Drinking This Champagne Water: Walks With Rousseau and Muir in Nature

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> These blessed mountains are so compactly filled with God's beauty, no petty personal hope or experience has room to be. Drinking this champagne water is pure pleasure, so is breathing the living air, and every movement of limbs is pleasure...(John Muir, Nature Writings 228)

Sixty years separate Jean-Jacques Rousseau's death (1778) from John Muir's birth (1838). Muir is not considered a philosopher, and Rousseau is not considered an environmentalist, but each man had an abiding passion for the solace occasioned by long walks in nature, and saw in Nature[*] an expression of God. Each loved the mountains, whether hiking or appreciating them from a distance, and each shared a love of flowers, and of moving water, and each saw himself reflected in the cold, still waters of alpine lakes. This paper addresses the parallels between these men, and the divergences and convergences, which until now have not been sufficiently explored.

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* By capitalizing the word "nature," as other, cited, writers do, I distinguish lower-case nature, representing the natural world, from capital "N" Nature—the idea of an uncorrupted, authentic representation which includes the world and us within it, often associated with a deity.

In those papers I have read on Muir, references to Rousseau are scant. Several works compare Henry David Thoreau with Rousseau, most of them examining their social philosophies,[*] but as Joseph Lane (2006) notes, "the lines of intellectual transmission from Rousseau to Thoreau and his successors…are, at best, indirect."

Indirect, but not indistinct. If I were to list several founders of contemporary environmental philosophy—which I am aware would be contentious—there is good reason to include Jean-Jacques Rousseau.[†]

PARALLELS AND DIVERGENCES

Rousseau and Muir preferred botany over the hard sciences and both were, to differing degrees, autodidacts: Rousseau was, with the exception of books his father read to him, self-taught; while Muir attended university, he did so without having completed secondary education, and he did not complete a degree. Each was comfortable with and indeed often preferred their own company, particularly when outdoors. Socially, Rousseau found (and often imagined) himself time and again "betrayed" by those he once called friends, and was often embarrassed, indeed tongue-tied, among the philosophes in the salons, whereas Muir was gregarious, formed many lifelong friendships and was an tireless raconteur. They both had deistic beliefs based on their Christian upbringing, but neither man was conventionally religious, and

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* See, for instance: "Wayside Challenger: Some Remarks on the Politics of Henry David Thoreau," Heinz Eulau. *The Antioch Review,* Vol. 9, No. 4 (Winter, 1949), pp. 509-522; "The Case Against Thoreau," Vincent Buranelli. *Ethics*, Vol. 67, No. 4 (Jul., 1957), pp. 257-268; and an unpublished 1969 dissertation by Rice University doctoral candidate Gary Lambert, *Rousseau and Thoreau: Their Concept of Nature*.

[†] Joy Palmer includes Rousseau and Muir in *Fifty Key Thinkers on the Environment* (Routledge, 2001). Also listed are: Chuang Tzu, Aristotle, Virgil, St. Francis, Montaigne, Linnaeus, Goethe, Malthus, Clare, Emerson, Darwin, Wallace, Humboldt, Thoreau, Ruskin, Leopold, Marsh, Carson, Schumacher, Erlich, Plumwood, Callicott, Singer, among others. I would add Lovelock and Naess.

neither attended church. Even though there is no evidence that Muir read Rousseau*, a connection can be drawn between Rousseau's socio-political philosophy, which inspired a revolution, with Muir's eco-theological texts which inspired a President, and a country, to save wilderness for future generations.

Both men were botanists; both took multi-day, cross-country walks early in their lives; Rousseau was unable and Muir unwilling to return to his birthplace; and both had lifelong, theological connections to Nature, which each expressed in poetic (and in some cases, hyperbolic) prose, which gave deistic credit for Nature. Even their preference for women was similar, in that Rousseau found in his youthful relationship with Mme de Warens a substitute for a mother he'd lost after his birth, and a mentor and sexual "initiator," while Muir's early relationship with Jeanne Carr, the older wife (twenty years difference between her and Muir) of a university professor, quickly deepened beyond the collegial. While there is no evidence that Muir had a sexual relationship with anyone other than his wife Louie, a woman younger than he, for whom Jeanne Carr had smoothed the way with introductions and effusive letters, Muir and Carr "became more intimate later on…[and] his feelings toward her…are impossible to read reliably: was she a mother figure,…or the older sister type…or was she sexually attractive to him?" (Worster 79-80). Both men, in fact, were less interested in libidinous affairs than they were in the intellectual stimulation they enjoyed with their female friends, although Rousseau certainly had many opportunities for a liaison amoureuse.

As I alternated reading texts by and about Rousseau and Muir, I became aware of a vanishing point on my personal horizon, a convergence at which history, literature,

* From a personal correspondence with Muir's biographer, Donald Worster (7 Nov. 2009)

philosophy and "self" merged. It wasn't a mystical experience; quite the opposite, it was forced and artificial, but nevertheless it was a method by which I could connect myself, and my experience of nature, to their writing. I would choose one or the other, Rousseau or Muir, or sometimes both, and go for a walk: at some point I would imagine one or the other's shade* accompanying me, to engage in a dialogue, or to enjoy reverie in an empathetic resonance.

JOURNALS

In his *Confessions*, Rousseau wrote: "I went to take a walk by myself, I dreamed about my great system, I threw some of it onto paper with the aid of a blank booklet and a pencil which I always had in my pocket" (309). This statement contradicts an earlier one in which he regrets not having jotted notes during his walks, "those I made up during my travels, those I composed and I never wrote...", but alas, "I did not forsee that I would have ideas; they came when they pleased, not when I pleased" (136). Perfectionist writer that he was, polishing a manuscript did not come easily: "My scratched out, blotted, mixed up, indecipherable manuscripts attest to the trouble they have cost me,...I have turned and re-turned some of my passages for five or six nights in my head before they have been in a condition to be set down" (95-96).

Muir's first long-form written work was the journal he kept on his walk into the South. Worster notes that "words crowd the margins...many of them crossed out or written along the edges as he searched for the right choice" (Worster 122). Each of the journals he kept throughout his life has pencilled drawings of plants, geologic

*Shade, as in the classical sense of a spirit or ghost--OED: II.5.c: 1667 Milton P.L. x. 249 "Thou my Shade Inseparable must with mee along."

formations, and of himself in situ; if a notebook wasn't at hand, he "randomly pencilled notes on paper bags or on the margins of newspapers, fiercely saving every scrap" (Worster 455), making Muir's job of later rewriting them, and that of his secretary and typist of compiling his notes, Herculean.

WALKING

Much of their writing depicts or is influenced by walking, which in the 1760s had not yet become a literary genre, as it did toward the end of the century[*] and into the next with the advent of middle-class pedestrianism. The rise of this mode of travel, which earlier had been the privilege of the poor, occurs not long after Rousseau's *Julie, or the New Heloise,* became a bestseller (Jarvis 6-28). Robin Jarvis doesn't go so far as to attribute the rising interest in cross-country walking to Rousseau, but it is probable that Rousseau's enthusiasm for walking, expressed primarily in the *Confessions,* may have encouraged the sport. One of the earliest published accounts of Continental pedestrian travel is William Coxe's *Sketches of the Natural, Civil and Political State of Swisserland* (1776-1786). By the late 1780's pedestrian touring, Jarvis contends, "was not a matter of a few 'isolated affairs,' but was a practice of rapidly growing popularity among the professional, educated classes" (Jarvis 12).

Rebecca Solnit contends that walking arose from a new aesthetic in gardens, replacing the formal, walled Renaissance and Baroque gardens with ones which reproduced an experience of the Italian countryside, in which walls disappeared and gardens (which were already vast estates) apparently went on forever (Solnit 84-103).

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[*] One of the first self-consciously literary essays on walking is William Hazlitt's essay "On Going on a Journey," published 1822. See the appendix.

For Rousseau and Muir, walking was more than an economical means of getting from one place to another. Walking was a political act. Rousseau opposed, in *Julie* and *Emile* and *the Social Contract,* the ordered and "depraved" society he lived in with the natural democracy of nature. "To walk in the world was to link walking with a nature aligned instead with the poor and whatever radicalism would defend their rights and interests" (Solnit 109). It was an act of defiance, a repudiation of carriages and aristocratic privilege.

Walking also provided each man with emotional, intellectual, philosophical and physical sustenance; their long walks were as necessary to their thinking and writing as pen and paper. Their perambulations fit perfectly with their lifelong passion for botany.

As young men, each had taken walks which were life-changing: Rousseau, across the southwestern Alps and his famous walk from Paris to see Diderot, comfortably imprisoned in the Château de Vincennes; Muir, on his solo, thousand-mile walk from the midwest to Florida after the conclusion of the Civil War and, later, his first hike from the San Francisco docks into the Sierra Mountains:

> [1 April 1868] Arriving by the Panama steamer, I stopped for one day in San Francisco and then inquired for the nearest way out of town. "But where do you want to go?" asked the man to whom I had applied for this important information. "To any place that is wild," I said. This reply startled him. (Muir, *Wilderness World* 100)

To walk involves an act of faith: leaning forward, destabilized, we further upset equipoise by casting one leg forward, becoming momentarily monopedal; to walk is to continually catch oneself from falling; momentum, synchronized with vigorous arm-swinging, carries us in pendular progression. A difficult act to learn; once mastered,

never forgotten.[*] As with the flight of the bumblebee, it ought not to work--at least not as well as it does.

It is also an act of faith to set out—anywhere—for any distance—for any number of purposes: exploration, conquest, commerce, travel, recreation, reverie. The assumption is the walk will get us where we intend to go, but Solnit believes most *literary* walks are circular, metaphorically, in that the walker/author ends up pretty much where he or she began (Solnit 120), whereas it is my experience that each walk changes us in different ways and by varying degrees, so that upon arrival/return, we are not quite the same person we were at departure. For a walk to a corner store, the change is imperceptible (barring misfortune); for a walk of a day's duration, the change may be more marked for the aggregation of experience and effort; to set out on a walk of several days or weeks, is to alter a life in ways unforeseen at commencement.

It was an act of faith that led Rousseau to turn his back on the locked gates of Geneva when he was young—faith, and the irrepressible urge to "find feasts, treasures, adventures, friends ready to serve me, mistresses eager to please me" (Rousseau, *Confessions* 38). Of course it became something of a habit, this wandering, or what Leo Damrosch terms "a repetition compulsion," in which Rousseau condemns himself to exile through repeated provocation of his friends and enemies—a curse to him, but a gift to mankind.

After his self-imposed banishment from Geneva he undertook a series of cross-country journeys necessary for his apprenticeship in various trades and for religious education, which allowed him to benefit from extended periods of solitude. Crossing the

[*] Except after a severe stroke or spinal injury, when walking must be re-learned.

southwestern Alps from Lyon to Chambéry and from Annecy to Turin, he refused the offer of funding for a horse, preferring to travel on foot. "The ambulatory life is the one I need," he wrote in book IV of the *Confessions*. "To travel on foot in fine weather in a fine country without being rushed, and to have an agreeable object at the end of my journey…is the one most in accordance with my taste" (144). In *Emile* he spoke of the virtues of pedestrian travel, otherwise "a man spends half his life going from Paris to Versailles, from Versailles to Paris...he hurries in order to hurry," therefore, he advised, "travel not like messengers but like travellers" (411), making the journey as important as the destination, by being observant and stopping to admire the view from time to time.

Annecy, France*
July, 1730
45° 53'58.65" N 6° 07' 42.44" E

Distance to Chambéry: 40 to 54km depending on the route.
Time to complete: 6.25 hours on foot, or 38 minutes by car.
Elevation gain/loss: 167 meters (Annecy 449m, Chambéry 281m).

Taking the A41 from Annecy to Mme de Warens house near Chambery† would not be the best walking route today, unless one were a masochist. Instead, you'd want to walk Grande Randonée 96, one of the long-distance footpaths that criss-cross France, down the east side of Lac d'Annecy.

When we now think of recreational long-distance walking, we have in mind trails marked with flags, posts or at the very least, slashes on trees, as they do in Quebec's Eastern Townships. We imagine ourselves with a daypack, broken-in hiking boots, a

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* Rousseau. Confessions, 113-116
† Maison de Mme de Warens: 45° 33' 9.41" N 5° 55' 48.00" E

compass, bottled water, in short all the modern necessities for a long hike. Rousseau would have carried a satchel, perhaps over one shoulder, or perhaps arranged as the Nordic, Swiss and Germans did, as a canvas sack attached to an external wood frame, the forerunner to the aluminum frame packs popular in the mid-20th century. "I paid attention to the countryside, I noticed the trees, the houses, the streams, I deliberated at the crossroads, I was afraid of getting lost and I did not get lost at all," at least not in his memories.

Rousseau did not have had the benefit of way markers, but there would have been shorter trails established by local use between villages, and much of the way he would been walking along a quilt of trails and rutted roads, or cutting across field and forest. South of Annecy he could have found a way through the Foret Domaniale du Grand Roc (which probably wasn't a national forest two hundred seventy years ago), where the winding Route du Semnoz would take him south, but eventually he had to locate or break a trail south-southwest, as the road begins to switchback east. He may have stopped for something to eat in La Chapelle Saint-Maurice, a tiny commune of 115 souls (1999 census): a croque monsieur with a Pernod to fortify him for the remaining miles.

> I need torrents, rocks, fir trees, dark woods, mountains, rugged paths to climb and descend, on all sides of me precipices that scare me very much. I had this pleasure and I tasted it in all its charm while drawing near Chambéry. (Rousseau, *Confessions* 144)

The alternatives to walking were expensive and arguably less comfortable, as Tobias Smollett describes*:

> There are three methods of travelling from Paris to Lyons, which, by the shortest road is a journey of about three hundred and sixty miles. One is by the diligence, or stagecoach, which performs it in five days; and every passenger pays one hundred livres, in consideration of which, he not only has a seat in the carriage, but is maintained on the road. The inconveniences attending this way of travelling are these. You are crouded into the carriage, to the number of eight persons, so as to sit very uneasy, and sometimes run the risque of being stifled among very indifferent company. You are hurried out of bed, at four, three, nay often at two o'clock in the morning. You are obliged to eat in the French way, which is very disagreeable to an English palate...

Robin Jarvis, quoting Philip Bagwell's *The Transport Revolution From 1770,*† notes that the ride was "subjected at times to a severe pendulum-like jolting. In the 1790's to be 'coached' meant getting used to the nausea, akin to sea-sickness, which travelling in these vehicles induced" (Jarvis 20).

In his later years, Rousseau did take coach trips on his longer voyages, but continued to walk for mental and physical health, if not as far as he had in his youth. Whether it was for botanizing, thinking, or engaging in idylls of reverie, his walks infuse his work with the red-blooded, oxygenated vigour of someone who has just returned from being in nature. He extolled the restorative and civic benefits of a life led out-of-doors. In the *Letter to D'Alembert*, he claims that, in his time, "children…did not fear the injuries of the air to which they had been accustomed from an early date," and, after long days spent outdoors, "went home sweating, out of breath, and with their clothes torn; they were real scamps…" (Rousseau, *Political* 112), and he had little time for the

* Tobias Smollett: *Travels Through France and Italy.* Letter XXXVIII, To DR. S— at Nice. March 18, 1765. Project Gutenburg e-text #2311, Sept. 2000.
† Bagwell, Philip. *The Transportation Revolution From 1770.* London: Batsford, 1974

stale air of the Parisian salon, with its “scheming, idle people” (58) ,whose idea of the great outdoors was to promenade in a city park, braving the clatter and splashes of horse-drawn coaches.

While Rousseau wrote many impassioned paeans to nature, he was also cognizant of how one day’s pleasurable walk could easily become another day’s chore: “I well remember how in my brief periods of prosperity these same solitary walks which give me such pleasure today,” he writes in the *Eighth Walk*, “were tedious and insipid to me…the need for exercise and fresh air often led me to go walking by myself,…but far from enjoying the quiet happiness that I find there today, I took with me the turmoil of futile ideas…[and] the memory of the company I had left,…fumes of self-love and the bustle of the world….” (*Reveries* 133). Writing what would be his final work, living on the outskirts of Paris, Rousseau longed for “solitude and the country,” a claim which John Muir could easily have made on his trips to lobby politicians in Washington.

Walking alone was “one of the pleasantest things in the world” for Hazlitt. “I like solitude,” he writes in *Going on a Journey*, “…because I want a little breathing-space to muse on indifferent matters.” Hazlitt wants to see his “vague notions float like the down of the thistle before the breeze, and not to have them entangled in the briars and thorns of controversy.” There are times for talking and walking, of course; Rousseau conversed with friends on the road, while John Muir engaged all manner of folk, white and black, rich and poor, in conversation on his long, at times lonely, walk through the war-ravaged South to Florida.

Muir left Scotland with his family when he was a boy; his formal schooling had stopped the day his father announced they were to take a boat across the Atlantic, because once in America he would be working six days a week helping his father clear land and build a farm. As soon as he came of age, Muir escaped the farm and his father's oppressive faith, under which he had chafed (the Bible was the only book officially allowed in the house). Already a minor local celebrity with his mechanical inventions, Muir approached the president of the University of Wisconsin who, upon meeting the intelligent young man, allowed him to enroll; he met several important mentors during his four years studying biology and geology. A pacifist, he moved to Canada to avoid Lincoln's draft, but shortly after Lee's Confederate Army surrendered, in 1865, Muir returned to the States.

An accident in a mill nearly cost him sight in one eye; several weeks of convalescence, and the idea of returning to a factory job, caused him to reassess his priorities. His destination: the Amazon, by way of a steamship from the Gulf of Mexico: "How intensely I desire to be a Humboldt!" he wrote (Worster, *Passion* 471n10), where he could locate "a world without trace of human power" (119) and discover new plants.

He set out on 1 September, 1867. Along with a bible, he carried a blank notebook which provided the raw entries for *A Thousand-Mile Walk to the Gulf,* although it would not be published until after his death. Unlike Rousseau, Muir did not set out to write for others, and it was only with his need for income and some persuasion from his supporters, that he began to edit the notes, initially as articles for magazines such as *Harper's* and *Scribner's*.

He made it to the Florida keys, where he was waylaid for three months with malaria. When he had recovered, he visited Cuba, but had, by this time, changed his mind about the Amazon, and decided instead to travel by ship to California. Shortly after disembarking in San Francisco, Muir realized he'd found a "health-filled paradise on earth,…a place that laid such a hold on his affections that he could never leave" (149).

In terms of how a walk, or rather a lifetime of walks, changes someone, Muir wrote: "You cannot feel yourself out of doors," Muir wrote. A lifetime of walking changes perception. "Presently you lose consciousness of your own separate existence: you blend with the landscape, and become part and parcel of nature" (Muir *Thousand-Mile* 212). Infrequently, on walks and hikes, I too have felt this empathetic or symbiotic binding of self with nature. The destination, as Todorov wrote, is the journey itself (47).

I record these thoughts as I cross Queen Elizabeth Park, a former quarry:

> *I see him in the distance, half a kilometre, appearing and disappearing over hills; the few times I catch up, I imagine his shade as my shadow, flickering through the London Plane trees. Could I cover the distances he covered? Perhaps when I matched his age, nineteen, when he walked from Turin to Lyon, or from Annecy to Chambery; he is still young, but I am fifty-four.*

I comfort and reassure myself, these are measured, scholarly walks, rather than those of a man fueled by passions. Walking and thinking about Jean-Jacques Rousseau and John Muir, my mind veers off on another tangent.

Rousseau and Muir were both long-legged men; their walks outdistance mine by an order of magnitude, and my *amour propre* is wounded: I had imagined myself a strong walker, but my longest hikes have been less than what they sometimes covered in a day.

How tall was Rousseau?—and from that, extrapolate his stride. People were, on average, shorter in the 18th century than they are now. If he had been my height, 1.75 meters [5'9"], his stride would be about .73 meters, requiring 1,374 steps for each kilometer of level ground. Bones examined from an archeological dig in London show the average height in the 17th and 18th centuries to be 1.69 meters [5' 6"] for men and 1.55 meters [5' ½"] for women.* The aquatint portrait by Frédéric Mayer of Rousseau holding a bunch of flowers, outside the house at Ermenonville, suggests a compact, well-proportioned man, who held himself straight-backed into his sixties.

Château de Vincennes†
October 1749
48°50'33.17" N 2°26' 7.84" E

The most direct walking route from Paris to the Bois de Vincennes is along the busy Rue du Faubourg Saint-Antoine, across the boulevard périphérique, onto the Avenue de Paris and then into the park: an hour or two. Two hundred sixty years ago, this would have been a much quieter, countryside walk, once out of the city and away from rampant Great Danes.

He claims his famous inspiration, after reading the announcement of the contest by the Academy of Dijon in the Mercure de Paris, took place in August. According to biographer Damrosch, the issue with the announcement was not published until October. To give Jean-Jacques the benefit of the doubt, it could well have been a warm autumn. The 18th century was the recovery period from the "Little Ice Age" [16th & 17th c.] and although the summer of 1740 had been unseasonably cold throughout

* Carolyn Freeman Travers. *Were They All Shorter Back Then?* Plimoth Plantation. http://www.plimoth.org/discover/myth/4-ft-2.php
† Rousseau. *Confessions* 294

Europe, summers during the latter half of the 18th century were on average slightly warmer than in the same months in the 20th century*. Warm enough, but not sweltering.

But consider what a petit bourgeois wore (this was before Rousseau discarded much of the fashion): woolen undergarments, long-sleeved shirt, waistcoat, coat or frock, a cravat if the shirt didn't have a ruffled front, tight breeches, which usually ended at the knee, below which were long leggings of silk or wool extending into low-heeled leather shoes or boots. No wonder, then, he thought it hot even in October.

Most walks do not offer up profundities, let alone blinding insights that change our lives; most of the time we are embroiled in thinking, rather than observing and simply being present, engaged in the minutiae of mental calendars and checklists, the replay of conversations, promises made and regrets intended. "I did not forsee that I would have ideas," Rousseau explained, but "they came when they pleased, not when I pleased" (*Confessions* 136). It is the rare walk indeed where one consciously, or subconsciously, processes thoughts into a synthesis which may result in insight, whether of the blinding, or merely illuminating, kind.

"Walking has something that animates and enlivens my ideas," Rousseau wrote. "I almost cannot think when I stay in one place; my body must be in motion to set my mind in motion" (ibid). Rousseau had more flashes of brilliance than most men, but these came not out of left field, but from sustained focus and writing, perhaps initiated

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* H.H. Lamb, *Climate History and the Modern World* 1982, p.225 Google Books.

by reverie and that other state, similar in effect to reverie, but opposed in its application, a state the psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi calls *flow*.[*]

Rousseau's descriptions of his many walks and his homages to sublime nature are the precursor to the English Lake District Romanticism of Dorothy and William Wordsworth, of Goethe, Keats, Shelley, Byron, Thoreau and Emerson. While there is no proof that John Muir read any of Rousseau's books[†], the long walk was a well-established rite of passage in England. It was less commonplace in the North American wilderness—and it was wild land, except for narrow corridors on the east coast—with the exception being commissioned exploratory and military treks, and the combined walk and canoe trip of the French Canadian *voyageur*. Thoreau wrote an essay on walking, and Whitman's *Song of the Open Road* celebrated the long walk:

> Afoot and light-hearted I take to the open road,
> Healthy, free, the world before me,
> The long brown path before me leading wherever I choose.
> Henceforth I ask not good-fortune, I myself am good-fortune,
> Henceforth I whimper no more, postpone no more, need nothing,
> Done with indoor complaints, libraries, querulous criticisms,
> Strong and content I travel the open road. [‡]

Muir continued walking into his seventies, finding it impossible to resist invitations to go on expeditions, "to ramble in whatever direction lay forests or wildness" (Worster 360), a wanderlust that would take him not only to the glacial inlets of Alaska and northern British Columbia, but overseas, to Russia, India, Egypt, Africa; the indefatigable traveller even managed, three years before his death, to visit South

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* For a 20 minute introduction to flow, see TED Talk: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fXIeFJCqsPs
† Private correspondence between myself and Donald Worster, 7 November 2009.
‡ Walt Whitman, *Song of the Open Road.* Philadelphia:David Mackay, 1900. New York: Bartelby.com, 1999 http://www.bartleby.com/142/82.html

America and finally realize his early dream of seeing the Amazon. Tourism was a perk of fame and newfound wealth, but Muir, in his own mind and the minds of everyone who read him, was forever associated with the Sierra mountains and Yosemite Valley, as Rousseau belonged to the Savoy and Geneva.

Nature was now, in the 19th century, “an established religion...divine and morally uplifting” (Solnit 119), and magazine articles extolling the healthful virtues of the outdoor perambulation were commonplace. Nature was Good, and “for an age that had begun to doubt its older religious traditions,...Muir offered a modern version that was...profoundly egalitarian” (Worster, *Religion).*

REVERIE

Rousseau and Muir were not pantheists. Both had Christian upbringing, and both believed in the munificence of God as He expressed Himself in Nature. Each offered a distinctly Christian appeal to achieve oneness with Nature.

This theologic convergence of man-and-text with the wild-as-experienced—“the identification of the author with her/her natural surroundings” (Lane 474)—is expressed most acutely in the reverie, a “blissful loss of consciousness of the self” (ibid). The reverie is simultaneously unconscious and fully conscious: unconscious in the unmediated experience, and conscious, because it is a state one enters with intent. Reclining in a rowboat on Lac Bienne, or lying in Tuolemne Meadows, watching clouds, the consummation of man and Nature is expressed in ecstasy; God is everywhere and everything.

The problem, as Davis points out, is that reverie, as a spontaneous experience, cannot be recovered in memory or in writing (Davis 113-129); to simultaneously be in reverie and observe oneself in reverie, in order to record and recollect, is "like being placed in front of a camera and told to be natural" (114). To which I would respond: good writers can employ literary contrivance to represent all states of being, utilizing precisely that tension between the "pure spontaneity" of reverie and the memory of it. To suggest that it is a "condition that of its very nature could never be defined" (129) is to deny the essence of creativity.

Davis contends that Rousseau "conducts an experiment with himself…designed to discover whether or not human beings can (re-)discover and effect a return to something resembling their original nature by embedding themselves in and drawing normative guidance from Nature" (Lane, *Convergence* 476), which leads to a "Rousseauian source of environmentalism" in which people, who are alienated from Nature, might recover something of their oneness by "relinquishing...the conceptual boundaries that separate our self from the natural world" (ibid), while at the same time realizing that "we cannot return to our original place" in that world (478).

Rousseau, of course, is not the only writer to have tried this, but he was one of the first. Lane notes that similar approaches to capturing oneness with nature were later recorded by Thoreau, Leopold, Muir, and Dillard; to which I would add Wordsworth, Emerson, and Snyder. The point of the exercise is not to "go native," as the British used to say of errant diplomats who, in foreign postings, would adopt local garb and manners, but to shed light on the socialized human by stripping away *amour-propre* and living simply in a rural or wilderness setting. The *Reveries* was "an attempt to preserve

in a socially transmittable form a singular account of a human being who has returned into Nature…"(480).

Living simply did not mean living alone, and it is instructive that while Rousseau makes much of being alone, he was accompanied not only by his former "housekeeper" and, later, wife, but also by the ever-present visitors attracted to his fame, if not to him, such as Boswell. "How could a writer...be an incarnation of solitude," Todorov surprisingly asks. Of course writers are solitary, but they are also "in constant communication with others: a mediated communication, to be sure, but an intense one" (Todorov 50), to which he had devoted his life.

Rousseau's concept of Nature in the 18th century—sublime and untamable, home to the "natural" peasant—is not how Muir understood it in the mid-19th, a time in America where the early stages of an awareness of the need to protect wild places conflicted with the rapidly expanding demands to exploit its potential, a conceptual divide which would evolve, by the late 20th century, to an almost total divorce of urban humanity from the natural world, to a belated awareness of the breadth and depth of our ecological *footprint,* and to the nascent desire to re-engage, symbiotically, with ecosystems under siege[*].

Where Muir differs from Rousseau is in his political involvement; he (somewhat reluctantly) decided to lobby to save wild areas, and became a figurehead for nature's preservation with the formation of the *Sierra Club*. "For a religious prophet," Worster writes, "he became very good at this worldly, pragmatic business" (Worster, *Religion*);

[*] Michel Serres' concept of a new, or renegotiated, *Natural Contract* (Michigan 1995).
The footprint model of aggregate per capita use of land and resources was developed by UBC professor William Rees: Rees, W. E. (1992) "Ecological footprints and appropriated carrying capacity: what urban economics leaves out," *Environment and Urbanisation.* 4(2), Oct. 1992.

he was the club's president from its inception, 28 May 1892, to his death in 1914. He would then and always be "identified as the greatest founder of the conservation movement," even if he was a "reluctant leader, diffident and inclined to head for the hills when he heard the call to arms" (Worster, *Passion* 329-331). That said, his pen was forever ready to be wielded in the fight to preserve his beloved Sequoia groves; this is from a 1920 Sierra Club bulletin:

> Any fool can destroy trees. They cannot run away; and if they could, they would still be destroyed....It took more than three thousand years to make some of the trees in these Western woods—trees that are still standing in perfect strength and beauty....God has cared for these trees, saved them from drought, diseases, avalanches,...but he cannot save them from fools. (Muir, *Nature Writings* 830)

How much of Rousseau's deistic intimacy with Nature informed, if only indirectly, the eco-philosophy of John Muir? While Rousseau used nature primarily as a means to discover himself and man's place in society, thereby to develop a philosophy which stressed the deleterious effects of social structure *on man*, Muir sought in wilderness an understanding of the interrelatedness of plants, geology and animals *with man*; to "eliminate the separation between subject (himself) and object (the plant or rock or pine)" (Devall 66), by describing his direct experience of it—this is Nature, and this is Man in Nature, and it *feels like this*. He resolutely maintained his status as an independent naturalist, whose ecstatic eco-theology and anthropomorphized descriptions made his writing accessible; that, and his publication in general interest magazines prejudiced the scientific establishment against him.

Yet he did undertake valuable studies. In addition to cataloging life in the Yosemite, he argued for the method of its creation. There were those, including

California's most prominent scientist, Professor Josiah Whitney, who did not believe glaciation had been the primary creative force in carving the Yosemite Valley, but that the land had subsided to create the great valleys. Whitney and other eminent geologists would eventually be proven wrong by Muir's extensive back-country exploration and observation (Worster, *Passion* 190-200). Muir could be as contrary as Rousseau, as willing to risk censure and embarrassment when he believed his ideas were right.

Rousseau's abiding need to be alone in nature is congruent with his belief that we were born solitary and naturally good, in our pre-civilized state. "The moment when I escape from the horde of evil-doers is one of joy," Rousseau wrote, "and as soon as I am under the trees…I feel as if I were in an earthly paradise" (*Reveries* 133). Muir, on the other hand, delighted in introducing friends to the mountains, although his early years in the Sierra were often spent alone, hiking, where he could observe, listen and record his impressions unbothered by conversation.

Each man's preference for reverie, and the spiritual solace occasioned by walks in nature, provided the inspiration for their philosophies and reflections, whether such reveries were primarily inward-focused and autobiographical as Rousseau's, or outward-focused and observational as Muir's. The works which resulted from their intimate relation with the natural world would later make them two of the leading figures of environmental philosophy; in a sense, they could be thought of as "step-grandfathers" to Arne Naess, Peter Singer and eco-centrist deep ecology.

The contrast between urban and rural, industrial and agricultural, and tamed and wild areas was less marked in the 18th century than it became one hundred years later. There was no need to focus on, or even acknowledge, the creep of humankind

across the countryside, although Rousseau noted, half-bemused and half-dismayed, how it was impossible to walk across Switzerland without encountering farms, villages and workshops (i.e. the stocking mill incident in the the *Reveries*). Certainly these were intimations of the disappearance of true wilderness, but even in Europe there was much left untouched: Mont Blanc, for instance, would not be first climbed until 1786 (first by a woman in 1808); in Muir's time, many of North America's vast ranges had yet to be explored in detail, and his contributions to geographic and geologic discovery were rewarded, in his lifetime, with a peak and a major glacier named after him. Even so, Muir found humanity's encroachment evident in his earliest forays into the Sierra, when he was employed as the overseer of an unreliable shepherd and watched, dismayed, as the thousand-strong flock trammeled fragile alpine meadows.

Rousseau opposed "the pretensions of the enlightened age… [and instead] proposed a open-hearted and virile approach and abandon to nature" (Kirchner 431), presaging the early stirrings of a Romantic reappraisal of nature's "purpose." Unfortunately, the "virile" approach to nature, embodied by a shotgun-wielding Theodore Roosevelt in Muir's time, was not particularly focused on conservation. Muir expected men to continue their encroachment, and to some extent he encouraged it by extolling the beauty to be found in the mountains, but his vision of increased public engagement with the outdoors became, in the 1950s onward, ever-longer lineups of exhaust-spewing car campers and, thirty years on, massive motorhomes, as sad a disjunction of man and nature as had ever been imagined in dystopian literature, in which nature was seen through picture windows when there was nothing on tv.

BOTANY

My rationale for Rousseau's inclusion among the forefathers of environmental philosophy is that he appreciated nature for its own beauty, rather than for its utility, which is particularly evident in the poetry of his botanic work. Like Muir, Rousseau was an *amateur* scientist. Was he being disingenuous, or self-deprecating, or did he actually believe, in describing his botanizing (*Seventh Walk*), that he was engaged in a "fruitless study where I neither make any progress nor learn anything useful"? He claimed he devoted his "last hours of leisure to acquiring" knowledge of plants (*Reveries* 106). This is probably literally true: his *Dictionnaire des termes d'usage en botanique* was incomplete when he died. Rousseau's botanical work was exacting and comprehensive; in addition to the letters and unfinished dictionary, he created several herbariums, of which a few survive (in Montmorency, Zurich and Paris) (Cook, *Exchanges* 391).

"The amount of knowledge, time and effort involved in [the herbaria] production is difficult to estimate," Alexandra Cook writes. "One must be in possession not only of considerable knowledge about plant collecting and identification, but also about the best methods for drying, preserving and mounting them. This is a work of painstaking care and exactitude." Herbaria are still used in much the same way today, and their method of preparation remains largely unchanged (Cook, *Botanical Exchanges* 149).

Ile St. Pierre, Bern*
September 1765
47°04'08.13" N 7°08'40.02" E

Had Rousseau been able to remain on the Ile St. Pierre for a year, he would have been well on his way to accomplishing his goal of a catalogue of all the island's plants.

* Rousseau. *Confessions* 534-542; *Reveries* 81-91

The study of nature, Rousseau writes to his "dear Cousin," is a useful counterfoil to "frivolous amusements," and thus by engaging her daughter in plant collecting she will "prevent the tumult of the passions" (Rousseau, *Letter I, 22 Aug.1771*). While his contribution to botanical taxonomy is of only historical interest, his work nevertheless shows how observant he was, and this is the point I want to make, in reference to comparing Rousseau's observational skills with Muir's: Rousseau may have believed "that one can be a very good botanist without knowing one plant by its name" (ibid), but he knew every part of every plant:

> Between the Pistil and the Corolla you find six other quite distinct bodies which are called the Stamens. Each stamen is compose of two parts, namely, a thinner one by which the stamen holds onto the bottom of the corolla and which is called the filament. A thicker one which attaches to the higher end of the filament and which is called the Anther. Each Anther is a box that opens when it is ripe and ejects a very fragrant yellow powder of which we will speak later. This powder up to now has no French name; botanists call it the pollen, a word which signifies powder. (ibid)

The eight *Elementary Letters on Botany,*[*] and his botanical correspondence with the Duchess of Portland,[†] which Alexandra Cook describes as a "gentlemanly scientific exchange typical of the period" (Cook, *Botanical Exchanges* 143), comprising sixteen long letters, if read as a complete text, is a complete introductory course in botany. Sam George suggests that "Rousseau considered botany to be ideally suited to the female character, being both 'amusing' and 'agreeable to delicacy'…a series of 'pleasant

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[*]Letters to Mme Madelaine-Catherine Delessert, also known as the *Elementary Letters on Botany.* http://web.archive.org/web/20050416235526/http://www.geocities.com/avisolo3/rousseaubotany.pdf

[†]Rousseau and Martyn. *Letters on the elements of botany: addressed to a lady.* London: 1802. Google Books, accessed 27 Nov. 2009

impressions' obtained through the senses, a 'recreation for the eyes'" which aided in the "cultivation of the female mind" (George 220).

Rousseau's botanic letters express a non-threatening, scientific sexuality.* It had been an accepted feature of botanic texts that "flowers were emblems of purity, beauty and fragility" (George, *Botanical Woman* 2). Virginal, that is, until Carl Linnaeus described their reproductive systems, which were subsequently translated in one introductory English text [Lee, 1760] as marital metaphors: "'male' stamens are 'husbands,' 'female' pistils 'wives' and sexual union a 'marriage'…" while a later text [Rose, 1775] describes "the union of stamens and pistils during fertilization [as] 'husbands and wives on their nuptial bed'" (ibid).†

Were they also a sly form of seduction, the experienced older man instructing the young woman? In the first letter, Rousseau warns against too much, too soon: "You will not begin by telling your daughter all this at once; and still less when in the sequel you shall be initiated in the mysteries of vegetation; but you will unveil to her by degrees no more than is suitable to her age and sex, by directing her how to find out things of herself…" (*Letter I* 26); in the second letter he fancies " a charming picture of my beautiful cousin busy with her glass examining heaps of flowers, a hundred times less flourishing, less fresh, and less agreeable than herself" (*Letter II* 32); by the fourth, he approaches the boundary of gentlemanly decency:

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* See papers by Jane Walling and Sam George which expand on 18th century botanic texts and "the instruction of ladies."

†By the mid-19th century, "Darwin's libidinous work," with its overt descriptions of plant and animal reproduction, was accused of inflaming women's interest in botany, which "in turn increased those sexual anxieties that were already surrounding the female botanist"(George, *Botanical Woman* 4)

> Upon the same receptacle are two other glands, one at the foot of each pair of longer stamens;….If you ask me what the glands are for? I answer that, they are one of those instruments destined by nature to unite the vegetable to the animal kingdom, and to make them circulate from one to another. But laying these inquiries aside, in which we anticipate a little too much, let us, for the present, return to our tribes of plants(*Letter IV* 40-41).

Rousseau also corresponded with a number of fellow botanists, including his friends Pierre-Alexandre du Peyrou, Marc-Antoine-Louis Claret de Flerieu de Latourrette, and Jean Baptiste Christophe Fusée Aublet, who published the *Histoire des Plantes de la Guyane* in 1775, coincident with Carl Linnaeus's *Plantae Surinamensis*. Rousseau had a particular interest in plants from the West Indies (Cook, *Anticipation* 390), perhaps because du Peyrou's father was a colonial official in Dutch Guiana and could send his son seeds, which he then forwarded to Rousseau. Yet, Cook notes, true to his contradictory impulses, he decried the importation and promulgation of exotic species for gardens, and she reminds us he has Julie create a garden composed of indigenous plants for her Elysium.

His education was Linnaeus's *Systema Naturae*[*], "for which I acquired a passion which I have not been able to cure myself of completely" (Rousseau, *Confessions* 538), although he felt Linnaeus, with whom he corresponded (Cook, *Geography* 390), studied botany "too much in herbaria and in gardens and not enough in nature itself" (*Confessions* 538),whereas Rousseau would claim an entire island as his herbarium.

[*]Cincinnati's Lloyd Library has an online exhibit entitled *In Rousseau's Own Hand: Book, Notes and Botany,* which clearly shows his handwritten annotations in a copy of the 1650 Historia Plantarum Universalis, by Jean Bauhin. http://www.lloydlibrary.org/exhibits/rousseau%20exhibit.html

Louisville, Kentucky[*]
September 1867
38°15'15.26" N 85°45'33.87" W

Muir, too, carried a copy of "the admirable Linnaeus" (Muir, *Thousand-Mile* 116) on his thousand-mile walk to the Gulf and, later, in the Sierra. His first hurdle was to counter his father's Calvinist doctrine, literally beaten into him, in which the world was made by God for Man's use—if we were stewards, we could justify all manner of rapaciousness due to the apparently infinite, and hard-won, bounty presented by the New World. The cracks in his personal theology began at the University of Wisconsin, where he was exposed to the sciences, particularly biology, which had begun to divide contemporary thought into the opposing camps of Creationist and Evolutionist (Darwinist) theories of life's beginnings and geologic processes. Muir was quick to adapt, because he saw no conflict between the two: God created the universe, and his plan for it included evolutionary and geologic principles. His interest in botany began when a fellow student at the University of Wisconsin asked him if he knew what kind of tree it was he had been sitting under (he didn't), and from that point on the two of them began local explorations to study and collect specimens. Muir studied botany under Professor Ezra Carr, an iconoclast who fought university administrators to include the natural sciences in the curricula (Worster, *Passion* 76). Later in his life Muir formed a close friendship with Asa Gray, the Harvard botanist who was "Darwin's most

[*] Worster. *A Passion for Nature* 118-145; Muir. *A Thousand-Mile Walk to the Gulf.*

prestigious defenders in North America" (203); Gray would join Muir on two climbing trips in the Yosemite.*

Everything was connected to everything else, Muir realized as he explored the mountains he would call the Range of Light: "when we try to pick out anything by itself, we find it hitched to everything else in the universe" (Muir, *Nature Writings* 245). Remarkably open-minded, he refuted "post-Calvinist, Anglo-American theology that divine interventions could be read in minute detail…[which led to] human reason at the center of the cosmos…" (Worster, *Passion* 141). The natural world, as Muir experienced it firsthand, was perfectly well-off without us.

Rousseau likewise believed that non-human animals were sentient creatures which "ought to partake of natural rights" and that "this quality, being common to both men and beasts, ought to entitle the latter at least to the privilege of not being wantonly ill-treated by the former" (Palmer 59), a philosophical position which Muir echoes in his works, and which has recently been revived. Man should neither dominate nor submit, but should be—and was, in his natural, pre-societal state—coexistent, a partner in the ecosystem. It was only through "inequality occasioned by social institutions" (Rousseau, *Political* 58) that we placed nature in a hierarchical relationship, with us in the ascendancy. "Nature commands every animal," Rousseau states in the *Discourse on Inequality*, but man "knows he is free to go along or to resist." It is man's "faculty of self-perfection," and centuries of trial and error, which is "the source of all man's misfortunes," that turned him into "a tyrant over himself and nature"(45).

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*On the second trip, to Mt. Shasta in 1877, Muir and Asa Gray were accompanied by Joseph Hooker, a friend of Darwin's and director of the Kew Botanical Gardens (Worster *Passion* 205)

THEOLOGY and REVERIE

Rousseau's conversion to Catholicism was sufficient to gain him re-admittance to Mme de Warens' home, but religion, however it was practiced, was not enough to grant him comfort; rather it was "the voice of reason…[which] can console us in the end for all the misfortunes which it was not in our power to avoid" (*Reveries* 130).

A century later, as John Muir walked deep in the swampy, lowland pine barrens in Florida, exhausted, hungry, and lonely, he took solace in "God's family" which included alligators, which are also "his children, for He hears their cries, cares for them tenderly, and provides their daily bread" for even these feared predators were "unfallen, undepraved, and cared for with the same species of tenderness and love as is bestowed on angels in heaven or saints on earth" (Muir, *Thousand-Mile* 98). Her doesn't see how, if the world was made for us, it contains animals "which smack their lips over raw man," and biting insects, and things which poison us, but he was moving toward a theological position in which the object of Nature's plan—God's plan—was the happiness of each, rather than the dominant "creation of all for the happiness of one." The universe, Muir wrote, "would be incomplete without man; but it would also be incomplete without the smallest transmicroscopic creature that dwells beyond our conceitful eyes and knowledge" (139).

Both men experience Nature two ways: as direct, focused observation, and in contemplative reveries.

Reverie itself is almost a non-event in which, "from time to time some brief and insubstantial reflection arose concerning the instability of the things of this world,

whose image I saw in the surface of the water, but soon these fragile impressions gave way before the unchanging and ceaseless movement...” (Rousseau, *Reveries* 87). Reverie allows Rousseau to maintain a psychological distance, if not much of a physical one, from the world of “constant flux” where “earthly joys are...creatures of a moment” (88) and lasting happiness but a chimera. The solitary reverie locates us within ourselves; we become unaware of, or unresponsive to, externalities; it is almost as if he is describing meditation, where we are attentive to “nothing apart from ourselves and our own existence; as long this state lasts we are self-sufficient like God” (89). Soon enough the wind comes up, or there is a shout from the shore, or hunger brings one home. Reverie cannot be forced; one has to set the stage, as it were, and allow it to evolve from the relaxation of cares.

But can we trust the recollection of reverie and thus the insights it brings? How reliable is memory and the writing generated from long-past events?

MEMORY

Is Rousseau prevaricating, exaggerating, fictionalizing, misremembering, or romanticizing this island idyll and his other reveries? Perhaps it is a conflation of all these, unencumbered by the author’s value judgements of veracity over mendacity. After all, Rousseau believes that “to conceal a truth which one is not obliged to divulge is not lying” (*Reveries* 65): there is a greater truth to be served.

Muir’s famous story of the little dog Stickeen, about which I’ll have more to say further on, is, as Ronald Limbaugh points out, a carefully constructed story which is “not a true-life adventure but an allegory” (Limbaugh 26), in which a single incident

took on an importance Muir recognized only years later, when he finally built it into a "profoundly moving narrative, a classic commentary on the rights of animals and their place in nature" (27).

As with any remembered event or time, the mind rebuilds—even though it seems as if it is "playing back"— memories from disparate elements, some of them sensorial, some imagined—a reconstruction which we imagine is fixed, like a photograph or movie, but which changes subtly with each retrieval.[*]

Memory doesn't play tricks on us; memory is by its very neurological nature unreliable. It has been called the *Rashomon* effect[†], after the 1950 film by Akira Kurosawa, in which four witnesses recount different versions of a murder and rape; the film leaves us uncertain how the event actually unfolded, or indeed whether there can be an objectively true narrative of any event. As each witness sees something different— not only from different angles, which means some details obscured to one person will be clearer to another, but to confound "truth" further, each observer will retain differerent information according to his or her perceptive abilities/disabilities and the ranking each places on the importance of specific details. The end result is absolute yet contradictory retelling.

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[*]In a review published in Leonardo, Vol.35 No.3, of Douwe Draisma, Metaphors of Memory: A History of Ideas About the Mind (Cambridge: 2000), Robert Pepperell writes: "Advancing through the centuries,...memory has been variously compared to abbeys and cathedrals, the aeolian harp, aviaries, theatres with stages and wings, storehouses and warehouses, phosphorescent substances, clockwork mechanisms, the telephone exchange, railway networks, the camera obscura and photography, the phonograph and cinematograph, and the more recently familiar computers systems and holographs."
[†] Karl Heider. "The Rashomon Effect: When Ethnographers Disagree" American Anthropologist, March 1988, Vol. 90 No. 1, pp. 73-81

Northwestern University neuroscientist Aryeh Routtenberg proposes a revision of current memory theory which challenges the widely-held model of a stable memory. "Our subjective experience of permanence is the result of the re-duplication of memories across many different brain networks," the report states. The current model is that proteins stabilize memories at recently activated synapses; while Routtenberg agrees that the synapse is modified by a recent activity, he proposes that "the spontaneous activity of the brain actually acts to cryptically rehearse past events." In other words, the brain, using a feedback loop, builds and rebuilds previously modified synaptic proteins.[*]

It is precisely this variability of what we persist in calling "the true story" or "what really happened," which calls into question the accuracy of all autobiography. Should we take Rousseau to task for inaccurately representing the date of his walk to Vincennes as midsummer, when in fact it was in October (Damrosch 213)? Perhaps this is one of those "inconsequential untruths," where inconsistency in details does little harm to the narrative's "emotional truth."

My point is not to quibble about the value or degree of truth and fiction in the works of either author, but to point out that any non-fictive literary art will have elisions and compressions and re-ordering of dates. The fastidious researcher may derive delicious pleasure and academic stature in locating such intended and unintended "errors," and thereby label the author an inveterate liar, or merely careless, but for Rousseau and, I would argue, Muir, the overarching truth relies less on fact-

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[*] "New theory challenges current view of how brain stores long-term memory." Northwestern University January 2005. http://www.physorg.com/news2699.html

checking than on an emotional engagement with the reader. Whatever the "truth" was that October day, indeed whether Rousseau even read the Mercure de France under a tree on the road, or earlier, back in Paris, or with Diderot at the Château, literary license—what one might term an immunity of the greater good—allows for and indeed demands inconsequential untruths.[*]

DOGS

A dog's life is measured times seven; if so, I hope Kara had seven times the happiness I had in the ten years we were together. In 1977, while I had been away on my Wanderjahr around western Europe (where I fell hopelessly in love with a Dutch girl in Amsterdam, only to part days later), my grandmother, who lived with my mother, had picked up a dog at the SPCA, a two-year-old Siberian Husky. I can clearly visualize my slow walk up the back lane toward our house, lugging my backpack and missing the girl in Amsterdam. As I opened the gate, a young dog timidly approached me, wagging her curly white tail. She looked at me shyly with her light blue eyes, and took my hand gently in her mouth: I had fallen in love again. Kara was named for the Kara Sea, 1500 kilometers north of Ekaterinburg in Russia. For ten years, she and I walked in Lighthouse Park, hiked up Hollyburn ridge, clambered along the river rocks in Capilano Canyon, and beach-combed along the shoreline.

[*] For a particularly harsh criticism of Rousseau's untruths see Robert Bell, "Rousseau: The Prophet of Sincerity." Biography 3.4 (August 13, 1980): 297-313. "Rousseau is the incarnation of the Intentional Fallacy: he wishes us to judge him not by his fruits but by his good motives" (307).

"What times, Sir, would you believe that I recall most often and most willingly in my dreams?" Rousseau wrote to his friend Malesherbes. "They are my solitary walks,...days that I have passed entirely alone with myself, with my good and simple housekeeper, my well-loved dog, my old cat, the birds of the country..." (Rousseau, *Confessions* 578). Rousseau was one of us who, rather than call himself a dog-owner, would say: "My dog himself was my friend, not my slave, we always had the same will but he never obeyed me..." (579). This was congruent with Rousseau's belief that all sentient beings should be considered equals, although recognizing that humanity held a special role due to our self-reflective and communicative abilities. It was a philosophy reborn, some two hundred years later, by Rachel Carson, Aldo Leopold, and Arne Naess. "The value of non-human life forms," Naess wrote, "is independent of the usefulness of the non-human world for human purposes" and that "humans have no right to reduce this richness and diversity except to satisfy vital needs" (Naess, *Ecology of Wisdom* 111).

Rousseau's first dog, Turc, had to be put down shortly after an accident with a coach left him permanently disabled. "My poor Turc was only a dog, but he loved me; he was sensitive, disinterested and good-natured...there are many so-called friends who are not worth as much" (Cranston 293). In Môtiers he obtained another dog, Sultan, which accompanied him to England. Damrosch quotes Hume, writing to Mme de Boufflers, that his famous guest would cling to Sultan as if he was the only creature who understood him, and whose "affection for that creature is beyond all expression or conception" (409).

Muir Glacier, Alaska[*]
July 1880
59° 06’ 18.85” N 136° 22’ 59.70” W

Of all John Muir’s books, the one best-loved continues to be Stickeen, the story of a treacherous day on an Alaskan glacier and the brave dog who accompanied him. Initially the dog came aboard the ocean-going canoe, paddled by Indian guides, which would take Muir and his fellow traveller, the Reverend Young, into unexplored inlets.[†] Muir thought the dog would be a nuisance, but Young, whose dog it was, assured him he was a hardy little fellow, and sure enough Stickeen “immediately made himself at home by curling up in a hollow among the baggage.” The dog was small and of mixed-breed, “short-legged and bunchy-bodied” (Muir, *Nature Writings* 553), and Muir didn’t think much of him; in fact there are no references to the dog in his journals, but his existence has been independently corroborated. Each time the canoe drew close to shore he was “always the first out of the canoe [and] the last to get into it” (ibid). While Young remained in camp, Muir, exploring a glacier with the dog, was waylaid by a storm, and had to make a hasty retreat. Donald Worster provides a summary of the climax:

> Again and again man and dog had to leap those cracks in the ice, until they came to one that was forty feet across....Eight feet down the sides of the crevasse...stretched a bridge of ice from wall to wall...Muir cut steps down to the bridge and then inched his way across....He had left the dog behind. Stickeen was painfully aware of its predicament and, frantic with fear of being abandoned, began to howl and whine. Muir coaxed it to follow his lead. Screwing up its courage, the dog flew down the steps, over the bridge, and up to safety. Its whole body was shaking with nervous tension...the little mutt whirled, danced, and moaned with relief. (Worster 259)

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[*] Muir. Nature Writings 549-571
[†] Muir also explored British Columbia’s lower Stikine River in 1879.

Written decades after the event, *Stickeen* was about "more than just a dog; he was a messenger, a harbinger of good news about the natural world," published at a time when people felt threatened by Darwinism and the parallels being drawn from the theory that we were base, instinctual and amoral (Limbaugh 28). Muir's short story encapsulated his philosophical position that we were linked, man, beast and the natural world in "moral egalitarianism" (32), which contradicted neither Darwin nor the post-Romantic fusing of Christianity with the early eco-theology, arising from Emerson's Transcendentalism. The dog's courageous dash down the crevasse and across the narrow ice bridge "symbolized the dark unknown,...[where] bridging the gap represented not only oneness and immortality...[but also an] affirmation of the human-animal bond" (41). It was a oneness I shared with Kara.

Lighthouse Park
April 1987
49° 19' 54.06" N 123° 15' 50.09" W

I took Kara into Lighthouse Park, that great cathedral of Douglas Firs and Red Cedars and gnarly Pacific Madrone, with its peeling, red bark. Kara, thirteen, had slowed down considerably the past year. The spark was still in her beautiful blue eyes, but she had developed arthritis in her hind legs and had to be helped downstairs to relieve herself. I hadn't been living at home for a number of years, and my visits were less frequent, although I tried to take her out once a week. My grandmother, on whose bed she slept, had passed away that Christmas. Kara was, in a word, lonely. It saddens me now to write this, twenty-two years later. That day in Lighthouse Park, I hurt her, pushed her too far: this was a walk she hadn't done in some while, and it was too much for her weakened legs. It

was a walk for me, not for her. I wanted it to be memorable, special, one last walk in the park we'd enjoyed so much those ten years. We didn't go home after the walk, but to the animal hospital. I held her tightly on the cold, metal operating table. The veterinarian shaved her left front paw and clumsily jabbed once, twice, three times before finding a vein. Kara whimpered. Did she know? She slumped, heavy, in my arms.

I have been walking with Jean-Jacques Rousseau since mid-summer. Only in late fall did I ask Muir to accompany me. He is more difficult to access emotionally, because he wasn't given to introspection; rather, I share his heartfelt joy in being outdoors, in movement and stillness, and in the close observation of animal life. Just now I watched a crow alight on a chimney opposite my apartment. It had been raining heavily all night and much of the morning, but the rain had stopped, tempting me away from the computer. The crow ruffled its feathers. It was only after a few minutes observing the bird preening itself that I noticed heat waves rising from the flue and again had to marvel at the high intelligence of crows[*].

What would it be like if winds were visible as streams of colour?

"Most people like to look at mountain rivers," wrote Muir in *A Wind Storm in the Forest* "…but few care to look at the winds, though far more beautiful and sublime, and though they become at times about as visible as flowing water." It is the action of the wind we see because, like thought, the element itself is invisible. The mountain clouds were "detached plumes and leaves, now speeding by on level currents, now whirling in eddies,…grand, up-swelling domes of air…like mountain rivers conforming to the

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[*]Nathan J. Emery, et al. *The Mentality of Crows: Convergent Evolution of Intelligence in Corvids and Apes.* Science 306, 1903 (2004); see also Bernd Heinrich. *Mind of the Raven* Ecco:2007

features of their channels" (Muir, *Nature Writings* 472). These windswept thoughts, which fill much of his article, were recorded while he clung to a Douglas Spruce one hundred feet off the forest floor, in the midst of a storm.

Forever trying to get as close to nature as possible, Muir slept on pine needles, made shelters from broken boughs, oftentimes he would go hungry because he'd brought such meagre provisions (tea and dried bread were his staple diet). "When the storm began to sound, I lost no time in pushing out into the woods to enjoy it" (467). Only in the penultimate paragraph of this article did Muir turn his pen to humanity:

> We all travel the milky way together, trees and men; but it never occurred to me until this storm-day, while swinging in the wind, that trees are travellers, in the ordinary sense. They make many journeys, not extensive ones, it is true; but our own little journeys, away and back again, are only little more than tree-wavings--many of them not so much. (472)

Rousseau's alpine and sub-alpine rambles (nothing as risky as what Muir undertook) provide the setting for several scenes in *Julie*, such as this solitary mountain retreat described by St. Preux: "A torrent caused by by thawing snows rolled in a muddy stream twenty feet from us and noisily carried along dirt, sand, and stones..." (*Julie* 335), a description which could only have been written by someone who had experienced the rumble of rocks in a mountain stream.

Neither man fit into society: Rousseau's disadvantage, of not belonging to one world or the other, but somewhere in between, was his great advantage: he was a guest in the garden, looking in through the window. "The philosophes wore a team uniform that allowed them, like bicycle racers, to profit from each other's slipstream," writes Damrosch, but for Rousseau "the uniform never fit...and he knew what he was doing when he took it off" (219). It was his very contrarian nature, determinedly sailing into

the prevailing wind, no matter how much it cost him socially, that made his writing so powerful.

John Muir didn't scandalize as Rousseau did; he was, if anything, an established middle-class businessman in his later years, literally enjoying the fruits of his labours. Yet he too provoked dialogue and action, first with his newspaper and magazine articles, later with the expanded books, and then with his invitations to prominent leaders of capitalism and politicians to join him in walks in the Yosemite, leading to his petition to Congress to establish the National Park Act, thus ensuring the preservation of much (but sadly not all) of the Yosemite and Sequoia forests. An eco-theological prophet, his impassioned writing inspired others to save wild areas for the future.

In this essay I have drawn parallels between the lives, texts and philosophies of Jean-Jacques Rousseau and John Muir, while at the same time acknowledging there is little evidence, if any, of Muir's indebtedness to his illustrious predecessor. The pre-Romantic depiction of Nature in Rousseau's works, notably the *Confessions*, *Julie, or the New Heloise*, and the *Reveries*, would certainly influence the Romantics; as a movement, it arrived later in America (1820-1860), after it had swept across Europe and Britain, to be picked up by Emerson, Whitman and Thoreau, each of whom was deeply perceptive of the importance of an "untamed" Nature. They would then fold Romanticism into Transcendentalism, which fitted perfectly with Muir's nature writing, but Muir also belonged to an age beyond him. He lived long enough to see the rise of the social-realist and Modernist movements in the first decades of the 20th century, the most violent century in history.

Rousseau's writing is as relevant today as Muir's: each man wrote of the beauty of the natural world, and of its intrinsic value apart from any utility we might derive from it. Muir's Sierra Club remains an important lobby for conservation, and we now see nascent and varied movements—ecotopic, eco-theologic, green, wholistic—which incorporate Rousseau's virtues of indebtedness to, and oneness with, the natural world, and with Muir's comprehension of the interrelatedness of things and the miracle of life in all its complexity. This movement did not appear out of the current emergencies: it began in the alpine meadows around Geneva, and in the managed ecology of *Julie's* Elysium.

The indirect, and somewhat indistinct, line which connects Jean-Jacques Rousseau with John Muir, is built of many strands—botanic, theistic, philosophic—strands woven into a braid by their reverential walks in Nature.

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