructing a fully realized sense of place for the reader. Confined by the confessional self, Hugo's landscape poems often reveal the limitations of the landscape mode imposed by its inherent anthropocentrism. Despite drawing our attention to human culture's alteration of the landscape and the industrial ruins that have left their mark there, Hugo's landscape poems often move from the outer landscape inward toward the troubled speaker who inhabits them.

James Wright: The Symbolic Landscapes of Home

While foregrounding the connection between home and the search for personal identity, both Hugo's and James Wright's poetry can come under criticism for its preoccupation with the self. Such a self-centric perspective impedes many of their poems, especially those oriented toward cultural landscapes, from achieving an ecopoetic, ecocentric perspective such as that achieved by poets in the following chapters. Whereas Hugo's overarching metaphor equates the Western landscapes with personal failure in the ruins of the rundown mill and mining towns, Wright's poetry transforms place into metaphor to comment primarily on the part of his own identity that was shaped by his boyhood hometown. Wright's Ohio comes to symbolize a death of the human spirit that results from a life lived through the landscape of steel-mill and factory communities of the Upper Ohio Valley region of Northern Appalachia. Whereas Hugo's representations of place often display the sensation of the passage of time, emphasizing the temporality of the landscapes he recreates, Wright's landscapes of home often remain fixed in time

and memory. Like Hugo, Wright's body of work reflects his transience, as his poems construct landscapes that span the Midwest, West, and locations in Europe as well. My focus here shall consider how the Ohio poems composed throughout his career construct a deep-seated rooted sense of self, a resituated, and at times solipsistic self, who looks back on his home as a place of intense meaning and value.

As the speaker of Wright's "Sages on a Journey Westward" announces, "I began in Ohio. / I still dream of home" (124). While the speaker of Wright's poems is often constricted by a preoccupation with inner self, he often recognizes and laments the transformation of the natural landscape that results from the industrial culture of his hometown. Although he left his home region of the upper Ohio Valley early in his life, Wright's poetry illustrates how the memory of and experience in one's native landscapes provide a way of perceiving and processing all other experience and places thereafter. While much scholarship has noted the questing aspect of Wright's body of work,² and although his pursuit of education and his writing career led him Westward and overseas to Italy, Ohio is a constant presence in his work. And while scholars have also noted Wright's self-admitted ambivalent relationship with his native Ohio, his representations of the region symbolically transform the landscape into depictions that effectively critique the culture of small-town industrial America. At the same time, Wright recognizes the part of himself that is eternally rooted in the small river town of Martins Ferry, Ohio. That sense of rootedness results from the connection between place, the

² The two most commonly discussed aspects of Wright's poetic development are his stylistic shift from formalism to a freer verse between his second book, *Saint Judas* (1959) and his third book, *The Branch Will Not Break* (1963), and the pattern of the quest. The most thorough treatments of the quest pattern in Wright's work are both by Peter Stitt: "James Wright: The Garden and the Grime" in *Kenyon Review* 6 (1984): 76-91, and the chapter "James Wright: The Quest Motif in *The Branch Will Not Break*" in Smith's *The Pure Clear World*.

culture that inhabits it, and the meaningful experiences one has within it. Kate Sopher explains this experiential relationship as follows: “One’s experience of the landscape of home and one’s response to it—how much it is cherished, or whether indeed it is—can hardly be separated from the nature of the human relationships there....Our experience of any landscape through the senses is inseparable from the social and psychological context of the experience” (137-138).

Reading Wright’s work within the framework of the landscape mode, specifically noting the exchange between internal and external and the transformation of place into symbolic and metaphoric expression, emphasizes these tensions among Wright, his past, present, and the self-proclaimed “complicated feelings” about the place of his upbringing surface again and again (Graziano and Stitt 99). Though he seldom returned there after he left to go to college, Wright returns to the Ohio Valley in his poetry. Through this return his depiction and representation of the place and its specific cultural landscapes construct a singular and unifying metaphor that expresses sympathy for the members of small-town communities who are not fortunate enough, in Wright’s eyes, to escape the socioeconomically determined trap. Despite his sometimes-nostalgic treatment of the place, Wright metaphorizes the Upper Ohio Valley as a living death, a purgatorial afterlife, and/or Hell itself.

Wright’s Ohio poems clearly illustrate the way in which poetic place representations symbolically reconstruct landscapes into cultural critiques that raise the reader’s consciousness toward the interaction between human culture and place. To this end, Wright’s recollected landscapes address several aspects of the landscape mode, specifically the relationship between external and internal landscapes, identity, and the

subjective processing of place. As William Davis has theorized, there are specific poems of Wright's in which he "successfully effects a physical transformation of place in such a way that the specific and particular becomes almost universal and in which place blurs into metaphor and theme goes beyond any literal Ohio to become an almost mystical, largely metaphysical, place--an 'Ohio of the mind'" (355). Davis refers here to the process by which many of Wright's Ohio poems are able to transform the physical landscape into a metaphorical and personally symbolic one, a landscape that resides deep within the consciousness of the poet.

Across the body of Wright's work, his landscape depictions generally fall into one of two categories: pastoral landscapes of immediacy, and recollections of the landscapes of home. The poems of immediacy tend to describe the immediate and present effect of the landscape on the speaker as the poem generally moves from a description of the external world to the internal. The often anthologized "A Blessing" and "Lying in a Hammock on William Duffy's Farm" are such poems that seem to focus more on the internal response of the speaker to his surroundings, as the landscape serves as a gateway to the deep image. These landscape poems achieve an effective blend of pastoral and landscape, as the speaker often takes note of a pastoral moment³ within a space or place that represents the convergence of the cultural and natural landscapes. From this position within the landscape, the speaker is moved then to explore the relationship between culture, and nature. More so than Hugo, Wright's work exists on a blurry line between the landscape mode and the contemporary pastoral.

³ The "pastoral moment" is more fully discussed in chapter three's discussion of Contemporary Pastoral, specifically section three on Gary Snyder.

One of Wright's better-known landscapes, "A Blessing," begins: "Just off the highway to Rochester, Minnesota, / Twilight bounds softly forth on the grass" (143). The speaker finds himself in the midst of two worlds, the world of the highway that both represents and leads back toward the city, and the field off the highway in which he greets two ponies. "They have come gladly out of the willows / To welcome my friend and me" (143). In the convergence of human and animal, the poem builds toward its final expression as the speaker makes a leap from the external through one of the more famous examples of the deep image: "Suddenly I realize / That if I stepped out of my body I would break / Into blossom" (143). The leap from the actual to the surreal typifies the kind of deep image poetics Wright attempted to work with through the influence of Robert Bly. These "psychic dissociations of surrealism," as Bonnie Costello refers to them, signify the exchanges between the outer landscape and inward responses to it ("Returning" 226). Costello describes Wright's poetics in *The Branch Will Not Break* by noting this relationship between the inner and the outer: "An inner voice and vision go out to meet the landscape, and the landscape moves in to shape the private world....Such surreal conjunctions become formulaic in this book, but they mark an effort to engage the imagination in the local, and to discover the boundaries of both" ("Returning" 227).

In contrast to the pastoral landscapes of immediacy, Wright's poems of recollection take specific memories of the landscape of home and transform them into cultural commentary, while at the same time making use of the kind of imaginative and subconscious leaps typical of the deep image. Since the following chapter focuses on the contemporary pastoral, a mode through which these Wright poems may be read, my focus here will pinpoint these recollected landscapes of home. Most of these poems

present a tension among the speaker, his sense of self, and his relationship to his regional identification with the Upper Ohio Valley. Wright's recollected landscapes may be considered as, according to Paul Kane, actual places associated with childhood "joy or trauma," and as imaginary "composites of actual places" (213-214).

In his second collection titled *St. Judas*, Wright's "At the Executed Murderer's Grave" reveals such tensions and seems to echo a similarly tenuous relationship with his hometown as one might find in a number of Hugo poems. The poem opens as follows:

My name is James A. Wright, and I was born
Twenty-five miles from this infected grave,
In Martins Ferry, Ohio, where one slave
To Hazel-Atlas Glass became my father.
He tried to teach me kindness. I return
Only in memory now, aloof, unhurried,
To dead Ohio, where I might lie buried,
Had I not run away before my time. (82)

In this early poem, Wright figures the landscape of home as a grave, a recurring metaphoric image that persists throughout much of his work. The theme of escape is also introduced here and haunts many of the lines in Wright's Ohio poems. Yet while many poems express this desire to escape, Ohio is a place of constant return for Wright, and that fact only solidifies the love-hate relationship with his hometown, a defining tension in much of his artistic output. In the introduction to Wright's collected poems, Donald Hall comments, "Jim's whole life was compelled by his necessity to leave the blighted valley, to escape his father's fate, never to work at Hazel-Atlas Glass. In his poems, Martins Ferry and its sibling valley towns blacken with Satanic mills along the river and under the green hill" (xxv). Hall points out the same conflicts Wright creates in the above

lines, and while several of the Ohio poems cast this negative imagery, Wright often blends this negativity with a sense of nostalgia. Hall further points out the following: “If he reviled his Ohio, he understood that Ohio made him—and Ohio remained his material. We choose exile as a vantage point; from exile we look back on the rejected, rejecting place—to make our poems out of it *and* against it” (xxvi). This self-induced exile provided Wright, through the experience of transience, the perspective from which to contrast and compare his home region with several other places in the American landscape.

Wright’s second wife Anne notes, “When he left Martins Ferry he carried the Ohio Valley and its people with him wherever he went” (Graziano and Stitt 111). This life of uprootedness afforded Wright the perspective to create poems informed by a constant returning home. An early poem in *The Branch Will Not Break* titled “Stages on A Journey Westward” narrates the speaker’s departure from Ohio and ends on the West Coast. In the first section the speaker explains his sleeplessness and thoughts of his father at home during the Great Depression:

But by night now, in the bread lines my father
Prowls, I cannot find him: So far off,
1500 miles or so away, and yet
I can hardly sleep (124).

Far removed from his home, the memory of Ohio conjures up a powerful scene from the speaker’s childhood. The section concludes with the following lines: “In 1932, grimy with machinery, he sang me / A lullaby of a goosgirl, / Outside the house, the slag heaps waited” (124). While being sung to sleep, the speaker in his recollection of the scene, emphasizes the work-stained father and the ominous and looming slag hills of the

landscape outside. These images of machinery and industry maintain a constant presence throughout Wright's landscapes of home and ultimately critique those aspects of the cultural landscape that enslave and entrap the husbands and fathers of the region.

While Wright's speaker ultimately finds his way West where "America is over and done with" (125), the poet's returns to Ohio through recollected experiences occur in multiple poems across the body of his work. Inherent in their expression is the relationship between the speaker's sense of self, the cultural landscape as he remembers it, and the people who populate it. The following poems of recollection epitomize these tensions and aspects of Wright's work as well as the ways in which poetic landscapes of home transcend the limitations of the provincial by expressing larger cultural concerns. Although focused primarily on the individual response to place and memories of home, these poems provide significant social and cultural critique, as they probe seriously the intersection of connection between the natural and cultural landscape

Considering Wright as a transient place-based poet hinges upon the notion that uprootedness implies a prior rootedness in a place. In the recollected landscapes of his youth, Wright re-invents and re-imagines his Ohio in a way that conveys a sense of permanent imaginative and psychological rootedness to place, rather than a sense of de-location and placelessness. "And still in my dreams," notes Wright in a later poem titled "On a Phrase from Southern Ohio," "I sway like one fainting strand / Of spiderweb, glittering and vanishing and frail / Above the river" (301). Here, and in other poems, place is not simply a setting or a backdrop against which the poem is set; rather the river, the symbol of home, is part of the poet's imagination and subconscious.

Wright's continued returning to Ohio often results in negative imagery of home that manifests itself in his using the cultural landscape as a metaphor for hell or a living death, as many of his deep-image, surrealist scenes paint the picture of his Ohio Valley as a grave or a waking death. Looming slag heaps, the satanic glow of steel mills and factories, as well as the demonized Ohio River itself are recurring symbolic images that Wright uses to critique the industrial landscape of his youth. "The River Down Home" is a short poem that illustrates these characteristics, as well as exemplifies one of Wright's poems of reflection. The Ohio River itself plays a significantly symbolic role in Wright's Ohio landscapes, on the one hand functioning literally as a specific geographic entity, as a place of danger, pollution, and death, and on the other serving a metaphoric role as it becomes the river Styx of the underworld within the larger metaphor of the Ohio Valley as hell. Reinforcing Wright's portrayal of the river as a place of potential death, the first of the two stanzas in "The River Down Home" reads as follows:

Under the enormous pier-shadow,
Hobie Johnson drowned in a suckhole.
I cannot even remember
His obliterated face.
Outside my window, now, Minneapolis
Drowns, dark.
It is dark.
I have no life. (172)

Here, reminded of a tragic past memory of the Ohio, the speaker associates the darkness outside his window with the darkness of both the river and the current emotional state of his own life. Similar to the way a Hugo landscape moves from outer to inner, the process in this poem begins with a memory of home, transitions to the present setting in

Minneapolis, and then proceeds to the inward psychological state of the speaker.

Wright's obsession with his hometown, however, is accentuated when the speaker returns to descriptions of river images along the Ohio in the final stanza, which reads as follows:

What is left of all of it?
Blind hoboes sell American flags
And bad poems of patriotism
On Saturday evenings forever in the rain,
Between the cathouses and the slag heaps
And the river, down home.
Oh Jesus Christ, the Czechoslovakians
Are drunk again, clambering
Down the sand-pitted walls
Of the grave. (172)

Focusing on cultural groups who occupy the fringes of society, the speaker proceeds to turn the Ohio River valley into a symbol of a living grave. Not only do the waters of the Ohio present the realistic possibility of drowning as indicated in the memory of the first stanza, but they also function as a recurring metaphor equating the river with the grave.

Immediately following this poem in the collection *Shall We Gather at the River* is "In Response to a Rumor That the Oldest Whorehouse in Wheeling, West Virginia Has Been Condemned." Again, the cultural landscape of the Ohio Valley is the stage for another memory, as the speaker recollects a moment that verges on confessionalism, yet the focus proceeds outward from the speaker to the women in the poem and to the river itself:

I will grieve alone,
As I strolled alone, years ago, down along
The Ohio shore.

I hid in the hobo jungle weeds
Upstream from the sewer main,
Pondering, gazing.

I saw, down river,
At Twenty-third and Water Streets
By the vinegar works,
The doors open in early evening.
Swinging their purses, the women
Poured down the long street to the river
And into the river. (173)

In a memory that closely resembles the lonely voyeurism of Lowell's "Skunk Hour," the young speaker witnesses the prostitutes emerge into the evening. The surreal image of the women descending into the river carries over to the next stanza, as the speaker asks the following question:

I do not know how it was
They could drown every evening.
What time near dawn did they climb up the other shore,
Drying their wings? (173)

The surrealism here evokes dreamlike images of the death and resurrection of the fallen women reborn by crossing a threshold from one realm into another. The chief metaphor that runs through the poem is the Ohio River, which, on a literal level, signifies the region itself and figuratively signifies the mythical river Styx. Drowning under the stresses and pressures of the socioeconomic conditions within which they exist, the women figuratively descend and cross the threshold to the underworld into which they emerge on the other side of the Ohio. The poem concludes with two stanzas that stand as some of

Wright's harshest critiques of the cultural landscape of the Ohio Valley, and further his recurring metaphor that equates the landscape of the valley with hell:

For the river at Wheeling, West Virginia,
Has only two shores:
The one in hell, the other
In Bridgeport, Ohio.

And nobody would commit suicide, only
To find beyond death
Bridgeport, Ohio. (173)

The penultimate stanza expresses a harsh enough contempt for the river town of Wheeling, West Virginia, and yet the final stanza pushes that critique one step farther. The life that the women are leading is hellish enough to make them contemplate suicide, and yet the speaker's imagery here magnifies the hellish environment of the river valley by maintaining that the small town of Bridgeport, Ohio, just across the river from Wheeling, West Virginia, and a stone's throw south of Wright's native Martins Ferry, is, in fact, more hellish than hell itself.

"In Response" exemplifies Wright's blend of surrealism, landscape as metaphor, and the process by which certain landscapes can stimulate powerful memories of important events situated within them. As a poem of recollection, the imagery becomes more an amalgam of the physical landscape and the landscape of the imagination. Since the poem relies heavily on the memory of a place rather than speaker's being present in the landscape, this kind of representation aligns itself with Paul Kane's notion of an inner landscape as an imaginary place that is a composite of actual ones, which include "deep images or archetypes that emerge in dreams or waking visions" (213-14). Rather than focusing on the self in the poem, however, the speaker focuses on his perception of the

human participants in the symbolic landscape who themselves become subjects of the poet's critiques.

While a poem such as "In Response" reveals the speaker's surreal and dreamlike rendering of a childhood memory, it resists in many ways some of the inquiries and characteristics of the landscape mode. In the broad frame of eco-poetics from which the place-modes have been drawn, such interior landscapes can be viewed as too anthropocentric to achieve the kinds of consciousness-raising toward which an overt eco-poetics might strive. Despite drawing our attention to the ruins of the Ohio Valley and their effects on the lives of the people there, the confessional "I" speaker in Wright's poems often becomes overly solipsistic, thereby hindering the poems from achieving any kind of fully rendered eco-poetic expression.

One poem of Wright's that naturally lends itself to the notion of landscape as a metaphor and cultural critique is "Autumn Begins In Martins Ferry, Ohio." Like Hugo's "White Center," the poem comes to represent the complicated relationship the poet maintains with the culture of his hometown. Not only does the poem stand as one of Wright's best-known poems, but it also is often misread as a celebration rather than a critique. The representation of cultural landscapes reveal one of Wright's strongest critiques of his hometown, as well as some of the primary ways in which place and cultural landscapes serve not only as individualistic experiences, but reach outward from the self and perceiver toward the larger collective experience of American culture. While doing so, the poem furthers the overarching metaphor in Wright's Ohio poems that the Ohio Valley and his Martins Ferry are symbolically rendered as a purgatorial afterlife, a waking death, an entrapment in Hell.

Since Wright often uses his titles to establish the geographic setting of the poem, a portion of the following analysis considers multiple ways of reading the title. The poem is quoted here in full, with the title intact, since the title itself bears significant weight on the overarching metaphor of the entire poem:

Autumn Begins in Martins Ferry, Ohio
In the Shreve High football stadium,
I think of Polacks nursing long beers in Tiltonsville,
And gray faces of Negroes in the blast furnace at Benwood,
And the ruptured night watchman of Wheeling Steel,
Dreaming of heroes.

All the proud fathers are ashamed to go home.
Their women cluck like starved pullets,
Dying for love.

Therefore,
Their sons grow suicidally beautiful
At the beginning of October,
And gallop terribly against each other's bodies. (121)

Although the poem draws no specific imagistic representations, it does, by its use of specific place names, specify a location that sets off a chain of associations recollected by the speaker. The titles of Wright's poems, like Hugo's, often specify particular geographic locales, and therefore meaning and perception in the poem rely heavily upon where the title locates the speaker. In this particular case, the title situates the speaker in the poet's own hometown. The specificity of the place name allows the speaker of the poem to emphasize how he views himself as either in harmony or at odds with the landscape. The names themselves connote images of the Upper Ohio Valley steel towns

with which a reader familiar with these provincial landscapes can identify, just as certain place names such as San Francisco and New York may evoke certain iconic imagery of more well-known cityscapes. This suggests that a localized reading audience might connect on a much more fundamental level to the imagery in the poem than one that has no or little geographical frame of reference. A placename, then, suggests a particular landscape without necessarily describing it.

Additionally, the tonal quality of the title initially suggests that the poem to follow will be celebratory of the beginning of a season, perhaps a celebration of the time of year with which we associate the communal experience of football and the harvest. The content of the poem, however, which quickly evolves into a critique of the effects of life in a highly industrialized, working-class cultural landscape and the people who populate it, quickly shifting the seeming celebratory tone of the title toward the negative. The use of the word “autumn” in the title evokes notions of the end of one season and the transition into winter, a season connoting associations of bleakness, darkness, and death. Considering the idiomatic expression “the autumn of my years,” which suggests the season of autumn as a precursor to death, the title can thereby be read metaphorically—the beginning of the end of one’s life begins in Martins Ferry, Ohio. The very use of the title to establish a particular temporal and geographic setting underscores the cyclical nature of the poem itself, which reinforces and thematizes the generational cycle of small-town family life as a trap and metaphorical death.

As specifically as the title announces the geographic setting, the first line further narrows the focus by physically positioning the speaker in a definite location within the setting. After establishing settings through proper place names, and geographic or

industrial imagery, the poem shifts into a moment of introspection, epiphany, philosophizing, or a degree of social and cultural criticism. Wright situates his speaker in the setting itself and establishes the agency of the speaker through the use of the first-person pronoun; that the first-person speaker casts assumptions concerning the emotional state of others, however, calls into question his authority, while at the same time allowing the observations of the poem to reveal his subjective “inner history.”

Although this is one of Wright’s poems of recollection, the second line begins with the construction “I think,” locating the events described in the poem in the present tense as well as suggesting that being in the physical setting of the football stadium prompts within the speaker’s imagination certain associations that surface in the rest of the poem. One location triggers the images the poem later constructs, as Wright shifts the focus away from the immediate spectacle toward images of the surrounding cultural landscape.

In a 1979 interview Wright claims not to have been back to the Ohio Valley in more than twenty-five years, since 1954, when he was twenty-seven years old (Smith “James Wright” 5). If this holds true, Wright is writing from a distanced position in which he reflects on the sensations and imaginative leaps of his speaker, who is a representative voice of his former life. This recollection is not nostalgic, as Costello suggests, but suggests overtones of disdain while recreating the sense of entrapment one can feel within a community that continuously recycles generations of working-class men, neglected women, and dreams of escape. Approached from this biographical lens, then, one can imagine a more closely contextualized first line—(when I used to sit) in the Shreve High football stadium, I (used to) think. Wright’s choice of the present tense

creates a sensation of immediacy, furthering an anti-nostalgic reading of the poem that suggests the speaker's brooding over the possibility of escaping the generational trap he sees before him.

The third, fourth, and fifth lines shift from the speaker's description of place to an imagined description of working-class men who occupy very specific positions within representational landmarks of the cultural landscape—the bar and the mill. Described in this way, the mill and the bar and the home carry the symbolic weight of the chief metaphor—the culture of the small American town as a trap or metaphoric death. In this daunting landscape, the home entraps the women in their daily neglect and domestic obligation, and the mill enslaves the men to the point that their only hope of escape is through alcohol or the vicarious thrill of Friday nights at the football stadium.

Rather than generalize about the geographic location of the men, Wright specifically locates each one through the application of town names: Wheeling, Tiltonsville, and Benwood. The poetic effect of these proper names suggests the connection between individual identity and place, not only of the speaker, but also of the men. Additionally, the place names enforce the identity of the speaker, as well as specifically represent the cultural setting and identity Wright sought to renounce. Similar to the effect that Hugo's use of place names engenders, the use of the specific small-town place names aids in establishing geographic, economic, cultural identity, and it also enables the reader to understand more easily small-town life by evoking images of their opposites: Chicago, New York, and Los Angeles culture, for example.

Intrinsic to the cultural critique that the poem makes are the respective activities in which the men are engaged. The calculated diction in each of these lines establishes a

commonality among the men, despite their being of different ethnic and occupational backgrounds. The Polish men in Tiltonsville, just north of Martins Ferry, are “nursing long beers” (121) suggesting the deliberate attempt of the men to draw out their time in the bar, to delay re-entering the life that awaits them outside. The African-American steel worker in the third line is placed in the Wheeling Steel Works, working the blast furnace. Embedded in this hell-like image, in which the gray face is framed by the orange-red fire of the furnace, is not only commentary on the dangerous working conditions in the mill, but also on the notion of racial striations within the working class itself, as the African American worker is relegated to what would be one of the most physically demanding and potentially injury-threatening jobs, working the bottom coal feeder of the blast furnace. Further embedded in this image is the inter-poetic reference to the aforementioned poems in which Wright equates the banks of the Ohio River with Hell.

As Kevin Stein suggests in a chapter on Wright in *Private Poets, Worldly Acts*, “Wright feared this fate for himself and mourned it for others” (65). Several of Wright’s poems suggest that the Ohio River Valley is a place that kills one’s spirit, will, and even potential, much like the night watchman in line four. Stein cites a letter from Wright to Donald Hall that states, “I knew musicians and possible poets and even ordinary lovable human beings, and saw them with brutal regularity going into Wheeling Steel, and turning into stupid and resigned slobs with beer bellies and glassy eyes” (65). These are the same men depicted through the speaker’s eyes in the poem, all having possessed at one time the potential to rise above the fate that awaited them. It is the infrequency with which these men are able to escape that becomes the center of Wright’s critique, and their dreaming becomes just another symbol of lost potential and personal inadequacy.

A literal reading of the word *ruptured* might suggest the night watchman's physical condition as a result of years of intense labor, yet the word carries a double meaning here, as it refers not only to the bodily suffering felt by the worker, but also to the spiritual and emotional rupturing from which it results. Despite the night watchman's cultural identity's remaining undefined, the speaker reveals the common condition of all three of these men—a condition of suffering that results from the cultural, geographic, and socio-economic situation in which they find themselves. These men who entered the mill years ago have died, and Wright describes with a certain amount of disdain the men who have emerged—broken and dreaming—in their place.

They are all broken, yet they are all “Dreaming of heroes,” as stated in the last line in the first verse paragraph. Wright's choice to isolate the last line of the first stanza not only draws attention to it for emphasis, but it also suggests the commonality felt among the working-class men despite their cultural or racial identity or their positions within the hierarchy of the working classes. This community of dreaming, however, is an assumption cast upon the men by the personal “I,” and this assumptive position suggests that since the men occupy these jobs, they surely must dream as a way to cope psychologically with their socio-economically determined position, and their state of being ruptured, whether physical or spiritual.

Additionally, as well as questioning the myth of the American Dream, the “Dreaming of heroes” line creates symmetry between the first and second verse paragraphs as it parallels the emotional condition of the women who are “Dying for love.” All that is left for the men is the state of dreaming, which signifies the death of the potential to escape literally one day; therefore, their dreaming is focused on the past as

well as on the present young heroes of the small-town football team. The poem transitions from the men in the first section to the women/wives of the second section by way of the line, "All the proud fathers are ashamed to go home." Wright has established a cause-and-effect relationship between the emotional condition of the men and the neglect of the women. In other words, because the men are dreaming of heroes, they are ashamed to go home, and thereby they are the cause of the wives' suffering emotional, and perhaps physical, lack of fulfillment. This line also calls into question the type of home to which the men must return and whether the men in the opening section, especially the drinkers, are not nursing those beers to delay returning to the inevitable. If home is the site of shame, at least from the speaker's perception, then the poem's presupposed nostalgia becomes suspect.

It does remain ambiguous, however, who the fathers in line seven are. The fathers could refer to the men depicted in the first sections, yet also, if Wright's speaker is among a crowd of football fans, the word could refer to men there in the stadium as the game is played. These very same fathers are those who once played the game of football on that very same field, and, as the speaker suggests, at one time dreamt, and still do vicariously dream, of success in the world of sports which would transport them out of the inevitable future that awaited them at the mill, the mine, the factory, or the bar. To extend this ambiguity further, and if the poem holds up as an attack on industrial towns, the fathers, modified by the adjective "all," could refer to every father in that region of the Ohio Valley who is employed by the mill or the factory or the mine. This consideration problematizes the meaning of the paradox in the line created through the juxtaposition of pride and shame. From the perspective of the speaker, the fathers are proud of the sons on

the field, in the glory and beauty of their athleticism, and ashamed that they themselves never became heroes on the field. In a more generalized sense, the line implies that the fathers are too proud to return to the home that they are ashamed of as a result of the societal position they occupy. Read in this way, the poem calls attention to the psychological condition that can result in the working-class men who populate this cultural landscape, thus demythologizing the American Dream. The fathers have deemed themselves failures.

As the poem shifts to the speaker's imagining the women, questions arise concerning the choice of metaphor and the poem's representation of the female consciousness. Wright's treatment of the women in the poem seems particularly subjective because the speaker again casts assumptions, this time speaking for the emotional state of wives. They must be lonely, suffering, and sexually starved in the husbands' absence. These feelings of abandonment and loneliness, the poem suggests, are possibly caused by either the men's being consumed by their jobs, the night shift, long shifts in the mill, or by their failure to return home as a result of alcoholic escapism. The men also do not go home because of the vicarious pleasure provided by the spectacle of the football game itself, as it serves at once as a distraction and recollection of when they themselves had dreams of being or becoming heroes via the game itself. Regardless of the possible reasons for the estrangement of the male-female relationships, Wright, nevertheless, depicts the women in an emotional state similar to that of the men—one that is constantly looking toward something better than the present, thus the attention drawn by devoting a single line to each phrase at the end of the first two verse paragraphs, "Dreaming of heroes" and "Dying for love."

Wright's choice of metaphor introduces one of two animal images in the poem, and in this case casts a gendered gaze, as the women are depicted first in line seven as "cluck[ing]," the call of the hen to its chicks and as "pullets" referring specifically to a young hen in the prime of its egg-laying productivity. The suggestion and assumption made by the speaker, then, is that of the wives' lack of sexual fulfillment as a result of the absent husbands. That Wright does not specifically locate the women in a particular town suggests the speaker's view that these feelings of abandonment permeate the lives of most women in this region.

As the poem transitions into its final section, a particular emotional state has been emphasized through the imagery and the isolation of the two lines that describe them. The logical cause-and-effect progression of the poem, then, suggests the following: the men are broken and dreaming of heroes, and so the women are neglected and dying for love, and their respective emotional states result in the description of the sons in the final-verse paragraph. Wright isolates "Therefore" on line nine to signify the transition to a description of the sons and to refocus the speaker's perception back to the spectacle of the game itself. The relationship among the three distinct social groups—the men/husbands, the women/wives, and the sons—is not, however, a simple linear cause-and-effect connection, but a generational, seasonal, and circular one.

After having imagined the emotional, physical, and psychological conditions of the "dreaming" men and the "starved" women who populate the working classes of the surrounding mill towns, the speaker can now justify the young men on the field voluntarily engaged in a violent game that could potentially result in death. This interpretation rests on a literal reading of the word "suicidally" in line eleven. A

metaphorical reading of the word “suicidally,” however, confirms the trapped nature of the lives of the mothers and fathers described above as a kind of living death. This reading of “suicidally” invites a cyclical interpretation of the poem’s narrative, as the boys currently on the field will themselves one day be entrapped and “nursing” beers, shoveling coal in the blast furnace, and ultimately “ruptured” physically and spiritually, dreaming of escape.

Perhaps more than any of Wright’s poems, “Autumn Begins” typifies the ways in which recollected images of home, as well as the calculated structure and diction that constructs the cultural landscape, effectively metaphorizes a particular place. Further, the implied temporality suggests the generational trap, the sons becoming the fathers and living out their lives in a place where, through the eyes of the speaker, men’s spirits and desires die. As such, “Autumn Begins,” like Hugo’s Philipsburg poem, tends to represent the poet’s most effective rendering of the intersection of landscape, human and material culture, reflecting his commitment to a poetics of place that at once celebrates and critiques the American small town.

As landscape representation is a subjective construction of images, Wright, like Hugo, specifically chooses images that symbolize decline, decay, and death, not only of the natural world, but also of the physical and spiritual death of the humans who populate it. This conscious choice to focus on the negative results from what Peter Stitt calls Wright’s rejecting “the fake pastoralism surrounding the Ohio of his boyhood” (Graziano and Stitt 18). Stitt contends that Wright recognized the beauty of Ohio on the surface, but knew first hand the Ohio that was “a wound on the face of the earth, a wound kept open by industry, strip mines, pollution of water and air” (Graziano and Stitt 18). This aspect

of Wright's landscapes occurs in many later poems, such as "Beautiful Ohio," within which Wright's personal tensions toward his hometown are dramatized through a memory of his sitting on the railroad tracks above a sewer main. The poem's central symbolic image is of wastewater pouring into the river:

It spilled a shining waterfall out of a pipe
Somebody had gouged through the slanted earth.
Sixteen thousand and five hundred more or less people
In Martins Ferry, my home, my native country,
Quickened the river
With the speed of light.
And the light caught there
The solid speed of their lives
In the instant of that waterfall. (317-318)

In the spillage, the river is at once polluted, but also "quickened" in the sense of being stimulated or revived. This recollection perhaps expresses the kind of love-hate relationship Wright continued to have with his home region. While the imagery to this point tends to focus solely on the negative, reducing the lives of the small town to the waste it produces, the final five lines turn the seemingly negative image into one that reflects Wright's deeper understanding of his home:

I know what we call it
Most of the time.
But I have my own song for it,
And sometimes, even today,
I call it beauty. (318)

The driving contradictions in the imagery here suggest Wright's attempt to move toward some reconciliation between the self who grew up in Martins Ferry and the self who

managed to escape. As the culture and life in the Ohio Valley may be reduced and equated with the abject, there is, however, that aesthetic quality to the river and his home region that the speaker comes to accept as an intricate part of himself and his way of seeing the world. While “Beautiful Ohio” is an extreme example, many of Wright’s recollections create landscapes with this blend of contradictions where the byproduct of human culture, whether it be factory pollution or human pollution, infects the landscape.

A later poem, “Ohioan Pastoral,” illustrates this technique of paradoxical imagery. Just as the title “Beautiful Ohio” sets up the reader for positive imagery, “Ohioan Pastoral” suggests a portrait of the kind of countryside landscapes one might expect through its title’s implications. Instead, through its biting sarcasm, the title communicates the most effective cultural critique when considered in conjunction with the imagery in the poem:

On the other side
Of Salt Creek, along the road, the barns topple
and snag among the orange rinds,
Oil cans, cold balloons of lovers.
One barn there
Sags, sags and oozes
Down one side of the copperous gully. (348)

What begins as a typical portrait of the landscape turns toward a focus on the decay and decline of the landscape and ultimately, like “Beautiful Ohio,” toward imagery of the abject. The ironic title suggests that the decaying barns, the empty cans, and used prophylactics, signify a used and failed landscape, a complete contrast to the idyllic landscape of a typical pastoral and evoking the “fake pastoral” to which Stitt refers.

Throughout Wright's Ohio poems, these contradictions and tensions persist and are seemingly never reconciled. However closely Wright and the speaker of his poems tend to identify with its landscapes, Ohio remains, persistently, a place of blight, decay, and death. "But I am not home in my place / Where I was born and my friends drowned" (355) states the speaker in "A Flower Passage," one of the last of a handful of poems to focus on the Ohio landscape. Here are both a recognition of his sense of self and identity with home and the literal and figurative expression of the river as death. Ohio comes to overtly represent death—of both the friends and relatives of the poet and of any semblance of beauty in the landscape. The later poem "Chilblain" is an elegy for Wright's Uncle Willy in which he describes his uncle's gravestone in Ohio: "Before I wake, the stone remembers / Where it is, where Ohio is, / Where violets last only a little. / Mill-smoke kills them halfway through spring" (335).

Viewed through the self-exiled gaze of Wright, his representations of the cultural landscape of the Ohio Valley illustrate the way in which highly subjective and internalized interpretations of landscapes symbolize the poet's own ambiguous feelings toward the region. These images of drowning, deaths, broken human spirits and fractured landscapes that persist throughout the body of Wright's work tend to establish a nearly apocalyptic vision of a ruined Ohio. If we consider this symbolic aspect of the landscape mode and follow Cosgrove's and Daniels' claim that "landscape is a cultural image, a pictorial way of representing, structuring or symbolizing surroundings" (qtd. in Wylie 68), then Wright's Ohio poems effectively construct these symbols that ultimately raise the reader's consciousness toward the cultural and social conditions of small-town American life.

The characteristics of the landscape mode, then, allow us to view the work of poets like Hugo and Wright as poets whose rendering of place constructs a specific subjective and singular perspective of the post-World-War-II cultural landscape. However, within the broad context of ecopoetics as defined by critics such as Bryson and Scigaj, who call for a poetry consciously engaged in an ecocentric perspective, the landscape mode imposes several limitations on the achievement of such goals. The preoccupation with the self and with its reaction to and identification with place overshadows any possibilities of a less anthropocentric gaze. I return here to Wright's famous epiphany: "Suddenly I realize / That if I stepped out of my body I would break / Into blossom" (143). The image suggests that the only way for the poet to achieve such a transformation is to rid himself of his human form, to break from the constraints of his innate anthropocentrism. Wright seems to recognize the impossibility of this through the use of the conditional tense. If he were able to rid himself of self, he could become part of the landscape that he views rather than a human imposing his gaze upon it. It is this perspective that the contemporary pastoral mode of the following chapter attempts to explore.

As authors of landscapes, then, Wright and Hugo are poets who assume agency over what is seen and what is not; therefore, they construct a highly subjectified view for the reader toward some critical end. Despite their efforts to draw our attention to environmental concerns surrounding their home regions, they are more committed to situating and understanding how their individual identities are defined by the landscape than they are in creating a voice that speaks from and through a sense of place. For Wright and Hugo, their poetics, at least as viewed as landscape place poetics, is less

about lamenting the impact of human culture on the environment and more about their individual quests to understand themselves in the midst of the post-industrial ruins of the regions to which they will always refer as home.

CHAPTER 3

JOHN HAINES, GARY SNYDER, AND THE CONTEMPORARY PASTORAL

Defining the Contemporary Pastoral

As seen through the discussion of Wright and Hugo, the landscape mode at times suffers under the restrictions connoted by the term *landscape* itself. The anthropocentrism of landscape as an orientation toward place tends to limit the poem's possibilities of shrinking the human-nature divide. In comparison to the largely anthropocentric gaze perpetuated by the landscape mode, the contemporary pastoral mode considers the human-nature divide more fully through its focus on the process of the individual's withdraw from society and into nature. Such a process of fleeing one's own society or culture can demonstrate a powerful rejection of it. To flee England for the unsettled wilderness of the "New World," to flee the East Coast city toward freedom in the western frontier, to flee the town to a cabin in the woods—no matter the scope of the retreat, across an ocean or into the mountains, the fundamental urge to escape the societal forces by which one feels trapped motivates the pastoral retreat. While this narrative pattern has recurred throughout American history and literature, from *Of Plymouth Plantation* to *Walden* to *Huck Finn*, the work and lives of several contemporary poets follow in its path. Poetic representations of pastoral retreat in contemporary American poetry afford poets typically labeled as "nature" poets a lens through which to examine the complexities of the relationship between contemporary culture and the geographical places it occupies.

In his critical study *Pastoral*, Terry Gifford offers three considerations of the term "pastoral" as it is applied to literature: 1) in its traditional sense of poetic form, 2) as "any

literature that describes the country with an implicit or explicit contrast to the urban,” and 3) in a pejorative sense in that the term implies an idealized and simplified version of nature (2). The first sense of the term suggests the long historical connection between the poet and nature in that for ages, poets have looked to nature for sources of inspiration, and that searching has resulted in the continual development of pastoral poetry from the *Eclogues* of Virgil to contemporary ecopoets. The second consideration of the term emphasizes the inherent construction of oppositions between human culture represented by the city and nature. The third sense of the term as described by Gifford suggests a misreading of the pastoral, emphasizing the over-simplification of the term “nature,” as it suggests the term is not simplified in pastoral writing; instead, it is complexified as both a physical entity and as an idea.

In light of the recent growth of ecocriticism in literary studies, the notion of the pastoral has become more relevant, as it provides a way of seeing the various poetic representations of the intersection between human culture and nature, specifically the ways in which nature is understood as a physical reality and as a cultural construct. Pastoral writing gains its cultural significance by foregrounding the tensions and contrasts evident between city and country, culture and nature, civilization and wilderness. Just as regionalism has suffered under the weight of being labeled sentimental, the pastoral has often been attacked for simply being nature writing that romanticizes and idealizes nature.

In defending the relevance of the genre, Glen Love writes that “pastoral can be a serious and complex criticism of life, involved not merely with country scenes and natural life but with a significant commentary on the explicit or implicit contrast between

such settings and the lives of an urban and sophisticated audience” (65). The contemporary pastoral mode of place poetics, then, is not only simply a mode of writing, but it also functions as a way of questioning and critiquing the present relationship between human culture and the environment, and of examining how that relationship is represented in the work of poets who critique the contemporary culture they seek to escape and reform. As outlined in chapter one, the contemporary pastoral mode exhibits the following: 1) place functions as a determinant of the poet’s creation, not as simply an aesthetic backdrop, but as a place conceptualized and invested with meaning; 2) the poem or poet’s work follows the pastoral pattern of retreat from civilization to wilderness and ultimately reflects the variety of ways the process of retreat and return shapes the poet’s view of the relationship between humans and the environment; 3) the poem or poet, either through an expression of the pastoral retreat or a recognition of a pastoral moment, engages in an environmental politics that seeks to promote a more harmonious relationship between humans and the environment. As a result of these characteristics, the contemporary pastoral poem is a complex and powerful artistic statement that reveals and comments as much about the human-built world as it does about nature.

I suggest that several contemporary American poets, along with John Haines and Gary Snyder, whose focus is in part on nature, can be read within the framework of the contemporary pastoral mode of place poetics. While this mode displays a recognition of all three of these variations of the term “pastoral” that Gifford sets down, it also consciously de-simplifies the notion of distinct boundaries between city and country, civilization and nature, human culture and wilderness, and, while doing so, it subsequently complicates the definition of the term “nature.” It challenges traditional

pastoral assumptions of simplified and idyllic meanings of “nature” by overtly or covertly drawing attention to the human / nature boundary. I suggest, then, that poems in the contemporary pastoral implicitly or explicitly argue for a less mechanized world, and part of that argument is expressed through a lament of present-day human culture in which the pursuit of technological and economic advancement has increasingly damaged and consumed wilderness spaces.

Several contemporary poets’ responses to this nature / culture conflict express their protest through the pattern of the pastoral retreat, the corollary of which is a poetic mode that gains its perspective through the poet’s movement from the city to the wilderness and back. While the flight from society is important, equally or more important is the poet’s return to the culture from which he or she fled, now with a heightened perception of the relationship between human and nature, resulting in a poetry that seeks to raise the consciousness of its readers toward a similar state of awareness.

As the contemporary pastoral looks to the past in the form of retreat, it comments upon the present and contemplates the future. In this sense, contemporary pastoral poetry becomes an expression through which the poet may critique those facets of human culture that continue to fracture the relationships between humans and nature. Gifford notes the potential political activism of the pastoral in his discussion of the mode’s versatility: “...the pastoral can be a mode of political critique of present society, or it can be a dramatic form of unresolved dialogue about the tensions in that society, or it can be a retreat from politics into an apparently aesthetic landscape that is devoid of conflict and tension” (*Pastoral* 11). It is in these ways that the pastoral continues to be a relevant mode of contemporary poetry, as it maintains its historical roots in nature poetry,

continues to look toward the past, and engages in current political and ideological debates concerning tensions between human culture and nature.

Perhaps now, even more so than in the American Romantic era, current ecological crises demonstrate the pressing need for a poetry that expresses and questions humans' relationships to the places their cultures occupy. As contemporary pastoral reflects a general escapist desire to move from city to country, from civilization to wilderness, the possible places in which these retreats may be lived out have become fewer and fewer. As Americans in the nineteenth century saw an ample frontier to the west, Americans of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries occupy a settled and fully mapped American continent. Particularly relevant to American writing, the pastoral, as Greg Garrard explains, "remains significant for an American ecocriticism...because it continues to supply the underlying narrative structure in which the protagonist leaves civilization for an encounter with non-human nature, then returns having experienced epiphany and renewal" (49). This pastoral retreat may be as simple as a walk in the country or as complex and intense as relocating oneself in the middle of the wilderness and attempting to survive. The pattern of retreat and return ultimately provides a perspective from which the poet may now view contemporary society and civilization in contrast to his or her experience in the wilderness or country. The result is often a recognition of contemporary culture's misuse of the place it occupies and the continued growing distance between humans and the natural world.

Focusing primarily on the Romantic era in his foundational work on American pastoral writing, Leo Marx distinguishes between the "simple" and "complex" pastoral. According to Marx, the complex pastoral goes beyond a simple flight from the city to the

country, beyond a “symbolic motion away from centers of civilization toward their opposite, nature, away from sophistication toward simplicity” (9-10). What complicates this retreat is the presence of the machine, what Marx refers to as the “counterforce” in the pastoral—a “force which brings a world which is more ‘real’ into juxtaposition with an idyllic vision” (25). For Marx, industry and the machine provide this juxtaposition as the counterforce in American pastoral writing (26).

While Marx considers an America still in the dawn of the age of technology, the post-World-War-II poets who are the subject of analysis here are living and working in an American landscape that has been drastically reshaped and altered by the modern and contemporary ages. A result of this change is one of the main distinctions of contemporary pastoral from traditional pastoral—its lack of idealism and optimism in favor of a more elegiac tone that laments the lost potential once thought to rest within the landscape of America. This often comes during what I will call the “pastoral moment” in a poem. A reversal of Marx’s concept of the counterforce, a pastoral moment occurs when a symbol of the natural world takes the speaker out of his human-centered setting toward a contemplation of the imbalance between himself and the natural world.

The pastoral moment in Wright’s “A Blessing” clearly occurs during his physical contact with the horses off the highway. Another variation of the pastoral moment occurs in William Stafford’s “Traveling through the Dark.” After hitting a deer with his car on Wilson River Road, the speaker realizes the struck deer is pregnant, and while contemplating what he should do, he concludes:

I stood in the glare of the warm exhaust turning red;
around our group I could hear the wilderness listen.

I thought hard for us all—my only swerving—,

then pushed her over the edge into the river. (11).

The red exhaust, the automobile, the road itself all stand as symbols of the machine, the pregnant deer the symbol of the garden. Equipoised between the two is the speaker himself, in the midst of a pastoral moment in which the symbol of the garden has inspired an intense awareness of the division between human culture and nature. Both elegiac and apocalyptic in tone, the poem centers around the speaker's encounter with nature in a distinct pastoral moment of heightened awareness toward the culture/nature divide.

Situated within such contemporary scenes as the one in Stafford's poem, the pastoral takes on specifically relevant meaning to a number of contemporary American poets whose work expresses the kind of disillusionment with American society prevalent in the post-World-War-II years through Vietnam and after. Thus, my use of the word "contemporary" here is in reference to the historical period after the second World War, an age in which the post-war economy and technological advancement led toward an age of tremendous prosperity for the United States, but also escalated and ushered in the beginnings of what is today's environmental crisis. While poets such as Theodore Roethke, Lorine Niedecker, Wendell Berry, William Stafford, as well as several others, exhibit many qualities of the contemporary pastoral, this chapter focuses on the work of John Haines and Gary Snyder.

Haines and Snyder, through their extremity of vision and radical forms of pastoral retreat, both produce poetry that exemplifies the complexities of the mode. Because Haines attempted to fully live the pastoral ideal, and because Snyder constructs his entire collection *Turtle Island* around a conceptual retreat from contemporary society, each practices a poetics that constructs a deeper vision of place than is possible through the

landscape mode. Considering these poets' work in this light assumes a recognition that lived experience in a place and the details of the poets' lives importantly impact and affect how readers understand their work. My discussion will focus on the ways in which their lives and early work display varying types of pastoral retreat, as their respective retreats differ from one another in two ways: 1) geographically, as Haines' location of his retreat is outside of Fairbanks, Alaska, and Snyder's is the Sierra Nevada foothills, and 2) philosophically, as Haines seeks the solitude of the wilderness, and Snyder seeks to create a countercultural community, each poet attempts to move from the contemporary American culture of his time toward establishing a relationship with the natural world that recalls the ways in which earlier, less technologized and mechanized societies lived. The poetry produced through these two variations of retreat responds effectively to the second and third interrogations of the contemporary pastoral mode and verges toward a potent ecopoetics that re-defines the culture-nature dichotomy.

While Haines sought an isolated tract of Alaskan wilderness and, with the aid of a few locals, learned how to survive in what the poems describe as a solitary existence, Snyder's retreat is one of re-inhabiting a previously "used" portion of land, as he sought to create a counter-cultural community to live a life according to principles that guide the lives of the indigenous people of the region. Despite these differences, each poet's writing reveals how his respective retreats and various returns tend to alter his perspective toward how contemporary American cultures occupy the landscape, and it is this process of retreat and return that is so important to the vision of the poetry written from this experience. Perhaps the most overlooked and important aspect of the pastoral is

the return from nature back to society as the experience in the natural or wilderness setting illuminates the poet's perspective of the society from which he or she fled.

Ultimately, the contemporary pastoral mode provides a way of reading poetry that may be misconstrued simply as nature poetry in a more expansive light, as the complex ways in which these poets render and negotiate natural and wilderness spaces tend to illuminate as much or more about human and contemporary culture as they do about nature. John Elder expresses the consciousness-raising potential of this genre of writing, specifically poetry:

To turn from the city ignores the fact that they rise from the same earth
and are composed of the same elements as the unpeopled mountains.

These divisions between man and nature, man and himself, must be healed
by the constructions of a new frame of mind and a new way of life. In the
contemporary poetry of nature we see both a depiction of how far we have
gone wrong and an attempt to find a healthier, more inclusive
understanding of culture—one that can value the city and the wilderness
alike, but without denigrating one or domesticating the other. Poetry's task
is to ground human culture once more on a planet rich in nonhuman life
and beauty. (25-26)

What Elder refers to above as “contemporary poetry of nature,” I refer to as the contemporary pastoral, as the term *pastoral* evokes a human presence within nature and a human desire to understand how construct a more harmonious relationship with the natural world. The importance of the contemporary pastoral mode is that through its critiques of contemporary society, it prompts the reader to re-think and re-negotiate these

types of polarizing dichotomies set up by Western cultural viewpoints that humans are separate from nature; thus, it attempts to strike a balance between human culture and the natural world rather than pitting one against the other.

“Well Quit of the World”: The Solitary Pastoral Quest of John Haines

During the 19th century, literature in America begins to develop a distinct voice, vision, and subject matter that are uniquely representative of the nation. A large part of this development of an “American” perspective is revealed in representations of nature and the landscape. Guided heavily by the principle that they could uncover truths about themselves, God, and the entire world through observing nature, poets often pondered their place in nature by simple observations of their surroundings. For these writers who embrace the Transcendental spirit of Emerson, nature represents the confluence of God, one’s spirit, one’s self, and the environment. So fundamental truths about existence may be discovered through experiences in the natural world rather than through the teachings of the church or in school. The speaker in William Cullen Bryant’s “To A Waterfowl” responds to this divine revelation in nature as he observes the flight of a bird, which, by the end of the poem, has flown out of sight:

He, who, from zone to zone,
Guides through the boundless sky thy certain flight,
In the long way that I must tread alone,
Will lead my steps aright. (479)

For Bryant, the power in nature that instinctually leads the solitary bird on its migration and eventual reunion with its fellow birds is the same spiritual power that will provide him direction in his own life. For the nineteenth-century poets such as Bryant and others,

this revelation of God in nature was one of the primary results of observing and contemplating the non-human world.

With less spiritualism and mysticism and more attention to growing environmental concerns, several contemporary American poets of the next century continue this contemplation of human and nature. To consider the human-nature relationship, the poet often must engage in a pastoral retreat, thereby establishing a vantage point to contemplate such relationships. John Haines' pastoral retreat to Alaska culminates in his collection of minimalist poems *Winter News*. Far from a romanticized version of communion with nature, the poems of *Winter News* construct a more realistic version of the wilderness. A connection to God through a poet's experience in nature occurs in several poems, yet a contrast to Bryant's melodramatic tone exists in harsh and brutal wilderness imagery. The trapped bird within the confines of a deserted house in "The House of the Injured" exemplifies these characteristics in Haines' work:

I looked inside and saw an injured
bird that filled the room.

With a stifled croaking
it lunged toward the door
as if held back
by an invisible chain:

the beak was half eaten away,
and its heart beat wildly
under the ruffled feathers. (16)

This frantic fight for survival directly contrasts the solitary and peaceful migratory flight of Bryant's waterfowl. "Stifled" and entrapped by a structure that represents the encroachment of human culture in the wilderness, the poem questions whether the kind of

harmony achieved in “To a Waterfowl” could ever realistically be attained. Haines’ poem concludes, like Bryant’s, moving from an observation in nature to a spiritual and internal revelation: “I sank to my knees— / a man shown the face of God” (16). The revelation here, however, is lament and grief rather than the renewal and fulfillment of Bryant’s Romantic vision, as one speaker is lifted up by his experience in nature, and the other falls to his knees in lament. The two birds as symbolic of nature in each poem contrast the optimism and hopefulness of romanticism with the inherent pessimism and foreboding that persists in the contemporary pastoral mode.

While some critics are quick to label contemporary poet John Haines as a Romantic or neo-Romantic, Haines’ revelation through nature, as shown in the above contrast, transcends pure observation through his lived experience, immersion, and self-imposed isolation in the wilderness. As such, Haines’ poems construct a vision of nature that is not overly sentimental and mystical as in Bryant’s poem, but rather brutally realistic, naturalistic in its rendering of the forces that govern life and death, the wilderness, and inevitable mortality. This understanding is gained through the poet’s voluntary isolation and retreat to the wilderness of Alaska, which at that time in American history represented one of the final tracts of untouched land in America.

I begin this section with this comparison to emphasize an important distinction between poetry about nature in the early nineteenth century and poetry of the same genre in the second half of the twentieth century. When viewed through the lens of the contemporary pastoral mode, these distinctions between sentimental romanticism and contemporary nature poetry become clear. In contrast to the romantic optimism of the lessons learned through a life of observation and meditation on nature, John Haines’

version of revelation in nature questions the possibility, and at times pessimistically looks upon the impossibility, of a harmonious relationship between human culture and the non-human world. The result is a brooding solemnity pervading in the overall mood of Haines' work. In contrast to the certain path that Bryant's speaker in "To A Waterfowl" will now be set upon, the poems of *Winter News*, as well as several poems from later collections, lead their speaker in a direction that laments the present and future, rather than anticipates it with renewed hope, and ultimately communicates the notion that the only way to achieve a harmonious relationship with nature is by fleeing contemporary culture to an uninhabited wilderness landscape.

The work of John Haines, then, exemplifies the ways in which the contemporary pastoral tends to complicate ideas about the relationship between human culture and nature, and between man and wilderness to the point that any reading of Haines' work that would deem him romantic or neo-romantic would be a misreading. While any American poetry situated in nature will intrinsically draw comparisons to its Romantic forerunners, the development of nature poetry over these time spans reveals a narrative of the nation's cultural and geographical history that includes the push westward, the closing of the frontier, and the accumulation and development of land to such an extent that there were few unexplored locales in America by the first part of the twentieth century. There still remained for some, however, an impulse toward venturing into the unknown, unexplored portions of the world, and for John Haines in 1947, the Alaskan wilderness provided the site of his retreat from mainstream American society.

In his essay collection titled *Living off the Country*, Haines writes of his retreat and his motivations: "At times it becomes necessary for people to turn away from their

cultural origins and return for a while to an older and simpler existence...” (6). This turning is evident in Haines’ retreat to Alaska, and in, as will be discussed later in this chapter, Gary Snyder’s poetry of re-inhabitation. It is the act of retreat, as well as the poetic representations of it, that allows the pastoral mode to make its strongest critique of contemporary society. Yet, as Haines recognizes and acknowledges in his prose account of his Alaska experience, to him, the return from the wilderness back to society bears as much, if not more, significance than the retreat itself. The place of retreat, if it is a place in which one has spent enough time, becomes a part of the person’s consciousness, an indelible part of who he is, and it never leaves him upon his return to society. Haines writes the following of this impact of place:

On the evidence of my own experience, I believe that one of the most important metaphors of our time is the journey out of wilderness into culture, into the forms of our complicated and divided age, with its intense confusion and deceptions. The eventual disintegration of these cultural forms returns us once more to the wilderness. This journey can be seen both as fall and reconciliation. And place, once again, means actual place, but also a state of mind, a consciousness. Once that place is established, we carry it with us, as we do our sense of selves. (*Living* 13)

Haines suggests several important points here—the symbolic rebirth through returning to one’s primitive roots and the layered meaning of the word “place” as both a physical place and as a conceptual state of mind. The loose narrative structure of *Winter News* reflects this pattern of retreat as rebirth, and it is in later poems in Haines’ career that the return is emphasized.

Originally, Haines sought to capture and contemplate the Alaskan wilderness through painting, yet he has noted that he struggled with painting as an expression of his relationship with his surroundings and ultimately turned toward poetry, suggesting that language was the only tool through which Haines felt he could adequately represent his relationship with the wilderness (Klander 29). Of Haines' turning from one medium of representation to another, Sharon Klander writes, "For while such an isolated, untamed arena most certainly provided Haines with the opportunity to record the natural world at close range on canvas, the kind of life he was forced to lead in order to survive that wilderness gave him the additional chance to re-learn the process by which language and relationship define individuals as human beings" (30). Haines' pastoral retreat follows a Thoreauvian model in that it becomes a process that leads toward a redefinition and rethinking of how one views himself in nature. For Haines, an outcome of that process was his ultimately relying on poetry as a medium to express his understanding and re-invention of himself that resulted from his experience.

The act of retreat is a perspective-altering event, and Haines' life in Alaska was one of gaining such a perspective that allowed him to process two distinct kinds of human experience—that of civilization compared to the wilderness. Kevin Walzer asserts the following:

Haines' time in Alaska gave him an intimate connection to the natural world, a connection that goes far beyond that felt by most poets; his very life, not just his art, depended on a close understanding of the land. Not surprisingly, his connection to the natural world gives him a distinct perspective on human civilization's intrusion into that environment, a

perspective that did not leave him after he rejoined human civilization.

(76)

What unfolds when one reads across Haines' poetry and biography is a life and body of written work that contemplates a continual pattern of pastoral retreat and return. Read through that pattern and through the lens of contemporary pastoral, many of Haines' poems reveal a complex relationship between the poet and the past in two ways—first as the poet seeks to establish a dwelling in the wilderness that reconnects him with more primitive cultures' ways of life, and secondly, through his later poems, a constant reconsideration of his initial retreat, his birth as a poet that resulted from it, and his continued developing understanding of the relationship among human culture and nature and himself.

To a large extent, Haines lived out the romantic vision of Thoreau, with whom many critics are quick to compare him—a desire to live more simply takes the poet into the wilderness in search of the fundamental truths in life, immersing himself in a setting as far removed from human culture as possible. That relocation and re-establishment of his dwelling gave birth to the craft of poetry during his initial year in Alaska in 1947. His experience there was so impacting that he decided to return in 1954, and he lived there for the next fifteen years. Because of the length of his retreat, it is nearly impossible to consider Haines' work without discussing the degree to which his life on his homestead near the Tanana River shaped his perspective on nature and culture, and, consequently, his poetry.

Haines, clearly echoing Thoreau, responded with the following when asked about the motives for his sojourn to Alaska:

What was at first instinctive deepened into something else, thought upon and acted upon. I learned as I went, and in the process, grew as a man and a writer. But at first it was simply intuitive. I acted out a felt need to settle myself somewhere, and I had always been drawn to the woods, to the wilderness—to that world I had glimpsed as a boy standing on the stream bank with my father, whether it was Maryland, Virginia, or the east slope of the Olympic Mountains in Washington State. (Cooperman 127)

Based on this recollection, Haines' desire to retreat is rooted in a desire to return to this boyhood state of innocence and primitivism. This instinctive pull of the wilderness eventually led him to Alaska, where his identity as a poet was born. Further, Haines' upbringing and his having moved from place to place while growing up spurred a desire to become rooted in a specific place, and it was not until this happened that Haines was able to come to the realization of his own sense of self through the craft of poetry.

While the traditional pastoral purports an idealized vision of man in nature, the poems of *Winter News* reveal a more realistic, fundamental truth and brutality of the retreat. Haines describes the process of his retreat, emphasizing the isolation, emptiness and silence of the landscape in which he is living. "Poem of the Forgotten," follows here in full:

I came to this place,
a young man green and lonely.

Well quit of the world,
I framed a house of moss and timber
Called it a home,
and sat in the warm evenings

singing to myself as a man sings
when he knows there is
no one to hear.

I made my bed under the shadow
of leaves, and awoke
in the first snow of autumn,
filled with silence. (13)

This third poem of the collection tells the concise tale of the speaker's retreat from society into the wilderness, pointing out the stark contrast between "the world" of line 3, and the refashioned solitude constructed of leaves, moss, and timber in which the speaker now lives. It is clear that "the world" here represents the civilization or society the speaker has fled, yet the first necessity of the speaker's survival is to construct a dwelling, the "house of moss and timber." Immediately, the speaker's presence in the wilderness necessitates the altering of the landscape in order for him to provide the basic essentials for his survival. The poem appropriately appears early in the collection and is particularly symbolic of the transformation of an unknown space into a lived-in and knowable place.

"Poem of the Forgotten" introduces a recurring image and theme—the transition of the seasons as a necessary and inevitable process toward isolation. The speaker initially sings in the warmth of summer, and although he is alone, his singing voice fills the emptiness of the space. The song represents a return to the earliest form of oral poetry and provides a picture of the solitary artist composing in isolation. As the seasons turn toward autumn and winter, the speaker comes to a realization of the eventual loss of life around him in the death that comes with winter, but he also becomes fully aware of his

own isolation in the desolation of winter. In a metaphorical death and rebirth, the speaker makes his bed under the protection of the trees, yet he awakes to realize the harsh truth of the transition of the seasons and the empty silence that comes with it. The speaker's self-imposed exile leaves him to communicate with only himself, his poetry, and the wilderness. His poem, or song, opens up a dialogue between himself and the natural world.

The slow process of learning the language of nature is further emphasized by other images suggesting birth or re-birth—an entrance into the world. In “The Mole” the speaker describes a mole who “tunnels through a damp, / clinging darkness, / nosing the soil of old gardens” (14) during the winter. In the final stanza the mole surfaces to the “rising sun” (14), presumably after a long winter of hibernation in a symbolic rebirth. Haines uses the phrase “believe in” to describe his relationship with the mole, suggesting a strong sense of belief on a spiritual level in the natural process of death and rebirth in the landscape, a process that, for Haines, can be understood more fully through the pastoral retreat. These images of birth and rebirth early in *Winter News* strongly support the poet's own claim that he felt as if he were born as a poet through his Alaska experience and that the experience itself instructed him in the use of the language of the land and the language of poetry.

Many of Haines' poems in *Winter News* contain a sparseness and emptiness in their simplicity, and within several, that emptiness is suggested through a silence in nature that transcends human language. The opening poem of the book, “If the Owl Calls Again,” is filled with such silence. As the poem unites the speaker and owl on a dream-

like, nocturnal hunt, the silence between them suggests a primordial communication without words:

We will not speak,
but hooded against the frost
soar above
the alder flats, searching
with tawny eyes. (11)

Thus begins the poet's journey into the wilderness in this fantastical desire to unite with the owl, symbolic here of the natural world into which the poet has submerged himself.

While the collection begins with this dreamlike relationship with nature, it transitions into more realistic representations of the wilderness in the short second section. Revolving mostly around the survival of man in the wilderness and the necessity of the hunt, these poems express a mutual admiration and respect for the animals the hunter must kill in order to survive. In this section, we see the poet now firmly established in his dwelling place and now learning the language of the land as he attempts to communicate with the other forms of life that surround him. "A Moose Calling" describes a conversation between hunter and hunted as the speaker directly addresses the hunted moose: "I walk upright / and carry your death / in my hands" (23). This again establishes a clear divide between human and nature, as what separates the human from the animal, what clearly elevates the human above the animal is the symbolic machine in the garden, here represented by the rifle.

Through several of Haines' poems in which he encounters animals, there is the suggestion that communication in nature often transcends the capabilities of human language. Continuing a three-poem sequence about the moose is the poem "Horns,"

which recalls the speaker's attempt to attract a moose by rubbing horns against a tree. In this scene of primitive communication, the human attempts to "speak" the language of the moose. The arrival of the moose disturbs the silence of the camp, and the moose itself responds by rubbing its horns against a tree and then disappears, leaving the speaker again alone in the silence. Yet, it is in the absence of human language where the natural world seems to speak most clearly to the poet, and it is within the language of the wilderness that the poet is able to make a connection among, nature, the spiritual world, and himself. The final stanza reads as follows:

I stood there in the moonlight,
and the darkness and silence
surged back, flowing around me,
full of a wild enchantment,
as though a god had spoken. (25)

The quality of speech, the language of God, or nature, is here untranslatable for Haines in any form of human language—only in nature's sounds and silences.

The very next image we encounter in *Winter News* is in the opening stanza of "The Moosehead": "Stripped of its horns and skin, / the moosehead is sinking" (26). Over this short, three-poem cycle, the final result of the hunt is revealed, and the speaker describes the gruesome but necessary death of the moose, now in its natural process of decay and return to the earth: "The eyes have fallen back / from their ports into the sleepy, / green marrow of Death" (26). Bearing witness to the necessity of death and decay is an image that pervades Haines' poems. "On the Divide" is a poem that demonstrates this notion that seems to be a major influence on the ways in which the poet is able to process internally the external experience in nature.

I am haunted by
the deaths of animals.

Their frozen, moonlit eyes
stare into the hollow
of my skull; they listen
as though I had
something to tell them.

But a shadow rises
At the edge of my dream—

No one speaks;
and after while the cold,
red mantle of dawn
sweeps over our bodies.

(30)

A silence pervades the scene as if human language is incapable of functioning or communicating what the speaker is sensing from the stare of the dead animal's eyes. And the poem ends in silence. Looking into the eyes of the dead and listening to the language of nature that accompanies the dawn afford the poet a perspective rooted in the natural cycles of nature. The knowledge gained through his wilderness experience has accumulated toward a new level of understanding of the human/nature relationship, one that acknowledges a kinship and connection through mortality, and one that acknowledges the human as animal. What results is the recognition of two distinct forms of human existence in nature—one of struggle for survival and one of harmony.

These two perspectives resonate in “Divided, The Man is Dreaming,” a poem in the second section that magnifies the tensions between idealism and realism. One vision or version of himself in the wilderness reflects the base, brutal reality of survival:

“Bathed in sweat and tumult, / he slakes and kills, / eats meat / and knows blood” (32). In contrast to this reality of living off the land and the necessity of spilling the blood of animals is the “other half” which “longs for stillness” (32). In this vision of himself, the poet lives with the land rather than struggles against it for survival. Here he provides nourishment and nurturing from his own hands, the same hands that spill the blood in the brutal reality of his survival: “cool grass grows at his feet, / dark mice feed / from his hands” (32).

Haines’ poems seem to suggest that the way to come to understand this relationship between human and animal is by isolating oneself in the wilderness. There is seldom a human presence in the poems other than the speaker himself, thus emphasizing the isolation of the speaker’s life in the wilderness. Even when other human figures appear, they are often in the form of dreams or memories. This isolation in the Alaskan wilderness, especially that isolation imposed by the winter, is a constant reminder of mortality as Haines symbolically equates winter with death. In “The Visitor,” the encroaching frost is the visitor that beckons the speaker to come out into the emptiness of the land created by winter:

A spirit in it wants
to draw me out past
the whitening hinges
into the cold, enormous rooms
where it lives.

Out there a flickering pathway
leads to a snowy grave
where something in me
has always wanted to lie. (43)

Here, the frost is infused with a spirit, and the winter landscape becomes symbolic of the speaker's eventual death, again a realization of mortality. In the final stanza, the speaker concedes to the pull of mortality in the form of winter: "Then let it take me, / a lost and shivering animal—" (43). In a sentiment that echoes Jack London's "Law of Life," the speaker accepts that his struggle to survive will ultimately end in death, that he too is united with all beings in nature through his mortality.

For Haines, solitude and mortality are continually associated with winter, and as the title of the collection indicates, the poems express a preoccupation with winter as a powerful natural force. Premonitions of the coming winter dominate the later poems so much so that these forebodings ultimately symbolize the poet's growing understanding and acceptance of his isolation and inevitable mortality. In "Poem," the speaker notes that "The immense sadness / of approaching winter / hangs in the air" (55). The middle stanzas of the poem anticipate the changing season from fall to winter, and the final stanza presents an image of hope, patience, and understanding of the necessity of nature's cycles:

We believe in the life to come,
when the stark tree
stands in silence above
the blackened leaf;
but now at a bend in the road
to stop and listen:
 strange song
 of a southbound bird
 overflows
 in the quiet dusk
 from the top

of that tree. (55-56)

Here Haines returns to bird imagery that again recalls Bryant's migratory waterfowl. In the images of solitary life—one tree and one bird—Haines emphasizes the solitude of his experience in the wilderness. For the speaker here, "The life to come..." is not only winter, but also a symbolic afterlife once the fall has transitioned to winter. The present time in the poem is the midst of that transition, as the migration of the bird symbolizes the cycle of the seasons.

While *Winter News* does follow a loose narrative pattern, whatever conclusions Haines may have come to during his time in Alaska remain ambiguous, as the full scope of the collection cannot be grasped without considering some of Haines' later poems that reflect on his life in Alaska. That he returned to his homestead in 1954 after the 1947 sojourn to live with few amenities for the next fifteen years suggests the strong pull that a life free of contemporary society had for Haines. Inevitably, Haines returned to mainstream American society, and several critics have noted a resulting perspective shift in his later work. Don Bogen asserts, "While the early poems convey a Wordsworthian vision of the natural environment as a source of spiritual rejuvenation, a place that still can inspire awe, the latter work is considerably more skeptical...as he focuses on the encroaching mechanized world" (64).

Bogen reduces the vision of *Winter News* to a romantic one, whereas I would contend that the contemporary pastoral mode allows us to see Haines' work as a blending of Romantic and Naturalistic tendencies. Bogen does rightly emphasize, however, a shift in perspective in the later work of Haines. One of Haines' strongest comments on encroaching mechanization comes in the lengthy "In The Forest without Leaves" from

the “New Poems” section of *The Owl in the Mask of the Dreamer*. This poem offers an apocalyptic vision that resulted from the poet’s contrasting experiences of living in the pastoral retreat of his homestead and various cities in the lower forty-eight states. The first of the fifteen sections of the poem describes an industrial city with metaphoric imagery of a forest:

In the forest without leaves:
forest of wires and twisted steel...
The seasons are of rust
and renewal,
or there are no seasons at all,
only shadows that lengthen
and grow small—
sunlight on the edge of a blade. (207)

Here Haines returns to emphasizing the cycle of the seasons; only now the speaker anticipates a world in which that cycle is in the form of the decay of iron and steel, or a world in which this cycle no longer exists. “In the Forest Without Leaves” describes this natural process not as a one of death and renewal as it was depicted in *Winter News*, but rather as one in which machinery continuously feeds upon and regenerates itself. The last four stanzas of the first section reinforce this notion:

Nothing that thrives, but metal
feeding on itself—
cables for roots,
thickets of knotted iron,
and hard knots of rivets
swelling in the rain.
Not the shadows of leaves,

but shadows where the leaves might be. (207-208)

Iron, rivets, and cables here replace branches and roots and cast shadows in the absence of the natural landscape that once persisted there. Industry, in this apocalyptic vision, is a self-perpetuating machine that continually feeds upon itself as it consumes the natural landscape, or to evoke Leo Marx here, the machine is not merely in the garden; rather, the machine has replaced the garden.

David Mason argues that “Haines began as a nature poet, but has developed into a poet of significant intellectual range, whose principal subject is the place of the human in nature—of spiritual relations embodied in experience” (40). The development of which Mason speaks seems to have been possible only as a result of the pattern of retreat and return. While the poems of *Winter News* provide the reader a narrative of a lived, rooted and placed experience in the wilderness, several of Haines’ later poems establish a reflective tone and provide insight toward possible conclusions about how the retreat has shaped the poet’s perspective. One such poem is titled “Homestead,” in which the poet describes returning to his homestead thirty years later and asking the following:

What did I come for? To see
the shadows waver and leap,
listen to water,
birds in their sleep,
the tremor in old men’s voices.

The land gave up its meaning slowly
as the sun finds day by day
a deeper place in the mountain. (Owl 142)

Here, the homestead again becomes the idyllic pastoral setting that for the poet is now lost. “It was thirty-one years ago / this rainy autumn,” (*Owl* 176) the speaker recalls in an

elegiac tone as he laments that he will never be able to return to that original state of consciousness as expressed in the early dream/fantasy poems of *Winter News*. In the penultimate section of the poem, the speaker announces, “All / that we knew, and everything / but for me forgotten” (*Owl* 177). These lines, as well as the opening stanza of the final section, emphasize the change that has transpired over the thirty-one-years since his initial retreat:

I write this down
in the brown ink of leaves
of the changed pastoral
deepening to mist on my page. (*Owl* 177)

Considered within the context of the early idyllic poems of *Winter News*, this later poem suggests such accumulated knowledge over time that Haines’ answer to his question “What did I come for?” lies in this revelation of the “changed pastoral.” The initial retreat embodied in the romantic ideal is re-constructed into a less idealized understanding of his place in the wilderness and his own mortality.

Kevin Walzer notes that Haines’ later poems about his Alaska experience tend to transmit an elegiac tone: “The elegies of his time in Alaska are not motivated by simple nostalgia for lost youth. Instead, his constant poetic returns to Alaska can be read as an emblem of a quest for something much more important and elusive: a sense of what is elemental in nature and the humans who live there” (71). As noted in the characteristics of the contemporary pastoral, the past plays a key role in shaping the attitudes and subject matter of the poem, but Haines, especially with his later work, attempts to negotiate two distinct variations of the past—his own past experience of the Alaska he knew in *Winter News*, as well as the more distant, ancient, and idyllic past with which he sought to

reconnect there. Walzer posits that Haines' poetry "...seeks to find a space where time moves more slowly, where continuity can be found in both humanity and the natural world" (71). Yet, in line with contemporary pastoral, that search for continuity seems to be an increasingly problematic one in light of the rapidly industrialized and technologized contemporary world in which Haines was living later in his career

While the poems of *Winter News* express the immediacy of experience in the wilderness, these later poems treat a variety of places in the western United States. Yet even the perspective of the relationship between humans and nature in those poems seems to be tempered by the experience of the pastoral retreat to Alaska. In this sense, Haines writes a poetry that is embedded historically in his own past, which was both rooted and transient. Haines addresses the impact of this in an interview with Mathew Cooperman:

And there is the wider, the more general place, the nation, the continental mass on which the nation is based, and the particular period in which one lives. And there is this more abstract, historical situation we call Western civilization, its effects, its sources, its rise and decline. And then there is one's place as a writer in the story of our literature, our culture. In a valid sense, I think you cannot separate all of these into isolated instances; they all connect, and one's true place may be found at some intersection of time, place, and art. But it is true, all the same, that the place of one's origin, that physical place on the map, or where one has spent a sufficient time in one's life, has its indelible imprint. (129)

Haines' "place" as a poet in American culture is an important one as his early poems in *Winter News* express the pattern of pastoral retreat, not as an idyllic and romantic vision, but as a revelation of reality through a closer experience with the cycles of nature. His later work, then, returns often to Alaska, not only geographically and biographically, but also metaphorically. Alaska itself has functioned as just such a symbol in the American consciousness since the age of the frontier and westward expansion was deemed over.

His withdrawal to Alaska and the subsequent writing career that blossomed out of it demonstrate the profound impact of place on the imagination of a poet. The retreat however, is not permanent in the pastoral tradition. Terry Gifford writes, "Whatever the locations and modes of pastoral retreat may be, there must in some sense be a return from that location to a context in which the results of the journey are to be understood" (81). Haines' return to "civilization" allows him to process the broader meaning of his retreat. As his life followed this continued pattern of retreat and return, his isolated time in Alaska dramatically shaped his perception of the contemporary culture from which he fled. Haines comments on this shift in the introduction to his collected poems titled *The Owl in the Mask of the Dreamer*:

By the time I came to write the poems of *The Stone Harp*, many things had changed, and the spell had been broken. The outside world of public events, of politics and history and, to an extent, of professional necessity, intruded more and more. I re-entered, reluctantly yet necessarily, the world I had left behind many years before. This re-encounter was for me drastic and unsettling, and for some time I found it difficult to write new poems, and certainly never again in the mode of *Winter News*. (1-2)

Haines' comments about the differing ways in which human culture views nature shed significant light on how nature is presented in his body of work as a poet. In an interview with Matthew Cooperman, Haines recalls his own assertion that "there is no life apart from nature," but goes on to make the following distinction:

However, we seem to insist upon putting nature out there somewhere, to be protected or exploited, to be looked at and learned from, and we are aware of a certain detachment or separation in doing this. On the one hand, our humanity, our developed or cultivated place in the nature of things, does separate us from that other nature: the wilderness, whether we mean the jungle, the woodlands, the grasslands, or the desert. At the same time, Nature as *the* force in life, is with us, within us, and never abandons us entirely. (137)

This depth of insight no doubt has resulted from the more than fifty years Haines spent living his life between his homestead in Alaska and in several locations in the continental United States. "It is still a place I go back to, in mind and in spirit," Haines wrote about Alaska in *Living off the Country*, "...The Material it gave me is still a part of my life, and I go back to it in poems and prose, trying to understand as well as I can the significance of what happened to me there" (12). Here for Haines, like Wright's "Ohio of the mind," Alaska is a place of intense meaning and experience and therefore constantly remains a part of his consciousness and site of return.

As Haines' life oscillated between Alaska and other parts of the American West, his entire corpus of poetry reveals important observations about the places he inhabited, to the point where his life's work reaches beyond regional limitations toward a broader

commentary of the human experience in nature. While *Winter News* and the body of Haines' work that resulted from a life of retreat and return may not be overtly political in their statements about the environment, when considered within the context of the contemporary pastoral mode, they clearly examine the relationship between humans and nature, the process of learning to live with nature in the wilderness, the accumulation of experience and knowledge of the birth-death-birth cycle of seasons, the inevitability and necessity of death, and the reality of the poet's contemporary understanding of human culture and nature that de-romanticizes the idealism of classical pastoral.

Gary Snyder's *Turtle Island* as Pastoral Resistance

While the poetry born out of John Haines' life on the homestead outside of Fairbanks reflects a brooding solemnity and solitude, Gary Snyder's life and poetry, shaped by a different kind of pastoral retreat, speak more forcefully and politically toward contemporary American culture's relationship with the landscape it inhabits. Both poets, nonetheless, produced poetry early in their careers inspired by the pastoral pattern of retreat, revealing an inherent desire to escape contemporary society toward a more primitive way of life. Rooted in a developed understanding of the respective places in which they chose to live, both Haines' and Snyder's poetics fulfill the criteria of the contemporary pastoral. While Haines' cultural commentary comes through his quiet isolation, Snyder's is more forceful and overtly political, as the destination of his retreat is as much philosophical and conceptual as it is geographical, the culmination of which is a poetry that forces the reader to rethink the ways in which contemporary American culture has historically occupied the land. Whereas Haines seeks to retreat from society,

“well quit of the world,” Snyder seeks to repair it from within, writing a poetry that signals a retreat not across a physical geography, but a retreat from contemporary society toward non-mainstream and traditional native ways of life: Snyder constructs what I will refer to as a poetry of pastoral resistance and revision.

The forceful politics of resistance in Snyder’s work presents itself early in *Turtle Island* in the poem “Front Lines.” As well as evoking the notion of a frontier space between human culture and nature, the title also evokes imagery of warfare, pitting the forces of industry and consumerism against what are continually shrinking wilderness spaces. The first four stanzas center around four distinct machines that threaten the garden: “A chainsaw growls in the gorge,” “the 4-wheel jeep of the / Realty Company,” “jets crack sound overhead,” “A bulldozer grinding and slobbering” (18). The machines consume the land, physically and auditorily, transforming both the topography and the sound of the land. The poem features one of Snyder’s more forceful commentaries on the ways human culture consumes the wilderness for commercial and financial purposes: “they say / To the land, Spread your legs” (18). Where these aspects of the industrial and contemporary world encroach upon the natural landscape is where Snyder’s poetry attempts to draw our attention:

Behind is a forest that goes to the Arctic
And a desert that still belongs to the Piute
And here we must draw
Our line. (18)

The poem ends with this call to action, as the poet asks the reader to participate in working to preserve the remaining wilderness spaces that have not yet been transformed (or consumed) by American consumer culture.

Snyder's poetry, then, makes use of the pastoral ideal as a site of resistance and re-visioning more than an actual physical retreat and return. Considered within the framework of the contemporary pastoral mode, Snyder expresses a historical and cultural consciousness that place poets such as Wright, Hugo, and even Haines, do not. As evidenced by the poem "Front Lines," much of Snyder's work can be viewed most fully through the third aspect of the contemporary pastoral that suggests the poet or poem actively engages in mending the fractured relationship between humans and the environment. Rather than simply drawing our attention to environmental concerns, Snyder asks us to join him on the front lines.

In part, the genesis of the *Turtle Island* poems was Snyder's experience of continually resisting mainstream contemporary culture. After his twelve years spent in Japan studying Zen, Snyder built a house in the foothills of the Sierra Nevada Mountains, raised his family, and sought to create a countercultural community where the members lived in closer harmony with the land. Yamazoto writes, "Snyder, by beginning to live in the back country, in an abandoned rural area in California, chose to explore how to live in a place, to become 'placed' or 're-placed,' an act that would lead him to a new, alternative culture, and eventually to a new sense of 'what it means to be human'" (51). His embedding of himself and his family in the process of re-inhabitation functions both as a conceptual retreat and a physical one, a rethinking of how to live within a previously occupied and abandoned space rather than a physical retreat to the wilderness.

The placed perspective Snyder develops through this process manifests itself through a variety of verse styles in *Turtle Island*. Molesworth identifies three distinct types of poems in *Turtle Island*—poems of prayer and ritual, poems of instruction, and

poems of hope (99). These variations of poems result from the broad variety of influences on Snyder's poetics, influence which Patrick Murphy has reduced to the following four categories: 1) "cultures of inhibitory or indigenous peoples," 2) Asian culture, 3) ecology, and 4) the sources for his formal poetics—Anglo-American modernism free-verse, field composition, orality, shamanistic healing songs, and "classical Japanese and Chinese poetics" (*Place* 15-18). In addition to these influences that Murphy points out, the impact of place and the pastoral retreat toward re-inhabitation also provide the foundations of so many poems and afford Snyder the opportunity to render the experiential quality of place.

Establishing this rootedness in a single place is a process that allows one to become more in tune with one's surroundings, understanding and living with the land rather than simply living on it and using it. Snyder's relocation, along with his knowledge of Zen and Native American culture, allows him to re-conceptualize the place in which he is living and produce a poetry that constructs a re-envisioning of how to live in a place. The poetry that resulted from his re-inhabitation played an instrumental role in establishing the concepts of bioregionalism, a movement that begins in the fifties and sixties and that radically re-thinks ways that contemporary cultures inhabit the land. As such, bioregionalists are attracted to primitive and indigenous cultures' ways of life and "believe that as members of distinct communities, human beings cannot avoid interacting with and being affected by their specific location, place and bioregion: despite modern technology, we are not insulated from nature" (McGinnis 2).

This attachment to community, place, and the desire to establish a more traditional means of dwelling in the land are the key aspects of Snyder's contemporary

pastoralism, for it is in following this desire that Snyder attempts to step into traditional life-ways of Native American people—a life-way that he deems freed from the complications of the contemporary world. At the same time, the poetry born out of these place-experiences becomes a space through which the poet may critique certain aspects of contemporary life, as the poems of *Turtle Island* attempt to do what Snyder has referred to as the “real work.” Snyder claims, “The work of poetry...has to do with bringing us back to our original, true natures from whatever habit-molds that our perceptions, that our thinking and feeling get formed into. And bringing us back to original true mind, seeing the universe freshly in eternity, yet any moment” (qtd. in Sicgaj 232). Part of that seeing involves understanding the principles of living with the natural world rather than in it. As Snyder concludes a poem titled “Tomorrow’s Song”:

At work and in our place:

*in the service
of the wilderness
of life
of death
of the Mother’s breasts! (77)*

Here Snyder anticipates a future in which humans have learned how to view nature as intrinsic to their own existence. Earlier the speaker accuses the United States as it “never gave the mountains and rivers, / trees and animals, / a vote” (77). While nature and the wilderness may not have an active voice in human affairs, Snyder’s poetry in *Turtle Island* attempts to provide that voice.

Snyder’s pastoral resistance is intrinsic to his development of a poetics that attempts to create this voice for nature. Motivated by the influence of Eastern and Native

American cultures, Snyder achieves a poetic voice that speaks collectively instead of individually and a voice that speaks for the natural as well as the human world. By de-emphasizing the personal “I,” which seldom appears in *Turtle Island*, as such, Snyder stylistically attempts to create a speaking voice devoid of an anthropocentric viewpoint. Inevitably, though, the perspective of the speaker/self cannot be completely eliminated. Nick Selby makes the point that Snyder’s poetics comes from a “tense relationship between self and land” and that his identity is “dependent upon his returning to the land as the determinant of his culture and selfhood” (179). This connection between individual identity and the natural landscape goes beyond any kind sentimental romanticism, as Selby points out that “Snyder’s poetic work ethic is the ground upon which anxieties can no longer be sublimated into romantic myths of the land but must be seen as the traces of a self-division lying at the heart of the American psyche” (180). This “self-division” is precisely the gap that Snyder’s poetry seeks to emphasize and to reduce.

A preoccupation with the self is a concern of much contemporary American poetry, and, as a result, the work of many poets tends to reflect solipsistic and anthropocentric world-views, as these very tendencies impede poets like Hugo and Wright from fully expressing an ecopoetic vision. Snyder’s work, however, strives to create a more ecocentric and less egocentric voice by de-emphasizing the self, a result from his years spent studying the concepts of Zen, which tends to stress the interconnectedness of all things, both human and non-human. Having been influenced by Eastern philosophy to such an extent and having been influenced by Native American myth and religion, Snyder is able to write a de-centered poetry, one that fully considers the world outside himself as it attempts to speak for the non-human.

The corollary is that Snyder, perhaps more than any other American poet, establishes a pluralistic speaking voice, one that includes both the human and non-human, rather than a singular one. This de-centered speaker becomes a conduit through which the reader may listen to the natural world. Even in poems that make use of the singular “I,” the speaker rarely looks inward; instead, Snyder creates a voice that is always reaching outward toward nature and to the listener/reader. Critics have acknowledged, and in large part correctly, that in this way Snyder’s poetry attempts to provide a voice for the natural surroundings rather than focusing too heavily on the self. Jody Norton argues that Snyder is able to de-emphasize the self by creating a less singular speaking voice:

By eliding the solitary speaker as well as the One in many of his poems, Snyder follows Buddhism in tacitly asserting the illusory nature of the self. Elision of the subject is often accompanied by a replacement of verbs with verbals. Use of these two forms of ellipsis enables the poet to present activity not in terms of an “I” who takes action but simply as action that is taking place. (43)

Allan Johnston supports this claim that Snyder’s poetry is one that establishes an authentic voice for nature in which the self/speaker is ultimately absent. Johnston and Norton contend that by making himself a “non-presence” Snyder succeeds in having his poems “portray nature as a self-informing system” and that the poet himself becomes a “vehicle through which place can speak” (23). One way in which Snyder achieves this non-presence is through what is not said or written on the page. Of this formal practice, Jody Norton writes the following:

Gary Snyder's poems sheer away from abstractions, delineating the material world boldly in series of concrete images. Matter-of-fact as they appear, however, Snyder's lyrics depend as much on what they omit as on what they include. Honeycombing his poems with syntactical and structural ellipses, and refusing to fully determine his imagery, Snyder seeks to disrupt our complacent relation to our own experience by short-circuiting our customary ways of dividing and conquering that experience, the chief of which is language (42).

These omissions allow Snyder to achieve a “non-presence” in several instances. The best example of this type of poem in *Turtle Island* is titled “Without”:

the silence
of nature
within.

the power within.
the power
without. (6)

Here is a poem devoid of the personal “I,” as it suggests that the “power” that emanates through all things is present both within and without the human self. For Snyder, understanding this “power” as a presence both within each individual and outside of oneself is essential toward gaining a less self-centered worldview.

Concurring with Norton and Johnston, Patrick Murphy suggests that the influence of Oriental language also weighs heavily in Snyder’s style of de-emphasizing the self. In

noting the impact of these languages on Snyder's formal poetics, he writes, "Snyder eschews metrics, and in his poems the frequent absence of articles stands out. He also often uses infinitives and participles, *to go* and *going*, rather than subject + verb constructions in his poems, so that actions occur, but no 'I' claims control"

(*Understanding* 17). While this dynamic occurs in many poems, the personal "I" is not wholly absent from *Turtle Island*; yet, when Snyder does employ the first-person point of view, he does so usually in a way that the self never assumes agency over the scene but becomes a human participant in an ongoing natural process. The poem "Source," quoted here in full, exemplifies this minimally anthropocentric use of the personal "I":

To be in
to the land
where croppt-out rock
can hardly see
the swiftly passing trees

Manzanita clans
cluster up and fan out on their soils
in streaks and sweeps
with birds and woodrats underneath

And clay swale keeps wet,
free of trees, the bunch-grass
like no Spaniard ever came

I hear no news

Cloud finger dragons dance and
tremble down the ridge

and spit and spiral snow then pull in
quivering, on the sawtooth
spine

Clears up, and all the stars.
the tree leaves catch
some extra tiny source
all the wide night

Up here
out back
drink deep
that black light.

(26)

Snyder has structured this poem with calculated symmetry that captures the experience of connecting with the natural scene being described. Isolating the line “I hear no news” precisely in the middle of the poem creates the effect of the speaker’s being consumed by the scene rather than standing apart from it. Balanced on either side of the speaker are two descriptions of the landscape with which, by the end of the poem, because he hears no “news” from the human-built world, the speaker has connected. The omission of the pronoun in the last stanza suggests that the reader either assume the “I” has been omitted or that these lines stand as a direct command to the reader to “drink” in the knowledge and understanding that land has provided.

In these ways, Snyder shifts attention from the self to the natural world, as also in “Straight Creek—Great Burn.” This poem is primarily a landscape description, yet the speaker’s presence is not felt or even alluded to until the sixth of the poem’s eleven

stanzas. For most of the poem, aspects of nature are the subjects of the action as in the opening stanzas:

Lightly, in the April mountains—
 Straight Creek,
dry grass freed again of snow
& the chickadees are pecking
last fall's seeds
 fluffing tail in chilly wind,

Avalanche piled up cross the creek
 and chunked-froze solid—
water sluicing under; spills out
 rock lip pool, bends over,
 braided white, foaming,
returns to trembling
 deep-dark hole. (52)

The poem continues over the next three stanzas to describe the action of the transition from winter to spring and the marks it makes on the landscape. That Snyder defers until the middle of the poem to reveal the speaker's vantage point creates the sensation that the human presence in the scene is part of the scene rather than separate from it. The poem briefly locates the speaker and a companion in the sixth stanza: "us resting on dry fern and / watching" (53). From here the scene shifts from descriptions of the ground to the sky as the speaker observes a flock of birds, within which he notes the symmetry and singularity in their flight:

never a leader,
all of one swift
empty

Inherent in the instinctual flight of the birds is a communality rather than a singularity, an aspect of human existence the Snyder asks the reader seriously to consider throughout the whole of *Turtle Island*.

By seeking at once to project and achieve a unity with the landscapes he describes, as in “Sources” and “Straight Creek—Great Burn,” Snyder uses his poems as a vehicle for connecting the reader, the poet, and the land together. “Snyder presents nature and humans as equals,” argues Leonard Scigaj, going on to assert that “...Snyder presents the poet, always rooted in place and community, as a recycler of dead cultural biomass and inner potential” (47). To this end, Snyder’s introductory note to *Turtle Island* states this concept as an intended goal: “The poems speak of place, and the energy-pathways that sustain life. Each living being is a swirl in the flow, a formal turbulence, a ‘song.’ The land, the planet itself, is also a living being—at another pace.”

This headnote speaks toward not only the rootedness of Snyder’s poetics, but also of the spiritualism present in many of the poems—a spiritualism that preaches that all living things are animated. These animistic aspects of Snyder’s work transmit his vision of the interconnectedness of all things, including humans, wildlife, and the land itself. Firm in his belief that there is a spirit in nature, Snyder claims that that spirit is what inspires his poetry: “...the voice that speaks to me as a poet, what Westerners have called the Muse, is the voice of nature herself...” (*Island* 107). Snyder’s animistic spiritualism, as well as his rootedness, affords Snyder the perspective through which to compose a poetry that comes closer than most ecopoetry to speaking *for* nature. He writes the following in the prose section of *Turtle Island* titled “The Wilderness”:

I am a poet. My teachers are other poets, American Indians, and a few Buddhist priests in Japan. The reason I am here is because I wish to bring a voice from the wilderness, my constituency. I wish to be a spokesman for a realm that is not usually represented either in intellectual chambers or in the chambers of government. (106)

Here, Snyder brings upon himself the challenge of creating poems that feature an ecocentric perspective, stripped of a preoccupation with the self or personal “I.”

Another way in which Snyder achieves this dynamic is by his return to primitive cultures that were untouched by the modern and contemporary world of the machine. Such cultures achieved a closer relationship with the land because of their reliance on agriculture for survival. Through this primitivism, Snyder reveres past cultures and asks his readers to do the same. Such reverence presents itself in the opening poem of *Turtle Island* that pays homage to the Anasazi, a pre-Pueblo people of Arizona and northwest New Mexico. Snyder’s praise of this indigenous tribe suggests his desire to model his re-inhabitation of the land based on these people. The poem describes their closeness to the earth:

tucked up in clefts in the cliffs
growing strict fields of corn and beans
sinking deeper and deeper in earth
up to your hips in Gods
 your head all turned to eagle-down
 & lightning for knees and elbows
your eyes full of pollen

 the smell of bats.
 the flavor of sandstone

grit on the tongue. (3)

The poem speaks directly to the past by using the form of direct address, as the first two lines of the poem read “Anasazi, / Anasazi” in what begins the collection by invoking the spirit of this pre-contact tribal society. The description emphasizes the poet’s admiration for the tribe’s connection to the land as well as its polytheistic belief system.

A dramatic shift from ancient cultures to contemporary American culture occurs very quickly in the first half of *Turtle Island*. “The Dead by the Side of the Road” details a variety of animals that have been killed by interstate traffic—images of the garden destroyed by the machine. The very next poem, “I Went into the Maverick Bar,” perhaps best illuminates the culture/nature/self tension in Snyder’s poetry, as well as the elegiac tone of contemporary pastoral. The interior of the bar consists of images that represent contemporary American culture—pool tables, a country band, couples dancing—and the speaker identifies himself as an outsider, partly concealing his real identity by tucking his long hair under his hat and leaving his earring out. The speaker becomes immersed in the culture the bar represents, yet still feels separate from it, and is a cautious observer of the scene. Temporarily lost in a nostalgic daydream triggered by the couple dancing, the speaker reminisces about working in the Oregon woods in a time before he became fully engaged in a countercultural awareness. Once he leaves the microcosmic setting of the bar, the speaker recognizes the ways in which American culture can distract one’s vision from the natural world:

In the shadow of bluffs

I came back to myself,

To the real work, to

“What is to be done.” (9)

Molesworth emphasizes that in this closing, Snyder “realizes how far his values are from those of many of his ordinary fellow citizens, but he also realizes he must, and will retain those values” (98). The importance of this poem is that its narrative follows the reverse of the typical pastoral retreat. Here, the speaker’s movement is from nature back into the civilized world, and the pattern of retreat and return is reversed. Instead of nature being the teacher, it is civilization that instructs the speaker about his relationship with nature. Displaying the dynamic and symbiotic relationship between conceptions of nature and of society, a poem like “I Went into the Maverick Bar” complicates and blurs the culture-nature boundary within Snyder’s contemporary moment. Within the context of *Turtle Island*, Snyder places this poem and “The Dead by the Side of the Road” early in the collection to juxtapose variations of culture in contemporary America compared to the culture of the Anasazi that he praises in the opening poem. These cultural contrasts allow the reader to comprehend Snyder’s primitivism and pastoral resistance.

As the opening poem invokes an ancient tribal people, other poems in the collection such as “I Went into the Maverick Bar” present a blending of ancient past, present, and future through which the poet and the reader recognize the task of attempting to mend the fractured relationship between human and nature. While Molesworth has reduced the poems of *Turtle Island* to three types, I suggest that there are several poems, including “I Went into the Maverick Bar,” that contain what I call “pastoral moments”—moments in which the speaker’s gaze is drawn from human culture toward an awareness of nature, typically triggered by a symbolic image of the garden. Here we see the reversal of Leo Marx’s concept of the machine in the garden as counterforce, what John Cooley

has noted in contemporary pastoral writing as imagery of “a garden within a machine” (10).

By focusing on the pastoral moment as the controlling image and tension in the poem, Snyder is able to communicate to the reader his understanding of the human-nature divide. “Magpie’s Song,” for instance, is a poem that exemplifies a pastoral moment in the midst of human culture. Like Bryant’s waterfowl and Haines’ trapped bird in the cabin, the observer of the magpie receives instruction from the natural world, as Snyder provides a speaking voice for the bird indicated by italicized type. The poem begins, however, by situating the speaker in a specific natural landscape populated with signs of contemporary culture:

Six A.M.
Sat down on excavation gravel
by juniper and desert S.P. tracks
interstate 80 not far off
between trucks
Coyotes—maybe three
howling and yapping from a rise. (69)

Here again, Snyder creates an unidentified and ambiguous speaking voice that de-emphasizes the self. Although the personal “I” is never used, it might be implied through omission in the second line, yet this omission could also imply a third person or second person perspective as well. The ambiguity of the subject forces our attention away from the speaker toward the scene of excavation sites, interstates, and trucks that populate it, and only between the noises of the passing trucks can the speaker make out the sound of the distant coyotes. Thus is depicted a setting in which human culture and technology dominate the landscape.

The pastoral moment occurs in the song of the magpie that draws the speaker's attention away from the noise of the highway toward a revelation in nature:

Magpie on a bough
Tipped his head and said,

*“Here in the mind, brother
Turquoise blue.
I wouldn't fool you. (69)*

As a reversal of Leo Marx's concept of the machine in the garden, the symbol of the garden in the form of the magpie exists not only in image but also in its voice, which rises above the sounds of the machines of human culture. In this setting, the speaker's contemplation in the midst of nature is not disturbed by the counterforce; instead, the observation of the counterforce is interrupted by the sound of the bird, to which Snyder ascribes linguistic meaning. With Snyder as scribe, the poem becomes the conduit through which the voice of nature may communicate with the reader. Instead of giving the bird an actual voice, Snyder serves as mediator by giving the bird language that signifies his own internalization of this specific pastoral moment, which is then transferred to the reader. Through this exchange and the omission of specific personal pronouns, the pastoral moment, then, becomes the reader's, who is now being instructed by the voice of the magpie about the kinship between human and nature. In this process the reader's gaze is directed from the symbolic markers of civilization and industry toward nature, as the magpie's song instructs and reassures:

*No need to fear
What's ahead
Snow up on the hills west*

Will be there every year
Be at rest. (69).

This assurance from the voice of the bird representing the voice of nature ends with the meditative refrain “*Here in the Mind, Brother, / Turquoise Blue*” (69), and stands as one of the most hopeful moments in *Turtle Island*. The pastoral moment in “Magpie’s Song” allows the poet not to simply give a voice to nature, but to reconstruct his interpretation of the experience and invite the reader toward a state of mind in which the poet and we readers a kin of the magpie, toward a traditional life-way and perspective in the midst of machines and trucks and interstate highways.

While many poems of *Turtle Island* do consist of landscapes in which the machine intrudes, the reverse of this is also present with such elements as cityscapes in which there are pastoral moments, as well as the image of the garden trapped within the machine. “Night Herons” constructs a similar dynamic to “Magpie’s Song,” as images of the garden are seemingly consumed by aspects of technology and mechanization:

Night herons nest in the cypress
by the San Francisco
stationary boilers
with high smoke stack
at the edge of the waters:
a steam turbine pump
to drive salt water
into the city’s veins
mains
if the earth ever
quakes. and the power fails. (35)

The machinery of human culture has been devised to protect the city from the natural event of the earthquake, and part of the herons' habitat has become the smoke stacks, boilers, and pumps constructed by the bay, ultimately leading the speaker to the question, "How could the / night herons ever come back?" (36).

In contrast to poems that express these pastoral moments in the midst of the human-built world are poems that follow a more typical pastoral pattern akin to Marx's "machine in the garden." In the seemingly straightforward landscape poem "By Frazier Creek Falls," the speaker cannot avoid the recognition of human culture's presence in the scene: "The creek falls to a far valley. / hills beyond that / facing, half-forested, dry..." (41). The only evidence of human culture is the image of the logged hillsides. Despite the evidence of humans' destruction of nature, the poem follows the pattern of a typical pastoral retreat in which the speaker gains insight from contrasting nature with society. Employing the use of the empty page to signify the sound of an existence unaffected by human activity, the speaker invites the reader into the landscape. In the conclusion of the poem and following the purely descriptive first two stanzas, Snyder directly commands the reader to stop and listen to the sound of the "rustling trembling limbs and twigs" (41) of the pines he has just previously described:

listen.

This living flowing land
is all there is, forever

We *are* it
it sings through us—

We could live on this Earth
without clothes or tools! (41)

The empty space following the prompt to the reader to listen allows the rustling and trembling from the previous line to register. The next two stanzas evoke the kind of idealistic and romantic revelation reminiscent of Emerson's concept of the Over-Soul. However, the phrasing of the last two lines indicates a shift from idealism to reality and from romantic spiritualism to realistic speculation through the use of the conditional tense. What is implied through the use of the verb "could" is the assertion that *we do not* live this way, as well as the sense that we never will.

While this could be what Molesworth calls one of Snyder's poems of hope, one can read a degree of pessimism and lament about what society has become and its effects on the environment. Some critics, as some have mistakenly done with Haines as well, have read Snyder as a romantic, yet as Max Oelschlaeger has noted, his work diverges significantly from Romanticism; Oelschlaeger warns that to consider Snyder a romantic is to neglect that his work lacks the enthusiastic idealism of the romantics (267). Read within the frame of contemporary pastoral, these poems of Snyder's offer a speculative hope that often resembles pessimism when compared to the idealism of romanticism.

As much as the poems of *Turtle Island* ask their audience to re-imagine the relationship between human and nature and to rethink how to live with nature, they do not do so without controversy. Snyder's poems intend to aid in repairing the relationship between humans and nature by urging readers to recognize the contrast in the ways their contemporary culture occupies and conceptualizes space compared to other cultures, whether it be through the philosophy of Zen or through the practices of indigenous cultures. Part of that rethinking must come from achieving an awareness and a state of

mind akin to the ways people of indigenous cultures lived and live in America—to retreat from contemporary culture. The act of adopting an indigenous naming for America—Turtle Island—is intended to inspire that kind of radical rethinking. Bron Taylor notes the significance in Snyder’s symbolic renaming of the continent:

Renaming America “Turtle Island” was, for Snyder, an act of veneration acknowledging the sacrality of the land by linking it to sacred people—those still able to perceive its sacred voices and live respectfully upon it. Such renaming was an act of subversion, simultaneously questioning and repudiating any view that links the sacredness of the continent to a presumed beneficent and divine mission carried forward by the U. S. nation-state. As with Abbey, Snyder’s perception of the state as an agent of desecration is tied to his religious perception of the land as sacred. (38)

This act of subversion as viewed by Taylor, can be read as a linguistic act of pastoral retreat and resistance. Replacing the Anglo-European term of “America” with the appropriated “Turtle Island” reminds readers not only of the symbolic power of language, but also asks us to re-think and compare the life-ways of contemporary America with ongoing traditional life-ways of Native Americans.

Snyder’s poetry in *Turtle Island* gains its power from the notion of pastoral retreat and resistance and through invocations of the past intersecting with contemporary landscapes that make the reader aware of contemporary human civilization’s misuse of the land upon which it is situated. Snyder’s poetry often reminds readers of the process of Anglo-European settlement/appropriation of the land. In the poem “What Happened Here Before,” Snyder summarizes the history of the land from pre-human history to the

present. “Then came the white man:...” Snyder writes of the arrival of the Anglo-European, “... tossed up trees and / boulders with big hoses, / going after that old gravel and the gold” (79). Similarly, in “Mother Earth: Her Whales” Snyder again denounces American culture for the way it has used the land for the sake of economic progress: “Gone in a mist, a flash, and the dry hard ground / Is parking space for fifty thousand trucks” (48). The poem calls for unity, counting humans and animals as one living community, and asks them to take back the land that was taken from them:

North America, Turtle Island, taken by invaders
who wage war around the world.
May ants, may abalone, otters, wolves and elk
Rise! and pull away their giving
from the robot nations. (48)

In a 1977 interview, Snyder elaborates on his use of Native American myth and lore as it relates to his conception of Turtle Island as a place invaded by the Anglo-European: “What is implied in the title is, first of all, not even a *rediscovery* but a *discovery* of North America—we haven’t discovered North America yet. People live on it without knowing what it is or where they are. They live on it literally like invaders” (*Real Work* 69).

As many of the overtly political poems express the present environmental crisis that Snyder saw escalating in the late sixties and early seventies, the final section of *Turtle Island*, “For the Children,” provides a vision toward the future that is at once cautiously hopeful and pessimistic. In the short poem “Dusty Braces,” Snyder denounces his ancestors, the “stiff-necked / punchers, miners, dirt farmers, railroad men,” who “killed off the cougar and the grizzly” (75). The cause of this kind of denunciation of

ancestry and culture by Snyder is clarified in the prose essay “The Wilderness” at the end of *Turtle Island*. Western culture, Snyder claims, is at fault for the current environmental crisis. He writes, “There are many things in Western culture that are admirable. But a culture that alienates itself from the very ground of its own being—from the wilderness outside (that is to say, wild nature, the wild, self-contained, self-informing ecosystems) and from that other wilderness, the wilderness within—is doomed to a very destructive behavior” (106).

Snyder’s essay titled “Re-inhabitation” provides some significant insight on his sense of place and his disassociation from Western culture. In fact, Snyder claims to have no real sense of affiliation to a Western sense of identity: “I had no notion of a white American or European heritage providing an identity; I defined myself by relation to the place” (“Re-inhabitation” 67). Such a statement emphasizes Snyder’s bioregional perspective and the impact of place on his identity, yet he does not fully discount the influence of Western culture: “Soon I also understood that ‘English language’ is an identity—and later, via the hearsay of books, received the full cultural and historical view—but never forgot, or left, that first ground: the ‘where’ of our ‘who are we?’” (“Re-inhabitation” 67-68). Snyder here acknowledges a linguistic Western identity, and at the same time he acknowledges the subjective point of view from which a culture’s history is constructed. Ultimately, Snyder stresses his personal early understanding of a sense of place, place attachment, and the degree to which an attunement to place can become a primary factor in one’s identity.

This kind of attachment to place is what Snyder feels we need to develop. If we do not, then the future generations will suffer. The title poem of the “For the Children”

section anticipates the future struggles of the next generation in a nearly apocalyptic tone, less of hope and more of pessimism:

In the next century
or the one beyond that,
they say,
are valleys, pastures,
we can meet there in peace
if we make it.

To climb these coming crests
one word to you, to
you and your children:

stay together
learn the flowers
go light (86).

The advice the speaker offers in the last stanza reduces the sustaining of human culture to three basic principles: a sense of community (*stay together*), a bioregional awareness and deeper sense of place (*learn the flowers*), and anti-materialism (*go light*). As indicated by the title, the poem poses a vision of the future survival not just for nature, but for the next generations of humans that will inhabit it. Here again, the poem becomes a sight of pastoral resistance, as Snyder attempts to instruct his reader how to live. The apocalyptic tone embedded in the clause “if we make it” marks Snyder, as John Elder has claimed, as a “contemporary poet of cultural despair” (25). In poems that transmit such an eco-political stance, Snyder juxtaposes the “ecological harmony of his own life,” as Sherman Paul has suggested, against the knowledge of “the enemy that threatens it” (317).

The “cultural despair” and awareness of the “enemy” fuel Snyder’s pastoral retreat toward a re-visioning and re-conceptualizing of contemporary ways of living. Ed

Folsom notes that Snyder's vision in *Turtle Island* shows an earthward descent under and below layers and layers of American culture, and it is less a physical descent than it is a philosophical one. Here Folsom supports my notion that Snyder's pastoral retreat is just as much, if not more so, philosophical as it is physical. He writes that *Turtle Island* displays "...a descent into the mind, to the past, to the wilderness freedom that was lost under America, the arduous love; he is drawn there by 'fossil love,' an affection that pulls him to the lowest layers of the continental palimpsest as he becomes (finds in his own mind) the stored energy of the native continent and captures that stored energy in his poem of Turtle Island" (233-234). Folsom suggests here that Snyder, and in particular *Turtle Island*, unearths a cultural history that needs to be brought to the eyes of contemporary culture—that by looking to and learning from the past, we can do the "real work" on "the front lines" to relearn how to live with nature. In this way, the pastoral resistance and retreat of *Turtle Island* "summon us to a new-old way of life that now more than ever before is a necessary means of survival" (Paul 318).

Snyder's overall vision in *Turtle Island* attempts to raise the reader's consciousness toward contemporary environmental issues, to move the reader toward environmental activism, and, ultimately, to encourage the reader to live differently in nature, and to adopt ongoing traditional ways of life that run counter to the Euramerican mainstream. Max Oelschlaeger notes that *Turtle Island's* publication occurs at a controversial time in American history and during "the peaking of public consciousness of environmental crisis" (261). Oelschlaeger emphasizes that in the midst of these controversies, Snyder emerges as a poet of "quiet revolution that might transform the way in which the earth's peoples interact with the land and among themselves" (261).

Similarly, Molesworth notes that one of Snyder's achievements in *Turtle Island* is to provide a "future model of the lyric poem as more committed to enhancing an awareness of cosmic scale and cosmic forces and the need of the community to heighten and preserve such awareness" (93). Snyder's putting into practice the philosophies that develop out of the bioregional movement results in a poetry that is politically engaged in an attempt to move members of contemporary American culture toward rethinking how culture and nature interact.

Herein lies the essential element of the contemporary pastoral—the interconnections among poet, text, nature, and culture. Resulting from the influences of Zen, Native American cultures, and bioregionalism, Snyder's poetry, when considered through the characteristics of the contemporary pastoral mode, makes its radical political statement through a poetic voice that speaks for the natural world more than it speaks for the individual poet. The ultimate statement that *Turtle Island* makes is to urge its readers not toward an unattainable idyllic landscape (a return to the garden), but toward a state of mind that is idyllic. With this state of mind, communities will effectively change the ways in which they live with their natural surroundings. Read with these tensions in mind, the contemporary pastoral becomes less about nature and the wilderness than it is a commentary about the culture from which the poet has fled, or in the case of Snyder, reconstructed his way of life. These aspects of Snyder's poetics in *Turtle Island* exemplify key characteristics of the contemporary pastoral—they call our attention to the fractured relationship between culture and nature, and they urge us to join the poet on his philosophical retreat toward re-imagining, re-discovering and re-inhabiting America, Turtle Island.

CHAPTER 4
ECOHISTORICAL ORIENTATIONS OF PLACE IN LESLIE MARMON
SILKO AND RAY YOUNG BEAR

Defining the Ecohistorical Mode

Through the first two modes of contemporary place poetics, we have seen the interplay of external and internal landscapes in the landscape mode, and we have seen the search for a connection with the land through the contemporary pastoral. Compared to these first two modes, the ecohistorical mode expresses a historically complex and rooted relationship to the place about or from which the poet writes. Poets whose sense and understanding of place is informed by their inherent link to cultural tradition can be typically read as ecohistorical. An ecohistorical poetics reflects a rootedness that grows out of a familial, historical, and cultural attachment to the land. Such a connection to a homeland, whether it be a homestead, a town, a bioregion, a reservation, or tribal lands, is the focal point of an ecohistorical place poetics. Taking its meaning from the prefix “eco-” as “dwelling place,” and coupled with the root “historical,” the ecohistorical mode uncovers the layers of history and personal experience out of which one’s understanding of place is formed and articulated through poetry.

In an essay titled “A Native Hill” Wendell Berry observes the following of his personal relationship with his native Kentucky:

All that any of us may know of ourselves is to be known in relation to this place. And since I did most of my growing up here, and have had most of my most meaningful experiences here, the place and the history, for me,

have been inseparable, and there is a sense in which my own life is
inseparable from the history and the place. (171)

This self-identification with place described by Berry here is a central characteristic of the ecohistorical mode. As the third and final mode of place poetics, the ecohistorical signifies a return home to one's native ground as both a geographic and richly symbolic place whose meaning grows out of the interplay between the individual, history, and ongoing lived traditions of the community. While we have viewed the anthropocentric qualities of the landscape mode and the middle ground between civilization and nature occupied by the contemporary pastoral, the ecohistorical verges toward a more ecocentric, biocentric understanding of the self in relation to places—both human and non-human. An ecohistorical place poetics allows us to re-think and reconsider our relationship with place, homeland, hometown, and the environment based on the cultural roots that anchor us there.

Lawrence Buell has pointed out that place is an ongoing interplay among symbols, societies, and ecologies, and that this interplay needs to be at the center of current ecocriticism (707). In addition to these factors, an understanding of place is influenced by the intersection of cultural beliefs, languages, and histories. In his conceptualizing of an “ethnocriticism,” Arnold Krupat views these cross-cultural spaces as frontiers, which, he argues, are not to be thought of as static ending points, but rather as dynamic meeting places between two cultures, “a shifting space in which two cultures encounter one another” (*Ethnocriticism* 5). From this perspective, much of the contemporary American cultural landscape constitutes various kinds of frontiers.

Following the notion that the experience of place is determined by these cross-cultural merging points and that a place is a continual process of this merging, an ecohistorical place poetics demonstrates the following: 1) place functions as a determinant of the poet's creation, not as simply an aesthetic backdrop, but as a place conceptualized and invested with meaning; 2) a communication of an individual historical connection to cultural tradition through place; 3) the relationship between the contemporary present and an ongoing sense of traditionalism as they are connected through language, landscape, and the continual transformation of cultural space; 4) an ecocentric rootedness informed by cultural, philosophical, religious, or spiritual perspectives that run counter to Euramerican¹ anthropocentric views of place.

Such characteristics of the ecohistorical mode inherently draw attention to cultural and ethnic distinctions and contrasting orientations toward place. If we are to think of home and place as not simply a static geographic location, but as a locale with layers of cultural history and geopolitical struggle whereby the land becomes embedded with meaningful experience, then differing ways in which one's personal, historical relationship to that place need to be considered as a powerful force that shapes an individual's understanding of self. What the ecohistorical mode does for readers is raise awareness toward the complex relationship between self and place, culture and nature, present and past, human and non-human.

While the ecohistorical often demonstrates a culturally informed relationship with place that runs counter to mainstream Euramerican thought, writers may demonstrate

¹ As I find the term "Anglo-American" to be too limiting toward cultural roots in England, Scotland, Ireland, and Wales, here and following, I use the term "Euramerican" in a broad way to refer to specific ethnic affiliations that may include one of several cultural groups that encompasses the span of European ethnicities involved in the long history of immigration in America.

characteristics of an ecohistorical poetry regardless of ethnic or cultural position. More ecologically and environmentally minded Euramerican poets have emerged in the wake of growing interest in place studies, regionalism, and bioregionalism. Euramerican place poets such as Gary Snyder, as we have seen in chapter three, and Wendell Berry, suggest a trend in a reevaluation of how contemporary society lives on and with the land. Both Snyder's and Berry's bioregional approaches are inspired by an orientation toward place that is not necessarily instilled or advanced by a predominantly anthropocentric contemporary Euramerican culture.

In addition to Snyder and Berry, a number of other Anglo-American poets in the post-World-War-II era, such as Charles Olson and William Carlos Williams, have shown ecohistorical tendencies in their mytho-historical re-constructions of Gloucester, Massachusetts and Paterson, New Jersey. Lorine Niedecker writes from the rooted perspective of her Wisconsin hometown where she lived her whole life. Her poem "Paeon to Place" demonstrates a significant relationship to her home as her birth is described in relation to both her mother and the earth:

Fish
 fowl
 flood
 Water lily mud
My life

in the leaves and on water
My mother and I
 born
in swale and swamp and sworn
to water (261)

Niedecker's lines demonstrate an ecohistorical connection between self and the surrounding homelands of Black Hawk Island that she often wrote about. These opening lines suggest that the speaker's life is born out of elements of the surrounding marshes—mud, flowers, and waters. Such a connection to place and home is at the root of the ecohistorical mode.

Poets with Euramerican cultural roots such as Niedecker, Snyder, Berry and others display and exemplify aspects of the ecohistorical mode, each expressing their own sense of “native” ground and attachment to place. In contrast to a Euramerican cultural perspective, a number of contemporary Native American poets write from cultural space that simultaneously negotiates both Anglo-American culture and their ongoing traditional culture. Being rooted in such a transcultural space significantly informs the poetics of such poets whose senses of place, home, and self are based on both traditional and contemporary ways of life. The ecohistorical mode draws attention to these transcultural dynamics between poet and place, and often the work of such poets expresses the ways in which Anglo-American culture and Native American culture are simultaneously negotiated within specific geographies of home.

While the pastoral, both Romantic and contemporary, tends to indicate a desire to establish a way of life more in touch with the landscape, more attuned to the rhythms and subtleties of the natural world, and to achieve a relationship with nature reminiscent of cultures of the past, the ecohistorical suggests a pre-existing, rooted sense of place and home which recognizes the harmonious co-existence of both the human world and nature. And while the landscape mode considers the personal “I” as it is situated within a particular landscape, the ecohistorical communicates an understanding of the self as a

rooted part of the land and the community. As such, the ecohistorical reveals relationships with home and nature and the environment that run contrary to the dominant Euramerican culture of the last several centuries toward a deeper understanding of rootedness and home.

Thus, the ecohistorical mode explores the differences and complications present in the composition of place through the eyes of poets whose cultural background or personal histories have instilled a sense of rootedness to place. The complex history between Native American and Euramerican cultural history and literature has often led scholars to note distinctions between Euramerican and Native American interpretations of place and space. One of these contrasts is that Native American writers rarely express the escapist tendencies of those discussed in the contemporary pastoral. Daniel White points out this contrast clearly by suggesting that pastoral tendencies begin in America with Thoreau's *Walden* and goes on to claim, "The pattern has become familiar: John Muir trekking off to the Sierra Nevadas, Edward Abbey to the Colorado Plateau, Barry Lopez to the Arctic and on and on. By contrast, traditional native peoples have never needed to leave town to seek out an experience in nature; nature *is* their town" (142).

Extending White's contention concerning Native Americans' relationship with nature, William Bevis has pointed out a pattern in Native American writing whereby the protagonist's leaving home eventually leads toward his or her more fully understanding it. In contrast to the "leaving" plot typical to many American novels in which "the individual advances, sometimes at all cost, with little or no regard for family, society, past or place. The individual is the ultimate reality, hence individual consciousness is the medium, repository, and arbiter of knowledge" (Bevis 582). By contrast, the "homing"

plot in Native American novels, “coming home, staying put, contracting, even what we call ‘regressing’ to a place, a past where one has been before, is not only the primary story, it is a primary mode of knowledge and a primary good” (582). Bevis emphasizes the importance of identifying oneself with home, but also his most salient suggestion in his homing theory applicable to the ecohistorical mode of place poetry is that “‘identity,’ for a Native American, is not a matter of finding ‘one’s self,’ but of finding a ‘self’ that is transpersonal and includes a society, a past, and a place. To be separated from that transpersonal time and space is to lose identity” (585). Such an integrated worldview and understanding of the self is one in which the individual alone has no meaning outside of the community; such a construction of identity stands in contrast to white Americans for whom “the individual is the ultimate reality” (Bevis 590).

In general, such contrasting views of identity formation, of spirituality and religion, and of the relationship among the individual, the land, and nature exist between Native American cultures and Euramerican cultures (Murray “Translation” 69). Instead of an isolated or alienated sense of self within the community, the Native American sense of identity recognizes the self as a part of the community, and poets writing in the ecohistorical mode often express this kind of consciousness that is borne out of a cultural background that recognizes the individual, community, and land as intertwined.

While Bevis aims his notion of homing mainly toward the novel, the concept itself, along with White’s distinctions between pastoral uprootedness and Native American rootedness, primarily distinguishes the ecohistorical from both the landscape and pastoral modes. As we have seen, the landscape mode constructs a vision of self within the land whether that land is a familiar one or not, and the pastoral suggests that

knowledge accumulated through place experience exists in a location removed from the individual's home environment. By contrast, as seen in the process of homing, the ecohistorical mode suggests that what is beyond the home neither does not nor cannot satisfy the individual's quest to understand the self.

While it may be accurate to label the pastoral as a Euramerican male trope, and while White's assumptions about Native American relationships with place aid in defining the ecohistorical, they do verge on what Lee Schweningen calls the "land ethic stereotype" (16) and what Gregg Garrard refers to as "the assumption of indigenous environmental virtue" (*Ecocriticism* 120). Such stereotypes of Native Americans' inherent eco-centric relationship with the land have been perpetuated over the centuries not only by popular books and films by Euramericans, but also by some Native American writers themselves (Schweningen 25). While recognizing these stereotypes, scholars at the same time acknowledge that Native American relationships to the land are informed by, in contrast to Anglo-Christian beliefs, an animistic religious foundation that recognizes a spiritual presence in all life and not just humans. Joy Porter asserts that "a sense of the interconnectedness and relationship between all things, between animals, land, peoples and their language, and a requirement to seek individual, communal, and environmental balance" are common pan-Indian characteristics (43).

Given that we know a Native American cosmology invites an alternative way of thinking about place compared to dominant Euramerican ideology, we can see the ecohistorical mode as a meeting ground between these two opposed systems of thought. The ecohistorical poet often acknowledges this reciprocal relationship between what is home and what is not. Such a rooted understanding of place does not, however, suggest

an insular or limited world-view. In fact, it often results in the contrary as Scott Russell Sanders has noted in his autobiographical *Staying Put: Making a Home in the Western World*:

To become intimate with your home region, to know the territory as well as you can, to understand your life as woven into the local life does not prevent you from recognizing and honoring the diversity of other places, cultures, ways. On the contrary, how can you value other places if you do not have one of your own? If you are not yourself *placed*, then you wander the world like a sightseer, a collector of sensations, with no gauge for measuring what you see. (114)

Recognizing the uprootedness of contemporary culture, Sanders notes how concepts of rootedness run counter to current trends in contemporary life: “The longing to become an inhabitant rather than a drifter sets me against the current of my culture, which nudges everyone into motion” (117). Recognizing place and home as a merging point of cultural histories and influences, as the confluence of cultural traditions, customs, and ways of life in the same geographical locality, poets of the ecohistorical mode express this multifaceted relationship among poet, cultural past and present.

Thus, a rooted sense of place typifies perspectives articulated by poets in the ecohistorical mode, and, as such, several Native American poets’ work might be classified within the construct of the ecohistorical mode and the overall discussion of place poetics since, broadly speaking, issues of land appropriation and the occupation of cultural spaces are such a large part of the history of America’s native people, regardless of tribal affiliation. Because the ecohistorical mode expresses a relationship with the land

that is directly linked to the poet's cultural background, the contrasting ways in which Euramerican culture and Native American or Chicano or other such cultures whose ancestral past has been affected by Eruamerican occupation of the land ultimately surface.

The ecohistorical mode, then, often articulates a perspective that is aware of the interplay between contemporary and traditional culture. "I come back to myself / near this tree, and think of my roots / in this land" writes Jimmy Santiago Baca in *Black Mesa Poems* (11). In this poem titled "Roots" Baca's speaker recognizes the multilayered historical narrative attached to his homeland:

Before history books were written,
family blood ran through this land,
thrashed against mountain walls and in streams,
fed seeds, and swords, and flowers. (12)

Acknowledging the presence of his family in the land the pre-dates written record, the speaker becomes an important link between past and present. Aesthetic images of the natural landscape contrast those of warfare and bloodshed, symbols of past conflicts played out upon the land. Not only does the speaker make the connection between present and past, but also the connection between history and the land, as he recognizes the place as the same tree, the same mountains and streams where his ancestors lived. Here, in contrast to the escapist idealism of contemporary pastoral, or the individualist perspective of the landscape mode, the ecohistorical mode expresses how the self relates to the cultural and historical traditions rooted in a particular landscape. The confluence of indigenous and contemporary Anglo-American culture, then, often forms central tensions in poetry of the ecohistorical mode.

Exploring the ecohistorical aspects of the poetry of Leslie Silko and Ray Young Bear reveals a complex relationship between self and the history of the community and land as well as two distinct kinds of Native American-ness through each writer's unique cultural and geographic experience. Arnold Krupat has argued that all Native American writings "whether oral, textualized, or written, are mixed, hybrid; none are 'pure' or, strictly speaking, autonomous. Native American written literature in particular is an intercultural practice" (qtd. in Murray "Translation" 70). Both Silko and Young Bear have produced writing fraught with these complex notions of individual and communal identity, cultural and tribal affiliations, as well as a sense of obligation to the past, while at the same time being subjected to the powerful forces of both contemporary tribal and Euramerican mainstream culture.

As the interplay of these cultures continues to shape the landscape, the literature produced within them continues interpret contemporary spaces and places, and a large part of that interpretation rests upon how we value the cultural past, and how those cultures that preceded us valued and lived in place. The works of Young Bear and Silko, along with other Ecohistorical poets, allow us to view place as a process, as always in a state of change, as Tim Creswell has noted: "Place provides the conditions of possibility for creative social practice. Place in this sense becomes an event rather than a secure ontological thing rooted in notions of the authentic. Place as an event is marked by openness and change rather than boundedness and permanence" (39).

“Shared Ground”: Leslie Marmon Silko’s *Storyteller* as Ecohistorical Poetics

Songs and stories passed on through the oral tradition of Native American tribal groups preserve a sense of cultural heritage rooted in the land that remains integral to ongoing traditional ways of life. Several voices in contemporary Native American poetry seek to carry on and preserve traditions of storytelling and oral history through various written forms of verse. Continuing these traditional modes of storytelling with an attention to the ways in which these stories define both the culture and the land as intertwined is what primarily constitutes these poets as ecohistorical. The cultural position held by Native American writers is complex, influenced in some cases by a Pan-Indianism and tribal affiliations, and at the same time by dominant forces of Euramerican culture such as mass media, education, and religion. Yet a sense of being selfrooted in the land is inherent in the cultural past. Donnelle Dreese writes:

The roots of the identity of a tribe are initially determined by the oral tradition, creation and emergence stories. These stories tell of the ancient peoples of a tribe, how they came into being and how they emerged....These stories and others within the oral tradition describe specific landscapes from which a tribe derives its means for survival, its cultural symbols, its sense of self, and its spirituality. (8)

Where these cultures overlap, the shifting borderlines between and among them are the complicated, hybridized cultural spaces from which many contemporary Native American poets write. As ecohistorical poets, their work merges the traditional and contemporary in a blending of oral storytelling with more Anglicized, contemporary

poetic forms, resulting in a poetry written from a culturally complex perspective—
simultaneously Native American and “American.”

Both Leslie Marmon Silko and Ray Young Bear, in formally different ways, compose an ecohistorical poetry that retains cultural ties to tradition as well as contemplates and questions the complex dynamics, present and future, of Native American and Euramerican cross-cultural exchanges and relationships. Tribal history and tradition through song and oral storytelling are at the heart of their work, as both exude qualities that William M. Clements calls a “folk historical sense” by which the writer “perceives his or her work as part of a continuing artistic heritage which begins with the culture’s oral literature, owes its primary survival to oral tradition, and continues to, or through, his or her own fiction, poems, plays, or essays” (66). The artistic heritage of which Clements speaks is deeply rooted in the places occupied by Silko’s Laguna-Pueblo people and Young Bear’s Mesquaki people.

The following discussion of Leslie Marmon Silko’s *Storyteller* explores Silko’s ecohistorical poetics as an expression of both the communal and individual, as well as the intertwining of the traditional and the contemporary, as it negotiates the influence and impact of Euramerican and Native American conflict within the cultural landscape of her Laguna-Pueblo upbringing. Such negotiation and expression of cross-cultural influences contribute to *Storyteller’s* expression of an ecohistorical poetics, as it is a text that constructs a vision of the Laguna Pueblo reflective of its rich textures and history as a place in process. In addition to these perspectives, an ecohistorical analysis of Silko’s work suggests that inherent in the ecohistorical mode is the potential for a broader,

feminist, gender sensibility². Silko's work brings this feminine perspective of responses to the land through shifting female narrative voices in her poems, as well as in the inclusion of female mythical figures from Laguna-Pueblo cosmology. Calling on these multiple feminine voices allows Silko to emphasize the matrilineal tradition of her native culture's strong female figures who importantly pass on tribal history and myth through generations of storytelling.

Published in 1981 and containing many of the poems from her *Laguna Woman* (1974), *Storyteller* is a challenging, genre-defying text that assimilates multiple forms of native and Euramerican discourse. The text itself is a "frontier" text in the ecohistorical sense of a frontier's being a merging point between two cultures rather than a space that is a demarcation between civilization and the wilderness (Krupat *Ethnocriticism* 5). The poetry and prose in *Storyteller* come from a wide variety of both native and Euramerican influences, and the sense of selfhood expressed within it dually illustrates both the individual and communal experience of being placed.

The text of *Storyteller* in its entirety re-configures the function and structure narrative prose and poetry through its manipulation and re-configuration of both conventional Anglo-American storytelling modes and more oral, tribal modes of storytelling. Rather than a straightforward collection of short stories or poems, Silko's decision to move across genres aims to communicate the multiplicity of ways in which cultural history is communicated, absorbed, retold, and written. Such a re-thinking and re-structuring of the text allows Silko to reach across cultural conventions to

² While a discussion of responses to the land shaped by gender goes beyond the scope of this dissertation, potential for further analysis exists in the relationship between gender and place, as well as an eco-feminist sensibility toward the land.

communicate to a broad range of readers. Jeff Karem notes that *Storyteller* creates a link between “the nonnative readers’ world and her own with the recurrent suggestion that Laguna narratives form archetypal stories that continue in the present” (182). Such a reconfiguration not only challenges the dominant conventions of an “American” literature, but the “book” itself becomes a written performance woven out of the specific cultural landscape of the Laguna-Pueblo people that draws together Native American cultural heritage and contemporary American culture as well as crosses racial and ethnic boundaries.

The overall structure of *Storyteller* is a textual representation of a transcultural place. As such, its structure aids in the text’s expression of a communal, transpersonal voice. Several critics have noted the effects of the multi-genre structure of *Storyteller*, as in the following commentary in which Cynthia Carsten argues that the text’s structure challenges and thwarts typical genre conventions:

Leslie Marmon Silko is one of the prominent contemporary Native American authors who reconfigures the structural boundaries of Euro-American literary genres in her work. She experiments with multiple genres-fiction, poetry, historical narrative, and memoir-within a single work. In addition, Silko subverts the Euro-American aesthetic expectations of temporal continuity and chronology of plot. These features of her work are aimed at more than a mere demonstration of her artistic literary skill. These techniques draw upon the narrative patterns of her indigenous Laguna Pueblo oral tradition, which she artfully interweaves with her original poems and fictional narratives. Her unique style results in

narratives that more faithfully capture the experiential qualities of her community's oral tradition and its reflection of Pueblo orientation in time and place. (107)

While Carsten seems to discount the spirit of experimentation embodied by many Euramerican writers through the Modern and Postmodern eras, she does maintain that the text of *Storyteller* creates an effective link between oral storytelling and place.

Part of that link can be attributed to Silko's constructing a plurality of storytelling voices from her family past which contribute to the text's expression of a communal and transpersonal point of view. Linda Danielson claims, "Inside the book Silko simply denies individual authorship. Self-effacement is not the usual author's stance in mainstream Euro-American literary practice. Taking such a stance, Silko reclaims authority as a storyteller who speaks for the community" (392). Danielson's assertion here is, in part, correct, in that many of the texts within the collection seem to speak from a communal rather than an individual voice. However, along with this plurality of storytelling voices, there are many occasions in which Silko's individual experience and voice assert themselves in the form of prose descriptions of people, personal letters, and memories of events from her childhood.

While many critics, such as Daniels and Carsten argue that *Storyteller* subverts dominant, white conventions, and as much as the text attempts to be one that reflects oral tradition and history, it is still in ways bound by Anglo-European conventions. The text becomes a cross-cultural, transpersonal expression that illuminates Silko's experience of place as a merging point of culture, both present and past. These attempts to re-configure storytelling result in a work at once faithful to oral traditions and reflective of the

hybridized cultural space which she, as an ecohistorical poet of place, occupies. As characteristic of the ecohistorical mode's emphasis on places being dynamic rather than static and as merging points of cultures and histories, *Storyteller* as a text embodies such an expression of place through its veritable montage of genres.

So, rather than completely subvert Euramerican styles of narrative, Silko adopts and re-shapes modes of storytelling within the text. This genre-crossing and blending of linguistic styles is what Krumholz has referred to as "mixed" discourse, noting that the text of *Storyteller* "mediates between the Laguna Pueblo discourse and the 'mixed' discourse of the United States that *already includes* both white and Native American" (67). Krumholz argues that the multi-genre construction of the text creates a "cross-cultural" place that effectively and ultimately marginalizes the previously dominant "white regulatory discourse" (68). This kind of cross-cultural mediation is directly exemplary of how the ecohistorical mode reveals the intertwining of ongoing traditional culture and the contemporary "American" present. We see *Storyteller*, then, as a text that expresses an orientation to place configured by the notion that places are sites of overlapping cultures, both traditional and contemporary, and the Laguna Pueblo constructed through the stories, poems, and photographs in *Storyteller* becomes such a merging point.

Because of this structure, *Storyteller* appears at first as a disjointed collage of autobiography, photography, poetry and fiction; it does, however, in its entirety cohesively portraitize the life and landscape of the Laguna Pueblo. The text itself represents Silko's development into what Brewster Fitz calls the "writing storyteller" (8). In his *Silko: Writing Storyteller and Medicine Woman* Fitz argues that a central

perspective articulated across Silko's work is that "the conflict between the oral and the written resolves itself dialectically in a web of cultural syncretism, interweaving the Western and the Indian. This web centripetally gathers toward a syncretic and ancestral figure: the writing storyteller" (8). Fitz claims that the result of the Anglo influence on Laguna culture has given birth to the "writing storyteller" who now has "one foot in each culture" (240). Silko's transcultural perspective produces an Ecohistorical text in which her manipulation of genre conventions allows readers to engage in multiple modes of storytelling, all of which attempt to articulate the relationship between contemporary and traditional Laguna culture.

Part autobiography, part fiction, part tribal history, *Storyteller* brings together conventional short story, multiple verse forms, personal letters, and photographs, all of which combine to communicate not only the effect of Laguna-Pueblo tribal and cultural history on Silko's perspective as a writer, but also the trans-cultural nexus of written text and oral storytelling. While this multi-genre construction of *Storyteller* adds to the text's expression of the ecohistorical mode, the verse forms within the text also comprise a variety of formats—poetry, song, poem-stories, and personal narrative poems shaped into verse. These verse forms work to communicate and preserve Laguna traditions, and through their communicating specific attention to geography and landscape, *Storyteller's* verse is perhaps a quintessential example of a poetry that comes *from* a specific place—culturally and geographically. Compared to her works of fiction and non-fiction, Silko's body of poetry is relatively small, and while the bulk of her work is in short stories and novels, the fact that traditional song and poetry heavily inform her work is undeniable.

Read as an ecohistorical text, the verse forms in *Storyteller* communicate the significant connections among storytelling, people, and place. For Silko, traditional stories form an intrinsic part of her identification with the Laguna-Pueblo of her upbringing where storytelling is “a whole way of being....a whole way of seeing yourself, the people around you, your life, the place of your life in the bigger context, not just in terms of nature and location, but in terms of what’s gone on before, what’s happened to other people” (Barnes 71). The verse forms in *Storyteller* often communicates the notion that a particular place itself embodies the histories and stories of a cultural group.

Such a notion is intrinsic to the ecohistorical mode, and Silko’s personal understanding of the idea of landscape aids in distinguishing the mode from orientations to place expressed through the contemporary pastoral and landscape modes. The connection between storytelling and place, according to Silko, is inherent in Pueblo thought. In her essay “Landscape, History, and the Pueblo Imagination,” Silko explains the following:

Location, or “place,” nearly always plays a central role in the Pueblo oral narratives. Indeed, stories are most frequently recalled as people are passing by a specific geographical feature or the exact place where a story takes places. The precise date of the incident often is less important than the place or location. (36)

The text of *Storyteller* is a reflection of Silko’s view that place and landscape as understood through her Laguna-Pueblo cosmology contrasts significantly with more Westernized/Anglicized views. As noted in the following excerpt from her essay, the idea

and definition of “landscape” from a Euramerican perspective takes on a problematic meaning when contrasted with her Laguna-Pueblo perspective:

So long as the human consciousness remains *within* the hills, canyons, cliffs, and the plants, clouds, and sky, the term *landscape*, as it has entered the English language is misleading. “A portion of territory the eye can comprehend in a single view” does not correctly describe the relationship between the human being and his or her surroundings. This assumes the viewer is somehow *outside* or *separate from* the territory he surveys.

Viewers are as much a part of the landscape as the boulders they stand on.

(32)

Silko raises the issue that inherent in the very definition of the word “landscape” is a marked division between the human and the natural worlds. Implicit in Silko’s comments here is a fundamental contrast concerning Euramerican and Native American views of the natural world, suggesting specific culturally defined ways in which one’s perspective shapes and processes his or her natural and cultural surroundings. Common Native American perspectives stress a de-emphasis of the self in relation to the natural world. These contrasting perspectives of the individual’s relationship to the land and the tensions that arise out of Euramerican versus Native American conceptions of self and the landscape undergird the whole of Silko’s *Storyteller*.

For Silko, viewers become “part of the landscape” by participating in the communal knowledge of the stories that are part of its history. The stories themselves are part of the land, and knowing those stories affords one a perspective of the landscape that is not simply gained by looking, but rather experienced and known through the narratives

that contribute to a given landscape's construction. One such example from *Storyteller* is the story of Kochininako, a young huntress, Estrucuyu, the giant, and the Twin Brothers who rescue her by killing the giant. Silko frames the story as one being told to her by her Aunt Alice, one of several storytelling voices in the text. After rescuing Kochininako the Twin Brothers cut out the heart of the Estrucuyu and throw it as far as they can. The poem concludes as follows:

they threw the *Estrucuyu's* heart
clear across—
those things could happen
in those days
and it landed right over here
near the river
between Laguna and Paguate
where the road turns to go
by the railroad tracks
right around
from John Paisano's place—
that big rock there
looks just like a heart,
and so his heart rested there
and that's why
it is called *Yash'ka*
which means "heart." (87-88)

As one of several remembered oral stories from Silko's childhood, the poem demonstrates how particular stories ascribe meaning to specific geographical spaces, thereby becoming part of the mythic and historical culture of the people who inhabit it. The power of the story is such that it transforms the specific location into a place infused

with symbolic cultural meaning. This moment in *Storyteller* is one of a number of instances through which we see storytelling as a process of passing on the shared knowledge of the community, as well as how narrative participates in the transformation of space to place. The story now inhabits the place and provides it with cultural significance. Such an interplay of landscape and history is an essential aspect of Silko's expression of an ecohistorical rootedness.

Re-creating this notion that oral storytelling constructs a shared communal knowledge and identification with the land is a key component of Silko's ecohistorical poetics. For Silko, the landscape and the community are inseparable, and it is the community that makes up the audience for the storyteller; within that community, Silko argues in the following excerpt from an interview, is a "shared knowledge" of the landscape:

I began to realize that landscape could not be separated from narration and storytelling. One of the features of the written or old-fashioned short story was the careful, detailed description of its setting. By contrast, in Laguna oral stories, tellers and audience shared the same assumptions, a collective knowledge of the terrain and landscape which didn't need to be retold. That's why something an anthropologist or folklorist has collected may seem sparser than a literary short story; sometimes the oral short story can seem "too sparse." I realized that all communities have shared knowledge, and that the "literary" short story resulted when all over Europe--and all over the world--human populations started to move. People didn't have this common shared ground anymore. (Boos 137)

Here, Silko contrasts the “literary short story” with the kinds of stories represented in the text of *Storyteller*, suggesting that the audience’s role in the reception of the story, in part, depends on its knowledge of the landscape. That communal sense of “shared ground” implies an inherited relationship acquired over time with both the land and the community that inhabits it, and, therefore, an ecohistorical perspective. This ecohistorical sense of place that results from such a relationship is what the overall text of *Storyteller* attempts to express.

Part of Silko’s role as a storyteller is to continue these long-standing traditions storytelling that contribute to the ongoing formation of the cultural landscape. In that effort of continuation, her work explores the confluence of traditional tribal history and the contemporary Anglo-Americanized world in which she lives and writes. Landscape, place, and the cultural and familial traditions contribute to the meaning of these places are the center-points for Silko’s work, and while all of the multiple forms of storytelling comprised within *Storyteller* express characters’ and speakers’ of poems relationships to the land, the genres that most significantly locate the text within the specific geographic locales occupied by the Laguna-Pueblo are the verse forms and photographic images. The work as a whole communicates its sense of place through these varied layers of storytelling, yet that sense of place is deepened and complexified through Silko’s attempting to re-create the oral aspect of storytelling by breaking away from conventional prose forms.

While the text of *Storyteller* as a whole employs multiple storytelling formats, the verse in *Storyteller* is composed in multiple forms as well—some poems are written in a contemporary free verse style, some are contextually framed as oral performances of

traditional Laguna stories, some are prose-like autobiographical sketches of Silko's memories of family, and some are presented as tribal songs. Within the oral poem sections, Silko recreates a storytelling atmosphere in which the reading audience may imagine the oral and aural qualities of the language of the story. In framing the story-poems as oral performances, Silko effectively presents the deeply rooted cultural tradition of oral storytelling.

Throughout the story-poems (and other genres as well) emerge a few central themes that relate directly to Silko's cultural upbringing rooted in the Laguna Pueblo. For Silko, as we have seen, stories come from the land, and the cultural past and present are rooted in the surrounding New Mexico landscape, and her connection to the landscape of her upbringing is intrinsic to the transpersonal perspective articulated throughout *Storyteller*. Robert M. Nelson affirms, "As a child, Leslie Marmon grew up attaching herself, in memory and imagination, to the village and then to the land around it; and because this is Laguna land, many of the stories she grew up with were stories from the Keresan oral tradition, the stories of her father's people and their shared history" (15). This kind of intimate and rooted understanding of the connection between storytelling, landscape and one's individual place within the community and understanding of the land are at the heart of *Storyteller's* expression as an ecohistorical text.

Connecting the history of the Laguna people to the land, the poem "The Two Sisters" tells the story of how Hait-ti-eh lost her beautiful hair, the tragic result of which was the Laguna migration to their current location. The poem concludes with the storyteller breaking from the narrative just before the ending of the story to explain that many of these events end up being turned into songs:

The end of the song goes like this:

Long ago
in the East Country
called Tse'dihania
this took place
something tragic took place.
So the people migrated from there.
The people of Ahsti-ey and Hait-ti-eh
came to Laguna
and settled here
because something tragic took place. (102-103)

By incorporating these cultural myths and framing them as oral storytellings, Silko establishes the ways in which the importance of narrative and oral history embed meaning within the specific geography of the Laguna Pueblo. Such poems effectively express an acute awareness of how the past has shaped the present and the ways in which history shapes and re-shapes the land.

Along with this sense of storytelling contributing to an ecohistorical expression of place, another aspect of ecohistorical in Silko's work is her attention to the cross-pollination of religious beliefs that affect individual's understanding of the relationship between humans and nature. Silko has commented that because of her mixed ethnic heritage, she was "acutely aware of the inherent conflicts between Indian and white, old-time beliefs and Christianity" (*Yellow Woman* 17). In an introduction to her essay collection titled *Yellow Woman and a Beauty of the Spirit*, Silko addresses the impact that growing up in this culturally mixed environment had on her: "The mesas and the hills loved me; the Bible meant punishment. Life at Laguna for me was a daily balancing act of Laguna beliefs and Laguna ways and the ways of the outsiders" (17). Where Anglo-

Christian cultures tend to promote an anthropocentric world-view, animistic religions tend to de-emphasize the individual and preach harmonious relationships with the land, which, in turn, lead to a transindividual consciousness rather than a self-centered consciousness.

Along with these contrasts stemming from religion and spiritual beliefs, *Storyteller* exposes other major contrasts between Euramerican and Native American orientations toward place when considered as an ecohistorical text. The prevalence of the mytho-historical narratives rooted in the landscape in Native American cultures adds a symbolic meaning to the land that is less present in Euramerican culture. Silko's *Storyteller* as an ecohistorical text makes readers aware of this mytho-historical past through poems that recall myths of origin, such as "Prayer to the Pacific." Here Silko describes travelling to the coast, "from my southwest land of sandrock / to the moving blue water / Big as the myth of origin" (179). Responding to the ocean landscape, the speaker is reminded that, "Thirty thousand years ago / Indians came riding across the ocean / carried by giant sea turtles" (179). The poem concludes as the speakers consciousness shifts from an acknowledgement of the mythic past to a connection with the of that past with the present:

And so from that time
immemorial,
as the old people say,
rain clouds drift from the west
gift from the ocean.

Green leaves in the wind
Wet earth on my feet

swallowing raindrops

clear from China. (180)

The poem ends where it began, shifting from the narrative of the myth back to the speaker in the landscape. The final stanza suggests the speaker's recognition of herself as connected not just to the land itself, but also to its mytho-historical past, as the poem draws its imagery from the mythologization of the literal Asian migration to the Americas. Though the speaker of the poem is away from her "native" homeland, she is still able to make this ecohistorical connection between the land and herself.

As an ecohistorical text, *Storyteller* makes readers aware of these kinds of cosmological associations with place. A sense of belonging and rootedness to place is established by the connection to a particular geographic locality through the generational and cultural chain forged by storytelling and the handing down of cultural myths. This sense of maintaining and telling the story of a culture rooted in an indigenous landscape seems not as prevalent in the cultural past of Euramerican cultural groups. Krumholz argues that the strategies of *Storyteller* shift the powers of discourse away from the dominant forms controlled by "white Christian men" (67) and that that shift "fulfills the deconstructive impetus of 'border' discourse as well, since the point is that there is not 'pure' United States culture to begin with" (67). The uprootedness and ethnic and cultural blending resulting from years of immigration play a major role in this contrasting view of the landscape.

Compared to indigenous tribal nations of Native Americans, Euramerican culture has occupied the North American continent for a relatively short amount of time. As such, rather than speaking from a perspective that has the limited cultural geographic past of a handful of generations, Silko's and other Native American poets' cultural pasts

extend thousands of years into the past. A late poem in *Storyteller* titled “Where Mountain Lion Lay Down with Deer” further articulates the sense of the individual’s connection to the cultural past and landscape:

I climb the black rock mountain
stepping from day to day
silently.

I smell the wind for my ancestors
pale blue leaves
crushed wild mountain smell.

Returning
up the gray stone cliff
where I descended

a thousand years ago (199)

There is a sense here of returning to origins in the earth and in the landscape and a symbolic rebirth into the rest of the world. It is ambiguous whether the “I” in the poem is Silko herself or a persona that represents one who is seeking to understand his or her tribal identity. The poem, in a way, is a lament, as it suggests the loss of memory of the story of the speaker’s birth upon entering into the contemporary world: “The old ones who remember me are gone / the old songs are all forgotten / and the story of my birth” (199). A fear of losing the connection to the past in the wake of the contemporary world pervades the poem. The physical movement of the speaker in the poem is an ascension and then descent, re-entering the world:

...tumbling down
out of the mountain
out of the deep canyon stone
down
the memory

spilling out
into the world. (200)

The rebirth of the speaker suggests a re-emergence or re-entrance into the contemporary “world” after having acquired the knowledge of the past from communing and re-connecting with her ancestral past symbolized in various nature images—rock, wind, leaves, mountain, and canyon. The speaker’s connection to the land and its history is reified and an inherent sense of place is established as the poem moves back and forward creating a synchronic blending of cultural past and present. The pervading fear of losing the knowledge of the past heightens the importance of the storyteller as preserver, and it is this role that Silko attempts to fill through both the form and content of *Storyteller*.

Often in *Storyteller* Silko focuses on this blending of cultural influences as an intrinsic part of Laguna Pueblo life. The effect of Anglicized education on the traditionally oral culture is the focus of one of the early story-poems. It reads, as do most of the story-poems, prose-like, but on the page it is shaped into verse-lines to reflect the speech patterns of oral storytelling. Many of these stories are framed as an oral recitation of a traditional story Silko remembers hearing from various voices during her upbringing and are written in a fashion to reflect the rhythms and patterns of oral storytelling. In the following example, Silko’s Aunt Susie becomes an allegorical figure who embodies the tensions between the traditional tribal past and the Anglo-Americanized present. The speaker writes the following of Aunt Susie:

She had come to believe very much in books
and in schooling.
She was of a generation,
the last generation here at Laguna,
that passed down an entire culture

by word of mouth
an entire history
an entire vision of the world
which depended upon memory
an retelling by subsequent generations. (5-6)

Here the speaker laments the fading tribal tradition of oral storytelling which has become endangered through “European intrusion” and “taking the children away from the tellers” (6). Aunt Susie is a central symbol of the transition from past to present, having earned a college degree at Dickinson College in Pennsylvania. A bridge from the past to the present, she is one who embodies the knowledge of the past and one with the linguistic skills in English to pass on traditional Laguna stories to a contemporary listening audience.

Just as the figure of Aunt Susie represents a perspective that is both traditionally Laguna and Anglo-educated, so too does Silko herself, whose authorial voice, when it does surface at certain points in the text, represents the present and future generation of the traditional storyteller. That role of storyteller, Arnold Krupat points out, is less an individual one and more of a polyphonic one. In his discussion of *Storyteller* as autobiography, Krupat makes the following useful claim concerning the narrative voice in the text:

There is no single, distinctive, or authoritative voice in Silko’s book nor any striving for such a voice (or style); to the contrary, Silko will take pains to indicate how even her own individual speech is the product of many voices. *Storyteller* is presented as a strongly polyphonic text, in which the author defines herself—finds her voice, tells her life, illustrates

the capacities of her vocation—in relation to the voices of other
storytellers Native and non-Native... (163)

One way in which Silko achieves this effect is by the framing of several story-poems as oral performances. Within the verse sections of *Storyteller*, these oral poem-stories are distinguishable from the other verse forms by Silko's use of a number of cues to re-create the effect of an oral performance. One such method is by describing the teller and the telling of the story while telling the story itself.

For example, beginning one of the early stories with the line, "This is the way Aunt Susie told the story," serves as an adequate method of framing the story for the audience as an oral performance and not simply as a story written down on the page. Silko returns to this framing device after the story of Waithea by describing the tonal shifts during moments in the story she remembers hearing in Aunt Susie's voice when she would listen to the story as a child:

...I remember there was something mournful
in her voice too as she repeated the words of the old man
something in her voice that implied the tragedy to come.
But when Aunt Susie came to the place
where the little girl's clothes turned into butterflies
then her voice would change and I could hear the excitement and wonder
and the story wasn't sad any longer. (15)

These framing techniques require the reader to rethink, or perhaps reread, portions of the story, now informed by the descriptions of the storyteller's narration. In such a process between reader and text, the text can be re-visualized as an oral performance rather than simply read as written words, and, as Danielson notes, the story, on one level, becomes less about the story itself and more a "story, finally, about a storyteller" (334), suggesting

that the performance frames add a layer to the story in which importance is placed on how the story is told as well on the content of the story itself.

Another technique Silko uses to aid in staging her poem-stories as oral performances and to add to the polyvocality of the text is by shifting to italicized type to signify the voice of the storyteller. One of the Aunt Susie stories begins with the following lines:

*The Laguna people
always begin their stories
with “humma-hah”:
that means “long ago.”
And the ones who are listening
say “aaaa-eh”* (38)

The effect of such framing throughout the poem-stories further enhances the atmosphere of storytelling to the point that the reader may visualize a gathered audience being spoken to. These performance cues are a primary technique in differentiating the poem-stories in *Storyteller* from more conventional Euro-American poetic forms.

The importance of storytelling to an understanding of one’s own place in that culture seems to be an overt expression made through looking at the structure of the text in its entirety. Silko often reminds the reader of oral and aural aspects of processing her poems, and through this process, the reader is transformed into part of the listening community. Along with Aunt Susie, there are several other storytelling voices in the text. Aunt Alice and Gandma A’mooh are two other narrators of story-poems. In a recollection of her Grandma A’mooh’s telling her a story that she had heard many times over, Silko speculates why she and her sisters desired to hear the same story over and over:

Maybe it was because

she always read the story with such animation and expression
changing her tone of voice and inflection
each time one of the bears spoke—
the way a storyteller would have told it. (93)

The poem-stories often evoke the oral tradition of passing on tribal mythology from one generation to the next, and in doing so, they make connective links between the cultural past and present.

As well as making these connective links, another characteristic of *Storyteller's* verse as ecohistorical poetry is its drawing the reader's awareness toward contrasting relationships with the land between Euramerican and native cultures. One of the major expressions of this conflict comes in a central poem-story in *Storyteller*. Without a title, the poem-story begins as a creation myth, "Long time ago / in the beginning / there were no white people in this world / there was nothing European" (130). The story describes a gathering of witches from "across oceans / across mountains" (130) of non-white, cross-tribal and cross-cultural representation, "Some had slanty eyes / others had black skin" (130). The main expression of the poem comes in the form of an apocalyptic, prophetic vision from a witch whose tribal affiliation and gender remain anonymous:

*Then they grow away from the earth
then they grow away from the sun
then they grow away from the plants and animals.
They see no life
When they look
they see only objects.
The world is a dead thing for them
the trees and rivers are not alive
the mountains and stones are not alive.*

The deer and bear are objects

They see no life.

(133)

The separation between human and nature here results from the domination of those who do not believe in an animistic view of nature. For Silko, and, generally speaking, the preponderance of Native American belief systems, the land itself is animated with a spiritual presence. In her Laguna Pueblo religion, as with several other Native American religions, the land is represented by female deities. This animistic way of thinking typical to Native American identity is summarized by Susan J. Scarberry in "Land into Flesh: Images of Intimacy" the following way:

Through our flesh we experience a reciprocity with our environment as we receive and emit vibrations, impressions, and knowledge. Many contemporary Indian writers and thinkers from diverse tribal traditions express this connection between humans and land in their writings. Indian women, in particular, have developed these "perceptions of being" in their work as appropriate expressions of their life experiences. Images of land as woman and people as land-forms emerge, signifying that a special quality of being infuses both. These images, usually linked to a particular landscape, are more than anthropomorphic, more than metaphors or symbols for relationship; the images are a means of grasping and talking about real physical sensation and traditional tribal knowledge, as reflected through an individual's angle of vision. (25)

Here, and represented in various passages in *Storyteller*, is perhaps the single most significant contrast in the Native American and Anglo-American experience of place.

The land itself is a living being to be lived with rather than an object to be used and lived on.

The impact of Euramerican culture on the landscape of the Laguna-Pueblo people is no more apparent than in the story-poem that describes Silko's Grandpa Hank driving tourists to the Enchanted Mesa. In a local legend, a blind woman and her baby were stranded on the mesa and died there, and the place had since become a draw for tourists and archeologists. Grandpa Hank describes an excavation conducted by the Smithsonian Institution in 1908 and ultimately concludes with the following:

“...They took everything with them
in those wooden boxes
back to Washington D. C.”

Then Grandpa said

“You know
probably all those boxes of things
they took from Enchanted Mesa
are still just sitting somewhere
in the basement of some museum.” (198-99)

While archeologists' digs may alter the landscape and they may have extracted symbolic artifacts of the cultural past, the story of the Enchanted Mesa itself, which has been passed on over generations, preserves the spirit, history, and sense of the place.

The very need for cultural preservation arises from the growth of influence of the dominant culture. As expressed in *Storyteller*, cultural artifacts that can never be physically extracted from the land and removed are the stories themselves. “With these stories of ours / we can escape almost anything / with these stories we will survive” (247)

are words spoken by the storyteller-speaker in “The Storyteller’s Escape.” Emphasizing the important cultural role of the storyteller, the poem continues:

She keeps the stories for those who return
but more important
for the dear ones who do not come back
so that we may remember them
and cry for them with the stories.

“In this way
we hold them
and keep them with us forever
and in this way
we continue.” (247)

The storyteller is the conduit that transmits culture, history, language, and the sense of place, thus a main contributor in the cultures maintaining ongoing traditional ways of life in the contemporary world.

While the variety of verse forms as discussed here, as well as the prose fiction, of *Storyteller* contribute to the text’s ecohistorical expression, the photographs interspersed throughout the text provide an additional layer of storytelling. Several landscape photographs at various points within the text allow the reader to further associate the poem-stories and poems with specific landscape imagery depicted by the photography. Just as the written portions in the text tend to express the intersection of Anglo-American and Native American cultural spaces, so too do the images projected by several of the photographs. Using a medium of expression like photography that represents technological advances made by contemporary culture provides a stark contrast to the deep-rooted history of orality and serves as another way that Silko bridges the ancient

past and the contemporary present. Several of the images capture the transformation of cultural space as a result of that very same contemporary technological and mechanical advancement. Thus, Silko's notes at the end of the text aid the reader in interpreting the photographs and the stories that the landscape images tell. One of the most relevant descriptions is of an early photograph in the text and reads as follows:

Looking east from Paguate Village at the open pit uranium mine which the Anaconda company opened on Laguna land in the early 1950's. This photograph was made in the early 1960's. The Mesas and hills that appear in the background and the foreground are gone now, swallowed by the mine. In the beginning, the Laguna people did not want the mining done on their land, but then as now, military needs and energy development far outweighed the people" (270).

The photographs add more layers of storytelling and allow the reader to visualize specific aspects of the cultural landscape, providing for another interpretive view of the function of landscape and sense of place. Bernard Hirsch argues for the important impact of the photographs, "they reveal something of the particular landscape and community out of which Laguna oral tradition is born, and of specific individuals... they involve the reader more fully in the storytelling process itself... and they expand the reader's understanding of individual works and also suggest structural and thematic links between them" (2).

The images contributed by the photographs allow the book as a whole to tell its story of the shifting landscape at the intersection of cultures both traditional and contemporary. Silko has commented at length on her conception of the function of the photographs, noting on the first page of *Storyteller* that the photographs "are here because

they are part of the many stories / and because many of the stories can be traced in the photographs” (1). Silko replied with the following when asked about the photographs in a 1994 interview:

One of the reasons that *Storyteller* contains photographs was my desire to convey that kinship and the whole context or field on which these episodes of my writing occurred. The photographs include not only those of my family, but of the old folks in the village and places in the village. I started to think of translation [from Laguna]. I realized that if one just works with the word on the page or the word in the air, something's left out. That's why I insisted on having photographs in *Storyteller*. I wanted to give the reader a sense of place, because here place is a character. (Boos 137)

This sense of place communicated by Silko through the union of written text and photography in *Storyteller* transcends any kind of sentimental associations of place often connoted by the term “regionalism.” Elizabeth McHenry observes, “she functions as both artist and ethnographer. Blurring the boundaries between art and social science, she is able to introduce her readers to the fullness and fragmentation of her own private life and the life of Laguna culture” (116).

In its multi-genre construction, *Storyteller* as an ecohistorical text expresses an orientation toward place that is grounded in cultural history, storytelling, myth, and a transpersonal sense of self. Considering *Storyteller* as an ecohistorical text, reveals the various ways it attempts to communicate the sense of place, a sense that emanates from Silko’s own cultural identity which is informed by various expressions of oral history through storytelling, Native-Anglo conflict, and the representation of landscape through

written, oral and photographic expressions. The heart of *Storyteller's* ecohistorical expression is the way in which these formats of storytelling contribute to communicate intertwining of community, landscape, self and storyteller that ultimately leaves the reader standing on “shared ground.”

“From the Red Earth”: Mediation as Ecohistorical Poetics in Ray Young Bear

As demonstrated through the above discussion of Leslie Marmon Silko, the ecohistorical mode of place poetics expresses the interweaving of cultural history, geopolitical tension, and the poet’s sense of rootedness. That sense of place inherent in the writing of Silko and, as we will see in Ray Young Bear, is strongly informed by the effects of being born into and raised in a cultural place where ongoing tribal tradition often intersects with the contemporary American present, in which Judeo-Christian beliefs interlace with animistic Native American beliefs. As a result, the ecohistorical poetry written by contemporary Native American writers often addresses the tensions created by cross-cultural pollination of specific places. Silko’s attachment to the Laguna-Pueblo and Ray Young Bear’s attachment to the Mesquakie tribal settlement form a poetry that attempts to negotiate a personal and tribal identity rooted in the transcultural spaces that their homelands have become.

Such an array of influential forces speaks toward the difficulty in assessing the primary factors in Native American identity reflected in literature. Native identity, comments David Murray, whether it is “measured by blood, expressed through kinship and genealogy, or through culture and place, remains a complex problem in Indian writing, reflecting the complexity of arguments over Indians’ actual legal and cultural status in America” (81). Among these complexities, Murray identifies that one’s

relationship to the past is one of the most important of these factors: "...it is the problematic relation to the past and the role of the past in memory, personal or tribal, and in self-definition which continues as a major theme" (81). An important measure of ecohistorical poetics is how that relationship with the past manifests itself in the ongoing process of a present cultural space of both traditional and contemporary life-ways. That relationship often manifests itself in noted changes in the landscape, and this confluence of time, place, and culture is at the center of Ray Young Bear's ecohistorical vision, especially in his poems that reconstruct his native Mesquakie settlement as the fictional Black Eagle Child Settlement.

Consider the following lines from Young Bear's *The Rock Island Hiking Club* which describe a portion of the landscape on the Black Eagle Child settlement:

We swear nothing is apocalyptic
while garish beacons from
the tribal gaming complex
create apparitions
in the sky (21)

Here the speaker, assuming a first-person-plural perspective, ironically denies the inevitable change brought upon the tribal lands by the foreboding lights cast in the sky from the tribally sponsored casino. Such economic forces that shape the landscape intrude upon places once imbued with history and meaning. Thus, the speaker draws our attention to the convergence of present and past and future, especially in the closing lines of the poem:

we cradle fine shovels
that are designed to slice
the earth

leaving behind rectangular
shaped markings
of a former industrious
society (21)

The closing of the poem comments on the inevitable mark that human cultures, Native American or otherwise, make upon the land. While Young Bear's ecohistorical poetry speaks of the experience of such transcultural spaces, he often refers to his orientation to his tribal homeland as the inside world, demarcating it from the rest of the "outside" world.

Part of this inside/outside dichotomy is the result of strong linguistic influences on Young Bear. Because he was born in 1950 as a full-blooded member of the Mesquakie tribe located in Iowa, Young Bear's first language is his native Mesquakie, and his poetry and singing performances of traditional songs reveal not only strong ties to traditional language but also certain concerns within Native American tribes about cultural boundaries and geo-political struggle. Such linguistic ties to the history and place of the Mesquakie allow Young Bear a cultural position that results in a poetry of, as James Ruppert has labeled it, mediation. Not wholly identifying with one or the other culture, the poet constructs his or her vision of place and identity across cultural, geo-political, and linguistic boundaries. Ruppert asserts that American Indian writers simultaneously are participants in three literary traditions—the American, pan-Indian and the tribally specific:

Through their work, they express amazing potential for synthesis and creation. They address two audiences—white and Indian, or maybe three—a local one, a pan-Indian one and a white one. This multiplicity of

background and audience forces the work into a complex texture. In this complexity, the writer may utilize the epistemological structures of one culture to illuminate the other, stay within one code or change every other line. This incredible ability to move from one epistemological code to another is what I call mediation. It is the axis which generates the text producing a text which is a record of mediative discourse.

As such a mediator Young Bear's poetry follows this type of shifting—between the inside and outside world of the Mesquakie settlement, between his original tribal first language and English—as it allows his work to construct a complex ecohistorical construction of the Mesquakie settlement.

An important characteristic of the ecohistorical mode is that it raises an awareness to the differences in cultural and regional experience determined by the poet's sense of rootedness to place. In the case of Silko and Young Bear, ethnic and tribal affiliations contribute to such a rooted relationship with the land. Just as Silko's verse in *Storyteller* negotiates blurry territory between and expression of individual and community, Ray Young Bear's work contains its own unique expression of the dynamics between individuality and tribal identity. He has overtly expressed anxieties about being labeled and categorized as a particular type of writer and insists that he has set out to create his own voice in his poetry that is less influenced by the American poets he emulated early in his career. He states, "Some may classify me as an American Indian writer, a Native American and so forth. But I just view myself as me, and trying to stay afloat in this chaotic world" (Moore and Wilson).

Both Silko and Young Bear express similar sentiments toward individuality, and yet their Native American backgrounds differ greatly. Whereas Silko comes from a mixed ethnic background, Young Bear writes from a full-blooded Mesquakie perspective, and his close connection to the history of the geopolitical struggles of within the Mesquakie settlement significantly informs and embitters Young Bear's understanding of the relationship between place and the contemporary American landscape. Commenting upon a surrounding New York landscape during an interview Young Bear stated, "...these places are very beautiful and no wonder people were forced to move from them. All the beautiful places in America belong to the white people now" (Moore and Wilson 206). Because of the long history of his Mesquakie tribe's relationship with their settlement, the appropriation of tribal lands at the hands of Euramericans is a topic that often surfaces in Young Bear's work.

As ecohistorical poetics, then, Young Bear's works express a variety of cross-cultural tensions similar to those found in Silko's, yet some of these tensions are bound up in the history of the Mesquakie's establishing a settlement through the purchase of land rather than a reservation. Much of his work considers the interplay of cultural spaces inside the Mesquakie settlement compared to the "outside world." The impact of his first language's being Mesquakie and not English, and the geopolitical struggles for land over the span of Mesquakie-Euramerican relations contribute to Young Bear's ecohistorical poetics that express specific orientations to cultural, individual, and geographic place. Acutely evident in his poetry is his close relationship to the history of the Mesquakies' struggle to maintain and keep their tribal lands in the wake of westward expansion and geo-political tensions between themselves and white Americans. Part of Young Bear's

expression of an ecohistorical perspective comes from his construction of an inside (Mesquakie settlement) / outside (white Euramerican world) dichotomy. Though, as we will see, such cultural boundaries are not static divisions, as the interplay of traditional Mesquakie and Euramerican culture, the linguistic play between traditional Mesquakie and English in Young Bear's work suggests a crossing and re-crossing of these boundaries.

Young Bear's work follows a progression from the early poems of *Winter of the Salamander* in which the preponderance of poems reflect the patchwork imagery of dreams, visions, and reality, to the narrative poems of *Black Eagle Child*, which project a more fully expressed ecohistorical connection to the land as they fictionally recreate Young Bear's journey toward identifying himself as a writer with an entrenched sense of the cultural layers of his Mesquakie settlement. In a 1994 interview, Young Bear discussed the bicultural nature of the forces that have shaped his writing: "I attribute my writing to my grandmother who instilled in me some of the early aspects of Mesquakie cosmogony and ideology. I am eternally indebted to her, as I am to poets like Robert Bly and Marvin Bell" (Moore and Wilson). Young Bear goes on to cite Charles Bukowski and Galway Kinnell as influential poets early in his career, but as he developed as a poet, he attempted to break away from these influences. "But I stopped reading these poets in 1971," Young Bear stated, "and from that time on, I have not made any effort to keep up with contemporary writers. Only because my philosophies today are more attuned to my own writing processes as opposed to trying to derive influence from other writers" (Moore and Wilson 207).

Young Bear's comments here exemplify the blending of influences in his writing, one grounded in the storytelling tradition through the relationship with his grandmother, and one grounded in a text-based education in poetry with prominent contemporary white poets noted as influential. The combination of bilingual and bicultural upbringing and an exposure to more traditionally Western contemporary poetics results in the recognition of the cultural past and mediation in Young Bear's written work.

This turning from the reading and therefore the influence of white American poets suggests Young Bear's desire to create a wholly original type of poetics that is firmly placed within Mesquakie culture. In an interview with Joseph Bruchac, Young Bear claims that after attending several poetry readings in college in California at which several prominent poets such as Charles Bukowski, Seamus Heaney and Galway Kinnell, he realized that such poets "had limitations, such as the absence of one's roots—which Native Americans have" (344). That experience and insight, Young Bear insists, prompted him to turn back toward his own culture, toward an "aboriginal, primal sort of poetry" (Bruchac 344). The result is a poetics inspired by both Native and Euramerican culture and language.

At the heart of these cross-cultural influences is always an attention to the land and moments when the poet's relationship with the land triggers moments of self-realization, memories of an ancestral voice or traditional stories. The combination of these factors is abundantly clear in Young Bear's first collection of poems titled *Winter of the Salamander* (1980). Inspired largely by dream visions and his cultural past, many of the poems tap directly into his ancestral roots. The first poem of the collection,

“grandmother,” typifies Young Bear’s style in much of this first book, as well as noting the profound cultural impact of his relationship with his grandmother:

if i heard
a voice
coming from
a rock
i’d know
and her words
would flow inside me
like the light
of someone
stirring ashes
from a sleeping fire
at night. (3)

The poem at once takes on a Bukowski-like shape, but it is at the same time powerfully informed by the memory of the grandmother’s language. Along with exposing the reader to his use of dreamlike imagery and metaphor, opening the collection with this poem signifies the importance of the poet’s relationship with his oral past as he equates her words to a light stirring somewhere inside of him. At once the voice is described as internalized and emanating from the land. The land, symbolized by the rock, connects the speaker with his memory and oral past. Thus, the image of the first poem establishes the notion that the poems we read in the rest of the collection come not just from Young Bear but also from the internalized voice of his grandmother as well.

Poems in *Winter of the Salamander* resonate deeply with the link to the cultural past and the search for identity in the modern world. The influence of voices, dreams, and songs infuses the lines of this first collection, as the memory of a voice from the past,

whether it be a family member or friend, is often triggered by a moment during which the speaker interacts with the natural world:

i touch a gentle deer
on the neck with my cold hand.
it informs me of the lines
in the river.
the frozen bait
at the close of october.
from my mother
i hear:.... (130)

This poem, titled “i touch a gentle deer” continues to describe the mother’s warnings against the evils of alcoholism. Through the interaction with the natural landscape, the poet is made aware of “the lines in the river,” which can also be considered as lines of poetry, a poetry fashioned out of the land. This same imagery persists later in the following lines from “a pool of water, a reflection of summer”:

I feel it is poetry swimming under the shallow
river. a time imprinted into one’s mind:
a last beam of sunset between a valley
of trees filled with hovering birds.
insects darting across the river.
...
i remember hearing my friend speak
of the dynamite blast carrying the water
from the dam up into the sky over the hills.
i wished for some magic to come into us
and to lead us to the fish who chose
to remain behind. fish we would never see. (134)

The remembered voice is a recurring image in these and several Young Bear poems. Here the voice recalls the alteration of the natural landscape and the destruction of a natural habitat that the speaker suggests can never be regained.

Voices from the past and the memories that they trigger play a vital part in Young Bear's expression of an ecohistorical rootedness. "Four Songs of Life" reveals his recognition that the oral tradition of his people is something that will connect him to that history:

i remember well
my people's
songs
i will not
reveal to anyone
that i know
these songs
it was intended
for me
to keep
them
in secrecy
for they are now
mine to die with
me. (7)

These lines reflect the deep cultural resonance that traditional song holds for Young Bear, as well as the problems and pressures that come with owning such knowledge, adding to the sense of an inside/outside relationship to cultural places. Significantly contradicting the content of this poem is the fact that Young Bear does indeed perform these songs for general audiences as well as include some of them, as we will see, in his collection of

poetry titled *The Invisible Musician* (1990). Nonetheless, the song serves as an important part of identity formation, as later in the poem in a section titled “the fourth” Young Bear speaks of the power of the song in shaping perception:

here i am
being
taught
to be
a man
with life
and old sacred
songs to guide me alone
and love me
forever. (7)

Here, the song serves as a link to tradition and a force of identity formation as the poet looks toward the future, while always looking back through a perception shaped by the memory of song. A. LaVonne Brown Rouff asserts that a central theme of the book “...is that the individual and the tribe can survive the destructive forces present in the mythic and real world. Survival must come through an attempt to heed the lessons taught by nature, tribal elders, and one’s own instincts”(102). An affinity and reverence for the traditions of the elders are necessary for the survival and preservation of cultural traditions, and Young Bear’s work exemplifies this need, while at the same time recognizing the inevitability of change.

While a significant portion of *Winter of the Salamander* consists primarily of poems constructed from dreams, visions and memories, some poems express more overtly the struggle between the Mesquakie settlement and the outside world. “In whose world do we go on living?” (*Salamander* 135) is the question that opens the poem “in

viewpoint: poem for 14 catfish and the town of tama, iowa.” Later in the poem, the speaker answers the question through a collection of images that suggest the land’s being overtaken by various Euramerican influences:

but the farmers and the local whites
from the nearby town of tama and surrounding
towns, with their usual characteristic
ignorance and disregard, have driven noisily
over the ice and across our lands
on their pickups and snowmobiles,
disturbing the dwindling fish
and wildlife— (133)

The obvious tension here exists between the local Mesquakie and white population, who “disregard” natural spaces and disrupt the natural flow of life with the use of machines that symbolize the destruction of nature through industry and mechanization. The farmer himself becomes a symbol of the use of the landscape for industry and profit. Later lines in the poem read as follows:

...but with the same 17th century
instincts they share with their own town’s
drunken scums who fantasize like ritual
each weekend of finally secluding and beating
a lone indian’s face into a bloody pulp,
they’re no different except for the side
of railroad tracks they were born on
and whatever small town social
prominence they were born into. (136)

The seventeenth-century mentality of white dominance over the local native that Young Bear asserts here has not changed, even across 400 years of the development of America

as a cultural space. Such ecohistorical characteristics surface in Young Bear's first collection, but it is not until he begins to represent the Mesquakie settlement as the fictional Black Eagle Child settlement that his full expression of an ecohistorical poetics begins to take shape.

This shift begins as Young Bear's use of traditional language becomes more frequent over his next few collections of poetry. This inclusion of original Mesquakie language in the poems is another way in which Young Bear specifically mediates across his native and Euramerican cultures and reveals an identity woven out of the interplay of two cultures. As suggested by cultural geographer Peter Jackson in *Maps of Meaning*, individuals identify themselves partly through belonging to "*linguistic communities*, characterized by the possession of shared belief systems, myths, and ideologies, as well as a common language" (161). Since language serves as a significant factor in individual identity formation and modes of perception, multilingual writers such as Young Bear experience a creative process dictated by the several layers of perception their known languages present to them.

This bilingual and bicultural background shapes his or her thought and writing processes; specifically, writers raised in a culture in which English is their second language develop differing ways of thinking about the functionality of language and writing. In "Song/Poetry and Language—Expression and Perception" Native American poet Simon Ortiz writes, "The words, the language of my experience, come from how I understand, how I relate to the world around me, and how I know language as perception" (407). This notion seems to be a powerful force in Young Bear's work as well because he did not speak the English language "comfortably" until he was fifteen or

sixteen years of age (“Wednesdays”). Being situated as such in two overlapping linguistic communities, Mesquakie and English, suggests a perspective that mediates the contemporary and the traditional, place and language simultaneously. An ecohistorical rootedness through both land and language develops as Young Bear begins to include the original Mesquakie language in various poems and stories.

Compared to the very minimal use of tribal language in *Winter of the Salamander*, Young Bear’s second collection *The Invisible Musician* utilizes much more of the original Mesquakie. At four different points in the collection, Young Bear includes Mesquakie songs with opposing English translations, such as in the following example:

Mesquakie Tribal Celebration Songs

<i>Ma ni ma wa wi ka</i>	This flag	
<i>tan a se ki</i>	shall wave	
<i>ke ki we o ni</i>	forever.	
<i>A qwi tta ka na qwa</i>	No, not ever	
<i>ne ka ski te a te ki</i>	shall it be overtaken	
<i>tta ki a na to wa ta</i>	by men of many languages	
<i>ma ni ke ki we o ni</i>	this flag.	(40)

The translation establishes an ecohistorical connection between traditional and contemporary and not simply through the inclusion of the original Mesquakie. The content of the song itself suggests notions of tribal solidarity and sustainability in the face of potential intrusion, loss of cultural space, or other important tribal traditions. As a symbolic marker of both territorial and tribal identity, the flag’s immortality suggests the strong resistance to change. That the song identifies the outside threat as “men of many languages” suggests the importance of the linguistic community’s being an important part

of tribal identity and affiliation and that one form of resistance to the constant threat of potential loss of tribal identity through the transformation of cultural space is retaining the original language of the settlement.

The decision to include and translate the original language for a non-Mesquakie reading audience further enriches Young Bear's role as mediator. Ruppert emphasizes that Native American texts may use "two epistemological poles of traditional Western culture and traditional Native American cultures...to illuminate each other" (33). Further, both the songs and other instances in which Young Bear calls upon linguistic shifts in his poems indicate moments in the texts that can be read through Ruppert's notion of mediation: "...a meditational approach," Ruppert argues, "explores how their texts create a dynamic that brings differing cultural codes into confluence to reinforce and re-create the structures of human life: the self, community, spirit, and the world we perceive" (3). While *Winter of the Salamander* contains a very minimal amount of Mesquakie—apart from the opening inscription, the tribal language is evoked only in one more instance in the final poem of the collection—the inclusion of complete songs in Mesquakie in *The Invisible Musician* indicates a transition in Young Bear's work toward more frequently employing such linguistic shifts. Such shifts add to Young Bear's construction and deconstruction of the inside/outside relationship between the Mesquakie settlement and American culture.

Along with these linguistic ties to the community, some poems speak of the important identification with the land in Mesquakie cosmology. Titled "The Significance of a Water Animal" the opening poem speaks of the creation of the land first, and then the people from it:

A certain voice of *Reassurance*
tells me a story of a water animal
diving to make land available.
Next, from the Creator's
own heart and flesh
O ki ma was made:
the progeny of divine
leaders. And then
from the Red Earth
came the rest of us. (3)

The creation story stresses that the origins of the people are tied directly to the earth itself, separate from the first human *O ki ma* (The Sacred Chief) who provides spiritual guidance to those who were shaped from the earth. Young bear adds a final stanza to the poem that evokes the voice of his grandmother:

“To believe otherwise,”
as my grandmother tells me,
“or simply to be ignorant,
Belief and what we were given
to take care of,
is on the verge
of ending . . . ” (4)

The grandmother's apocalyptic vision here is particularly effective in opening the collection. Throughout the presentation of life on the Black Eagle Child settlement, Young Bear illustrates the kinds tensions created by the inevitable sense of change and loss brought about by the confluence of American and Mesquakie culture. Across Young Bear's work, the voice of the grandmother becomes a symbolic marker of history, language, and place.

Beyond evoking the voice of the Grandmother who often is a symbolic voice of the mythic past, Young Bear's work stresses additional familial ties to the actual geopolitical history of the Mesquakie, a history that becomes important in his re-imagination of his home region through the fictional Black Eagle Child Settlement. Forced by the government in the 1830's to move to a reservation in Kansas, the Mesquakie spent more than thirty years displaced from their ancestral homeland in Tama, Iowa. In 1865 a group of Mesquakie, one of whom was Young Bear's great-great grandfather, purchased part of the original ancestral land back from the government (Beard 136). To the present day the Mesquakie reside in this settlement, which remains distinctly different from a reservation. Young Bear's strong and direct familial ties to this political past suggest his commitment to continue the preservation of cultural past through his writing, his band named The Woodland Song and Dance Troupe, and through his performance of traditional Mesquakie songs at poetry readings.

Their historical success in reinhabiting a traditional homeland creates a unique dynamic in relation to the cultural geographic places the Mesquakie occupy. A number of legal complexities surround the history of the Mesquakie and the land, resulting in the questions Jim Cocola poses concerning the inside/outside dynamic of the settlement: "do they exist in a cultural space inside or outside the United States?... *or* do they exist in a cultural space *both* inside *and* outside the United States?" (283). So, the Mesquakie settlement is an anomaly among Native American cultural spaces in that through a series of displacements, they have come to purchase and own the land upon which they reside, and thus they have established as self-contained community "whose foundations are

rooted underfoot rather than elsewhere, and whose conceptions of the associative are fundamentally territorial” (Cocola 284).

So, historically, Young Bear’s sense of place is rooted both in the mythic and geopolitical history of the land as well as in the linguistic interplay of the English and Mesquakie languages. His early writing in English was shaped by his native first language of Mesquakie, and, following Simon Ortiz, this suggests how cultural ties to the first language play a large role in shaping a particular worldview, as well as a strong sense of connection to a linguistic community and homeland. In a biographical sketch of Young Bear David Moore writes, “Early in his career he wrote by thinking in Meskwaki and translating his thoughts into English. Although he no longer follows that procedure, he often writes in a heightened, formal style that echoes Meskwaki oratory.” This bilingual method of composition creates significant distinctions of style, content, identity perception, and the potentiality for mediation. That Young Bear’s work reflects the combination of both Native and traditional Euramerican notions of poetry also produces, as it does in several Native American writers such as we have seen in Silko’s work, a palpable tension as he negotiates the boundaries between his tribal culture and his western education. That tension, as well as other complex tensions that surface within the Mesquakie community, is illuminated in Young Bear’s the thinly veiled fictional portrayal of it in *Black Eagle Child: The Facepaint Narratives*.

In a much more overt way compared to *Winter of the Salamander* and *The Invisible Musician* the semi-autobiographical narrative poem *Black Eagle Child: The Facepaint Narratives* constructs an ecohistorical vision of place, where we see the full impact of the multiple influences on Young Bear’s poetry: language, memory, song, and

land. In a series of interrelated narrative poems, Young Bear re-imagines his Mesquakie upbringing and personal quest toward becoming a writer through the fictional, semi-autobiographical voice of Edgar Bearchild. Just as Silko shapes her poem-stories into lines of verse to represent the oral aspect of storytelling, Young Bear also develops a stylistic form of prose-verse. Written primarily as a long narrative poem, with intermittent sections of prose, the shaping of the writing into verse paragraphs indicates the strong impulse of oral storytelling, as Young Bear acknowledges that he sat down to write a novel, but what naturally resulted was the “poetic style” in which it was written (“Wednesdays”). The line breaks are dictated neither by rhyme nor meter, and the work takes on the appearance of blank verse. This decision to shape the text as a poem resembles Silko’s decision to shape her story-poems into lines of verse to convey a sense of oral storytelling on the page. Such a technique is an attempt to create what Dennis Tedlock calls an “open text”—one whose shape is determined by audible characteristics and “the stops and starts of dramatic timing” (7).

Many of the narrative poems in *The Facepaint Narratives* follow Edgar Bearchild as he comes of age and notes the changes in the culture and the landscape that shape his understanding of himself and his “place” in America as full-blooded Native American. Through this poetic re-creation of the culture of the Mesquakie settlement, Young Bear effectively captures the specific regionalism and unique cultural space occupied by his people. Young Bear makes readers well aware of the settlement as a place in which both native and Euramerican cultures overlap, the result of which is a transcultural space of both acceptance and resistance. The book opens as a Thanksgiving party on the settlement is breaking up and its organizer Dolores Fox-King remarks, “...national

holidays are for Indians, too!” (1) to which the voice of Bearchild responds, “But tribal members were keenly aware affairs / such as Christmas, Halloween, and Easter / were meaningless” (1).

Later in this opening section that describes Bearchild and his best friend Ted Facepaint participating in a peyote ceremony, Bearchild muses, “Christianity was the white / man’s belief. What the hell was it doing here?” (12). The ironic turn of phrase here suggests another aspect of Young Bear’s mediating voice, questioning the existence of the intrusion of the Euramerican belief system with a linguistic idiom constructed from that very same belief system displays at once the significance Euramerican impact on the language and a simultaneous resistance to such influences. Such linguistic play negates any notion of a pre-contact “native” culture and emphasizes the syncretism of contemporary one.

Using the settings of a tribal ceremony to juxtapose the young and old generations of the Black Eagle Child settlement, Young Bear opens the book with two narratives that tell the story of Young Ted Facepaint’s and Bearchild’s participation in the ceremony with mainly tribal elders. As the ceremony begins, the elder Facepaint, after a short traditional song, introduces the tribe’s origins:

There exists a past which is holy and more
close to us than ourselves. In gatherings
such as we have tonight, we would be remiss
in not remembering it, acknowledging it
as something new for the young minds here.
For us, the aged, we must never let it grow
old, for it is as much a religious history
as it is tribal. We believe it is in part

why our families reside here:...

(21)

The elder Facepaint proceeds to tell the origin myth of Star Medicine, the hallucinatory drug taken by those who participate in the ceremony. The myth is tied both to the cultural and geographical history of the Black Eagle Child Settlement. The description of the ceremony juxtaposes the young and the old, as well as images of Christianity and tribal religion, and pop culture references. Because the elders cannot remember the exact meaning of Bearchild's tribal name, *Ka ka to*, only that he was named after some who rode horses a lot, Bearchild is given a nickname: "He was a superb horseman. / I will therefore call you Randolph Scott" (25). These early scenes importantly set up the relationship between tribal tradition and Euramerican beliefs that form the basis of Edgar Bearchild's journey toward understanding of himself and his sense of place in relation to the Black Eagle Child Settlement and what is often labeled the "outside" world.

This interplay of past and present pervades the whole narrative poem, and as the loosely connected sections tell the story of Bearchild's journey toward becoming a writer, his identity as such is closely tied to his understanding of the slow transformation of the Black Eagle Child Settlement caused by outside influences. In a section titled "The Introduction of Grape Jell-O," Bearchild comments upon tensions among the tribe's elders and younger generations during a summer ceremony:

With the gradual acceptance of modern
change, fate dictated we would lose
some aspects of our multifarious religion.
We never accepted it, however.
We led on proudly on the exterior,
never quite knowing the masks
of our fabulous lives were transparent,

revealing to one and all that our insides
were in disarray. (60)

These lines emphasize Bearchild's inner conflict initiated by his growing up in a changed world and struggling with internalizing the past with unavoidable change. The tension between the cultural past and the present resonates throughout the work, as the issue of inevitable change causes the narrator to question his past and present:

Change was unavoidable;
yet we blamed ourselves for creating new mythology
and rituals from the last traces of the old stories,
our grandfather's ways. There were critics on how
proper ceremonies should be executed. Possessing
various interpretations of the prayers, songs,
and rituals was inevitable. But exactness
was touted as the only form of communion.
Since parts of ourselves perished slowly
with those who "ceased to see the daylight,"
our keepers emulated the customs in
a languishing way. (60-61)

It is natural, as reflected here, for the elder members of a community to lament the loss of the old traditions or the degrees to which they have changed. Yet, the narrator recognizes the inevitability of the change that results through the transmission of cultural traditions like ritual and song throughout the generations. The price paid for such a transformation, notes Bearchild, is gradually losing part of one's identity that is tied to the past.

The rituals, songs, and stories specifically locate Bearchild's identity as being constructed within the Black Eagle Child Settlement. Yet, as the narrative progresses, Bearchild on occasion leaves and returns to the settlement in a pattern that resembles

Bevis' notion of the homing plot. In an important moment of homecoming, Edgar Bearchild, as he returns to the settlement from college prep classes, describes the land upon which the settlement sits as "...the vast desolate stretch of corn and soybean fields" (46). He goes on to contrast the landscape with that of Decorah, Iowa:

Geographically, I preferred the rocky terrain
that surrounded Luther College and the community
of Decorah, Iowa. The air was surprisingly cooler,
the people more friendly, and the perspective
of land behind was exemplary. The place,
I was told, where monolithic glaciers stopped
thousands of years ago, carving out the buttes
and deeply recessed valleys. How I wished
the theory had included Black Eagle Child.
Why didn't the Boy-Chief, who initiated
the historic purchase of our land, choose
to go further north? What made him stop here?

In Grandmother's voice I heard the answer:... (46-47)

In another instance in which the land triggers the memory of a past voice and a story attached to it, what follows is the story of how the Boy-Chief chose the spot for the settlement based on an ancient story of Dances Lead and a divine revelation that took place there. Here, Bearchild's return to the landscape of his home incites the historical and mythical stories linked to that particular geography, in this case in the form of the oral narrative of his grandmother. This response to a specific place is not only one of history, but also a specific memory of the oral storytelling tradition that passed that history to Bearchild himself. And although he expresses something lacking in the

topography of the land upon which Black Eagle Child Settlement rests, he recognizes his own historical ties to the past embedded in the land and that:

...it wasn't what stretched
endlessly beyond the borders of the sanctuary
that mattered, it was the people themselves
and their cherished woodlands-oriented beliefs. (48)

Bearchild recognizes the connection here between place, community, beliefs, and those factors that contribute to his sense of self within that particular society. The fact that he must leave the settlement to pursue his education further suggests the interplay of the inside and outside worlds that Young Bear presents through the narratives.

Eventually, Bearchild is drawn away from the settlement to the west coast to pursue an education that cannot be provided from within the settlement. In this section, identified as taking place in 1970 and titled "The Year of Jefferson Airplane," Bearchild narrates that "The transition / from the prehistoric Midwest was shocking, / to say the least" (110). Bearchild narrates the process of adjusting to a culture where he felt "out of place" which led him to the use of Star-Medicine as "a cure from the horrendous absence of relatives, / friends, and the Black Eagle Child landscape" (112).

Ultimately, Bearchild begins to construct an identity and understanding of place based on his leaving the familiar landscapes of the Midwest for "the western edge / of the North American continent. Going / as far away from 'the rest' / seemed the most logical choice" (113). Bearchild suggests here a desire to escape the confines of home toward some sense of liberation and freedom from the bounds of the settlement. Yet it is in process of leaving and returning home that elucidates Bearchild's understanding that his

identity is connected inextricably to his homeland and that his destiny is to become a poet.

Bearchild's psychological readjustment to home requires his wrapping himself in a literal and symbolic paper cocoon by which, he states, "metamorphosis was my only salvation" (149). In such a state Bearchild notes, "In the blindness / the words from my childhood and past alighted / on my sluggish tongue" (149). Here, the narrative transitions into a long prose section titled "In the First Place of My Life," in which Bearchild recounts specific childhood memories. These ultimately lead toward the revelation that his desire to become a poet and storyteller is rooted in the storytelling moments with his grandmother and specifically origin stories that suggest the animistic nature of Bearchild's tribal cosmology that preaches a spiritual interconnectedness of all life. The section concludes, "This acknowledgement of an invisible, life-affecting element, hovering around us, instilled respect and understanding of our tenuous existence" (165). Like earlier poems in *Winter of the Salamander* and *The Invisible Musician*, the voice from the past reveals a connection to the history of the land and a personal relationship to it.

Bearchild comes to his revelation by returning home both physically and in memories. Through following this pattern of leaving and returning, *Black Eagle Child* resembles the characteristic homing plot that Bevis applies to other Native American fiction. In Young Bear's narrative poem, the cultural past and present merge within the protagonist to formulate a clearer sense of self. As depicted by Young Bear the semi-fictional Black Eagle Child Settlement represents the tribal lands as a complex transcultural space, a place where Young Bear's characters move within and across

shifting cultural boundaries where images of tribal history intersect with pop culture images of contemporary America. Ultimately, Bearchild finds his identity as a writer and as a tribal member in both his memory of voices from the past and how those voices contribute to his present and future sense of place and self. The formation of such an identity, Young Bear suggests in his narrative, necessitates a journey away from home as well as a return toward an understanding of home by re-establishing a cultural, tribal, linguistic, and historical rootedness.

As an ecohistorical poet negotiating both time and place, Young Bear projects a bilingual and bicultural worldview in his poetry that depicts the experience of place, both inside and outside the settlement, as one constructed through a complex relationship among history, cosmology, past and present. Young Bear confirms this dynamic in the afterward to *Black Eagle Child*:

Throughout the twenty years I have been involved with writing, I have attempted to maintain a delicate equilibrium with my tribal homeland's history and geographic surroundings and the world that changes its face along the borders. Represented in the whirlwind of mystical themes and modern symbols...the word-collecting process is an admixture of time present and past, of direction found and then lost, of actuality and dream.

(260)

Young Bear asserts here that his writing is an interchange among various factors that constitute time, place and culture. His ecohistorical construction of place across his developing body of work defines place as a continual process impacted by internal and external forces. Young Bear's ecohistorical poetics is one that expresses an awareness of

the effects of change to the physical landscape and the settlement as a linguistic community. This blending of forces that exists within the process of place results in Young Bear's poetic expression that is simultaneously Native American, contemporary American, and ecohistorical.

As these readings of Silko and Young Bear within the framework of the ecohistorical mode suggest, their work is exemplary of the multiple ways in which the poetry of place can heighten our awareness that place is not simply a static location but also a dynamic experience constructed through cultural, political, geographical and cosmological forces. Silko's and Young Bear's home regions of Laguna-Pueblo and Tama, Iowa are understood as specific geographies of contested space resulting from the overlapping and blending of both Euramerican and tribal influences. Read through the frame of the ecohistorical mode, both poets' visions of their home regions express the intimate connection among the geopolitical history of the land, the culture that inhabits it, the stories and songs the emanate from it, and the writer that bears the important weight of both maintaining and representing it.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION: THE SELF IN PLACE

The earth says have a place, be what that place
requires; hear the sound the birds imply
and see as deep as ridges go behind
each other.

~William Stafford

Ecocriticism has opened exploratory pathways for poetry rooted in place. The three place modes derived from my sojourns into the work of six poets seem to be only the beginning of the possibilities that a cross-disciplinary nexus of ecocriticism, literature, and cultural geography might present. Any foray into theoretical thinking challenges one's perspective and perception, and after being transported to Alaska via Haines, the Laguna Pueblo via Silko, the Pacific Northwest via Hugo, California via Snyder, and Tama, Iowa via Young Bear, I find myself back in Wright's Ohio Valley, composing these final pages in a home that sits only one block from the Ohio River. On daily walks with my son and the dog, we parallel a long history of transformations, and I am constantly reminded of J. B. Jackson's comment, "Landscape is history made visible" (qtd. in Horowitz x).

On a footpath converted from the old B&O railroad, we head north along the Ohio River Valley, and after a mile or so we reach the Pike Island Dam that spans the width of the river, a looming symbol of humans' technological attempt to manipulate and harness the forces of nature. Having been where I have been transported by the contemporary place poets of this dissertation and the various cultural and place theorists whose work has informed my analysis, I now look upon the landscape of my own home with a heightened sense of what it means to be "placed." If the exploration of just these

few poets through the application of the three modes can incite reevaluation of place for me, it stands to reason that the modes, as a way of reading, may do the same for other readers and potentially for students in the classroom.

This dissertation has not been an attempt at an all-inclusive treatment of America's poetry of place; any such attempt would be a massive undertaking, given the multitude of poetry now being produced in America. Joseph Parisi writes, "That more poetry is being written today than in all history seems probable, if hard to prove.... There can be no doubt, however, that more poetry than ever is being *printed*" (3). Rather than attempt an all-inclusive regional representation, I have sought in my dissertation to construct a framework of reading that will allow us to incorporate aspects of place-studies as viable theoretical and critical approaches to poetry. As scholars have acknowledged a resurgence in the interest in localized place studies, an attention to regionally attuned poetry should be valued as participating in the various aspects of culture that contribute to the construction of place.¹

Similar to the way several Native American poets function as mediators between cultures, all place poets can fulfill a significant role as mediators between the human and non-human. And while, as argued in the preceding chapters, the experience of place is a highly subjective one, the place modes can allow us to consider a poet's individual expression of the experience of place as it informs and deepens the value we invest in the

¹ The following provide good, yet by no means comprehensive, catalogues and works of recent place poets: *Windfall: A Journal of Poetry and Place* (2001-present); "Chapter 4: The Poetry of Place" in *Containing Multitudes: Poetry in the United States Since 1950* (1998); Quetchenbach's "Primary Concerns: The Development of Current Environmental Identity Poetry" in Bryson's *Ecopoetry: A Critical Introduction* (2002); "Teaching Post-World War II American Poetry as Environmental Literature" in Christensen, Long, and Waage's *Teaching North American Environmental Literature* (2008) and Peter Macuck's "Outside, Inside" (2009).

places we know, cherish, or dislike. And while I have only touched upon a handful of American places in this dissertation, the possibilities for place-based analysis in contemporary poetry span from coast to coast and beyond. “Now, in the last decade of the century,” write Moramarco and Sullivan, “every region of the United States can validate its claim to be an area where poetry is written, published, and appreciated...all fifty states, to varying degrees, now appear on the literary map” (122). Because of this trend, more and more places can become visible via the work of poets who speak from them. Michael Kowaleski recognizes an increased interest in regional and place-based study:

This new cross-disciplinary interest in the idea of place has arisen along with fairly prominent signs of revitalized regional culture. Every major region of the country now has its own center for regional studies, membership in local and state historical societies continues to increase, new regional book awards honor local talent, regional theaters, literary journal, bookstores, and publishers hold on (and often flourish) despite a sluggish economy. (172)

Now more than ever, there is a value and an interest in poetry that consciously establishes the multilayered meanings of place, that functions as important part of the continued process and construction of place, and that participates in defining the relationship between human culture and nature. Concurrently, the rise of ecocriticism provides lenses through which these poets and their work may be explored.

The tripartite place-mode approach developed in this dissertation, along with revealing the various complexities of place poetics, serves as potential model to attune

readers toward both revaluating the function of poetry in the ongoing process of place and reassessing their own relationships with the places they inhabit. Reading a poem from this placed perspective, from the ground up so to speak, with as much of a sense of the place from which it speaks as possible, adds potential layers of meaning, as well as cultural and personal significance. Such an attunement to place allows us to consider more fully terms like “nature” and “wilderness” and to consider where the human fits within the various contemporary constructions of each. In the structure and discussion of this dissertation I have suggested inherent differences in Euramerican worldviews compared to Native American worldviews as they relate to phenomenological responses to place. Reflected in this contrast is the fact that attitudes toward nature, landscape, and wilderness are deeply ingrained in and dependent upon the cultural affiliations, perspectives, and identities of the poets themselves. While current Ecocriticism challenges and critiques the anthropocentrism of contemporary Euramerican culture, poets such as Gary Snyder push toward a bioregional perspective and way of life that falls somewhere between contemporary and traditional life-ways.

At the outset of this dissertation, I posed the following major questions: Does poetry possess a power to alter our perception based on how we view and understand our relationship with landscapes, the environment, nature, home, and culture, potentially leading us toward a reevaluation of the boundaries between the cultural and natural world? Can ecocriticism and place poetry shift our perspective of these binaries toward an understanding of these forces as intrinsically related elements of a balanced whole of which humans are a small part, since occidental Euramerican perspectives continue to

construct reality through binary oppositions such as nature / culture and wilderness / civilization? The answer to each of these questions is “Yes.”

The framework provided by the three place-modes allows us to consider more fully the complex relationship between human culture and nature. Jonathan Bate asserts that “culture and environment are held together in a complex and delicate web” (23). Bate reminds us here of the difficulty in removing the human from nature. Considered within the framework of the place modes, we see that while the poets discussed in this dissertation may not actively seek to provide a voice *for* nature, they illuminate the ways in which we view ourselves in relation to our surroundings, both cultural and natural.

Since poetry is the construct of the human imagination, we are reminded that poetry is a product of human culture, that the poem is shaped by and filtered through human experience. As such, any voice *for* nature that poetry might actively seek to provide is mediated through human perception and language, both of which are “inescapably anthropocentric” (Kern 430). A contemporary poetics of place viewed through the framework of the place modes ideally shows us from a human perspective the intersection of culture and nature, thus allowing us to re-evaluate both anthropocentric and ecocentric worldviews, ultimately leading us toward a more balanced perspective. The modes of place poetry attempt to explore that dynamic as fully as possible, and if as readers we can approach a poem with the place-focus offered by each mode, we can uncover the value in poetry that values place—from the preoccupation with the self of the landscape mode, to the escapism and reinhabitation of the contemporary pastoral, to the shared ground of the ecohistorical.

Determining various expressions of place through the modes can potentially lead us toward what Robert Kern refers to as “open[ing] up some space within our inevitably anthropocentric identities and allow ecocentric awareness to take its place there and to play a greater role in our perception and behavior” (443). Kern’s “Fabricating Ecocentric Discourse in the American Poem (and Elsewhere)” argues for an ecocriticism that recognizes human’s unavoidable and inherent anthropocentrism, and calls for a rethinking of the ecocentric / anthropocentric dynamic by acknowledging the implausibility of becoming completely one or the other. Such a rethinking would lead toward “a broader outlook, even a more human one, in the sense that as humans we exist as both part of nature and apart from it. Accordingly, anthropocentrism and ecocentrism are both part of what we are. As conceptual possibilities, they are our invention, and, if we think in terms of both, they offer us the opportunity to redefine ourselves as beings on the earth...” (443). Kern’s suggestion is useful here when considered in light of the scope of the three place-modes and when viewing the place poet as one whose verse creates a dialog across these two seemingly opposed perspectives. Such a dialogue can reveal to us the destructiveness caused by anthropocentrism, leading us toward more ecocentric ways of thinking, or as Kern writes, “a greater attunement to the place in which our experience happens to unfold” (426).

Following Kern in seeking to balance these traditionally polarized conceptions of eco- and anthro-, Scott Hess argues for a perspective in contemporary life that recognizes an “everyday nature,” calling for a way of looking for and experiencing the nature in everyday life, rather than viewing nature as some elusive and untouched space in the

wilderness, or as a potential romantic site for spiritual connection and renewal. Hess argues the following:

...we need a different idea of “nature” that includes such everyday relationships and experience, even in its most common and untranscendent forms. Respect for everyday nature is thus not just a matter of breaking human/nature dualism, but also breaking the more subtle bonds between our ideas of nature and the self, along with related ideas of art, and spirituality which support and accompany them. (97)

As the place-modes have revealed, this kind of conceptual shift in our understanding of nature asks us to contemplate the human, the individual, and the community in relation to their environment toward a more harmonious relationship with the places that human culture inhabits.

Place-based readings of American poetry, then, hinge not only upon the multiple ways we view nature, but also upon multiple aspects of the cultures that inhabit it. Issues of gender, race, ethnicity, language, and socioeconomic status, are all aspects of culture that are predicated upon the ongoing process of the occupation of place and space. If we consider a place-based, ecocritical approach as a convergence of environmental and cultural geographical perspectives, this is a step toward revaluing place and developing a “glocal” perspective. Such a place-based approach can aid in shifting our understanding of previously opposed binaries, as William Cronon points out the dangers in the ways in which humans have constructed the idea of wilderness: “To the extent that we celebrate wilderness as the measure with which we judge civilization, we reproduce the dualism that sets humanity and nature at opposite poles. We thereby leave ourselves little hope of

discovering what an ethical, sustainable, *honorable* human place in nature might actually look like” (17). Cronon warns against continuing to perpetuate ideas of wilderness that polarize the relationship between humans and nature. Landscape, contemporary pastoral, and ecohistorical poetics serve precisely this function—locate the human within nature, recognizing each as part of the other.

The poet of place both composes places as the confluence of the human and non-human world, as well as serves as a mediating voice between the two. Favoring the term “ecopoet” where I would “place-poet,” J. Scott Bryson asserts, “While virtually all ecopoets are indeed place-makers who repeatedly encourage us to value and create place, their writings simultaneously push readers to appreciate and even revere *space*” (*West* 16). Thus, as readers transported to the various places of intense meaning for the poets who render them, we can develop a reverence for locations where we have never been. If place poetry can potentially achieve that end, and if we continue to develop fields of cultural studies in literature that value culture, race, ethnicity, and gender as applicable material for literary analysis, why not value equally the places that those cultures inhabit as intrinsic to that analysis as well? As the development of ecocriticism continues, and as scholars continue to develop, expand, re-think and challenge its positions, the significance of regional and place-based analysis will only continue to grow along with it.

Becoming rooted and placed in today’s diverse, hyper-technologized, frenetic contemporary world requires a more valued relationship and understanding with the places that provide us with a basis of cultural identity. And so, through the poetry of place, illuminated through ecocriticism and cultural geography, we can come to re-think our understanding of what it means to be “placed,” to conceptually re-position ourselves

within our own particular cultural spaces. My organization of the place-modes has suggested a trajectory from an “I” / eye that looks from the land inward, as in the landscape mode, toward an “I” / eye that looks outward from the self, as in the ecohistorical mode and recognizes the individual as an intrinsic part of the whole. These perspectives voiced through the poets in this dissertation have allowed us to consider more fully the symbolic value of the industrial ruins of failed mill-towns and the significance of re-imagined landscapes of home, to re-think our relationship with the wilderness, to strive toward adopting traditional life-ways through reinhabitation, and to contemplate more fully an ecohistorical connection to place.

Ultimately, the spectrum of place orientations and the relationships between poetry and place offered by reading through the modes opens up a variety of possibilities for future study, especially the consideration of a number of poets who by restrictions of time and place could not be included in this study. More extensive readings of poets such as Wendell Berry, Lorine Niedecker, William Stafford, and Jimmy Santiago Baca seem particularly fitting for consideration through the ecohistorical mode. Potential also abounds for a place-modes analysis of several American long poems such as Charles Olson’s *Maximus Poems* William Carlos Williams’s *Patterson*. Additionally, poets such as A. R. Ammons, Theodore Roethke, and Mary Oliver present potential readings through both the landscape and contemporary pastoral modes. Certainly, while my focus remained on American poets, the modes are not exclusive to nationality, and as such, writers like the Caribbean poet Kamau Brathwaite, whose work explores the relationship between language, identity, and place, can be explored through the ecohistorical mode.

The importance of place as a theoretical concept continues to gain momentum and validity in literary studies, and as place-studies theorist Lawrence Buell reminds us, “There never was an is without a where” (55). The poet of place, then, whether through the landscape, contemporary pastoral, or ecohistorical modes, fulfills, and will continue to fulfill, an important communal and artistic role in the continual process of place. Ultimately, the three place-modes, along with opening up these future paths of study and potential analysis, allow us to view place-oriented poets as important voices who speak as part of a fabric woven out the interconnection of nature, language, and culture so that we may more fully locate the self in nature.

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