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The American Civil War confused the nation in unprecedented ways and challenged established Americans' identities more than any previous conflict. While some combatants' previous military experience made them familiar with warfare, no one was prepared for the physical and emotional destruction that the war would wreak in their own front yards, pitting brothers against one another in horrifically violent combat. I argue that during this period of extreme upheaval, individuals deployed their natural landscape to provide a justification for their lives, to comprehend the turmoil, and to pray for national reconciliation.

This study identifies three chronological, though overlapping, phases that demonstrate how the human relationship with nature becomes paramount during periods of physical and emotional instability such as war. Essays, letters, novels, memoirs, and poems from the mid-to-late nineteenth century demonstrate that Americans before, during, and after the war relied upon their physical landscapes to make sense of their lives. I investigate publications from well-known Northern white men, such as Henry David Thoreau, Frederick Law Olmsted, and Herman Melville, as well as works by less-familiar Southern white men, such as Sidney Lanier and Samuel Watkins. I also consider women writers, including Confederate author Eliza Frances Andrews, African American autobiographers Susie King Taylor and Elizabeth Keckley, Union teen Matilda Pierce, and conflicted Southern poet Sarah Piatt. Including authors who have racially and regionally diverse affiliations enriches the breadth of this project which, though by no

means exhaustive, attempts to encompass multiple perspectives. The Civil War provides a unique period in American history that best demonstrates how people on all sides of the conflict experienced complete upheaval yet used their physical environment to ground themselves. Military conflict presents specific challenges in that warfare changes the terrain on which it is fought, thus making human understanding of the landscape shifting and problematic.

My project first establishes how human associations with the landscape often defy definition because the environment is constantly changing and situationally dependent. Thus, while authors attempt to capture the relationship's foundation, they ultimately succeed only in establishing that the human/nature construct is fraught. I call this phase justification, because it demonstrates the multiple ways that humans can justify behavior by "naturalizing" it. Once the war begins to damage the natural environment, humans shift to the second phase, which I term comprehension. Here, they understand battlefield violence through the damage they see. Often, visible (and sometimes tangible) destruction to their landscape is the only way that humans can comprehend warfare. Lastly, Americans enter the reconciliation phase, where they look to natural death/growth cycles to engender a natural renewal that may lead to national unification.

Throughout these phases, humans' dependence on their natural landscape remains constant. Their view of the landscape and the reasons they depend on it may change, but my study suggests that connection to the natural world informs human identity through all situations. Once we acknowledge the significance of the human/nature connection, we can accept responsibility for the human element of that relationship. Ultimately, this

study contributes to scholarship that investigates human participation in the local ecology and expands discussions of human responsibility to nature. Additionally, I conduct valuable recovery work, investigating previously unstudied texts for their ecocritical and cultural implications.

HUMAN NATURE AND THE CIVIL WAR: JUSTIFICATION, COMPREHENSION,
AND RECONCILIATION THROUGH ENVIRONMENTAL RHETORIC

by

Tamara Luikart

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To my three boys:

I love you more than you will ever know.

And to Mom and Dad:

Thank you for planting the seed and for making this possible.

APPROVAL PAGE

This dissertation written by Tamara Luikart has been approved by the following committee of the Faculty of the Graduate School at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

Committee Chair _____

Committee Members _____

Date of Acceptance by Committee

Date of Final Oral Examination

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION: DARWINIAN EVOLUTION AND THE CIVIL WAR

War and the Environment

In *Widow of the South*, a 2005 novel about the 1864 Battle of Franklin, Tennessee, the Confederate Army transforms a widow woman's plantation home into a makeshift hospital. After the battle, the army buries almost 1,500 Confederate soldiers in a field near her property, leaving the bodies shallowly covered in dirt to literally become the landscape of this woman's life. Years later, when the landowner insists that the field be plowed, the widow begs him to leave it untouched. He replies: "people may think I'm rich, but even I can't afford to let acres of good land lie fallow because it contains the bodies of men who fought an idiotic battle in an ill-considered, stupid war" (Hicks 346). His statement illuminates a common trend in environmental conflicts: the individual who owns the land views it differently from the less wealthy people surrounding it.

War further complicates this conflict, because the battle fought there literally changed the land. In the widow's eyes, the field is a graveyard of soldiers who deserve honor and memorialization, and it is also a backdrop to her daily life – something she has become accustomed to seeing. The owner, however, views the land as a resource valuable for its potential monetary profit, regardless of what military history occurred there. He ignores the widow's objections and decides to plow it. Before he can hire laborers to do

the work, however, the woman painstakingly moves all the graves onto her property so that she can give them the attention she and their families think they deserve. Even though she has no personal connection to any of the dead buried there, the widow firmly believes that the field should not be plowed with men buried underneath it.

The disagreement between the field's owner and the widow highlights how easily individuals can hold contested views of the same land. Military conflict only complicates those issues. One problem after military battle is the change to the land's composition, and dead bodies tangibly exemplify that war-induced transformation. Once these bodies are interred, both the land's make-up and the public's perception of it change. Many people cannot view a landscape the same way if they know that a violent battle happened there or bodies are buried underneath. My project will explore these aspects of change to expand upon current notions of how war impacts the environment, both physically and in the cultural imagination.

I break this introductory chapter into sections to place my argument in conversation with others who examine the connections between war and nature. In the following section, I position myself in relation to scholars who merge concepts of ecocriticism, cultural studies, rhetoric, environmental history, materialism, and military strategy. This portion of the introduction outlines the theoretical contribution of my project and provides a synopsis of my overarching argument. After explaining my approach to the topic, I include two sections on Eliza Frances Andrews, who serves as a key figure throughout this dissertation. References to Andrews' works appear in each chapter, so I foreground her biography and analysis of her unique rhetoric. The two

summary sections on Andrews signify her importance to this project; indeed, my analysis of her works frames my argument and this dissertation as a whole. After introducing Andrews, I provide summaries of the four following chapters, previewing the main idea and the authors I discuss. My approach incorporates a broad range of texts, spanning what Cody Marris has named the transbellum period, to provide one of the first literary attempts to classify an environmental understanding of the Civil War.¹ My project expands existing scholarship while also charting unprecedented territory: in the chapters to follow, I challenge prevailing notions of canonical authors and highlight previously understudied authors, while defining a shift in the cultural understanding of how war shapes the environment.

Theoretical Contribution

Military leaders and historians have always acknowledged the physical relationship between war and the natural world. Leaders analyze key terrain, natural avenues of approach and exit, sunrise, lunar cycles, and the weather to create effective military strategies. Historians later consider how those natural elements led to specific outcomes in battle, and soldiers themselves tell stories about how nature affects their wartime experience (for instance: cold, rainy nights; sand in the boots; or encounters with annoying or dangerous insects). Most examples consider how the physical environment affects warfare and soldiering, but Joseph Hupy also reminds us that “examining the

¹ Marris claims that many Civil War texts cannot be identified as antebellum or postbellum because they bridge the span of the war. Many authors in this study began texts before or during the war and published them years later. By bridging the entire war period, these authors create a new form of “transbellum” literature that Marris describes.

converse is also important; i.e. how and where military operations have *had an effect upon the physical environment*" (406, original emphasis). His article, "The Environmental Footprint of War," begins such an examination, studying how twentieth-century warfare has increased the magnitude of environmental destruction. My project centers the investigation on the Civil War, considering how Civil War battles altered the physical environment. My concern, unlike Hupy's, is not how modern warfare has increased environmental destruction in other countries, but how the sectional violence of the Civil War altered the landscape in our own nation. Unlike many other wars, during the Civil War soldiers often found themselves fighting in familiar environments, causing and observing natural destruction to land that was literally close to home.

Waging war in a familiar landscape complicates how people interpret both the war itself and the natural world. In "The Wilderness of War: Nature and Strategy in the American Civil War," Lisa Brady asserts that "the wartime relationship between humans and nature is a complex arrangement, characterized at times by collaboration, at others by adversarial competition. In the Civil War, both Union and Confederate forces continually negotiated the terms of this relationship" (422). Additional studies elaborate on her approach, reminding us that nature shaped war as war shaped nature. Katherine Shively Meier explains that, "by 1865, men from private to general had lived the reality that to win the Civil War meant adequately mastering nature as much as outmaneuvering and outfighting one's opponent" (37), and Mark Fiege argues that "the [Civil War] was an organic struggle in which two societies fought to use and overcome nature in the service

of competing national objectives” (39).² All three scholars raise questions about nature’s agency. Do humans “collaborate” or “compete” with nature? Do we “master” it, “use” it, and/or “overcome” it? Brady, Meier and Fiege approach the subject as environmental historians, ignoring critical questions of agency. Hannes Bergthaller suggests that we must merge ecocritical studies with environmental histories to “understand not only how particular texts represent the interactions between humans and their ecological environment, but also how such representations reflect and shape real-world environmental practices.” To make these critical connections, Bergthaller reminds us, we “must place [ecocritical studies] within the larger context of historical dynamics that cannot be inferred from these texts alone” (6). Thus, literary studies alone do not provide enough context to draw necessary conclusions. Instead, we must combine ecocriticism with the context that environmental history can provide. This project contributes to that combined scholarship while keeping additional fields of study in mind.

As noted previously, environmental histories exclude a critical component of a thorough examination of human/nature relationships: agency. As Stacy Alaimo and Susan Hekman remind us:

² Additional noteworthy studies include Kelby Ouchly’s *Flora and Fauna of the Civil War: an Environmental Reference Guide*, which examines the impact that humans had on plants and animals as they “tramped across the landscape foraging and waging war” and also considers how “wild plants and animals impacted people in the form of barriers, disease vectors, medicines, food, shelter, and raw products necessary to implement war.” (11). Adam Wesley Dean’s *An Agrarian Republic: Farming, Antislavery Politics, and Nature Parks in the Civil War Era* focuses on the Republican farmer as an individual who cared about small farms and “linked appropriate land use to political stability and cultural progress” to challenge traditional histories of the Civil War. Dean’s study links “antislavery politics, Civil War policy, national parks, and Reconstruction” to consider the connections between them (3).

nature can no longer be imagined as a pliable resource for industrial production or social construction. Nature is agentic—it acts, and those actions have consequences for both the human and nonhuman world. We need ways of understanding the agency, significance, and ongoing transformative power of the world (4-5).

This “transformative power” is a central concept in my study, one that I expand to include nature’s power over human comprehension. Alaimo further describes the problem of agency in *Bodily Natures*, where she suggests that we “[attend] to the material interconnections between the human and the more-than-human world.” She contends that humans have “historically ignored the materiality of nature to turn it into a mere empty space, an ‘uncontested ground’ for human ‘development’” (4). In this construct, humans forget that we are in fact comprised of “nature” as we eschew materiality for empty concepts. My dissertation combines environmental history with material ecocriticism, considering not only how the armies during the Civil War negotiated and altered their physical environment but also how wartime changes to the natural world affected civilian bystanders, public figures, individual soldiers, and others physically and emotionally. Several scholars have considered the physical alterations that the landscape suffered during the Civil War, such as the burying of bodies, raiding of livestock and crops, and the burning of crops and buildings, elements that Drew Gilpin Faust’s *This Republic of Suffering*, Andrew Smith’s *Starving the South*, and Megan Kate Nelson’s *Ruin Nation* discuss in detail. While it is certainly valuable to consider these physical changes for the way they altered future agricultural practices and other natural resources, my project is more concerned with how the human imagination refigures itself as the landscape

changes. My approach launches from material ecocriticism, but it moves significantly towards cultural studies to cast a wider net for our consideration of literature and the environment.

While early ecocritics often focused specifically on nature writing, more recent scholars have worked to ensure that ecocriticism extend beyond a subset of literary texts explicitly interested in the environment. Instead, critics such as Karla Armbruster and Kathleen Wallace, following William Cronon's lead, have worked towards developing an ecocriticism that "understands how nature and culture constantly influence and construct each other" (*Beyond Nature* 4). Scholars such as Karl Kroeber and Susan Kollin also participate in this new kind of cultural ecocriticism. Kroeber claims that "anything cultural must be understood as part of a natural ecosystem," and Kollin contends that "ecocritics need to acknowledge that recognizing nature as a socially constituted entity is not an arrogant or egocentric concept" (310, 46). Both scholars accept the interdependence of nature and culture, a relationship that informs my reading of the Civil War and the environment. Indeed, I maintain that we must read cultural institutions, such as slavery, the military, and complex social structures, as simultaneously influenced by and influencing the natural world.

Because of the interdependence of nature and culture, I argue that the Civil War-era relationships between Americans and the natural world undergo three chronological, though overlapping, phases: *justification*, *comprehension*, and *reconciliation*. At the onset of the war, during the phase I identify as *justification*, Americans wrote about the natural world to defend their cultural institutions and political preferences by making

them seem like a product of the natural environment. The use of environmental rhetoric signified righteousness, as if relating all things to nature made them appropriate, and correct. As the war progressed and its participants' relationship with nature increasingly emphasized necessity, writing about nature shifted as well. During this period I call *comprehension*, individuals began to understand that the landscape was more than an abstract concept to be manipulated for political ideology and more of a literal concern. The comprehension period includes acts of physical destruction as manifestations of violence and the resulting ideological shifts that must occur in response to those acts. Lastly, I identify a period of *reconciliation*. After the war, authors looked to the natural world for healing and reunifying the nation. During this phase, writers rely upon natural imagery and the landscape to advocate for national unification.

Before introducing Eliza Frances Andrews and beginning my analysis, I must address the challenges that vocabulary can present in a study of this complexity. Ecocritics and environmental historians pay special attention to differences between terms such as nature, environment, and ecology. As a scholar who studies the intersections among various fields of study in an effort to bring forgotten texts to the conversation and reinvigorate discussion about human/nonhuman relationships, I admittedly use much vocabulary interchangeably. With the exception of Thoreau, none of the authors I discuss purport to be writing *about* (or for) nature. Instead, the memoirs, letters, novels, and poems I discuss in this project are all *about* the nation and the Civil War. However, I identify an overwhelming reliance on the natural world in each work as these authors share their experiences. For these individuals, nature was just outside the

front door, and the environment was all around them and changing because of the Civil War. Thus, I request readerly indulgence as I conflate vocabulary to represent the experiences of the authors I discuss. When I mention nature, the natural world, or the environment, I am talking about the outdoors and everything that accompanies it (grass, trees, animals, water, weather). These writers seemingly believe that their observations about the environment will somehow make sense of the war, an event that far exceeds human comprehension. Thus, I am less interested in defining vocabulary and elements of ecocriticism than I am in sharing the way these Americans figured their natural world. Lastly, while I, like Alaimo and Heklen, contend that nature is indeed an agent, this study does not purport to represent or claim that agency; my project at times overlooks nature's agency as I focus on the essence of how these authors viewed their natural environments. Rather, making the egocentric move that Susan Kollin suggests we forgive, this study records the ways that humans have relied upon their own observations of nature to make sense of the world.

Diarist, Journalist, Teacher, and Botanist: Eliza Frances Andrews

Eliza Frances Andrews exemplifies the three Civil War phases that this study defines; therefore, her work appears in each chapter to demonstrate how these phases transpire. Because her writing, though not commonly studied, is central to my project, I provide biographical information in this introductory section to make Andrews more accessible to unfamiliar readers. As a diarist, journalist, teacher, and botanist from Georgia, Andrews clearly illustrates the trend I have outlined from the years of 1862,

when she started writing her diary, through 1908, when she returned to the text to add editorial comments after forty-six years of experience. Notably, her perspective changes with time, but her reliance upon environmental rhetoric does not. Though her editorial message has a different attitude from the initial journal, both the original work and the additions demonstrate that Andrews comprehends her world through environmental terms. The distinct voices that Andrews projects as a young diarist and a mature editor emphasize the changing rhetoric I identify throughout her lifetime. I will refer to Andrews throughout, introducing each phase with examples from her text that exhibit key characteristics of justification, comprehension, and reconciliation.

Born in 1840 in Washington, Georgia, Eliza Frances Andrews possessed a lifelong interest in the environment and education.³ As a child, Andrews thrived on a Georgia plantation, participating in privileged slaveholding Southern culture. Just before the onset of civil war, she received a B.A. in language and literature from La Grange Female College. During the war, she traveled around Georgia with her family and witnessed the scenes of greatest conflict, which she captured in her diary. By 1873, both of her parents had passed away and her siblings had settled throughout the South, so Andrews, with no money or local family, embarked upon a teaching career that would include time as a superintendent, a rhetoric teacher, and finally, a botany teacher and textbook author. At first, Andrews dreaded teaching, and she escaped from its monotony

³ Biographical information from Jean Berlin, "Introduction to the Bison Books Edition" of *The War-Time Journal* and Charlotte Ford, "Eliza Frances Andrews, Practical Botanist, 1840-1931" and "Eliza Frances Andrews: Fruitful Life of Toil."

by writing fiction that represented her Southern childhood.⁴ She made additional money publishing four novels: *A Family Secret* (1876), *How He Was Tempted, A Story of the South* (serialized, 1877-1878), *A Mere Adventurer* (1879), and *Prince Hal; or, The Romance of a Rich Young Man* (1882). While this study focuses on Andrews' war diary, I also discuss *A Family Secret* as a text that illustrates Andrews' deployment of natural imagery to comprehend her world.

Andrews never married, claiming that "marriage is incompatible with the career I have marked out for myself" (*Journal* 96). Instead, she traveled the world, studying botany, writing prolifically, and challenging popular opinion about what was appropriate for a woman in the late nineteenth century. She participated in the scientific community, publishing in several botanical journals, including *Popular Science Monthly*, *Garden and Forest*, *Botanical Gazette*, and *American Botanist*. Many of her articles addressed the widespread destruction of the longleaf pine, as well as the importance of conserving Southern plant species. She personally participated in conservation by collecting and classifying Southern flora for fifty years.⁵ In 1910, she presented her collection of over three thousand specimens to the Alabama Department of Agriculture.⁶ Because she believed in the value of botanical education, Andrews wrote and published two botany textbooks that she used in her Georgia classroom. Her contributions to the literary and

⁴ In his introduction to the 2005 republication of *A Family Secret*, Kittrell Rushing discusses the letters and diary that Andrews wrote during her early teaching years.

⁵ Andrews' interest in the protection of Southern flora represents her larger desire to conserve the Southern legacy. Her passion for botanical safeguarding symbolizes a desire for historical preservation of her childhood way of life as well.

⁶ 810 of her specimens now remain in the Auburn University Herbarium.

scientific communities, though understudied, are impressive and unusual for a woman of her time. Her unique experience also adds a distinct environmental/scientific rhetoric to her writing.

As a youth, Andrews was a student of literature and an aspiring author, so she kept a diary “to cultivate ease of style by daily exercise in rapid composition, and, incidentally, to preserve a record of personal experiences for her own convenience (*Journal* 4).⁷ She claims that she did not intend to publish her journal; however, decades after the war, a family member convinced her that she should present the material as an heirloom representing the family’s war experience. When Andrews revisits her text over 40 years later, she finds that her original words were “drunk with the wine of youth and passion” (Andrews 1). In the prologue that she wrote for the diary’s publication, she explains that she has edited the text vigorously, eliminating “tiresome reflections, silly flirtations...thoughtless criticisms,” and any other unnecessary or hurtful subjects. She did not want the document to be perfect, however, so she left her grammatical and informational mistakes to guarantee the “fidelity of the narrative.” Once she completed her editing, she published the journal with the title *The War-Time Journal of a Georgia Girl, 1864-1865*. The portion of the diary that Andrews published begins in December 1864 and ends in August 1865, covering the last few months of the Civil War and the first few of the aftermath. During this time, Andrews traveled across her home state with

⁷ See Sarah Gardner’s work on women’s narratives of the Civil War, particularly how women of the South participate in the Myth of the Lost Cause. See also Kimberly Harris, who includes Andrews’ diary in her argument that Confederate women were “active rhetors, politically and domestically, with lines between the two fronts often blurred” (3).

her sister to stay in southwest Georgia until the conclusion of the war and then returned to their family home in Washington, Georgia. During these journeys, Andrews viewed a portion of Sherman's March to the Sea and recorded her passionate feelings about the destruction of nature.

Because the text includes editorial additions such as a prologue, chapter introductions, and occasional footnotes, a clear distinction emerges between young Andrews the diarist and mature Andrews the editor. The girl who writes the text exudes the youthful passion of an ardent secessionist who has always enjoyed privileged access to well-kept natural spaces and understands her life in those terms. The woman who edits the journal has survived the Civil War, experienced Reconstruction, transitioned into the twentieth century, and participated in the academic community as a teacher and botany scholar. One crucial constant between the two voices, however, is the use of natural imagery for multiple purposes: to justify and legitimize the Old South, explain the Civil War, and construct a plausible identity for the New South.⁸ In a fascinating rhetorical move guided by her scientific background, Andrews uses Darwinian evolutionary theory to articulate how and why the Old South experienced a natural transition into the New South. She relies upon Darwin's description of the "tree of life," his concept of fossilization, and notions of "retrogressive evolution" to make sense of changes catalyzed by the Civil War.

⁸ I use the terms Old and New South in the same way that Andrews does, to describe the South before and after the Civil War. For more discussion, see the conclusion.

In American culture, as Kollin emphasizes, “nature has always been central to the processes of nation formation” (22). Indeed, Andrews forms her version of a nation, the South, by relying on natural imagery to develop an ecological understanding of the South and the Civil War. She does so as a youth in her journal, and she also does it as an adult editing her journal years later. Thus, Andrews fully represents Kollin’s idea that “landscapes are not naturally given, but rather are socially constituted entities whose meanings shift as the result of specific social practices” (19). This study explores that shift, beginning with Andrews and moving through various authors of the period.

Darwin and the Evolution of the South

Relying upon the controversial science of Charles Darwin, Andrews creates a “New South,” not as mythical as the “Old South,” but acceptable to previous Confederates because of natural, evolutionary processes. The prologue and chapter introductions that Andrews contributes to her journal forty years after the war demonstrate a grudging willingness to accept change only because the natural world exemplifies the necessity of such progress. In *The Origin of Species* (1859), Charles Darwin describes the Tree of Life: a multi-branching tree, where new buds on new branches struggle to flourish against older buds. Over time, the success of the new buds causes an extermination of the old, which then drop from the tree. Because Andrews alludes to Darwin’s theory throughout her editorial comments, I provide part of his Tree of Life description here. We should keep this description in mind as we explore how closely Andrews’ narrative follows it.

Of the many twigs which flourished when the tree was a mere bush, only two or three, now grown into great branches, yet survive and bear all the other branches; so with the species *which lived during long-past geological periods*, very few have left living and modified descendants. From the first growth of the tree, *many a limb and branch has decayed and dropped off*; and these fallen branches of various sizes may represent those whole orders, family, and genera which have now no living representatives, and which are *known to us only in a fossil state*. (Darwin 127, emphasis added)

Andrews relies upon a few key concepts from Darwin to present her theoretical evolution of the South. In her editorial comments, she makes several moves to align the South with Darwin's natural processes. First, she compares the Old South to the "*species which lived during long-past geological periods*." Next, she mentions the "*fossil state*" of the Old South. In a later move, she explains how "*many a limb and branch have decayed and dropped off*."

We see Andrews naturalizing the loss of the Civil War in her editorial prologue:

We look back with loving memory upon our past, as we look upon the grave of the beloved dead... We teach the children of the South to honor and revere the civilization of their fathers, which we believe has perished not because it was evil or vicious in itself, but because, like a good and useful man who has lived out his allotted time and gone the way of all the earth, it too has served its turn and must now lie in the grave of the dead past. (10-11)

Andrews wants her reader to understand that the Old South simply outlived its time and had to die, just as any natural being must do. Her explanation both humanizes the Old South and softens the blow of its end. She then takes the metaphor further to begin the connection to Darwin's theory. Andrews compares the Old South to a powerfully beautiful species that has flourished for over a thousand years:

The Old South, with its stately feudal *regime*, was not the monstrosity (sic) that some would have us believe, but merely a case of belated survival, like those giant sequoias of the Pacific slope that have lingered on from age to age, and are now left standing alone in a changed world. (11)⁹

Andrews chooses a representative for her Old South that is not only completely natural in its unique setting, but also seemingly timeless. According to the National Parks Service, “it is estimated that these giants [the sequoias] are between 1800 and 2700 years old. They have seen civilization come and go, survived countless fires and long periods of drought, and continue to flourish.”¹⁰ Andrews’ comparison provides the launching point for her evolutionary theory. She would have her reader believe that, like the sequoia, the Old South is a natural fortress that has survived countless threats and will endure regardless of external strife. Of course, comparing the Old South to a living organism also intimates that it adapts in relation to its organic matter. Even though the sequoias symbolize a kind of changelessness, they must adjust to survive for so long. The ostensibly impervious South must also adapt as a result of the Civil War.

Once Andrews has completed her first move in the Darwin comparison, establishing the Old South as a tenured piece of the landscape, she then references

⁹ The two largest Giant Sequoias in the United States are the General Sherman and the General Grant, named in 1879 and 1867 respectively.

¹⁰ NPS website: <http://www.nps.gov/archive/seki/bigtrees/htm>. For more information on the sequoias, see the NPS Online Book *The Giant Sequoia of the Sierra Nevada* by Richard Hartesveldt, H. Thomas Harvey, Howard Shellhammer, and Ronald E. Stecker, at http://www.nps.gov/history/history/online_books/science/hartesveldt.

Darwin's concept of fossilization.¹¹ Andrews provides her readers the rationale for her published journal:

[It is] not offered to the public as an exposition of the present attitude of the writer or her people, nor as a calm and impartial history of the time with which it deals. It is rather to be compared to one of those *fossil relics* gathered by the geologist from the wrecks of former generations; a simple footprint, perhaps, or a vestige of a bone, which yet, imperfect and of small account in itself, conveys to the practiced eye a clearer knowledge of the world to which it belonged than volumes of learned research. (218, emphasis added)

Here Andrews invokes Darwin's idea of the fossil state as the only piece of a species that remains after evolution has occurred. Interestingly, though, she argues that her journal is historically more important than "volumes of learned research." In her description of the journal as a fossil, Andrews implies that it is authentic, concrete, and indisputable -- a tangible relic of a civilization. Thus, she suggests, we can examine her journal and learn more about the Old South than we could from history books. The Old South, and the journal that describes it, possess cultural and historical value that the nation must preserve.¹²

Comparing the journal to a fossil from a "wreck of a former generation" admits the Old South is that "former generation," now dead; however, evolutionary theory

¹¹ It is interesting that the sequoia is distinctly NOT southern. These trees grow on the Pacific Coast. Most of Andrews' readers had probably never seen one in person; however, images of the massive tree, and the sense of imperviousness that go along with it, would have been available to the reading public.

¹² Here we see Andrews' interest in preservation that she fulfills in later life by collecting Southern flora.

indicates that the next species will begin following its predecessor(s)' death. Darwin concludes his Tree of Life description with rebirth:

As buds give rise by growth to fresh buds, and these, if vigorous, branch out and overtop on all sides many a feebler branch, so by generation I believe it has been with the great Tree of Life, which fills with its dead and broken branches the crust of the earth, and covers the surface with its every branching and beautiful ramifications. (Darwin 107)

This rebirth is central to Darwin's theory of evolution, and it also forms a critical piece of Andrews' understanding of Southern change. In her textbook *A Practical Course in Botany* Andrews describes "retrogressive evolutions." She begins by explaining that "all the evidence we possess does go to show that, since the beginning of life on the globe, there has been a general progressive evolution from lower and simpler to higher and more complex forms;" however, "while the general course of evolution has been upward and onward, the movement has not always followed a straight line, but, like a mountain road shows many windings and deviations from the direct route" (360). This caveat indicates that evolution does not always equate with improvement. Because living conditions naturally alter periodically, ecologies must change, too; the kind of evolution that occurs, then, depends on the quality of the living conditions. If conditions degrade in some way, the evolving organisms will adapt to survive in the degraded condition, thus interrupting "upward" movement of evolutionary progress. When we place this discussion in the context of Andrews' Old and New Souths, it seems possible that she views the evolution of the South as retrogressive. Thus, the New South has adapted to survive, but it is not necessarily "higher and more complex" than the previous version that has "*decayed and*

dropped off.” Andrews’ reliance upon science allows her editorial voice to seem fully compliant with the New South while subtly suggesting that the Old South of her youth was actually better.

While Andrews’ opening prologue clearly invokes evolutionary theory, her most overt reference to Darwin appears near the end of the journal, in her introduction to the chapter “Foreshadowings of the Race Problem.” In this chapter, which covers June 1 – July 1, 1865, young Andrews records her anger and bewilderment at the behavior of recently freed slaves in her town and laments the new living conditions that her family must endure. In her explanatory note, she takes the opportunity to speak against the Fifteenth Amendment to the Constitution:

[The amendment] injected a race problem into our national life. There it stands to-day, a solid wedge of alien material cleaving the heart wood of our nation’s *tree of life*, and throwing the dead weight of its impenetrable mass on whatever side its own interest or passion, or the influence of designing politicians may direct it. (281, emphasis added)

Andrews provides a distinctive Darwin reference but again reminds her readers that something has gone wrong. While she accepts the evolutionary process represented by the Tree of Life, she views Reconstruction efforts as interfering with that natural process. Indeed, for her, Reconstruction was a “deplorable succession of blunders and outrages that has bequeathed us the most terrible legacy of the war – the race problem” (336). She views this problem as an obstacle that interferes with natural evolutionary processes. Andrews uses a natural, albeit awkward, metaphor to describe the issues. For her, it is “common sense...the simple fact that a horse and an ox, or an elephant and an antelope,

cannot pull together in the same harness.” Andrews’ complaint represents bitterness about Reconstruction efforts that remains even after a lifetime of experience, and her grossly inappropriate comparison belies her scientific expertise.¹³ While she accepts that the South has evolved, she cannot admit that the New South is an improvement. She goes to great lengths through most of the editorial text to appear accepting; however, we see at the end that she can still use evolutionary theory to explain history in a way that works for her.

As a Georgia woman, an educated botanist, a science teacher, a world traveler, a published novelist, journalist, diarist, and textbook author, Andrews provides complex material for analysis. She is surprisingly understudied and has never been approached in the manner I suggest for this dissertation, even though her use of environmental rhetoric surrounding the Civil War is both overt and complicated. Andrews provides clear examples of the three phases of environmental rhetoric and understanding that I identify. Examples from her journal will connect the discussion of justification, comprehension, and reconciliation in the chapters that follow.

Chapter Summaries

The authors in this dissertation appear in a roughly chronological manner, from 1852 to 1908, covering the environmental rhetoric of the years before, during, and after the Civil War. My organization reflects my argument, which relies upon the trajectory of

¹³ One could argue that her comparison is less racially offensive, since she conflates both white and black laborers with animals; however, the fact remains that the comparison seems out of character for the educated Andrews we see elsewhere.

the Civil War to identify trends in environmental rhetoric. Following a long ecocritical tradition, I begin my project with a chapter on Henry David Thoreau, who is well-known for his nature writing and his abolitionist, anti-imperialist message. Most of Thoreau's writing predates the war, and he also provides a Northern viewpoint, in stark contrast to the Southern, slaveholder Andrews. Thoreau provides an appropriate launching point not only because he is often named the father of American nature writing, but also because his method of providing natural metaphors to support his staunch beliefs represents the kind of self-righteous justification that I identify in the antebellum period. Even though Michael Branch argues convincingly that Thoreau is not the first American to write about nature, Thoreau nevertheless provides a provocative foundation for my pre-Civil War discussion.

Other critics' work suggests why we need Thoreau's writing to ground this project. A recent collection, edited by Kristen Case and K.P. Van Anglen, celebrates two hundred years since Thoreau's birth by interrogating the often-fragmented approach that scholars have taken to his work and suggesting a more holistic attitude instead. These essays remind us that "the fact that Thoreau remains not only a canonical but also a truly popular writer seems cause for hope, and also cause for renewed attention to the social impulse that the caricature of him as rugged individualist or lonely hermit elides" (2). Indeed, the editors suggest that we focus on Thoreau's neighborly impulse as it refers to both human and nonhuman companions. Robert Gross, in his examination of the writer's anti-war/slavery/establishment stance, notes that "few political protests have achieved so little in their time and gained so much subsequent renown," but Gross's study fails to

connect Thoreau's political (in)activities to his philosophical ideas about nature and the environment. Richard Schneider's essay collection, *Thoreau's Sense of Place: Essays in American Environmental Writing*, however, pays special attention to Thoreau's use of environmental rhetoric for political purposes.

My study builds upon the work in each of these scholarly collections. I argue that Thoreau's reliance upon the natural world to establish his political beliefs both draws upon an existing American tradition of using the natural world to validate behavior and lays the groundwork for future writers to participate in similar methods of justification. Thoreau provides a captivating example of the potential contradiction that emerges from invoking the natural world for political causes.

In conjunction with Thoreau, chapter two studies Frederick Law Olmsted, the landscape architect whose famous work designing New York's Central Park and California's Golden Gate Park overshadows his earlier, understudied, travel encyclopedia of the antebellum South. This massive reference volume, titled *The Cotton Kingdom, A Traveller's Observations on Cotton and Slavery in the American Slave States: Based upon Three Former Volumes of Journeys and Investigations by the Same Author*, provides fascinating descriptions of Olmsted's travels and contacts with rural Southerners in ways that illuminate often-unstated traditions about humans' interaction with the natural world. Olmsted's explanations clarify not only Southern notions of property ownership and farming but also his own understated comprehension of the natural order. Thus, a thorough examination of his text provides another example of justification much like the one my analysis of Thoreau inaugurates.

Following the period in which individuals on both sides of the Mason-Dixon line justified their lifestyles through a falsely constructed environmental framework, the Civil War violently changed the very landscape that such individuals had used to rationalize their lives. My second section examines the phenomenon I designate “comprehension,” which considers the ways that both combatants and non-combatants understand the violence of war through physical landscape alterations they can see and feel. Beginning with an introductory discussion of how Andrews’ wartime diary records the destruction of trees, fields, and flowers as manifestations of Northern violence against the South, this section highlights the ways individuals often conflated destruction of the environment with violence against humans. I argue that comprehending the violence of war through physical destruction was a necessary step for witnesses to experience prior to the reconciliation phase. In the two chapters of this section described below, I identify key differences between authors who participated tangibly in landscape destruction, those who viewed it as non-participants, and those who did not physically observe it. I argue that these differences figured centrally in how people understood the war.

Chapter three, the first in the *comprehension* section, focuses on non-combatants who either witnessed or heard about war-induced devastation. Many women offer poetry and prose that examines the Civil War from perspectives both on and off the battlefield. I draw upon the scholarship of Sarah Gardner, Elizabeth Young, and Drew Gilpin Faust in my analysis of writers such as Sarah Piatt and Matilda Pierce. Not only do these women construct their own identities through conventions in their writing, but they do so specifically with environmental rhetoric. Although white authors occupied a privileged

place in the writing arena during the mid-to-late nineteenth century, African American writers published as well, and I examine the writing of two. Both Susie King Taylor and Elizabeth Keckley participate in an ecoliterary tradition that is often overlooked by ecocritics. Here, I build upon the work of Kimberly Ruffin and Dianne Glave, who claim that African American writing contributes to the creation of a specifically African American relationship with the environment and a unique environmental rhetoric. I expand upon this scholarship to consider how these writers comprehend the war in environmental terms.

These women interpret war's violence varyingly, yet their writings all rely upon the natural world to understand that violence. While I group these diverse figures together into one chapter, I recognize that they encompass vastly different perspectives. Thus, this chapter also explores how these differences actually highlight the similarities in the way that they comprehend the war. Even though their experiences vary significantly, the constant in their writing is that the Civil War violence altered their observable landscape. The various ways these women write about the changes demonstrate multiple methods for comprehending and coping with the war.

While non-combatants played a significant role in interpreting and recording their experiences, soldiers from the North and South also contributed greatly to the body of literature about war and the physical environment. Chapter four focuses on these men. Often writing without envisioning a specific audience, soldiers recorded how the environment shaped their battles while also commenting on their own effects on the environment. Issues such as foraging and environmental destruction become paramount,

and the confusion caused by nature serving alternately as friend and foe appears throughout the writing of many soldiers, including Sidney Lanier and Sam Watkins. Their narratives, substantiated by the writings of many others, provide daily accounts of life as soldiers living in the “wilderness.” These accounts will illustrate how combatants from opposing forces often came to understand the war in similar ecological terms. Thus, these natural understandings of place become battlegrounds themselves, highly contested discourses used by individuals on both sides of the conflict to understand wartime events. Both the justification and comprehension sections of the dissertation demonstrate the inherent danger in creating an ecological justification for lifestyle or war.

My fifth and final chapter moves beyond the end of the Civil War to foreground authors seeking reconciliation. Again I introduce the chapter with Andrews, demonstrating how her journal’s editorial additions reimagine Southern change in terms of environmental evolution. Then, I move to Walt Whitman and Herman Melville, famous authors who published books of poetry after the Civil War. Like Andrews’ diary, their collections engage in the kind of natural discourse that the previous chapters discuss; however, these canonical poets move beyond justification and comprehension into a more thoughtful and often difficult reconciliation. Both struggle with their representations of the natural world as they attribute war and peace to various natural phenomena. Whitman’s and Melville’s poetry often questions how peaceful landscapes can become violent sites of destruction and then return to their undisturbed state. My examination begins briefly with Whitman, whose poetic optimism is well-documented. I depart from Whitman to focus much more fully on Melville, whose poetry has received

less critical attention. My study considers how Melville's poetry calls for a reliance upon natural cycles to achieve a challenging, but attainable, national reconciliation.

The dissertation that follows seems dizzyingly broad: a collection of poetry and prose from men and women, black and white, North and South, young and old, all framed by the story of one "Georgia Girl." While this broad scope unavoidably limits the depth of my analysis, I find it valuable to include myriad perspectives, because my study is the first literary attempt to classify an environmental understanding of the Civil War. I strive to demonstrate how the physical landscape, though varied across the country, became a contested reality for everyone affected by the Civil War. Future projects may narrow the scope of my claims and attempt to classify subsections of the broad moves I identify, but breadth is necessary at this point. I hope this collection launches subsequent conversations and contributes to the future combination of material ecocriticism and cultural studies.

CHAPTER II

“WALKING” THROUGH THE *COTTON KINGDOM*

Free State of Jones

Hollywood released a version of Civil War history in a 2016 movie about Newton Knight, a Mississippi farmer who deserted from the Confederate Army and led an insurgence against its troops. While several factors led to Knight’s rebellion, the film, *Free State of Jones*, highlights some key concepts that form his doctrine. First, Knight believes that poor Southerners, particularly small farm-owners who don’t own slaves, shouldn’t have to fight the war so that the rich plantation owners can remain rich. When Knight’s young nephew is forcibly conscripted and then dies in battle, Knight deserts his unit to return the boy’s body to his mother. Knight sees no purpose for the boy’s death and resents being required to fight in a war that he views as unrelated to his own life. While home returning the dead nephew, Knight realizes that the Confederate tax collector has been making unreasonable demands on rural families. When the Confederate government passed a law requiring all residents to provide 10% of their belongings to the Confederacy, tax agents and Soldiers were interpreting that 10% liberally, often taking almost everything and leaving women and children on small homesteads with barely enough to survive. To fight back against unreasonable forfeitures, Knight teaches the women and children to protect themselves and becomes an enemy to the Confederate Army. Subsequently, he flees into the swamps, where he leads a community of runaway

slaves and other Confederate deserters in a rebellion against what they view as an unjust war over unjust principles.

Newton Knight is an unusual character, but he reminds us that not all Southerners were privileged plantation slaveowners. Indeed, many white Southerners worked land that they didn't even own. Knight's perspective on farming demonstrates a Utopian notion of land rights, however, where ownership is related more to work than to legal papers and privilege. In the community that he develops, every farmer deserves to reap the bounty of his harvest. When Knight and his followers affirm their independence as a "free county," one of the statements on their creed is that "anything a man puts into the ground is his." These individuals believe in their right to grow and keep their own crops and that no one should be able to take that away from them. The film's representation of this farming attitude demonstrates a fundamental relationship with the earth that coincides with small agrarian communities and gets lost in the period's plantation culture. In both cultures, one concept of ownership prevails: I own the land and everything that comes from it. In the agrarian culture, however, personal labor contributes to ownership. The owner of a small farm must work the land to reap the benefits of claiming what grows out of it. For a plantation owner, the element of personal labor disappears in a complex system of slavery and global trade that obviates the need for the owners' work and replaces it with enslaved laborers who can be grossly abused. For those workers, the possibility of owning anything they grow remains elusive.

The film demonstrates different ways that humans understand land ownership and provides an excellent launching point for this chapter, which explores how humans'

interaction with the earth and nonhumans creates and informs those beliefs. While this discussion is by no means exhaustive, I include various examples of humans negotiating the human/nature relationship to explore its complexities. These varying notions of land ownership lead to the *justification* phase that characterizes American culture before the Civil War. During this period, notions of proper land use were closely related to work, although people understood work differently. Justification is closely related to *naturalization* as Noel Sturgeon defines it in *Environmentalism in Popular Culture*: “ideas of nature provide a basic but malleable form of justification for social relations in Western culture, where social injustice is presented as the “natural order.” Sturgeon specifically cites a prevalent example for the Civil War: “black people were enslaved in the United States through ideologies that painted them as closer to animals” (12). While this study does not interrogate the specific ideologies that enabled slavery, it does explore how humans could easily justify most behavior by naturalizing it. Because the human/nature relationship defies precise definition, Americans in the period created their own natural models to justify their behaviors.

I begin this chapter with Eliza Frances Andrews’ journal to define justification and provide examples. After framing the discussion with Andrews, I address pre-Civil War understanding of the natural world from two key figures, Henry David Thoreau and Frederick Law Olmsted, to see how easily they represent nature in often contradictory ways. The two men who comprise this chapter represent many others: farmers, agriculturalists, travel-writers, nature-writers, plantation owners, landscape architects, and other personalities of the antebellum era.

Following the tradition of many ecocritical studies, I begin with the creator of traditional nature writing as we know it, Henry David Thoreau. Studying Thoreau's essays to determine how he establishes common perceptions of humans and the natural world helps define "justification" as a launching point for environmental understandings of the Civil War. I argue that, before the conflict, individuals across the nation understood their lives in terms of their landscape and used that model as a justification for their various lifestyles. During this period, Americans had a relationship with the land around them that involved mutually beneficial work: humans worked on their landscape, and both they and nature benefited. Because Thoreau's works have such a strong tenure in the American canon, I look there to establish an interpretive baseline. While most scholarship focuses on his book-length collections, I pay special attention to two essays he published during the Civil War, "Walking" and "Autumnal Tints." I examine how Thoreau's writing participates in justification and establishes a confusing prescription for others to follow.

This chapter next discusses Frederick Law Olmsted, best-known for his landscape architecture but whose writings deserve ecocritical attention. Though it is unclear whether Thoreau influenced Olmsted, the latter develops some of the notions that Thoreau set forth and further defines humans' place in the natural world.¹⁴ Lawrence Buell's definition of the literary excursion narrative begun by Thoreau describes Olmsted's writing as well:

¹⁴ This study is the first to compare the two authors directly, although Andrew Menard publishes separately on each of them.

It [the literary excursion] was a succession of confrontations with nature, from each of which the observer is expected to extract as much as he can, the mark of success being not so much in the planning of one's itinerary or imaginative rearrangement of events as in the way in which he runs the gamut of events as they occur. (*Literary Transcendentalism* 202)

Olmsted's writing similarly presents these "confrontations with nature" as he travelled through the slaveholding states before the war in an attempt to understand the plantation system and to justify the strange form of agriculture upon which plantation owners had come to rely. Even though Olmsted intended to report without bias, his series of events and observations along the way took a slight turn towards abolition; the more he studied the slaveholding economy, the less he understood why anyone would manage their land in such an unproductive way. While Olmsted "runs the gamut of events as they occur," he unintentionally redefines what it means to labor in a slave economy and challenges the wisdom of those associated with the system. His writings illustrate multiple perspectives on prewar relationships with nature and demonstrate how the established ways of thinking about the environment set the stage for wartime confusion. By interpreting these large actors from the antebellum era, I determine that proper human/nature relationships defy definition, although work seems to be a common element in them. Because nature presented so many contradictions, humans were able to justify various methods of land use throughout the nation.

Andrews and the Embowered Plantation

Eliza Frances Andrews exemplifies how privileged men and women understood their surroundings in terms of natural beauty that was actually enabled by human labor.

Andrews describes the places surrounding her plantation home multiple times in her diary: “large white house in the midst of a beautiful garden, where roses of all sorts were running riot, filling the air with fragrance and the earth with beauty” (168). “How beautiful home does look, with the green leaves on the trees and the Cherokee roses in full bloom, flinging their white festoons clear over the top of the big sycamore by the gate! Surely this old home of ours is the choicest spot of all the world” (174). In these descriptions, Andrews illustrates the plantation’s beauty without mentioning the slave labor required to create and maintain them. She makes it seem as though the garden landscape is beautiful because it is a natural outcropping of the home, when, in fact, the labor required to keep the gardens that she describes would be extensive.

Andrews provides additional descriptions of the embowered plantation home in her novel, *A Family Secret*. She illustrates a fictional “White House,” which has been carefully designed to present Southern flora as a natural outgrowth of the construction:

On the western side the spaces between the columns were filled in with trellis-work for the support of creeping vines, which clambered up to the roof and fell back again in showers of gorgeous blossoms, that rendered the air in spring-time almost oppressive with their fragrance. (134)

The “trellis-work” allows the vines to cover the house in a way that naturalizes it, making the plantation home seem as if it grew out of the wilderness and belonged there, when the reality is that the plantation is manmade and requires significant labor to maintain. It takes a Civil War for Andrews to finally recognize that the natural beauty she has come to enjoy does not occur without human labor. While congratulating herself on her

newfound ability to clean house (work she has never before had to do), Andrews acknowledges that much of her previously comfortable existence was enabled by the family slaves. She shares: “our establishment has been reduced from 25 servants to 5, and two of these are sick. Uncle Watson and Buck do the outdoor work, or rather the small part of it that can be done by two men. The yard, grove, orchards, vineyards, and garden already show sad evidences of neglect” (375-6). Within this description, Andrews admits not only that the Southern landscape of her youth has been dependent upon slave labor, but also that it requires many more than two men to provide the artifice of natural perfection.

These notions of work and nature echo throughout antebellum literature, the subject this chapter explores. Before the war, many Americans positioned nature on a scale ranging from wild to cultivated, where humans understood wild areas as untouched and cultivated areas as resources for their consumption. The two authors in this chapter initially seem to represent opposite ends of the spectrum; however, as this study will illuminate, they each occupy multiple positions on what seems a slippery slope.

Thoreau: Justification for “Wildness”

Studies regarding the way Thoreau established humans’ place in nature owe much to Lawrence Buell’s seminal work *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture*. Buell outlines how Thoreau’s early writings help establish American views of the natural world, and he argues that, while Thoreau possessed a privileged place on the nature-writing stage, there were indeed many

critical works being published by other authors during the mid-nineteenth century that also profoundly impacted the way Americans viewed their environment. In fact, Buell reminds us that we must “imagine Thoreau not as the one American practitioner of the nature essay amid a group of male writers of wilderness romance and nature poetry, but rather as part of an extensive, variegated literature of environmental prose” (26).

Considering Thoreau and the authors around him in this way allows us to acknowledge that Thoreau may have set the conditions for much American nature writing, but there is more nature writing that we should consider outside the conventional genre that we typically attribute to Thoreau. Thus, I begin this study with Thoreau to examine what kind of guidelines he established before considering more noncanonical authors in the remaining chapters.

As I indicate periodically, echoes of Thoreau recur as Americans come to terms with the Civil War. While Buell’s seminal Thoreau work focuses primarily on *Walden* and often considers *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers*, recent studies have spent more time on Thoreau’s late essays, which he developed and wrote down a decade after originally presenting them as lectures. Len Gougeon provides a publishing history of the late essays, noting that Thoreau wrote them at the request of James T. Fields, who wished to print them in response to the burgeoning Civil War and the British support of the South. “Walking,” “Autumnal Tints,” and “Wild Apples” were published as the lead articles in *The Atlantic Monthly* in June, October, and November of 1862, and “Life Without Principle” appeared the following October. Gougeon argues that Thoreau’s essays directly oppose the United States to Great Britain, creating a New World/ Old

World dichotomy in which all things new are better. To respond to England's journalistic treatment of the Civil War, "Fields was looking for an authentic American voice, representative of the nation's uniquely democratic values. He found that voice in Thoreau, who wrote of America's natural and social environment and expressed himself in a distinctly American idiom" (127). Thus, while Buell contends that Thoreau's works were foundational for American concepts of nature, Gougeon suggests that they also established American wilderness as distinctly different from and better than British civility.

Thoreau's overarching claims to national superiority may seem boastful, but his confident voice is one of his most appealing, if not infuriating, features. In characteristic style, he begins "Autumnal Tints" by insulting England: "Europeans coming to America are surprised by the brilliancy of our autumnal foliage. There is no account of such a phenomenon in English poetry, because the trees acquire but few bright colors there" (281). While his comparison does present some literal truth, Gougeon intimates that the criticism is more political than literal: "America's rugged and pristine natural environment was, in Thoreau's view, the perfect place for a democratic culture to emerge and thrive without the hindrance of age-old institutions of aristocratic privilege that perpetuated social and political inequality." He continues, "Thoreau's essay offers an example of what might be called a kind of 'ecopolitics' in which the political structures of the unspoiled 'New World' are naturally superior to those of the corrupt 'Old World'

(Gougeon 130).¹⁵ Better nature, as in the U.S., leads to better democracy and a superior nation. Of course, this claim is flawed. The antebellum U.S. was not free of “age-old institutions.” In fact, the South was encumbered by one of the oldest and most problematic customs in the world – slavery – and Thoreau’s work both explicitly rejects and unwittingly supports the practice.

While I don’t suggest that Thoreau agreed with the tenets of human enslavement, the contradictions and uncertainties his writing present do require us to question how authoritative his stance on slavery really could be. In his study of Thoreau’s antislavery essays, Peter Bellis claims that “Thoreau’s work almost explodes under the pressure of the slavery issue. Nature and society, language and moral action—the terms that *Walden* struggles to bring together—are cast asunder with the utmost possible force. The antislavery essays end by emptying out the middle landscape of pastoral, leaving a nonhuman wilderness set against an all-too human world of social corruption” (152). Bellis’ assessment attributes moral right and indignation to Thoreau, and I agree that much of his writing possesses those attributes. The author’s self-confidence borders on arrogance, and he presents his version of moral rectitude with the utmost authority.

Much of Thoreau’s confidence is pretense. At times in his work we see him questioning his relationship with nature as well as asking if his interest in the natural world is appropriate. While reading Thoreau’s *Journal*, Nancy Craig Simmons notices how self-consciously the author explains his own work – the importance of observing

¹⁵ See my conclusion for more discussion of new/old world constructs.

nature so that he can write about it. In fact, Simmons argues, “writing became for Thoreau a justification of his way of living—his vocation or ‘business’” (227). She notes that Thoreau had to find a reason for his interest in nature, and writing gave him the grounds. The author recognized that he was participating in an important form of cultural work by recording his observations.

Simmons’ notion of justification in Thoreau’s work relates directly to the concept that I describe in this chapter. While she claims that Thoreau used writing to validate his time spent in nature, I contend that his work created a rationalization for society to also spend time in nature and problematically defined how to do that. Thoreau, as America’s first popular nature writer, documented a cultural understanding that shaped antebellum ideas of human and nonhuman relationships. His early environmental writing established accepted notions of how humans should relate to nature. As future manifestations of his doctrine would eventually show, however, his shaping of those ideas was inherently flawed. My concept of justification asserts that humans problematically dominate nature and use it according to their needs. Moreover, justification establishes a human/nonhuman dichotomy in which humans are the only agents. Thus, while readers have looked to Thoreau for an understanding of how we should commune with nature, Thoreau’s body of works ultimately fail to provide a coherent definition. Instead, he creates a flawed dichotomy by which all justification seems appropriate

As Thoreau faced the challenge of presenting nature as he experienced it, he was also establishing human/nonhuman relationships. And while he may have believed that he was nature’s advocate, his position in the dichotomy was troubled. Indeed, scholars

have interpreted Thoreau's famous opening to "Walking" in conflicting ways that demonstrate the difficulty of placing Thoreau in relation to nature: "I wish to speak a word for Nature, for absolute freedom and wildness, as contrasted with a freedom and culture merely civil, – to regard man as an inhabitant, or a part and parcel of Nature, rather than a member of society" (243). We can read Thoreau's assertion benignly, as hoping to speak a word "on behalf" of nature; however, he places himself in a problematic position, that of a human appropriating nature's voice. Simmons doesn't see how Thoreau "might do this without colonizing or appropriating the nonhuman – imposing his own language on nature, controlling and reducing it through language for human 'use' and consumption" (223). Simmons' idea of use and consumption ties back to the way that Thoreau uses his nature-writing as work and relates directly to the concept of justification. Thoreau justifies his position as a writer by providing something of cultural value to be consumed by society. Given this notion of the way that man can appropriate nature's voice to use it for profit, "Walking" establishes an essentially troubled way of looking at the land.

If we accept that Thoreau's writing embodies a form of labor that he uses to justify his lifestyle and support himself, then his own musings on properly enjoying present additional challenges as well.

In my afternoon walk I would fain forget all my morning occupations and my obligations to society. But it sometimes happens that I cannot easily shake off the village. The thought of some work will run in my head, and I am not where my body is... What business have I in the woods, if I am thinking of something out of the woods? (248)

Thoreau presents “occupations,” “obligations” and “business” as elements belonging to “the village,” not the woods, and he critiques his own difficulty in separating the elements. However, if Thoreau plans to write about his outdoor excursions, is he not fulfilling some kind of work obligation by walking in the woods? He indicates in “Autumnal Tints” that nature itself keeps work and pleasure separate. Discussing the magnificence of the Purple Grass, he claims: “How fortunate that it grows in such places, and not in the midst of the rank grasses which are annually cut! Nature thus keeps use and beauty distinct” (284-5). However, Thoreau does not always keep the two discrete, even as he advocates for their distinction. When he represents the landscape, Thoreau modifies his descriptions to emphasize elements he finds important. Isaiah Smithson compares Thoreau to American landscape painters Thomas Cole and Asher Durand, who often manipulate scope and perspective. Just as a landscape artist might “[insert] a withered tree as a framing device,” “[reduce] the size of human figures to emphasize the grandeur and indifference of the surrounding landscape,” [create] specific weather and light conditions,” and “[ignore] some actual feature and [invent] others,” Thoreau manipulates the way he records his observations to create a more attractive landscape for consumption.¹⁶ This artistic license is problematic for a writer who purports to “speak for

¹⁶ Smithson traces the minor descriptive changes that Thoreau makes in his “Autumnal Tints” essay to demonstrate how he participates in a similar kind of artistic license that the landscape painters, such as Thomas Cole (whom Smithson analyzes in depth) use. Similarly, we know that Thoreau crafted *Walden* to achieve the effect of a seasonal cycle, thus providing a nature journal that is not exactly ‘natural’ but somewhat fabricated. When Smithson compares the writer and the artist, he notes that they had different purposes for crafting their art. It is still worthwhile to make the comparison between the two kinds of artists, however, to consider how each operates within his medium to achieve his desired purpose (Smithson 95).

nature.” Indeed, in his *Journal*, Thoreau explicitly disavows landscape painting because it presents “Nature as somebody has portrayed her,” rather than “Nature as she is.” Yet, his own work of depicting nature through words has the same effect of concealing “Nature as she is” under the cover of Nature as Thoreau has described her. Thus, Thoreau’s work of portraying nature essentially creates nature for American consumption and establishes the way that Americans perceive and understand their place within the landscape.

The ability to understand human place in the environment becomes more complicated as Thoreau shapes his descriptions to make various political points. While nineteenth-century artists painted landscapes intended to create national identity and invoke pride, Thoreau’s interest in landscape eschewed patriotic ideals. For Thoreau, nature was a place where politics did not apply, as Smithson remarks:

The emphasis is not on the ‘Americanness’ of these places, but on their wildness. For Thoreau, wildness is exhibited in selected landscapes, personalities, and works of art from all places and eras; exists in opposition to mere civility; can connect humans with their nonhuman neighbors; and entails freedom that goes beyond nationalism. (106)

The idea of Thoreau’s freedom going “beyond nationalism” seems appropriate, especially considering his open criticism of U.S. policies regarding slavery, war, and other related issues. Thoreau may not have had a nationalist agenda; however, his writings informed a public that was grappling with ideas of national identity that, because of him, they looked to nature to solve. And Thoreau’s work in “Walking” does in fact ascribe appropriate nationalist qualities onto the landscape. The opening lines of the essay, quoted above, “deliberately constrict[s] the parameters of nationhood to those of

nature. ‘If the moon looks larger here than in Europe,’ Thoreau reflects a little later, ‘if the heavens of America appear infinitely higher, and the stars brighter,’ these facts must be “symbolical of the height to which the philosophy and poetry and religion of her inhabitants may one day soar”– “else to what end does the world go on, and why was America discovered?””(qtd. in Menard 592). And because this public was accustomed to looking at landscape art for its national appeal, landscape writing likely produced a similar effect. Even while Thoreau was pointing away from putative Americanness in pursuit of wildness, he inadvertently established both. He contradicts himself by invoking political implications while he purports to avoid them. His simultaneous aversion to and embracing of nationalism demonstrates just one of the contradictions he presents.

Indeed, Thoreau’s prescription for a relationship with nature appears excessively complicated. As Smithson notes, Thoreau’s ideal reveals “two contradictory faces: one asserting a kinship shared by human and nonhuman life, and the other insisting on an irreconcilable divide between human and nonhuman life” (108). Those two concepts differ significantly, and the paradox at hand challenges our ability to determine appropriate relationships with nature. The connection is further complicated by the fact that Thoreau *fabricates* his experiences in nature to develop a relationship with it. I use the term not to insinuate that Thoreau’s written experiences were fictional; instead, I use it to highlight how he records so much purposefully for human consumption. Again, I am not questioning Thoreau’s motivations or his experiments’ legitimacy. Instead, I simply want to recognize that the work he does as an observer inherently affects his relationship with nature and thus influences those who follow him. As Smithson reminds us through

his analysis of “Autumnal Tints,” Thoreau “constantly and overtly called his audience’s attention to his own representational devices.”¹⁷ As a result of this overt representation, Thoreau cannot escape his own presence in nature. His work contributes to the tension of the human/nonhuman relationship. And while he works to observe and document and know nature, he acknowledges the challenges of knowing something that is perpetually changing.

In the “Fallen Leaves” section of his “Autumnal Tints” essay, Thoreau remarks upon how the seasonal shift makes a seemingly stable nature become suddenly unknowable and confusing. His descriptions of the changing landscape suggest the confusion that occurs when a human realizes that he is not a part of nature. As Thoreau walks through the woods in the fall, he tells the following anecdote:

The other day I could hardly find a well-known spring, and even suspected that it had dried up, for it was completely concealed by freshly fallen leaves; and when I swept them aside and revealed it, it was like striking the earth, with Aaron’s rod, for a new spring. Wet grounds about the edges of swamps look dry with them. At one swamp, where I was surveying, thinking to step on a leafy shore from a rail, I got into the water more than a foot deep. (295-6)

Through this sketch, Thoreau acknowledges that nature changes and is difficult to know, even when one is certain he does (“well-known spring”). His brief mention of this uncertainty indicates that there may be other explanations of the relationship between humans and nature. While common understanding would have one believe that there is

¹⁷ Smithson’s analysis of Thoreau as landscape painter builds off Sharon Cameron’s discussion, which he acknowledges in his essay (98-99).

only one way to interact with the natural world, Thoreau's anecdote demonstrates additional possibilities that will have to be acknowledged in a post-Civil War America. Even as he establishes our place in the natural world, Thoreau also allows for the possibility of future (seasonal) change. His anecdote also reminds us that humans cannot know the intricacies of nature. Such knowledge is relegated to the forest's nonhumans who navigate natural spaces with significantly more ease than humans.

Another problem with understanding nature stems from human challenges of perspective. Thoreau criticizes humans for their shortsightedness: "I have found that it required a different intention of the eye, in the same locality, to see different plants, even when they were closely allied, as *Juncacea* and *Graminea*: when I was looking for the former, I did not see the latter in the midst of them" (314). Thoreau indicates human failure as a primary reason for an ineffectual relationship with nature. He notes that the eye can only see what it looks for, and he reminds us that different people will observe the same scene in multiple ways:

There is just as much beauty visible to us in the landscape as we are prepared to appreciate,-- not a grain more. The actual objects which one man will see from a particular hill-top are just as different from those which another will see as the beholders are different. (313)

Personal observation and human perspective form another critical part of interpreting and representing landscape, which is the subject of James McGrath's essay "Ten Ways of Seeing Landscapes in *Walden* and Beyond." McGrath begins with seminal concepts about landscape observation and applies them to Thoreau. He argues that, as a "founder

of American environmental writing... Thoreau develops most of the ways our culture approaches landscapes” (150). Drawing from D. W. Meinig’s ten ways of viewing landscapes, McGrath outlines how Thoreau’s *Walden* represents the world around him: the writer describes landscape as nature, as wealth, as aesthetic, as history, as habitat, and as system, to name a few. These representations are not always complimentary; indeed, some of them are worth questioning. How could Thoreau, who allegedly advocated for the wild and would likely be considered an environmentalist today, represent nature in these sometimes-conflicting ways? We may question how a man who claims he speaks for nature could also write about it as wealth, or as a system. Given the fact that the foremost nature writer of his day can display such ambivalence about what nature truly is and how we know it, then we can clearly see how a Southern plantation owner could view his landscape, though quite different from that at Walden Pond, in a similar manner. When we consider the multiple ways of viewing the landscape that Thoreau engenders and that this chapter has discussed thus far, we can begin to understand how antebellum Americans used nature to justify their lifestyles, as varied as those lifestyles may have been.

Studies of farming in the pre-Civil War era illuminate some of the various ways that Americans understood their landscape and serve as an excellent means to examine how Thoreau’s concepts of human/nonhuman interaction shaped early American thought. Lisa Brady explores how the period’s prevalent concepts of nature shaped Civil War strategy in the introductory chapter of her text, *War Upon The Land*. Brady outlines crucial differences in Northern and Southern ways of understanding the agroecosystem.

Beginning with Donald Worster's definition of the term, "an ecosystem reorganized for agricultural purposes – a domesticated ecosystem," Brady further clarifies that the agroecosystem offers a "fundamental means by which certain human societies interact with and understand the natural environment."¹⁸ Because humans create these ecosystems which are marginally natural yet cultivated, humans both shape and are eventually shaped by their relationships to them. Much as Thoreau's writings demonstrate, correct human/nature relationships defy definition because of the varying ways that humans engage with their landscapes. Brady provides specific examples of how these differences appear regionally in the antebellum era.

Northern and Southern antebellum farmers understood the farm in vastly different ways. For the Northern farmer, self-sufficiency was the goal, and most family-owned farms operated as small ventures where the families provided the labor themselves, occasionally hiring supplemental help during the most labor-intensive seasons.¹⁹ For many Northerners, however, land ownership was an unattainable dream. Thus, when the Union cause promised "free soil, free labor, free men," Northern farmers enlisted in droves, bringing with them their own notions of the appropriate agroecosystem. These individuals had a definite vision in mind that aligned with their personal goals of self-sufficient farm-ownership, and they carried that vision onto the battlefield and into the Southern plantation system that was like nothing they had ever experienced.

¹⁸ See Brady's introduction for a thorough definition of the term.

¹⁹ Brady cites research from Phillip Shaw Paludan on the Northern farm and reminds us that, though she's making generalizations about regionalized farming, farms across the north were exceptionally diverse. (18)

Farmers from the North who enlisted in the Union forces and travelled into contested territory viewed the Southern farm as uncivilized. They were appalled to find that Southern farmers did not match Northern ideas of order and discipline. On the Southern farm, owners often allowed their livestock to forage in uncultivated lands and eschewed the need for fences. Andrews describes Southern farms in *A Family Secret*:

[They were] great plantations, of many thousand acres each, which were in the hands of a few wealthy slaveholders. The division of the country into these vast estates tended to give it that lonely, unpopulated aspect which had impressed Colonel Malvern so unfavorably; for even the largest planters could not pretend to keep the whole of their vast domains under cultivation, and great tracts of wild land lay between the inhabited portions of the different plantations. (52)

Farmers coming from the North were appalled by the barely cultivated agroecosystems that were almost unrecognizable at times as farms. Thus, even without the disagreement over labor systems, notions of proper farming were highly regionalized. The differences significantly impacted how each side waged war. Union soldiers came from farming systems more than any other labor pool, and their understanding of farming included a specific kind of agroecosystem (Brady 18). Because Southern farms were so different in terms of structure, labor, and crop placement, Union soldiers often did not hold the same reverence for them as they would their own farmland. Even though many soldiers on both sides of the war farmed for a living, they lacked a common understanding of what farming looked like. This difference of opinion made it easier for them to destroy the landscape in the name of war, which we will see in the following chapters.

Olmsted: Justification for Improvement

Because Northern and Southern agricultural systems differed so dramatically, multiple publications strove to breach the regional divide and educate both sides about Southern agroecosystems. One such newspaper, *The New York Times*, relied on Frederick Law Olmsted to achieve that goal. While Olmsted lacks Thoreau's fame as a nature writer, his reputation as a landscape architect gives unique perspective and weight to his words. He was also better known during his life than Thoreau because of his popular outdoor work. Additionally, Olmsted has a particular place in this dissertation as one of the first individuals to try to make green spaces available to the populace, whether they were aware of their need for them or not. As multiple scholars remind us, Olmsted believed that by creating access to nature he was helping develop the nation. Lisa Brady explains, "Olmsted linked access to sublime nature to the mental and physical health of the individual, which in turn supported the health of the republic" (138). She ascribes a nationalist agenda to Olmsted's landscaping that relates to justification. Olmsted, like Thoreau, represents nature as undefinable. Because he believes that nature should look a certain way and accomplish certain goals for the humans who experience it, his relationship with nature is fraught. When we read his descriptions of the South and consider his experiences with nature, we see that Olmsted respects his own Northern ideals about proper use of natural resources, responsible cultivation, and "improvement." He practices his prescribed techniques in his own work as a landscape architect and advocates for them in his writing. Before creating famous gardens for the public to enjoy, though, Olmsted was a farmer.

Born in Connecticut in 1822, Olmsted inherited a love of travel and agricultural development from his father, who took him on trips through the countryside to observe various agrarian practices, both wasteful and prudent.²⁰ Olmsted began working his first farm near his father in 1847, and he did so well that his father gave him an additional 130 acres in New York for which the younger Olmsted had sole responsibility. He immediately improved the property both aesthetically and in terms of production, rearranging buildings and orchards, importing the newest machinery, and installing the “first cylindrical-drainage-tile system in the United States” (xi). In 1850, bolstered by his accomplishments and in search of new methods to employ, Olmsted accompanied his brother and a friend on a walking trip through Europe, part of which resulted in Olmsted’s first publication, *Walks and Talks of an American Farmer in England*. This 1852 book demonstrated Olmsted’s ability to observe and report rural life with a readerly simplicity that conveyed honest assessments of what he saw, and it also prepared him for the next opportunity to report life in what seemed like a foreign place, albeit the same country.

Curiosity about the state of Southern agrarianism was high in the years preceding the Civil War, such that many Northerners, whether abolitionist or not, wanted to understand how the region functioned. As authors such as Henry David Thoreau were theorizing on the moral wrongs of slavery while simultaneously touting nature’s spiritual benefits, more conservative men were attempting to learn the truth about Southern

²⁰ Unless otherwise specified, see Arthur Schlesinger’s Editor’s Introduction to the 1953 edition for biographical information.

economy and comprehend the phenomenon known as King Cotton. In late 1852, the editor of *The New York Times* commissioned Olmsted to tour the South and write about life there. The editor selected Olmsted for this responsibility because of Olmsted's unique combination of writing ability and agricultural experience. To complete his research for *The Times*, Olmsted began with an initial three-month tour of the seaboard slave states, followed by two additional journeys revisiting some states and exploring more inland slave states as well. The result was a series of observations recorded originally in three lengthy books. When Olmsted's London editor requested that he combine the three works into one volume for the British public, the result became the 1861 tome, *The Cotton Kingdom: A Traveller's Observations on Cotton and Slavery in the American Slave States: Based upon Three Former Volumes of Journeys and Investigations by the Same Author*.²¹

The title is not the text's only lengthy aspect. Attempting to summarize *The Cotton Kingdom*, Wilson writes that it is:

a record of innumerable incidents—journeys, conversations, night's lodgings; people who are courteous and people who are oafish, men who think slavery a curse and men who think it ordained by Heaven, masters who mistreat their slaves and masters who take excellent care of them; many gradations of misery and squalor, and a few of relative comfort. (224)

This seeming dichotomy of observations demonstrates Olmsted's adherence to journalistic integrity. Although it may appear that Olmsted was confused about how to

²¹ For a discussion of the publication, see Downs, Robert. *Books that Changed the South*. 126

represent the South, his inclusion of so many conflicting episodes instead demonstrates his attempt to remain neutral. Of course, this neutrality led to abundant description of every person and setting and fully detailed accounts of most encounters he had along the way. Though Olmsted clearly sided with the Union during the Civil War, his work in writing *Cotton Kingdom* was uniquely journalistic, attempting to present the idle ground through economic and agricultural fact.

He was well-suited for the task. Olmsted was an experienced farmer, and he investigated Southern agriculture as only a farmer could. As he assessed the various situations around him, he asked pointed questions about farming practices and reported on a variety of information ranging from ownership, labor use, and soil conservation, to name only a few.²² Olmsted's work cataloguing details about the Southern economy demonstrate cultural truths about human/nonhuman relationships during the period. Where his text literally documents facts about profit, labor, and soil use, more analysis uncovers common ideas about the justifications for interaction with the environment that prevailed. When Olmsted began his voyage, he intended to describe the South and the institution of slavery as he viewed it. His trip was not intentionally abolitionist, nor did he think that his final writings would reflect his bad opinion of the South. In the three years that he traveled and wrote, however, his neutrality changed greatly.

Because *The Cotton Kingdom* collection includes over six hundred pages of text, my analysis draws conclusions about the larger work from a few key anecdotes. Some of

²² Schlesinger's introduction paints a very complimentary picture of the role Olmsted played in reporting on the south. (liv)

Olmsted's episodes are quite lengthy; we'll see below that he writes seventy-eight pages about a one-day journey from one home to the next. His abundant description and constant commentary provide plenty of material for analysis. For every story he tells, Olmsted tries to include a differing perspective. Where he shows a greedy plantation owner, he also includes a benevolent one – after a lazy farmer, he highlights an industrious one, and so on. By the end of his journey, though, he finds that the good and bad do not balance, and he seeks outside counsel to corroborate his increasingly negative opinion of Southern practices.

Like many Northerners, Olmsted's early writings indicate that, although he did not care for the institution of slavery, he did not necessarily blame Southerners for maintaining it. He originally felt that enslaved African Americans likely benefited more than they suffered and that the South required slavery for economic success. By the time he completed his journey, however, he had changed his opinion dramatically, ultimately determining that the plantation lifestyle and the Southern economy it supported was terribly impractical and demoralizing. Indeed, after examining the agricultural practices through agrarian eyes, Olmsted concluded that the South was preventing progress and would continue to degenerate unless major change occurred. While he focused on agriculture, and thus nature and landscape by extension, the conclusions readers can draw from his experiences go far beyond the purview of enjoying simple landscape observation. Thus, when we look at Olmsted's ideas about the human/nonhuman relationship, we can learn how he both shares and diverges from Thoreau's earlier ambivalence about the nature of that connection.

When Olmsted combined his series of reports into *The Cotton Kingdom*, in 1861 he wrote a new “Introductory” chapter addressing the state of the nation. He begins by looking at what he titles “The Present Crisis.” Published shortly before the South declared its secession, Olmsted’s introductory chapter outlines the dangers of such separation for the nation as a whole. His writing indicates that the South must change its ways in order to save the entire nation. It is no accident that Olmsted begins this introductory chapter with a brief discussion of landscape:

[T]he mountain ranges, the valleys, and the great waters of America, all trend north and south, not east and west. An arbitrary political line may divide the north part from the south part, but there is no such line in nature; there can be none, socially. While water runs downhill, the currents and counter currents of trade, of love, of consanguinity, and fellowship, will flow north and south. (3)

Because there are no geographical divisions between the North and the South, Olmsted reasons, it is impossible to presume that they could be governed separately. Instead, they must operate under the same flag, as one unified nation, following the same laws. Olmsted significantly adds to his prescription to include both economic and social responsibilities as well. In addition to following the same laws, the nation should respect the other national elements that flow north and south, which interestingly include both economic and social elements. Because Olmsted’s text focuses on the economy and agricultural practices, he includes the fact that trade must occur across the arbitrary political boundary, but he takes it one step further. Additionally, “love...consanguinity, and fellowship” must also occur throughout the nation.

This requirement for peace makes Southern slaveholding an untenable practice. Olmsted's report ultimately determines that ownership of people denies the fellowship that he calls for; slavery must end to preserve the nation's peace. Twenty-first-century students often marvel at the seemingly arbitrary Mason-Dixon line, which well illustrates Olmsted's point. In reality, there are no physical boundaries between the two sections. Thus, a separation in government seems arbitrary as well. Olmsted's point is substantial. Why create an artificial political border within a nation that has already decided to operate as one? Why continue to distinguish between areas of the same country when those areas aren't naturally distinguishable? Olmsted's suggestion indicates that we should look more to nature as we declare national law than we should look to differences in population and belief. Moreover, much of his reporting in his extensive volume indicates that Americans should allow nature to guide their lawmaking rather than impose human laws on preexisting natural conditions.

Olmsted's later work as landscape architect tangibly represents the concepts he defines in the above passage. Architecture scholars assert that Olmsted's views on the landscape followed a tradition of thought leading to the direct correlation between landscape and freedom. Uvedale Price, a forefather to Olmsted, offers a prescription for landscape that we can see in the latter's work:

A good landscape is that in which all the parts are free and unconstrained, but in which, though some are prominent, and highly illuminated, and others in shade and retirement...they are all necessary to the beauty, energy, effect, and harmony of the whole. I do not see how a good government can be more exactly defined..." (Price qtd. in Menard 16)

This connection between landscape and government echoes Olmsted's thoughts in his introductory chapter. Indeed, when Olmsted considers the landscape of the nation, he views both North and South together as "necessary to the...whole," without political divides, and he believes that human interaction with the environment can shape that landscape. Thus, when Olmsted describes human/nonhuman interaction in his text, we see him questioning Southern practices and attempting to educate readers on better methods. While doing so, though, Olmsted also demonstrates the challenges of justification that inherently present themselves in writing about nature and echoes Thoreau's confusion about appropriate human/nonhuman relationships. The following analysis illuminates Olmsted's inconsistencies through his discussion of a variety of topics, including how to navigate through unimproved woods, the best crops to grow in different climates, how to improve land for cultivation, and how to best use unimproved land for profit. He presents often contradictory ideas in each of these areas that further illustrate how Americans can justify almost any decision.

The Cotton Kingdom is essentially a collection of anecdotes. Olmsted records his interactions with people across the South, and in so doing, he documents and questions Southern practices. While many of his anecdotes may seem like frivolous stories, reading them with justification in mind illuminates much about his own ideas of proper and improper interactions with nature. For example, many of Olmsted's narratives depict his belief that nature should guide human decision-making. One story in particular combines multiple elements of Olmsted's experience that recur throughout the text to teach some important lessons about human/nonhuman interaction. I will discuss the anecdote at

length here and then look at some of the repeated themes to consider what we can learn from Olmsted's experience.

One day in Virginia, riding a borrowed horse, Olmsted realizes that he has lost his way. As occurs on many of his outings, Olmsted becomes frustrated as he discovers that the simple directions he received to travel from one farm to another are not simple at all. Even though everyone who gives him directions notes that he can follow the road directly to his destination, making the route seem straightforward and foolproof, Olmsted always meets a fork and must decide which way to go. This particular trip is an accumulation of errors beginning with written directions from the man who rents him the horse. The owner asserts that Olmsted should find his way to the desired location (Mr. W's) after about two hours. Two hours into the journey, Olmsted notes, "we had lost our way, and I was trying to work up a dead reckoning."²³ He describes some more wanderings through the woods before he gives the lead to his horse, telling her: "Very well, my beauty; you know the country better than I do. If you'll risk your dinner, I'm quite ready to go anywhere you choose to take me." Jane the horse and Olmsted continue to walk, and Olmsted provides several more pages of landscape description, before they come across "a number of negroes" (53) and stop to ask directions. One man tells Olmsted that he only needs to take a straight road for about two hours, and then he will arrive at Mr. W's. After escorting him a few steps, Olmsted's guide leaves him with this advice: "You juss keep de straight road, massar...and it'll take you right dar, sar," which he repeats several

²³ These excerpts are from Olmsted's Petersburg, Dec. 28th entry, which is pages 48-76.

times as Olmsted rides away (54). Of course, only a quarter of a mile down the road, Olmsted comes upon another fork and shortly finds himself lost again. He again gives Jane the lead and notes how she chooses to walk through a creek bed, “as if it was the commonest thing here to take advantage of nature’s engineering in this way, walking into the water.” When she leaves the bed, “she soon found a beaten track in the woods. It certainly was not the “straight road” we had been directed to follow...” (55).

I pause here in Olmsted’s anecdote, even though he has not yet arrived at his desired location. In fact, matters soon get worse as the next people he questions do not even know Mr. W. and cannot provide directions. But Olmsted’s attitude demonstrates much about how he understands landscape and nature. First, recognizing that he doesn’t know his way, Olmsted allows his horse to decide the route. He trusts her natural instinct rather than insisting upon his human dominance, which demonstrates to some degree how he negotiates the human/nonhuman divide. Thoreau indicates that he would act the same way: “I believe that there is a subtle magnetism in Nature, which, if we unconsciously yield to it, will direct us aright” (“Walking” 253). In circumstances where nature is getting the best of him through challenging terrain and unimproved roadways, Olmsted allows an animal, “Nature,” to lead the way. He seems to share Thoreau’s belief that, “in their relation to Nature men appear to me for the most part, notwithstanding their arts, lower than the animals” (275). Thus, Olmsted trusts Jane’s instincts, rather than his own, to guide them out of the forest. When Jane wades into the water to follow an easier path, Olmsted remarks appreciatively upon her method of following “nature’s engineering.” He recognizes that Jane is not only better equipped to maneuver through the woods than

he is, but she also possesses the intuition to take advantage of a path that was created by nature. While it would have been untenable for Olmsted to walk through the creek bed, Jane can do so with ease before locating another path through the woods that will take them to their next destination.

Olmsted's appreciation of "nature's engineering" does not extend to the humans who have trodden various paths through the woods and not improved a single road. He documents his frustration that he cannot find his destination because no identifiable roads exist to get him there. Indeed, the journey to Mr. W.'s that was supposed to take only two hours turns into an overnight stay at someone's residence along the way, which is yet another example of how Olmsted demonstrates respect for the nonhuman. When he realizes that he may be traveling after nightfall, Olmsted considers the abundance of wild hogs in the area and remarks that he "did not think it was right to expose Jane to this danger, unnecessarily" (60). Instead of risking Jane's safety by forcing on through the woods at night, he decides to stay at the first house they see. The next day, Olmsted's journey includes several more mishaps before he finally arrives at Mr. W.'s, but it is important to keep in mind how the relationship he establishes with his horse and the attitude he projects towards her suggests a way for humans and nonhumans to interact.

For the remainder of Olmsted's journey to Mr. W.'s, he continues to rely upon his horse and also requests directions from a few other sources. At one point, he rides by a group of laborers who advise him to "go to Missy Abler's" by taking a path "dat'll take you right straight dar" (57). Of course, within the first mile, Jane and Olmsted "had our choice of at least twenty forks to go 'straight to Mrs. Abler's". Talking to other advisors

he encounters along the way, he receives advice to go “right straight upon this road,” to “keep on the main road, and to “keep *the best-travelled road*” (58, 59, original emphasis). There are, of course, no straight or main roads. Olmsted does, however, eventually make it to Mr. W.’s, but he does so twenty-four hours and many miles after his expected arrival. In addition to describing Olmsted’s relationship with his horse, this lengthy description of his voyage (it takes him twenty pages to get there!) also highlights the “forks in the road.” Quite literally, these alternative routes show how many paths humans tread through the woods to create a more direct route to their destination without actually investing the labor that it would take to clear and maintain a road. More figuratively, though, these forks represent choices to be made and demonstrate that there are multiple alternatives. Olmsted chooses to respect his horse’s natural instinct and protect her from potential harm.

He also chooses to describe every aspect of his two-day journey rather than summarize it. In fact, Olmsted explains that the inclusion of this lengthy anecdote is quite purposeful:

I have described, perhaps with tedious prolixity, what adventures befell me, and what scenes I passed through in my first day’s random riding, for the purpose of giving an idea of the uncultivated and unimproved – rather, sadly worn and misused—condition of some parts, and I judge, or a very large part, of all Eastern Virginia...For hours and hours one has to ride through the unlimited, continual, all-shadowing, all-embracing forest, following roads, in the making of which no more labour has been given than was necessary to remove the timber which would obstruct the passage of waggons. (67, sic)

Thus, Olmsted's representation of the forest roads on which he travelled, hopelessly lost most of the time, represents for him the greater negligence of the Virginian people when it comes to improving the landscape. The lack of improvement demonstrates to Olmsted that the people of the region did not comprehend their responsibility to the landscape. By failing to cultivate the area around them productively, Southerners were eschewing their right to freedom and happiness. Andrew Menard contends that Olmsted's philosophies about freedom and landscape were well developed before his trip through the "Cotton Kingdom," and we can see how such philosophies affect his interpretation of the landscape that he views during his travels. Indeed, Menard contends that Olmsted believed "freedom was enlarged, not diminished, by calculated, systematic, restrained improvements," and the fact that he does not see those kinds of improvements on his journey plays a significant role in his greater analysis of the South as an unfortunate place of significant decline. His conclusions seem to conflict with those of Thoreau, who searches for unimproved places to commune with undisturbed nature. Of course, much like Andrews' description of her plantation home, Thoreau's accounts of the wild often efface the fact that his appreciation of the natural world requires human labor. No matter how much Thoreau wants to appear "wild," he travels through a beautiful village down well-maintained roads to reach some of his natural places. Olmsted, on the other hand, openly calls for improvement and maintenance as prerequisites for the enjoyment of freedom. He determines that the South, with its degraded roadways and derelict farmlands, will be doomed unless it changes dramatically.

Olmsted does recognize a few locations where humans have attempted to make improvements to bolster their production; however, in those places, he questions the efficacy of such labor. His representation of the sugar plantations in Louisiana interrogates Southern plantation owners' ability to make good decisions about resource expenditure. While visiting two neighboring sugar plantations along the Mississippi River in Louisiana, Olmsted identifies one planter as significantly more successful than the other, noting that the main difference in production strategy involves the usage of a steam-pump to provide optimal soil drainage. Olmsted commends the successful planter, Mr. R, for determining a method by which he could produce sugar in soil that others had determined unworthy of cultivation; however, Olmsted immediately describes the extensive effort that must go into such production and compares the relatively low yields to those of crops harvested in more favorable locations. In fact, he notes that with the proper use of the steam-pump, one acre in Louisiana will still only produce on average less than one-third as much as an acre in the West Indies. Thus, Olmsted questions the value of growing sugar in Louisiana. He contends that the land and the climate are against it, and yet planters insist on working to the maximum exertion to plant and harvest this unnatural crop:

I must confess that there seems to me room for grave doubt if the capital, labour, and especially the human life, which have been and which continue to be spent in converting the swamps of Louisiana into sugar plantations, and in defending them against the annual assaults of the river, and the fever and the cholera, could not have been better employed somewhere else. (253)

While Olmsted's disparagement may seem to echo Thoreau's idea that "the farmer lives the meanest of lives," it is important to remember that Olmsted differs from Thoreau on this topic. Olmsted has no problems with land ownership, cultivation, and arrangement, as long as farming results in responsible improvements that can benefit humans. He even seems to respect the effort that these landowners have put into cultivating their sugar plantations; however, Olmsted's knowledge of agriculture makes him question the efficacy of their endeavor. Rather than simply criticize the judgment of the Louisiana plantation owners, Olmsted offers recommendations for the "somewhere else" that he thinks those efforts could be "better employed." As a farmer who believes in implementing new strategies and learning from other areas, Olmsted cannot resist the impulse to teach others agricultural methods that he thinks will help them. It seems that he often does this teaching obliquely, through his writing, rather than interfering with plantation operations while he observes in person. In several different locations during his travels, Olmsted remarks upon the crops that Southern planters should be growing and laments their decisions not to grow the crops that make most sense.

In North Carolina's alluvial land, Olmsted looks at the vegetation growing in the unimproved wooded areas around the farms and turpentine distilleries and infers that the soil could be used to grow fruits that are generally imported from outside the country and remarks:

[The soil] might be most profitably used in the culture of the various half-tropical trees and shrubs, of whose fruits we now import so large and costly an amount...The almond, doubtless, would succeed equally well, so also the olive;

but of none of these is there the slightest commercial value produced in North Carolina, or in all our country. (153)

The passage presents differing understandings of justification. Olmsted believes that landowners should choose their crops based on what would grow well in their soil and be “profitably used.” Instead of importing items that they could better grow much closer to home, he reasons, Southern farmers should augment their farming practices to take advantage of natural conditions. Instead, he sees stubborn plantation owners forcing the land to yield unprofitable crops which are not in their own best interest because they are participating in a culture that rewards those efforts more than it rewards ingenuity. Olmsted’s journey was designed to help him make sense of that culture, but his observations continued to confuse him more. He views this refusal to try more logical crops as an omen of the Southern farmer’s eventual demise. These farmers all have seemingly reasonable justifications for their activities that defy outsider logic.

Olmsted’s discussion of farming practices extends to the topic of hay and substitute forage, because he also observes "bad management" practices of those crops. While on a train moving through the Carolinas, Olmsted notes that the cargo bay holds 120 bales of hay being shipped to a Southern plantation from a Northern grower. After inquiring about the price of the hay, Olmsted figures that the plantation owner who imported the hay was paying more than four times its value, when he could have simply found substitute forage on his own land. This seemingly unnecessary hay importation troubles Olmsted, particularly because he recognizes its prevalence throughout the South. He connects the situation to something similar that he observed in central North Carolina,

when a landowner explained to him that there was plenty of quality forage available on his own property, but the landowner simply did not have the time to harvest it. His slave labor was much too busy working on cotton production, and the plantation owner would rather pay an exorbitant amount for imported hay than reallocate his resources to produce his own. This (il)logic baffles Olmsted, who concludes "either that there was most improbably-foolish, bad management, or that the slaves were more profitably employed in cultivating cotton, than they could have been in cultivating maize, or other forage crops" (156). Because Olmsted attempts to practice journalistic neutrality, he feels the need to corroborate his negative opinion of the practice, which he does through the mention of an English merchant.

Olmsted interrupts the story of his train ride to include the opinion of a merchant "who had had good opportunities, and made it a part of his business to study such matters" (156). The merchant echoes Olmsted's judgment of the situation, elaborating that it is "purely bad management that neglects these ['valuable forage'] crops and devotes labour to cotton, so exclusively" (156). The inclusion of the merchant's opinion is noteworthy for several reasons. First, Olmsted nests this entire discussion within his anecdote; however, the conversation with the merchant occurs "some days afterwards." Clearly, the author feels the need to verify his opinion with an outside source so strongly that he interrupts his story to include the merchant's commentary. Olmsted never specifically identifies this person, whose appearance serves multiple purposes. Being British, the merchant has no regional affiliation, so Olmsted can quote him without incurring wrath from the North or the South.

Additionally, the merchant's voice allows Olmsted to incorporate details that his direct anecdotes might not expose. Indeed, Olmsted uses the merchant to do more than simply validate his opinion. The salesman continues to speak about his "solution to the slavery question." Though Olmsted did not apparently ask the "slavery question," he prints the merchant's response in full to include additional details about the global cotton market that he might not observe in his current travels. The merchant expounds that lowering the buying price for cotton would create "more abolitionists in South Carolina than in Massachusetts. If that can be brought about, in any way—and it is not impossible that we may live to see it, as our railways are extended in India, and the French enlarge their free-labour plantations in Algiers—there will be an end of slavery" (157). This observation seems surprising, and Olmsted does not comment on it at all. Whereas he includes the merchant's opinion about "bad management" and forage, the commentary speaks to much more than just the price of hay. The merchant reminds us of global forces that may impact local production and challenge the highly regionalized justification that these farmers practice.

Although many of Olmsted's encounters highlight Southern practices that are unprofitable, illogical, and unkind to humans, Olmsted also includes a unique anecdote that describes a relationship between humans and nature that actually seems to work. In this situation, which occurs in a swamp known as the "Dismals," slaves work as free men living in their own camps for five months at a time. While there, the men can make money getting shingles out from the swamp waters. These shingles are taken from old tree trunks that have been preserved beneath the swamp surface. The slaves find them by

"sounding" the area with poles and then using hooks and straps to remove them from the water. They have a required work quota, and as long as they meet it, they can manage their own time and money. The overseers who work here (in contrast to other overseers whom Olmsted quotes) make no complaints about lazy slaves; in fact, they believe that the swamp water must be making the men healthier and more productive. Olmsted describes: "They almost invariably have excellent health, as have also the white men engaged in the business. They all consider the water of the "Dismals" to have a medicinal virtue, and quite probably it is a mild tonic"(116). Whether the swamp water itself actually has health benefits or not, the results of this work situation differ distinctly from the others that Olmsted describes. Regardless of the actual cause, there are clear benefits to production, health, and morale in this swamp work-environment. Two primary differences stand out. First, the workers are taking advantage of a resource that is present on the site, rather than forcing something unnatural or unproductive to grow there. Second, although the labor is provided by enslaved men, the manner in which they operate gives them freedom and control that Olmsted does not observe in most plantation laborers. This microcosm of labor in the Dismal Swamp is one of Olmsted's clearest indications of what productive land use could look like.

Olmsted's inclusion of the Dismal Swamp experiment seems to contradict his preference for well-cultivated nature. Indeed, swamps are more akin to the kind of nature Thoreau appreciates: "Hope and the future for me are not in lawns and cultivated fields, not in towns and cities, but in the impervious and quaking swamps" because they deny improvement and repel most humans ("Walking" 262). Earlier, I indicated that Olmsted

believed in the importance of husbandry and the sense of freedom that working to improve nature could provide. In the Swamp, however, the workers thrive without any intention to cultivate or improve. The key difference here is the way humans use resources to their benefit. Rather than forcing something that isn't natural to the area, the workers in the swamp are simply harvesting readily available resources. The Dismal Swamp, much like the setting in *Free State of Jones*, provides a location where this counter culture can thrive. Because the swamp itself defies categorization with its mystical healing powers, its mingling of black and white workers, and its mixture of land and water, it exemplifies humans' inability to prescribe human/nature relationships and adds to the myriad ways humans interact with their landscape. Whether Olmsted calls for cultivation or lauds the efforts in the Dismal Swamp, he emphasizes that humans must work in nature to the betterment of both.

Olmsted's prescription for proper use of the land, like Thoreau's, appears contradictory. Although we must rely on animals to guide us and take advantage of "nature's engineering," we also must conduct our own improvements to fully appreciate what nature can offer. While animals can potentially guide us, we must take care of them and ensure their safety. Sometimes we must improve land to experience its benefits, other times we can simply harness the present resources. The contradictions abound.

Much like the complex human/nonhuman relationships revealed in Thoreau's writings, Olmsted's complicated story suggests that humans must work in nature to make it work for them. Doing this work will benefit both humans and the natural world. Both authors had definite ideas about how humans should function in their environment and

how nature should be good for them; they establish the accepted notion that humans and nature could benefit from one another, which documents the kind of justification for human actions in nature that have been governing Americans prior to the Civil War. The combination of their writings makes one thing very clear: while we may agree that humans benefit from engagement with nature, there are myriad understandings of how that interaction should look. Within only a few selective texts of two prominent men, this chapter has identified conflicting ideas about the human/nonhuman relationship. Though they are not always mutually exclusive, these varying ideas demonstrate the difficulty in defining proper land use.

If Thoreau and Olmsted contradict themselves through words and actions, then how can non-experts do any better? The remainder of this study will explore how various authors appropriate their own landscapes to comprehend the war and hope for national reconciliation after it; however, if it seems difficult to understand the relationship between humans and nature before the Civil War rocked the nation, we must explore how critical those relationships become for individuals who grapple with the changes they see around them and hope for eventual peace. While individuals from North and South alike have certain expectations of their place in the environment, those understandings are shattered as they observe the destruction the Civil War causes.

CHAPTER III
WOMEN COMPREHEND THE WAR

“[The] local and national attachments of people are strong.”

The heroine in Eliza Frances Andrews' first published novel, *A Family Secret*, leaves her childhood home in Southern Georgia as a child and returns fifteen years later. When she reunites with her native landscape, Ruth Harfleur is thrilled to see the pine forests of her youth:

[S]he sat gazing at the monotonous landscape with as much eagerness as if it had been one of the loveliest scenes in nature. It is a singular fact that unprepossessing as these pine-flats appear to strangers, they possess attractions to people born among them that no change of scene or clime can countervail... Though a mere child when she left her home, and though fifteen long years of absence had flung their misty veil about the past, yet the strange fascinations of her native forests had never lost their hold upon Ruth Harfleur's heart. (66-67)

Ruth's love of the pine flats directly contrasts with the attitudes of the novel's hero and her chaperone, Audley Malvern, whose bravado requires that he find pine forests, as well as most Southern landscape, repetitious and dull. He replies condescendingly to her enthusiasm for the trees:

[Y]ou will generally find that the local and national attachments of people are strong in proportion to the distinctive and exceptional features of the objects that surround them. Hence the cosmopolitan instincts of city people, who can find nothing individualizing in their piles of brick and mortar; and hence, also, the enthusiastic affection with which the inhabitants of maritime and mountainous regions regard their homes. The ocean and the mountains are distinctive and impressive features which nothing else can replace. It is the same with your pines,

which are, I grant, sufficiently unique and peculiar. But...I should have thought that your local attachments would have taken root elsewhere during so long an absence. (68)

Audley's notion of "local attachments" appears to last only as long as those attachments remain nearby. He associates preferred landscape with past adventures or heroics and feels no attachment to a place as dull as "home." His response, however, does explain how many people associate their home with the landscape that surrounds it. While people who live in the "maritime and mountainous regions" prefer "the ocean and the mountains," Southern Georgians love their pine forests.²⁴ These comparisons demonstrate how commonly individuals develop identity in relation to the view from outside their door.

At the onset of the Civil War, most Americans' understanding of the world was limited to what they could see from their own front porches. Given this relatively narrow scope of experience, the notion of a war between Americans that would kill over 620,000 humans and an estimated three million nonhumans, devastate the natural environment, and irreversibly change the course of the nation was incomprehensible (Brady 1). Thus, when the Civil War swept down the east coast, causing unpredicted consequences, Americans relied on what they could understand to process the events. Because citizens could not comprehend the magnitude of the nation's tragedy, they often focused on their own landscape and the visible changes they could see there. For citizens in rural areas

²⁴ Kittrell Rushing suggests that much of *A Family Secret* echoes Andrews' personal life. She demonstrates her attachment to the pine trees through newspaper editorials and journal articles, and she illustrates her personal affection for them in the character of Ruth.

such as Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, destroyed railroads, urban conflagrations, and maritime battles would likely be foreign. Instead, dead livestock, damaged homesteads, and mutilated fields would bring *comprehension* of the Civil War much closer to home. The widow Lydia Leister, for example, demonstrates how many people could only process the damage that they could literally see. During the Battle of Gettysburg, General Meade requisitioned Leister's home for military use, resulting in extreme property damage. Several years later, when John Townsend Trowbridge interviewed Leister for his postwar narrative, *The South*, he recorded with dismay how Leister unflinchingly complained to him about her personal war losses. She listed horses, hay, wheat, and the orchard, among other things, as the main losses she suffered under General Meade's use of her land.

Subsequently, Trowbridge criticizes her for her seemingly shortsighted complaints. He writes, "this poor woman's entire interest in the great battle was, I found, centered in her own losses. That the country lost or gained she did not know nor care, never having once thought of that side of the question" (Trowbridge in Coco 60). While Leister's solipsistic complaints may seem selfish when we consider war's far-reaching consequences, I propose that we view her myopic concerns not as self-interested but instead as indicative of her inability to comprehend the war fully. Instead of worrying about national interests, this woman can only understand what she sees in front of her: her horses, her hay, her crops, and her orchard. This widow views the greatest loss as the death of her natural (nonhuman) surroundings. Leister perhaps represents all non-combatants whose property was requisitioned against their will for use of the military and

who have no other way to comprehend the devastation the war caused. In fact, we can potentially view her response as representative of all noncombatants whose realm of experience is limited to the outskirts of their own property – the landscape that they can view. Leister was not the only woman to focus on what seems like such minute details given the larger scheme of war. Many others documented the war through their experience of details related to the natural world. This chapter discusses those women and considers how their relationships with nature engender their individual comprehensions of war.

When Andrews travelled across Georgia in 1864 to avoid the middle of the conflict, she viewed Sherman's warpath for the first time, and she describes fallen fences, trampled fields, abundant animal carcasses, pillaged homes, and the ashes of houses, hay stacks, corn cribs, and cotton bales. After seeing the "Burnt Country" with her own eyes, she responds that she "could better understand the wrath and desperation of these poor people" (32). Much of Andrews' other war-related discussions indicate selfish responses to the war, such as her initial youthful patriotic zeal, followed by disappointment at her changing world: "it is a pity that this glorious ole plantation life should ever have to come to an end" (69). She also complains about the general inconvenience that the war is causing: "...she has the whole responsibility of the plantation and all these negroes on her hands" (81). However, after viewing the physical devastation, Andrews experiences her first feelings of comprehension. Once she sees the damage, she sympathizes with the victims in ways that she previously could not. For Andrews and the other women in this

chapter, the comprehension of war relates closely to their beliefs about nature and the way they create identity from it.

Scholars have been studying the way that women in particular relate to the natural world for almost forty years, considering the feminizing of “Mother Nature,” the relegation of women to the uncivilized side of the man/nature dichotomy, and the ways that women work with nature to civilize and beautify their immediate landscapes. Annette Kolodny contributes significantly to the discussion, investigating how women in early America responded to the concept of the disappearing Eden – of the ravaging of the landscape for wealth and development. Kolodny’s work shows us how women interact with the landscape, such as cultivating a personal garden, to preserve the beauty of the small area which they could indeed affect. Her research clearly establishes the importance of the landscape to early American women, a concept upon which this chapter relies. I continue the discussion that these scholars have started; however, my focus narrows specifically to women who experienced the Civil War. Examining this subset of authors allows me to make some observations that contribute to my larger notion of wartime comprehension as it relates to the natural world.

The chapter begins with two narratives from African American women who rely on natural associations to comprehend the war: Susie King Taylor’s *Reminiscences of My Life in Camp with the 33d United States Colored Troops Late 1st S.C. Volunteers* and Elizabeth Keckley’s *Behind the Scenes, or, Thirty Years a Slave, and Four Years in the White House*. While their wartime situations are vastly different, and their narratives provide disparate levels of discussion about the war, these women both demonstrate what

Kimberly Ruffin calls the "'ecological burden-and-beauty paradox,' which pinpoints the dynamic influence of the natural and social order on African American experience and outlook" (2). Ruffin reminds us that the African American experience with nature can be both a burden and a beauty depending how individuals interact with the natural world, which in the antebellum period (and arguably for decades after the war) was dependent upon where the social order placed them in relation to nature. Thus, even though Taylor and Keckley both write their narratives as free women, their experience with nature, and their corresponding comprehension of the Civil War, shifted based upon the relationship between their work and their environment.

I begin my chapter with these two authors so we can see some of the important dynamics that labor in nature provide. Echoing Ruffin, Dianne Glave also reminds us that African American relationships with the natural world have been made problematic by the social order. She argues that African American "identification and connectedness with the environment have been largely ignored by whites because they do not fit the white paradigm of land ownership" (9). Nor do they fit another common white paradigm of nature as site for leisure only.²⁵ Instead, these writers ask us to consider the question, "What does it mean when work, rather than leisure, is your central ecological experience?" (Ruffin 27). Taylor and Keckley work in multiple ways through their lives, some of which are more ecological than others. This study examines how the war affects that labor and suggests that, while it may be an important aspect of their ecological

²⁵ See Richard White "Are you an Environmentalist, or Do You Work for a Living?"

understanding, work is less significant than war for shaping beliefs about nature. I use Taylor and Keckley as a launching-point to illuminate how war interrupts and shapes ecological experience.

Several scholars have discussed Keckley and Taylor together. Jennifer James, in *A Freedom Bought With Blood: African American War Literature from the Civil War to World War II*, dedicates a chapter to Susie King Taylor, in which she draws valuable comparisons between Taylor and several other black woman authors, including Keckley. James' analysis relies upon the notion of "'self-effacement' in nineteenth-century black women's autobiography," in which the black woman author removes herself from the text to foreground her argument (109). This method allowed black women writers to deploy techniques that the public would not traditionally accept, and it challenged accepted notions of both gender and race. James' discussion provides an excellent base from which I can depart and allows me to further develop notions of work that are critical to understanding the experience of the Civil War.

After discussing Keckley and Taylor, I move to a teenage girl, Tillie Pierce, whose entire concept of home develops from an understanding of her environment. Her descriptions indicate a belief that the landscape possesses the ability to shape her life. Pierce's narrative, *At Gettysburg: What a Girl Saw and Heard of the Battle*, remains unstudied by literary scholars, even though her memories of the Battle of Gettysburg provide various descriptions that are begging for the kind of analysis this chapter contains. While most scholarly mentions of Pierce's narrative simply quote her descriptions to support historical documentation of the battle, I work to bring her into

conversation with these other female noncombatants whose personal associations with nature shaped their comprehension of the Civil War.

I conclude the chapter with Sarah Piatt, a poet whose work has been relatively recently recovered for literary study. Paula Bennett provides a comprehensive history of the writer in her introduction to a collection of Piatt's works: *Palace-Burner: The Selected Poetry of Sarah Piatt*. Bennett asserts that Piatt tried to accomplish three main tasks in her Civil War poetry. First, "she wanted to avoid the romantic drive that inevitably attached to a treatment of the war itself...Second...she wanted to demystify war's traditional (and highly perverse) allure for women. And finally, she wanted to suggest (as she does throughout her poetry) that the past subtends both the present and the future" (xlii). Essentially, Piatt's poetry allows us to comprehend the war differently. Unlike the first three authors in this chapter who primarily document their history in memoirs, Piatt presents war's irony and pain through poetry. While using the poetic genre seems as if it would likely stress a romantic perspective—unlike fiction or autobiography—Piatt's poetry, as Bennett argues, pushes against period conventions to challenge common war responses. In poem, Piatt expresses the ambiguities and incongruities of war that comparison to the natural world illuminates.

These women all show how comprehension occurred for noncombatants who experienced the war in various ways. Their use of environmental rhetoric allows us to draw conclusions about how nature shaped their understanding of the Civil War.

“They were a gruesome sight”: Susie King Taylor

Few written Civil War accounts exist from the perspective of black women.

Indeed, Colonel Thomas Wentworth Higginson, in his introduction to one such narrative, comments:

ACTUAL military life is rarely described by a woman, and this is especially true of a woman whose place was in the ranks, as the wife of a soldier and herself a regimental laundress. No such description has ever been given, I am sure, by one thus connected with a colored regiment; so that the nearly 200,000 black soldiers (178,975) of our Civil War have never before been delineated from the woman's point of view. (Taylor xi)

Higginson, who is best known for his literary relationship with Emily Dickinson, supported another female Civil War author as well. He served as the commander of the 1st S. C. Volunteers (later named 38d U. S. Colored Infantry) during the Civil War. When an unknown former slave named Edward King decided to join the volunteers at the beginning of the war, his wife, Susie King Taylor, went with him, serving as a unit laundress, a nurse, and an educator for freed slaves.²⁶ This young woman filled an important role for the soldiers during the war and formed a particularly strong bond with the commander, Colonel Higginson, to whom she dedicates her narrative.

In his introduction to her 1902 memoir, quoted above, Higginson emphasizes the value of her perspective.²⁷ He reminds readers that Taylor is the only black woman to publish an account of the Civil War, and he emphasizes the verisimilitude of Taylor's

²⁶ Susie Baker took her surname from her first husband, Edward King. When he died, she remarried and took a second surname from her second husband, Russell Taylor.

²⁷ Amusingly, Higginson's introduction also self-aggrandizes his OWN account of the war, which he notes is quite different from Taylor's.

narrative, underscoring that she describes "actual" military life from the unique lens of a woman who is also "the wife of a soldier and herself a regimental laundress," serving "in the ranks" of a "colored regiment." Much Taylor criticism focuses on how Higginson presents her, noting that he ascribes several specific roles to Taylor that all keep her aligned with appropriate gender conventions of the period.²⁸ Scholars argue that Taylor's work eschews these gender roles by demonstrating how a woman could be in such proximity to combat and perform duties previously thought unwomanly or impossible (James 112). While most scholarship criticizes Higginson's remarks as gendered and racialized, I present his introduction as a reminder that Taylor deserves our continued attention; her various roles make it imperative that we study her work to see what it says about wartime comprehension. When we read her text with an eye for her relationship with nature, we quickly see that, much like the widow Leister (who has little in common with Taylor) Taylor's interaction with the landscape informs how she understands and describes the war.

What little we know of Taylor's biography is revealed in her narrative itself. She tells of her ancestry and birth "under the slave law in Georgia, in 1848" and of her subsequent freedom after the Union Army captured Fort Pulaski in 1862 (Taylor 5, 9). She does not dwell on her enslaved time but instead collapses the first fourteen years of her life into nine pages before focusing on her work in the war, which is her memoir's ostensible subject. During the war, Taylor served with her husband's unit, the 33rd U.S.

²⁸ Several scholars take issue with the way Higginson appropriates authority in Taylor's memoir. I read his introduction as an honest appreciation for Taylor's uniqueness and the cordial relationship they shared (James 106).

Colored Troops. Afterwards, she and her husband moved to Savannah, where she opened a private school for black children in her home (Taylor 54). Taylor informs us of these personal details obliquely. For example, she conflates the news of her pregnancy with that of her husband's death, and neither narrative selection includes any detail: "On September 16, 1866, my husband, Sergeant King, died, leaving me soon to welcome a little stranger alone" (54). Taylor provides a few more specifics regarding her teaching work, which was intermittent based upon personal circumstances and the opening of free schools where Taylor's pupils chose to attend. After losing her teaching position, she worked as cook and laundress for a few different families until meeting Russell Taylor, whom she married in 1879. The Taylors then relocated to Boston, where Susie King Taylor continued her service to the Union Army conducting relief work for veterans.

As Higginson's introduction attests, Taylor's war experience provides a unique perspective from which readers can understand the Civil War. As literary scholars remind us, the war allows Taylor to publish a memoir that does much more than simply describe the war. Indeed, while some scholars describe Taylor's memoirs as a "small volume of random recollections," Karen S. Nulton argues that the concise narrative is not random at all but quite deliberately constructed (Romero and Rose 7). Nulton suggests that the Civil War provides Taylor an opportunity to write about a different conflict – the war for civil rights; she reminds us that, though Taylor speaks fondly of her time with the Union Army, her narrative essentially claims that the war is not over. Taylor feels that there remains significant work to do. Though my study explicitly covers the Civil War and not the ongoing war for rights that occurred after that conflict ended, Nulton's analysis

reminds us that Taylor's memoirs are an exceptionally self-aware attempt to use the military conflict as a pretense under which she can discuss the ongoing social conflict. If we accept Nulton's argument that Taylor's memoirs are so deliberately constructed, we can extend the analysis to consider what Taylor's representations of the natural world tell us about her comprehension of the war.

From the beginning, Taylor establishes a connection with the natural world that reinforces the period's stereotypes. She immediately aligns herself with nature through the depiction of her great-great grandmother who was "half-Indian. She was so old [120 years] that she had to be held in the sun to help restore or prolong her vitality" (1). By describing her grandmother in this way, Taylor reinforces two complementary racial stereotypes. First, she relates herself to her "half-Indian" grandmother, furthering her own role as a racialized other in the antebellum U.S. Additionally, when she describes her grandmother as solar-powered, she participates in the discourse of the period that conflates Native Americans and nature, making one representative of the other. And, as Noel Sturgeon reminds us, antebellum accounts often equate African Americans with nonhumans, thus naturalizing them as well. Taylor does this work herself through her description of her grandmother, though I will posit that her representation does not include the highly problematic associations that white authors invoke. Instead, Taylor's notions of her grandmother and nature provide a backdrop against which she can

understand herself. And we see through her narrative that she understands herself through a relationship with nature much like the one her grandmother enjoyed.²⁹

While Taylor was initially assigned to the regiment as a laundress, the soldiers quickly recognized her abilities and relied on her to do much more. When smallpox broke out among the regiment, Taylor acted as a nurse and caregiver to the afflicted soldiers. In one anecdote, she emphasizes the care she provided Edward Davis, a soldier in her company who had been quarantined because of the disease. Taylor explains that only the doctor was allowed to see Davis, but she made other contributions:

I went to see this man every day and nursed him...I was not in the least afraid of the small-pox. I had been vaccinated, and I drank sassafras tea constantly, which kept my blood purged and prevented me from contracting this dread scourge, and no one need fear getting it if they will only keep their blood in good condition with this sassafras tea, and take it before going where the patient is. (17)

Taylor's notion of being "vaccinated" is unclear. She certainly could have received the smallpox vaccine that was distributed during this period in the U.S. Exact records of who received the vaccine are difficult to track, although we do know that many Union soldiers were officially vaccinated through the military. Taylor's notion of being immune to disease, though, seems to relate more closely to the sassafras tea, which she prescribes for anyone who wants to "keep their blood in good condition." We see here that she believes in the power of herbal healing that connects her back to her ancestors and her Native

²⁹ James posits that Taylor's comparison to her grandmother allows her to accomplish two tasks. First, she demonstrates that she, like her grandmother, is tough and physically able to survive the challenges of war. Second, she describes her matrilineal heritage, effacing any discussion of men responsible for raising her. James uses this idea as part of her discussion of gender politics in the narrative.

American heritage. Thus, from the beginning of her narrative, Taylor positions herself as someone who knows how to use nature to her benefit. In her own way, Taylor asserts that she has some control over nature similar to the control that privileged men such as Thoreau and Olmsted possess. Taylor presents herself as a native woman who can control disease through her relationship with the natural world, which comes from her boldly displayed heritage and her knowledge.

Taylor's position as a woman connected to nature affects her perspective on the war's events. As she experiences the conflict in military camps alongside the troops, she comprehends the gruesome events and later records them with striking detail. Unlike the widow Leister from our introduction, Taylor's interaction with war places her in the middle of terrifying scenes involving human carnage; however, she seems most interested in the human ability to adjust to wartime circumstances that she would normally find appalling. Her position as a "natural" woman mitigates several of these circumstances. For example, Taylor notes that "outside of the fort were many skulls lying about" (32). Upon first reading this statement, we may assume that she is exaggerating (we should remember the essence of folklore she establishes with the narrative's opening story of her grandmother). However, she continues to describe the scene: "they were a gruesome sight, those fleshless heads and grinning jaws." Her detail seems unnecessarily macabre, but she soon makes her main point:

[B]y this time I had become accustomed to worse things and did not feel as I might have earlier in my camp life. It seems strange how our aversion to seeing suffering is overcome in war,— how we are able to see the most sickening sights, such as men with their limbs blown off and mangled by the deadly shells, without

a shudder; and instead of turning away, how we hurry to assist in alleviating their pain, bind up their wounds, and press the cool water to their parched lips, with feelings only of sympathy and pity. (32-3)

Taylor's description indicates how she has formed a new understanding of war based on her personal experience. She recognizes that her comprehension is forever changed – that this lens of wartime experience will always filter her ability to process horror. Like the widow Leister, whose experience revolves around the landscape of her farm and the animals she lost in battle, Taylor's experience revolves around the landscape she sees as she walks through these "skulls lying about." While the idea of skulls in the walkway is perhaps exaggerated and certainly unthinkable to most Americans, Taylor pointedly demonstrates how physical atrocities abound in war and how individuals can begin to associate those atrocities with their landscape. By naturalizing the horrors of war, individuals lessened the magnitude of those horrors in ways that allowed them to continue to function.

Immediately after noting her own ability to adjust to the realities of combat, Taylor provides some almost comical moments of physical distress that she personally experienced. While her own level of discomfort seems trivial after the description of dead soldiers she provides earlier, her inclusion of these moments is significant. Taylor's move from grotesque to comic illustrates one method of coping with the overwhelming sensory experience of Civil War death. She demonstrates a willful reimagining in which she focuses on the basic realities of military camp life because those memories are much easier to bear.

Taylor relates sleeping in her tent after the soldiers have departed for battle, and she remembers how "we went to bed, but not sleep, for the fleas nearly ate us alive" (33).³⁰ Her anecdote of the fleas comes immediately after the previous passage describing physical horrors, and although it seems unconscionable to link the two, their proximity in the text combined with the fact that they both describe uncomfortable realities of war make it a necessary comparison. Again, the scope of these wartime experiences varies greatly between individuals. Some, like the widow Leister, only have to tolerate losing property, while others endure fleas; and still others observe human mutilation and death. Regardless of scale, however, these varying descriptions indicate that the natural world informs comprehension of significant wartime devastation.

Taylor's memoir is short, and about three-quarters of it speaks directly about her Civil War experience; however, the last two of her fourteen chapters are the longest, providing both personal and anecdotal evidence of racial inequality at the turn of the century. While my analysis of Taylor focuses on her experience of the Civil War itself, I would be remiss not to give credit to her work in these chapters as she provides painful examples of injustice. She "hope[s] for better conditions in the future, and feel[s] sure they will come in time, surely if slowly" (75). Her memoir may not have sparked a civil

³⁰ Andrews also includes a discussion of fleas as she describes a stroll down "Lovers' Lane, a beautiful shade road...with all sorts of wild flowers blooming on the ground and climbing over the trees." She illustrates an incompatibility with nature that affects the Southern women on a personal level. The lane has "one most unromantic drawback; it is awfully infested with fleas. They are like an Egyptian plague, and keep you wriggling and squirming in a perpetual struggle against the vulgar impulse to scratch" (136). This image shows that natural beauty and natural parasites go hand in hand, although the latter is generally omitted from descriptions of landscape because of the jarring incongruence caused by pests in passages of beauty.

rights movement, but, as Nulton argues, it certainly “is crafted to demonstrate how the war ultimately did not grant African Americans true freedom. As do other women who write about war, Taylor takes advantage of a time of social upheaval to expand her social and political voice” (62). I argue that part of Taylor’s contribution, in addition to writing history and formulating social critique through her war memoir, is presenting how nature allows humans to comprehend and adjust to war through various means.

In the chapter titled “Mustered Out,” Taylor describes the disbanding of the troops in 1866. She includes the general order from Lieutenant Colonel C. T. Trowbridge, who was Colonel Higginson’s successor as the commander of the 33rd U.S. Colored Troops. The order thanks the volunteers for their service and concludes with an appeal to nationalism that Taylor repeats as she closes her narrative as well. The order states:

[T]he fundamental law of the land has been altered as to remove forever the possibility of human slavery being established within the borders of redeemed America. The flag of our fathers, restored to its rightful significance, now floats over every foot of our territory, from Maine to California, and beholds only free men. (47)

Trowbridge’s pride in his unit indicates that their actions in war contributed to the alteration of “the fundamental law of the land.” His appeal is interesting for multiple reasons. First, his reasoning directly contrasts to the previous “law of the land” that established Africans as lesser beings and enabled the system of slavery to endure for so long in America. While much earlier discourse reasoned that the inhumane labor system derived from Biblical and natural principles, Trowbridge’s comments indicate that it is

much more natural to have "only free men."³¹ By invoking the "law of the land," Trowbridge suggests that nature determines the laws. Thus, his rhetoric indicates not that natural law changed, but that American interpretation of natural law shifted to a more correct version. When we consider what caused Americans to reinterpret natural law, we must remember that natural law should reflect what is happening in nature. Thus, the ways that war changed the landscape essentially altered the way that Americans interpreted natural law. The subsequent shift in agroecosystems both contributed to and was caused by this new understanding of natural law. And, theoretically, the change would not have occurred without the violence wrought through the Civil War.

"Wedded to associations": Elizabeth Keckley

Elizabeth Keckley, a former slave who became Mrs. Lincoln's seamstress and ladies maid during President Lincoln's tenure, details her time in the White House in her narrative *Behind the Scenes: Thirty Years a Slave, and Four Years in the White House*.³² While the narrative does follow some conventions of the slave narrative genre, telling the brief story of Keckley's time as a slave before she purchased her freedom, the author departs from convention by focusing on the story of her life after slavery, when she served the Lincoln family during a period of significant national turmoil.

³¹ For a scholarly exploration of "the use of the Bible for social domination" and the way that black women writers responded in literature, see Katherine Clay Bassard.

³² There exists significant debate over the level of editorial intervention that occurred in the writing of Keckley's memoirs. See Jennifer Fleischner for more discussion. For the purpose of this analysis, though, I assume that the imagery and metaphor included in the memoirs are Keckley's. I also assume that one of the reasons the memoirs do not dwell on the Civil War is because Keckley's editors wanted the story to focus on her experience with the Lincoln family, as Jennifer Fleischner notes in her biography of Keckley.

Keckley was born a slave in Virginia in 1822 and became an extremely talented seamstress, making enough money in her enslaved status that she could support her owners and also put her own money aside. In 1855, she purchased freedom for herself and her only child using saved money and some she borrowed from her patrons. Five years later, she had earned enough to repay her patrons and enroll her son at Wilberforce College in Ohio. She then headed to Washington, D.C., where she procured work sewing for the wives and daughters of many political figures. Keckley quickly became a success in D.C., and earned a position as the seamstress for Mrs. Jefferson Davis. When the Davis family moved South just before secession, Keckley secured her place with Mrs. Lincoln, which she maintained for the remainder of the war until after President Lincoln's assassination. Jennifer Fleischner's compelling biography *Mrs. Lincoln and Mrs. Keckly* tells "the Remarkable Story of the Friendship Between a First Lady and a Former Slave," outlining the many nuances of their relationship and the eventual falling-out that would leave both women suffering in solitude.³³ Indeed, even after seven successful years of service with the Lincoln family, Keckley would descend into poverty, spending the years preceding her 1907 death in the National Home for Destitute Colored Women and Children.³⁴ Much like Mrs. Lincoln, who never recovered emotionally or financially after

³³ Fleischner chooses to spell the name as it appears Keckley herself intended. For this chapter, I choose the more common spelling under which the narrative was published. See Fleischner for more discussion.

³⁴ Keckley worked during the Civil War to assist contraband slaves in D.C. Ironically, one of her projects helped fund the National Home for Destitute Colored Women and Children, which is where she spent the last few years of her life (Fleischner 323).

her husband's death, Keckley's post-Lincoln career was never quite as fruitful as it was during her time in the White House.

Keckley collaborated with James Redpath, whom she met through her friend Frederick Douglass, to draft her autobiography, which she published in New York in April 1868. Redpath, a journalist interested in abolition and war politics, likely affected the trajectory of the memoir, which focuses significantly on the Lincoln family rather than on Keckley's childhood or the Civil War.³⁵ In the years following the President's assassination, the public craved gossip about the First Family, and it seemed that anyone with any personal knowledge of the Lincolns was publishing about it. Although working with the Lincolns was Keckley's primary claim to fame, participating in the publishing craze greatly reduced her memoir's credibility. Though readers had gradually become more willing to accept African American authorship from their previous experience with Douglass and Jacobs, they were unwilling to accept explicit commentary on a white family. Reviews of the memoir called it "back-stairs gossip of negro servant girls" and asked, "what family of eminence that employs a negro is safe from such desecration?" (317). As a result, Keckley's narrative was overshadowed by more successful slave narratives such as *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* by Harriet Jacobs. Because Keckley defied tradition by telling the story of prominent white families by name, most white audiences refused to read her work. In fact, the Lincoln family stopped publication of the text and attempted to purchase all existing copies to remove them from circulation.

³⁵ For a full discussion of the memoir's publication and reception, see Fleischner (315-318).

Thus, Keckley was not financially rewarded for her text, and the author and her narrative disappeared into obscurity until Oxford University Press republished the narrative in 1988.³⁶

Keckley's narrative tells her story chronologically in fifteen chapters covering the years from approximately 1818-1868, with a significant emphasis on 1862-1868. The first three chapters present Keckley's youth and how she gained freedom from slavery. The next chapter describes working for the Jefferson Davis family, and then the following ten chapters focus on the Lincolns, including topics such as Mrs. Lincoln's wardrobe, Willie Lincoln's death, the state of Washington during the war years, Lincoln's second inauguration, his assassination, and Mrs. Lincoln's subsequent breakdown. Rather than provide a traditional slave narrative or present an account of war experience in the White House, Keckley focuses her narrative on the relationship between herself and the First Lady, much to the Lincoln family's chagrin. By doing so, Keckley presents a revealing narrative about work, specifically as it relates to notions of race, freedom, and nature. Katherine Adams reads the memoir as reiterating the alliance of black freedom with "ownership of labor" (in Williams 126). Susan Williams expands Adams' discussion to consider how a black woman whose notions of freedom are relegated to the realm of work "could use her work to think about civil and political rights as well."³⁷ I consider these varying discussions of work through the complexities of

³⁶ Fleischner, Jennifer. *Mastering Slavery: Memory, Family, and Identity in Women's Slave Narratives*; and Stover, Johnnie. "African American "Mother Tongue" Resistance in Nineteenth-Century Postbellum Black Women's Autobiography: Elizabeth Keckley and Susie King Taylor."

³⁷ Fleischner suggests that the mental work of writing a book is symbolic for Keckley, as for other freed slaves, whose labor was previously relegated to physical forms. (316)

justification that Thoreau and Olmsted illuminate. Although Keckley's work does not involve the outdoors, her memoirs provide several references that indicate her reliance upon natural imagery to explain the war. Her descriptions suggest attempts at rationalization as she struggles to comprehend the devastation of the war.

As I observed earlier, Keckley's memoir does not emphasize the Civil War. She briefly mentions the impending conflict in her chapter about working with the Jefferson Davis family, but her reference gives no indication of her feelings about it. In a later chapter about her work with the Lincolns, she notes the limitations placed on the White House party budget due to war expenses. Other than that, the war hardly seems to affect her. Indeed, there is only a one-sentence mention of the loss of her own son on a Missouri battlefield.³⁸ She does, however, indicate that the war required adjustments in the capital city:

[F]reedmen began to flock into Washington from Maryland and Virginia. They came with a great hope in their hearts, and with all their worldly goods on their backs. Fresh from the bonds of slavery, fresh from the benighted regions of the plantation, they came to the Capital looking for liberty, and many of them not knowing it when they found it. (111)

As a former slave who has been free for several years, Keckley sympathizes with the plight of people who did not know what to expect with freedom, but she also describes them condescendingly. She mentions the "benighted" regions of the plantation likely to condemn the ignorance of slaveholders, but also to describe the freed slaves. She does not

³⁸ For extensive discussion of Keckley's silence about personal matters, see Fleischner.

blame them for their ignorance but recognizes that they cannot even know when they find liberty because of their previous lives. Keckley lightly criticizes some of the refugees who “had exaggerated ideas of liberty. To them it was a beautiful vision, a land of sunshine, rest and glorious promise. They flocked to Washington, and since their extravagant hopes were not realized, it was but natural that many of them should bitterly feel their disappointment” (139). Keckley naturalizes the behavior and feelings of a group of people who existed within such a structured and unjust society for so long. In her eyes, it was “natural” for them to misunderstand liberty and “natural” for them to “feel their disappointment” when the new life was not what they expected.

While Keckley naturalizes the ignorance of the freed slaves, she also chastises some of them for their “extravagant hopes” that stem from the dependence to which they had become accustomed. For them, sudden freedom is more of a burden than an opportunity:

Often I heard them declare that they would rather go back to slavery in the South, and be with their old masters, than to enjoy the freedom of the North. I believe they were sincere in these declarations, because dependence had become a part of their second nature, and independence brought with it the cares and vexations of poverty. (140)

She attempts to describe the challenging mentality that many freed slaves shared, but she struggles to empathize with this group of freed slaves who would huddle together and pine for “the good old days.” Even though Keckley does not condone when freed slaves demonstrate a tendency towards learned helplessness, she tries to explain their behavior for her readers, who may not comprehend the mentality from which these individuals are

emerging. She notes that "the colored people are wedded to associations, and when you destroy these you destroy half the happiness of their lives" (139). Her explanation indicates that these freed slaves place more weight on their associations with the past than they do on intangible concepts such as freedom when those concepts don't match with the associations they desire. "They make a home, and are so fond of it that they prefer it, squalid though it be, to the comparative ease and luxury of a shifting, roaming life (139-40). Keckley acknowledges the comfort of knowing that one has a home, even if the accommodations themselves are "squalid."

It is not simply the home that comforts these people, however; significantly, a familiar landscape also creates the kind of associations that they long for. Most of the slaves had no idea what they were actually looking for when they arrived in Washington: expectations seem to range from the ridiculous ("land of sunshine, rest and glorious promise") to the misunderstanding that things would remain the same, only better: Keckley interviews one woman who "thought, as many others thought, that Mr. and Mrs. Lincoln were the government, and that the President and his wife had nothing to do but to supply the extravagant wants of every one that applied to them" (141). This old woman was particularly confused because Mrs. Lincoln "an't even give me one shife. Bliss God, childen, if I had ar know dat de Government, and Mister and Missus Government, was going to do dat ar way, I neber would 'ave comed here in God's wurd. My old missus us't gib me two shifes, eber year." Recently freed slaves who had always lived on plantations were accustomed to having the plantation owners provide for their basic need. The mistress on this woman's plantation even gave her two old under-dresses, every year.

Therefore, she expected that conditions as a free woman in the North would be at least as good, and she could not reconcile those expectations with the reality of having to provide for herself.

Keckley acknowledges that, “while some of the emancipated blacks pined for the old associations of slavery, and refused to help themselves,” others took advantage of everything they had learned about building, farming, and raising families: “[they] went to work with commendable energy, and planned with remarkable forethought. They built themselves cabins, and each family cultivated for itself a small patch of ground. The colored people are fond of domestic life” (142). Her description of “remarkable forethought” reminds us that these slaves were likely making plans long before emancipation. While Keckley does not dwell on these individuals’ achievements, her remarks laud the planning and effort that went into successfully creating a new home and garden from nothing. She reminds us of the labor that goes into creating a new home, which is likely related to the labor that many of the freed slaves were doing in the South. The work that they do on their own land now, however, leads to domestic fulfillment, which she mirthfully describes as “happy children, a fat pig, a dozen or more chickens, and a garden” (143). Again, Keckley omits personal details, but this description seems to appreciate the labor of working one’s own garden in ways that many slaves were not previously allowed.

Not all freed slaves were industrious and successful, and for many the aimless search for an elusive liberty resulted in disappointment. Her imagery as she describes the search points specifically to an ecological understanding of both desire and

disappointment: "Instead of flowery paths, days of perpetual sunshine, and bowers hanging with golden fruit, the road was rugged and full of thorns, the sunshine was eclipsed by shadows, and the mute appeals for help too often were answered by cold neglect" (112).³⁹ Her description is both literal and metaphorical. She mentions twice that the freed slaves were searching for sunshine, which represents not only hope for a comfortable climate but also happiness, relaxation, and freedom from fear and the metaphorical darkness associated with slavery. The first part of her description points directly back to antebellum description of the plantation from a distinctly white perspective. The imagery of an embowered plantation (like those we see in Andrews' writing) seems to indicate that the slaves were wandering to find the kind of the natural luxury that their previous owners had enjoyed. Of course, the plantations that they were leaving behind were carefully constructed sites of "natural beauty," as chapter two discussed; therefore, searching for a similar kind of comfort that they believed would finally be available to them resulted in disappointment for many of the contraband slaves. Their reliance upon familiar associations explains partly why these freed slaves would be looking for the same kind of landscape they left behind, though they now intend to enjoy it as free men and women. When they arrive in Washington empty-handed in the middle of a war, however, their hopes are dashed. They cannot comprehend a free world that

³⁹ Keckley uses similar imagery in other discussions of slavery versus freedom. Earlier in her narrative she describes the life of a slave as "We who are crushed to earth with heavy chains, who travel a weary, rugged, thorny road, groping through midnight darkness on earth, earn our right to enjoy the sunshine in the great hereafter" (24).

looks so different from the one they left behind, and they are not prepared mentally to create new associations from their status as free people.

Thus, the inability to reconcile what they had hoped for with what they actually experienced confused their comprehension of war. Because their previous realm of understanding was limited to the embowered plantations that surrounded them, they cannot accurately comprehend the results of the war that freed them.⁴⁰ According to Keckley, these contraband slaves realize that they have freedom, but because it looks more like “thorns,” “shadows,” and “neglect,” than “flowery paths” and “sunshine,” they cannot comprehend what it means. They will have to find some other natural associations to help formulate their new comprehension of the world. At the period of Keckley’s memoir, she seems to think it will take a long time for these freed men and women to find the “associations” they desire.

The contraband slaves are not the only group who relies upon associations with nature for comfort; Keckley also searches for these connections as she relates her childhood memories. While touring the South with the Lincoln party after the second inauguration, Keckley remarks sentimentally on the comfort of being back in her birth state. She describes the landscape comprised of “pure air,” the “majestically flowing river,” “fair fields, emblematic of peace,” and she reminisces: “a birth place is always dear, no matter under what circumstances you were born” (165). Her commentary may

⁴⁰ When we consider the embowered plantations from the perspective of the enslaved, they can seem formidable. The same flowering vines could appear oppressive and suffocating or potentially concealing danger. Many of the underlying sensations of the embowered plantation are similar to the swamp, which also offers conflicting interpretations.

seem surprising given the fact that her childhood involved both enslavement and at least one instance of sexual assault (resulting in the birth of her son). Keckley explains that she purposely omits those years of her life from her narrative because they weren't the most important years that formed her character. Johnnie Stover suggests that Keckley's narrative exclusions relate more to audience: "she paints a sentimental picture of her need to write her story, not only to justify her later relationship with Mary Todd Lincoln, but to satisfy the romantic needs of her readers, to titillate them, and to elicit their sympathies" (124).

Regardless of the author's literary purpose, Keckley's memories cannot mask the natural beauty of the James River and surrounding area. Though she recognizes that the landscape around her has changed since the war, she describes the scene of "the golden hours of childhood." Her descriptions create serene images of natural beauty and childhood bliss, even as she looks upon "deserted camps and frowning forts" while wondering if her previous acquaintances had "fallen in battle [or] been scattered by the relentless tide of war." (165). This contradiction between the James River's natural beauty and the reality of a wartorn countryside serves as just one example of the challenges facing Americans to comprehend the effect of war on the natural world, particularly a natural world whose beauty one remembers so fondly.

Although Keckley does not explicitly concern herself with the realities of the "stern vicissitudes of war" that she briefly notes, she cannot help but mention them as she surveys her childhood land. Looking through the city, she notes that "war, grimvisaged war...had brought many changes to the city so well known to me" and laments that "the

scene suggested painful memories" (169). Here, we can read the "painful memories" to indicate experiences with slavery and her enslaved friends and family; however, the pain is also linked to her experience of viewing the city in such war-torn disarray. Keckley is not immune to the importance of associations that she earlier attributes to "those colored people." Even though she has been free for many years, she is not completely separate from her childhood or the associations of landscape that accompany it. In this scene, which is one of her few personal accounts of the war, she feels the pain of seeing a piece of her childhood irrevocably changed because of the war.

The members of the Lincoln party on this excursion do not lament this destruction for long, at least not in the narrative, and Keckley is not the only member of her party who takes time to appreciate the area's natural beauty. During their tour, she recounts that President Lincoln became enamored with "a large, peculiarly shaped oak tree" that was growing on the outskirts of Petersburg. Although Keckley doesn't attribute a reason to Lincoln's affection for the tree, she reports that he became so interested in it after his first visit that "he insisted that the party should go with him to take a look at the isolated and magnificent specimen of the stately grandeur of the forest" (170). Thus, the entire group takes a detour on their trip to visit the tree. Keckley includes another brief encounter with nature immediately after the previous, when President Lincoln asks the train conductor to stop for "a terrapin basking in the warm sunshine on the wayside" (170).

Keckley's inclusion of these two encounters in her narrative is noteworthy for multiple reasons. Throughout her account, she includes details and anecdotes to humanize President Lincoln. The description of his interest in a tree and a turtle

contribute to this effect, but it also points directly to a need for commune with nature during a time of crisis. As the president tours the devastated countryside, he recognizes elements of the natural world that have survived and will thrive in the new nation he aspires to heal. Both the large oak and the terrapin point to nature's eternity; these representations of the natural world seem timeless. Additionally, Keckley describes the oak tree as an "isolated and magnificent specimen of the stately grandeur of the forest," even though there is no forest nearby. The fact that these images occur out of their natural place – a tree in a city, and a turtle on the railway – indicates also that vestiges of the past will continue to survive in the ever-changing world. Though Lincoln strives to create a new united America, he still wants the nation to include elements of its previous constitution. Keckley's inclusion of these moments with the President demonstrate that he, too, relies upon "associations" for comfort in a time of distress. Her narrative contributes to my argument that all humans require associations with nature. While she presents some as strengths and others as weaknesses, Keckley's presentation indicates that freed slaves, seamstresses, and even President Lincoln himself all depend on nature in time of crisis.

Elizabeth Keckley's memoirs tell a fascinating story about a woman navigating treacherous social and political ground as an ex-slave and a servant, a literate and articulate African American woman, and a trusted companion to Mrs. Mary Todd Lincoln. Environmental scholarship needs to address the entire book to determine more about Keckley's "associations" with nature throughout her life, not just how they relate to the Civil War. Because this study focuses on the war period, I only address the natural

imagery that relates to comprehension and broadens my analysis of the term; however, there is much more to learn about the environment from Mrs. Keckley.

“A Strange and Blighted Land”⁴¹: Matilda Pierce [Alleman]

Black women were certainly not the only ones to hold these “associations” with nature that affect their memories. Matilda (Tillie) Pierce was a fifteen-year-old girl when the Battle of Gettysburg took place in her front yard, and her memoirs of the experience echo Keckley and Taylor’s accounts as she relies upon the nature she views around her to comprehend the chaos. Tillie Pierce was born in Gettysburg in 1848.⁴² Her two older brothers worked with their father as butchers so they could one day replace him in his trade, while Tillie and her older sister maintained the household with their mother and attended Young Ladies’ Seminary at the Gettysburg Female Institute. The Battle of Gettysburg occurred in Pierce’s front yard and served as the event that defined her teenage years. During the battle, Pierce nurtured the wounded and dying soldiers around her while grappling with previously foreign concepts of warfare and death. This teenage girl certainly never asked to participate in battle but was forced to act quickly by circumstances far beyond her control, and her firsthand account demonstrates some of the most honest and natural ways humans perceived the world around them during this period. Pierce's war memories indicate that humans cannot comprehend tragedy of this

⁴¹ Matilda Pierce’s married name was Alleman, which is the name under which she published her narrative. Most soldiers refer to her as Tillie Pierce, though, as if she were forever relegated to girlhood status by their memories of her. In the tradition of both Civil War veterans and military historians, I will refer to her as Tillie Pierce in this text.

⁴² Biographical information from Tanya Anderson, author of *Tillie Pierce: Teen Eyewitness to the Battle of Gettysburg*.

magnitude without considering their natural landscape. In fact, landscape is the means by which humans understand major devastation, even if that devastation involves much more than the natural world within their view. Though Pierce's narrative is brief, it is filled with natural associations and tells a compelling story of a girl who matures quickly because war is thrust upon her. She explains her personal development in terms of the landscape. Recovering her work for this study provides a unique opportunity to observe how noncombatant women relied upon nature to comprehend the war.

Other than the Battle of Gettysburg, which led to the publication of the narrative that would bring Pierce her fame, her life followed the period's class and gender conventions. After the war, she met and married a young lawyer, and they moved to Selinsgrove, Pennsylvania, near Philadelphia, where they raised their three children (Anderson 82). After multiple requests from friends and family, Pierce wrote her narrative in 1885 to "transmit in some tangible form [her] knowledge of the place now so historic" (Pierce 17). We see even in that explanatory line that Pierce's "tangible" attachment to Gettysburg relates to the "place" itself, which her further descriptions define as landscape and nature. Pierce's narrative provides an excellent example of how one girl experienced the war and made sense of it through environmental terms. She published her narrative, *At Gettysburg: What a Girl Saw and Heard of the Battle*, in 1889. The book does not seem to have received much public attention other than the small audience interested in the events at Gettysburg. In 2003, one children's historian published Pierce's biography in a juvenile history book, and historic novelist Frank

Meredith packaged it with the narrative of a teenage boy from Gettysburg for publication in 2010.

Pierce's brief narrative begins with an introduction during which she comments on her feelings about the war that occurred twenty-five years previous to her writing about it.⁴³ The introduction presents sentimentalized memories of her antebellum life and thoughts about the postbellum nation before she begins her six-chapter account of the battle itself. Each chapter describes the Battle of Gettysburg as Pierce experienced it, starting with "Incidents Preceding the Battle" and moving through the three days of fighting. She finishes her story with "After the Battle," "Home," and a conclusion. Two overarching themes prevail: Gettysburg is Pierce's beautiful and beloved home, and it has been blessed by God in multiple ways. Pierce lays the foundation for these themes beginning in her introduction and carries them throughout, reiterating her final position as she concludes.

Even though she has moved to another part of the state in her adult life, Pierce begins her memories with the fact that she is "still strongly attached to the place [Gettysburg], its surroundings and associations"(18). Note here that Pierce, like Keckley, recognizes the importance of natural "associations" and the way that they affect memory. Pierce's introductory descriptions all highlight natural places that she enjoyed as a youth: "the lovely groves," "the mighty boulders," "Spangler's Spring," and the "warbling of the

⁴³ The entire narrative is less than 50 pages, with illustrations. Bringing it into literary scholarship is critical, though. If we don't study the experiences of humans on war's periphery, how can we understand their experience? A teenage girl who never anticipated that she would nurture dying soldiers on the battlefield provides a unique and valuable lens through which we can view the war.

birds." Her language is romantic, describing the sunsets and the mountains with phrases such as "tinted ephemeral isles," "sea of occidental glory," and "grandeur in the beyond." Clearly, as she reminisces about her childhood in Eastern Pennsylvania, she sentimentalizes the landscape of her antebellum youth, supporting her claim that she is still "strongly attached" to her home. A woman who begins her narrative by describing childhood in terms of landscape provides an excellent opportunity to analyze the wartime relationship between humans and the natural world. Tillie Pierce tells her story with abundant natural detail, which demonstrates a clear shift in how she views the world before and after the war and allows me to explicate the notions of comprehension that develop through this chapter.

Pierce's concise narrative allows the reader to see how quickly she transitions from a blissfully ignorant girl to a war survivor. In the middle chapters describing the battle, she gives indications of her shifting attitude as she observes more war atrocities. For example, on the night before the battle, Pierce and her equally exuberant sister prepared bouquets of flowers to welcome the Union soldiers. On the first day of battle, they sang patriotic songs while walking outside in hopes of seeing action. Once the battle came near, however, Pierce fled her home with a neighbor and traveled out of town to the Weikert residence to avoid personal harm. The reality of conflict was getting closer. On the way to the Wiekert home, Pierce observed her first wounded soldiers and "more fully began to realize that something terrible had taken place" (32).

On the second day, Pierce observes "the grand panorama" of the battlefield, which she describes as "wonderful and sublime," "a grand and awful spectacle, [that]

impressed me as being some great review” (36). Even though she recognizes something horrible is happening, Pierce is still in awe of the spectacle and doesn’t quite comprehend. Wounded soldiers continue to collect at the Weikert house, and Pierce comforts them as she can. By the third day, Pierce is beginning to understand war violence. She notes that she “must have become inured to seeing the terrors of battle, else [she] could hardly have gazed upon the scenes now presented” (45). She describes the amputation benches in the house and the “surgeons sawing and cutting off arms and legs, then again probing and picking bullets from the flesh.” All of these descriptions appear in a detached tone, quite reminiscent of Susie King Taylor’s descriptions of the skulls on the ground. Both of these women quickly become impervious to the scenery around them, even though they have no historical preparation for the horrors they observe.

Pierce concludes her description of the hospital work with her narrative’s most grotesque image:

To the south of the house, and just outside of the yard, I noticed a pile of limbs higher than the fence. It was a ghastly sight! Gazing upon these, too often the trophies of the amputating bench, I could have no other feeling, than that the whole scene was one of cruel butchery.

But I do not desire to dwell upon such pictures any longer, for they are the most horrible that the battle presented to my mind (45).

Immediately after the gruesome descriptions of dismembered limbs and injured soldiers, Pierce begins a new anecdote to describe her house in Gettysburg. Her shift from macabre to mundane again echoes Taylor, who also quickly shifts away from the hideous discussion of skulls to a light tale of discomfort caused by fleas. Rather than dwell on the

horrific scene, both women quickly move to discussions of nature to reground themselves in reality after discussing such a challenging topic.

When Pierce begins her next story, she demonstrates her youthful attachment to nature as she interacts with a military officer. She asks the gentleman to locate her family home in Gettysburg, which he can identify "by noticing a row of Linden trees standing in front of a double brick house and by other indications..."(47). At first glance, using the trees as an indicator for the home seems completely ordinary. They serve as a visible marker to set her house apart from others nearby. As she continues to tell the story of her interaction with this officer, though, the trees become increasingly important. When he informs her that he has been to her home, she challenges him, asking how many trees are in front of her house. At first glance, testing him seems a reasonable means to validate his presence at her home, but her insistence that he notice the trees indicates that they serve as more than just a descriptor. After questioning him multiple times, the officer replies, "I don't care how many trees there are...". This anecdote about Pierce and the officer illustrates her youthful enthusiasm and the kindness and patience of the officers she encountered; however, it also provides insight into her associations of "home." For Pierce, describing the family home requires recognition of the trees in front, whereas for the officer, other details, primarily about his interaction with her family members, take precedence. Pierce's understanding of "home" and the life she had there is directly related to her natural landscape, which helps her comprehend the war and its aftermath.

Notably, Southern women also associate their homes with the plants that surround them. As mentioned in chapter two, Eliza Frances Andrews continuously describes her

home estate in relation to its gardens, trees, hedges, and orchards. She, like Pierce, cannot imagine a home without these natural beauties, and she assumes that others feel the same. Andrews muses, “nearly everybody that passes the street gate stops and looks up the avenue, and I know they can’t help thinking what a beautiful place it is. The Cherokee rose hedge is white with blooms. It is glorious” (182). Andrews’ thoughts occur early in the war, before labor becomes scarce and the family gardens “show sad evidences of neglect” (376) because the slaves who previously tended them are gone. The subsequent “neglect” that Andrews views on her family property contributes to her ability to comprehend the reality of war. As long as the gardens are maintained, Andrews believes that “this old home of ours is the choicest spot of all the world,” and she insists that her lifestyle is perfectly appropriate (174). Not until the war and subsequent loss of her enslaved laborers – and the landscape they largely create – does Andrews begin to comprehend that her life will be forever changed.

Tillie Pierce also understands home through her landscape, so her astonishment at seeing the countryside marred by war is particularly poignant. After the third day of battle, Pierce assesses her home and remarks: "the whole landscape had been changed, and I felt as though we were in a strange and blighted land" (50).⁴⁴We must note the major difference between her description of the foreign, post-battle landscape and the landscape of her youth. This "strange and blighted land" barely resembles the landscape of her childhood as her introduction describes it.

⁴⁴ Gregory Coco adopts this phrase as the title of his historical collection on the Battle of Gettysburg: *A Strange and Blighted Land-- Gettysburg: The Aftermath of a Battle*.

While the previous discussion clearly indicates how Pierce changed during the four days she experienced the war, she actually provides self-conscious commentary on the change in her introduction. Indeed, as she first describes her life before the war and then explains how the war changed her, she relies upon the landscape to portray these changes. On the first page of her introduction, among all the descriptions mentioned previously, Pierce identifies the once-peaceful hilltops with the war that so disturbed them. She writes, "little did I dream that from those summits the engines of war would, in a few years, belch forth their missiles of destruction; that through those sylvan aisles would reverberate the clash of arms, the roar of musketry, and the booming of cannon, to be followed by the groans of the wounded and dying" (18). Though she writes in prose, Pierce has an ear for the poetic; her descriptions include the visual image of her childhood landscape but also the sounds of the unexpected war that changed it. The young girl who enjoyed this native scenery had no idea that war would come to her front yard and no basis for imagining war. Thus, when it happened, she experienced it in phases. She first heard it from a distance -- cacophonous sounds that did not belong in her peaceful landscape. Then, as the war came closer to her home, she heard the unsettling noise that accompanied it – the human sounds of injury and death.

Pierce continues, describing how war explicitly changed the landscape she grew up loving: "Little did I think that those lovely valleys, teeming with verdure and the rich harvest, would soon be strewn with the distorted and mangled bodies of American brothers" (18). The juxtaposition of abundant green nature and human death articulates Pierce's comprehension of the war that she observed. Her native and peaceful land

became a war-torn landscape, which she not only viewed from afar but closely participated in. As an adult looking back over her experiences, she recognizes how much the observation of war changed her interpretation of the world around her. Her account clearly articulates a rapid comprehension of war made possible by observation and experience. While Pierce narrates several details that indicate how quickly she transitioned from being a blissfully ignorant girl to being a war survivor, she attributes her sudden maturity to the devastation of her landscape. It was: "the transition which in my girlhood days I was made to realize." Pierce implicitly argues that the transformation of her landscape was essentially the transition of her life.

Pierce concludes with a description of Gettysburg that indicates how the same landscape can instruct humans in varying ways over time:

What in my girlhood was a teeming and attractive landscape spread out by the Omnipotent Hand to teach us of His goodness, has by His own direction, become a field for profound thought, where, through coming ages, will be taught lessons of loyalty, patriotism and sacrifice. (64)

One landscape can teach multiple lessons, and Pierce's reminds us to look to nature for understanding, even when nature's message seems inconsistent. She shows us through her environment that nature can present a binary, but it will resolve itself and teach us valuable lessons in the meantime. The landscape where "the bloody hand of Mars blighted and killed the choicest of Nature's offspring" is the same one in which "Peace, with her smiles and arts has transformed the desolation into a Paradise of beauty and bloom" (63). Furthermore, Pierce notes how the same ground can hold both "terrible

chaos" during war and "pleasing order" before and after war. Thus, her "associations" with the natural world include pleasing childhood memories, terrible war recollections, and hopeful plans for future harmony. To Pierce, the landscape changes, but ultimately it serves her purpose of espousing peace and unity for the nation. Much like Taylor's insistence that the nation unite and Keckley's representations of Lincoln's vision for a new nation, Pierce's landscape can serve various purposes as it provides a backdrop for a young girl's fantasies, then for a war, and later for peaceful contemplation. Her narrative reminds us that we must be willing to learn from nature's lessons to best comprehend the world around us.

"You will know, or you will not know": Sarah Morgan Bryan Piatt

One female author from the period stands out as distinctly rejecting the kind of peaceful associations the previous authors espouse. While Sarah Piatt does participate in the tradition of mourning the Civil War through poetry, she also challenges convention through her biting irony and ostensible anger about the events. As a woman born on a plantation outside Lexington, Kentucky, in 1836, Piatt had firsthand experience of slavery and the lifestyle of the South.⁴⁵ When her mother died at a young age, Piatt moved between family members and had very little consistency in her childhood with the exception of an enslaved nurse. Her confused feelings of loyalty and guilt about this

⁴⁵ Biographical information from Paula Bennett's Introduction to *Palace Burner*. Additional details regarding Piatt's unhappy family life contribute to a greater understanding of her body of poetry. Because this study considers only a few war poems, I leave the specifics to Bennett's introduction, where we gain insight into the details that shaped Piatt's work.

relationship haunted her throughout adulthood and appear in much of her poetry that considers slavery and mother/child relationships.

Though she moved north in 1861 after marrying Ohio poet John James Piatt, her poetry demonstrates conflicted feelings about her own complicity in slavery and the subsequent Civil War. Piatt spent the war years in Washington, D.C., while her husband was serving there in the Treasury department. As a woman who was born and raised in the plantation lifestyle but married into federal service, she experienced divided loyalties during the Civil War. Her poetry, however, does not concern itself with which side of the conflict was right. Instead, she examines how combatants and noncombatants alike participate in making war and the idea of war. Her literal positioning in D.C. protected her from much of the physical comprehension that individuals such as Taylor and Pierce experienced. But her figurative positioning as a Southerner living in the Union capitol during the war contributed to the ironic and often contradictory emotions that she presents in her poetry. Her use of natural imagery to communicate these emotions demonstrates how she relied upon her landscape to help process her personal experience of the war.

Literary scholars relegated Piatt's poetry to the category of sentimental women's poetry and denied critical interpretation for many years, until Paula Bennett's significant recovery work. Bennett's book, *Poets in the Public Sphere*, claims that "Piatt's ability...to engage in politically grounded self-ironization makes her the single most important poet in this study," which is a bold statement considering that the book discusses Emily Dickinson, Lydia Sigourney, Emma Lazarus, and Pauline Johnson,

among others (139). Bennett presents Piatt as a highly skilled poet able to conform to the expectations of genteel women's poetry to make money while also subverting traditional, politicized gender roles. Faith Barrett agrees, arguing that Piatt "relies on an imagistic repertoire of flowers, gardens, landscapes, mothers, and children to offer oblique critiques of Southern nationalist ambitions, Southern racial hierarchies, and Southern gender norms" (197). Mary McCartin Wearn argues that we should pay more attention to the second half of Barrett's list: mothers and children. She suggests that Piatt's critique of maternal expectations merits as much study as her Civil War commentary has received, and she creates a compelling argument for shifting the Piatt conversation in that direction.

This study however, will focus on the first half of Barrett's list – flowers, gardens, landscapes—to further elucidate the catalogue of "political and aesthetic aims" that Barrett outlines:

she [Piatt] wants to use romantic landscape depiction to critique aestheticized and sentimental depictions of battlefield violence; she wants to reflect on the ways the war changed relationships between slaves and their former masters; she wants to consider white middle-class women's relationship to the war's violence; finally she wants to examine the ways that gender roles and heterosexual desire work to endorse military ideologies in general and a Southern code of masculine heroism in particular. (199)

This study accepts Barrett's claim while narrowing the discussion to examine Piatt's use of natural imagery to comprehend the war. Because Piatt is only one author in a chapter of powerful women's voices, I cannot consider her prolific body of poetry. Instead, I have selected three poems that best demonstrate comprehension. All three poems have been anthologized and studied, and they fit into the category of war poetry that Bennett

describes: “Piatt looks at what the war destroyed for those who did not fight as well as for those who did” (*Palace-Burner* xliii). My contribution, however, examines specifically how Piatt relies on the landscape to make sense of that destruction.

In "Hearing the Battle - July 21, 1861," Piatt demonstrates her confusion about both participating in and avoiding the war. Bennett explains that the poem was written in response to Piatt's husband, whose poem "First Fight" presented the domestic bliss of a man who could hear the war raging outside his home while "waxing eloquent on his own good luck in not having to fight it" (*Poets* 146). At first glance, the poem participates in the period's sentimental conventions; indeed, as with most of her work, Piatt's contemporary readers missed the poem's irony entirely, praising its "tenderness and simplicity" (*Palace-Burner* 2n2). The first two stanzas set the scene:

One day in the dreamy summer,
 On the Sabbath hills, from afar
We heard the solemn echoes
 Of the first fierce words of war.

Ah, tell me, though veiled Watcher
 Of the storm and the calm to come,
How long by the sun or shadow
 Till these noises again are dumb.

Piatt established the contradiction of war by setting the scene in "Dreamy summer / On the Sabbath hills." Those lines alone would indicate peace and holiness that does not merge with the "fierce words of war" to come. The incongruity confuses the narrator, who looks immediately to nature to explain what is happening. She seeks answers in natural terms, wanting to know the extent of the expected damage in terms "of the storm

and the calm” and measuring the length of the noisy battle “by the sun or shadow.” We see that the narrator turns to observable nature to assess new or frightening events.

The third stanza offers an immediate response to her question of “how long,” as everything quickly falls silent. The narrator and her lover discuss the battle and contemplate death:

And soon in a hush and glimmer
 We thought of the dark, strange fight,
Whose close in a ghastly quiet
 Lay dim in the beautiful night.

Then we talk'd of coldness and pallor,
 And of things with blinded eyes
That stared at the golden stillness
 Of the moon in those lighted skies;

While their conversation seems like an appropriately intimate reflection for two lovers to share during a time of war, their discussion is unsettling because of the atmosphere that surrounds it. Although the poem’s title prepares the reader for an account of the sounds of battle action, this poem is eerily still, presented mostly as a quiet conversation. Instead of explosive warfare and banging drums, which were common rhetorical devices in much war poetry, the poem depicts the “coldness” and “stillness” of the post-battle night and the death it represents in a quiet moment between two people. The silence, coming immediately after battle noise, is almost deafening.

Sound is not the only sense that Piatt confuses. The idea of “sun or shadow” returns, as Piatt alternates between light and dark imagery. The speaker can appreciate the “beautiful night” with “golden stillness / of the moon in those lighted skies”;

however, the “blinded eyes” of the dead cannot see it. Piatt has already established that the speaker is confused by war’s contradictions: it is loud and silent, sun and moon, summer and coldness. She concludes the poem with an ironic turn, including a popular floral image:

But a delicate wind beside us
Was rustling the dusky hours,
As it gather’d the dewy odors
Of the snowy jessamine-flowers.

And I gave you a spray of the blossoms,
And said: “I shall never know
How the hearts in the land are breaking,
My dearest, unless you go.

The jessamine is a popular sentimental flower, and it appears frequently in literature of the period, particularly from Southern women writers. Eliza Frances Andrews and Augusta Jane Evans both rely upon the jessamine as a symbol of Southern patriotism, both because it is known for its regional presence throughout the South and because of its pervasive perennial appearance as one of the first signs of spring. The choice of “snowy” to describe the flowers seems inaccurate, since the poem’s title indicates a July setting, and Southern jessamine flowers are typically yellow. Thus, the flower is neither white nor covered in snow. This seeming discrepancy suggests that Piatt includes the flower less as a literal image and more as symbol of sectional pride. The speaker chooses a flower native to Southern soil to demonstrate her affection for her husband before sending him to his death. Her symbolic gift reminds us that soldiers who marched off to battle often literally and figuratively maintained remnants of their landscape with them.

Piatt plays upon the idea of comprehension here, noting that the narrator of her poem could not possibly comprehend war unless her own lover marches off and likely dies in it. This speaker recognizes that she cannot truly understand war unless she loses someone she loves. While the scope of personal loss varies dramatically, Piatt's representation of comprehension is quite similar to that of the Widow Leister whose anecdote I discuss above. Both women demonstrate that we cannot comprehend war until we lose a part of our daily landscape. For Leister, that landscape included her livestock. For Piatt's speaker, perhaps it includes her husband.

Perhaps the poem most dedicated to Piatt's comprehension of war is "After-Poem," which she published in 1871. This poem relates images that represent the incongruity of the natural world. The three stanzas provide a list of natural metaphors, each demonstrating the unjust superiority of natural things that seemingly contradict themselves. For example, the poem suggests that dead or un-blossomed flowers are the most brilliant and that the moon, while capable of lighting the night sky, often shows only a sliver of itself. Lastly, she describes the mysteries of the ocean, whose depths remain impenetrable to the humans who try to reach them. Each of these metaphors implies a distinct separation between humans and the natural world. According to Piatt, we cannot fully comprehend the mysteries of flowers, the moon, or the ocean, much like we cannot comprehend the war.

You will read, or you will not read,⁴⁶
 That the lilies are whitest after they wither;
That the fairest buds stay shut in the seed,
 Though the bee in the dew say “Come you up hither.”

You have seen, if you were not blind,
 That the moon can be crowded into a crescent,
And promise us light that we never can find
 When the midnights are wide and yellow and pleasant.

You will know, or you will not know,
 That the seas to the sun can fling their foam only,
And keep all their terrible waters below
 With the jewels and dead men quiet and lonely.⁴⁷

Each of the three short stanzas in this poem begins with the idea that the observer may or may not observe something anomalous about nature. Piatt’s poem suggests that the knowledge gained by these various observations of the natural world is optional: one may or may not recognize this knowledge. Her poem brings several questions to mind: Where is the justice in this mysterious nature that she describes? Why is the knowledge to be gained from observation so elusive to some? Piatt acknowledges that some people will not understand the lessons that nature teaches others. Some people may not *read*, *see*, or *know*, that incongruous nature holds bitter surprises such as the beauty of the dead lily, the unblossoming bud, the crowded moonlight, and the ocean’s depths. Her poem speaks directly to comprehension and reflects how some people remain uncomprehending.

Relating to a lack of comprehension, the blindness Piatt mentions in the second stanza seems figurative. While literal lack of sight would certainly obstruct the kind of

⁴⁶ Bennett notes that this line captures the possibilities present in Piatt’s poetry. “You will hear the irony or you will not” (1).

⁴⁷ Full text from *Palace-Burner*

visual observation that she describes, mental ignorance, or the unwillingness to observe seems to bother Piatt the most. She ends the stanza with the idea of an unfulfilled promise in the midst of natural beauty, indicating that if we remain blinded by ignorance, we will never earn the privilege of the full moonlight.

The third stanza presents Piatt's primary concern: death. While she mentions death first in the opening stanza, the withered flowers seem purely symbolic; Piatt uses the irony of their beauty to set the tone rather than speaking about the injustice of death itself. She delivers the blow in the last line, however, when she finally reveals what troubles her most. Not only is nature unjust in how it treats itself (flowers, bees, the moon), but more importantly, nature unjustly treats dead humans, "the jewels and dead men quiet and lonely." Indeed, the fact that nature can hide the dead from us seems terribly unfair, particularly since the speaker tells us in the first stanza that there is a mysterious and bitter beauty in death. Ultimately, Piatt's "After Poem" suggests that people will view nature differently and draw different conclusions. For her, it seems as if the only true conclusions are bitter, reflecting a dark comprehension of the realities of the Civil War.

Piatt's most challenging representation of the Civil War is paramount in "Army of Occupation," written about Arlington Cemetery in 1866. Bennett claims that Piatt wrote this poem to commemorate the sealing of a mass grave containing 2,111 unknown soldiers (5n4). Thus, in addition to the already complex emotions of guilt and anger that Piatt's poetry expresses, this poem adds uncertainty. While Piatt attempts to comprehend the Civil War, her efforts are thwarted by events such as this burial, in which the

identities of the bodies can never truly be known. Piatt's poem refuses to efface the mourners' culpability for their own participation in the deaths of these soldiers and compounds the guilt with the element of the unknown. Her poem about Arlington best represents the stage of comprehension at the moment Piatt was experiencing it. Just as the narrator in "Hearing the Battle" is culpable for sending her lover off to death, the participants in the funeral rites at Arlington in 1866 are complicit in the culture of violence surrounding the American Civil War.

The poem has six stanzas. The first sets the stage for the day at the cemetery, commenting on the summer season, the abundant trees, and the Capitol visible in the distance:

The summer blew its little drifts of sound—
Tangled with wet leaf-shadows and the light
Small breath of scattered morning buds—around
The yellow path through which our footsteps wound.
Below, the Capitol rose glittering white.

Piatt presents a beautiful day for commemoration. Everything in the first stanza is light and airy and clean. She carefully depicts the pleasant scene with words such as "little," "light," "small," "scattered," "yellow," and "glittering white." Then, she introduces the Capitol to suggest the serious subject of national politics, but nothing in this stanza prepares the reader for the surprise of the poem's dark turn. Her second stanza leads to the gravity of her subject matter through moderately restrained descriptions of death. There is no doubt that her tone is serious, but Piatt is still invoking the culture of

mourning. She describes the fact that thousands of soldiers are placed in the mass grave at Arlington and comments on the manner of warfare that got them all there:

There stretched a sleeping army. One by one,
They took their places until thousands met;
No leader's stars flashed on before, and none
Leaned on his sword or stagg[e]r'd with his gun—
I wonder if their feet have rested yet!

Her description makes the death of these soldiers seem natural. They simply walked themselves to this grave, and laid down. Indeed, their arrival and organization required no leadership or weaponry. Now, they sleep in peace and they can finally rest.

If we only read the first two stanzas, we might think this poem calls for peaceful memorialization, but Piatt does not absolve her readers that easily. Instead, she spends the next two stanzas describing the kind of country that would conduct a war that would kill and terrorize and maim hundreds of thousands of its own citizens:

They saw the dust, they joined the moving mass,
They answer'd the fierce music's cry for blood,
Then straggled here and lay down in the grass:--
Wear flowers for such, shores whence their feet did pass;
Sing tenderly; O river's haunted flood!

They had been sick, and worn, and weary, when
They stopp'd on this calm hill beneath the trees:
Yet if, in some red-clouded dawn, again
The country should be calling to her men,
Shall the r[e]veill[e] not remember these?

These two stanzas contain the majority of the poem's natural imagery. First, the author directly addresses the river, instructing it to "wear flowers for such" and "sing tenderly"

in honor of the dead soldiers. She reiterates the power of nature to recover from warfare, acknowledging that flowers will grow on the banks of the river and water will continue to flow as before, even though thousands of men have trampled the grass there and ultimately died. Piatt also repeats the image she presents in her “After Poem” when she suggests that the river is haunted, providing yet another allusion to the power of the water to obscure dead bodies.⁴⁸

The idea of this haunting is what most pervades the final two stanzas:

Around them underneath the mid-day skies
The dreadful phantoms of the living walk,
And by low moons and darkness with their cries—
The mothers, sisters, wives with faded eyes,
Who call still names amid their broken talk.

And there is one who comes alone and stands
At his dim fireless hearth—chill’d and oppress’d
By Something he has summon’d to his lands,
While the weird pallor of its many hands
Points to his rusted sword in his own breast!

Piatt invokes the images of two different kinds of ghosts that the war created. First, there are the women who were left behind to mourn the loss of their sons, brothers, and husbands. She names these women “the dreadful phantoms of the living” and presents them as incapable of living fulfilling lives, at least so soon after their losses. Not only are these women presented as “phantoms,” but they live in a dark world, where even in “mid-day” “low moons and darkness” surround them.

⁴⁸ I discuss the river more in chapters four and five. In chapter four, I examine how the river conceals dead bodies and changes because of military activity. In chapter five, I examine the potential of water to wash away war-related atrocities and renew the land around it.

Piatt's phantoms are still more fortunate than the last character she describes, however, the "one who comes alone and stands." Piatt does not identify this individual, and perhaps it is not one person but a representative of many who share the guilt for this war. As the "many hands" point to this figure, we can extrapolate the thousands of widow, orphans, and soldiers (both surviving and deceased) that those hands may represent. Collectively, these metonymical hands accuse this last ghost of "summoning" the "Something" that ultimately led to the mass graves at Arlington. In this final stanza, although Piatt does not explicitly invoke natural metaphors, we see her reversing the natural order. Whereas the first five stanzas depict actions commensurate with natural human behavior -- soldiers answering the call to battle and dying and the living mourning their dead -- the last stanza represents the grossly unnatural act of suicide, "his rusted sword in his own breast." Through this final perverse image, we most clearly see Piatt's assessment that while war can possibly be a part of the natural order, the American Civil War and the atrocities it generated cannot.

Thus, Piatt leaves us with the extremely unsatisfying notion that we cannot comprehend the Civil War. Because it does not align with natural principles, the war represents irreconcilable incongruities. Even as the speaker in "Army of Occupation" looks to nature to understand the war, she recognizes that it does not fit common notions of the natural, and she, like Piatt's reader, can only wonder how to grapple with the tragedy it engendered. As we look ahead to the next chapter, however, we see that not everyone agrees with Piatt's assessment of the war. Humans often looked to nature to

understand the Civil War, and the lessons in the next chapter amply demonstrate how unreliable that nature can be.

CHAPTER IV
CIVIL WAR SOLDIERS AND FICKLE NATURE

“Ah, Nature has no politics”

In Sidney Lanier’s war novel, *Tiger-Lilies*, Confederate soldier Philip Sterling contemplates the relationship between war and nature while imprisoned onboard a Federal gunship. Sterling watches the water and the sky and thinks to himself:

The skies....smile, no matter who frowns. They are unmindful of men. And so are the waters. Two years ago these very waves floated our Merrimac proudly: there are the masts of the frigate she sunk that day. Now they float, full as proudly, the hostile keels of our enemies. (177)

This soldier finds bitter irony in the fact that the water doesn’t choose sides; in fact, the river might support or thwart either’s efforts without prejudice. While floating on a Federal ship, Sterling observes the masts of the sunken Confederate Merrimac and concludes that nature has no allegiance to any individual or political cause. Sterling continues his musing with some Shakespearean references:

Ah, Nature has no politics. She’ll grow a rose as well for York as Lancaster; and mayhap beat both down next minute with a storm!
She has no heart; else she never had rained on Lear’s head.
She has no eyes; for, seeing, she never could have drowned that dainty girl,
Ophelia. (Lanier 178)

His assessment of Nature indicates that it does not select favorites, nor does it discriminate against its victims. Lanier invokes two of Shakespeare’s most melancholy

characters to demonstrate that nature must have no sympathy to rain on the head of a delusional old man or drown a depressed young lady. In this description, nature can assume various forms and either “grow a rose” or “beat down with a storm” regardless of the recipient.

Sterling’s appraisal rings true throughout Civil War-era literature. The ability for the environment to serve simultaneously on both sides of the conflict becomes evident through descriptions of natural elements as both victims and weapons. Like the river Sterling observes, nature can favor the South on one day and the North the next. Sterling rebukes this fickle element in his final statement about nature:

O blind, deaf, no-hearted Beauty, we cannot woo thee, for thou silently contemnest us; we cannot force thee, for thou art stronger than we; we cannot compromise with thee, for thou art treacherous as thy seas: what shall we do, we, unhappy, that love thee, coquette Nature?

Sterling sounds like a tortured suitor as he poses his final question to “coquette Nature,” bemoaning his inability to sway the natural elements he both appreciates and fears. His recognition of nature’s duality resonates throughout other writing of the period. As we will see, Lanier is not the only author who seems fascinated with nature’s ability to serve multiple masters during conflict.

This Civil War literature suggests that the war served as a catalyst for American understanding of the inability to control nature. In fact, as the previous chapter demonstrates, during the Civil War, existing American thought about the ability, the right, and the need to control nature becomes contested. During this phase of wartime

experience, which I have named *comprehension*, Americans begin to view nature as something larger than themselves that they in fact cannot govern. Even more, they realize that their understanding of nature does not hold up to the stress of military conflict. Indeed, this shift in comprehension serves as a bold turning point for American relationships with the natural world. Whereas the previous chapter focused on female observers, this one explores how battlefield voices negotiate these shifting comprehensions of the natural world. I primarily focus on two combatant authors: poet and author Sidney Lanier, a Confederate soldier whose words open this chapter, and Samuel Watkins, a young man who served in the First Tennessee Regiment. I include descriptions from other battlefield sources as well. In memoirs, poems, and novels, these writers demonstrate a burgeoning understanding of the confusing nature of nature, and the Civil War serves as a catalyst for the knowledge that necessarily follows war's realities.

Rather than organize this chapter solely around the authors I discuss, I begin with an introduction to two elements of nature that appear frequently in the literature, because these elements provide touchstones for understanding soldiers' responses more deeply. I open by discussing trees, which quickly illustrate Lanier's claim that "Nature has no politics." Trees can serve as friend or foe during war, but they can also themselves fall victim to combat. This chapter explores examples of trees concealing shooters, providing refuge for resting victims, propping up the dying, and collecting dead bodies. Writers of the period also could not resist describing the damage done to the trees. Trees appear as victims in many battlefield accounts, written both during and after the war. Trees are not

the only ambiguous natural forms, however. Much like Piatt's denouncement of mysterious waters that concludes the previous chapter, swamps, rivers, and oceans appear throughout soldiers' memoirs and demonstrate the continuous confusion that such shifting forms can cause. Thus, I discuss how various forms of water affect the human ability to comprehend war before moving to analysis of specific authors.

After some broad discussion of trees and water, I shift to detailed discussion of Sidney Lanier and Samuel Watkins. These Confederate soldiers' writing so thoroughly addresses the relationship between the natural world and warfare that I limit my analysis here to these two; however, my goal is not to delineate between Northern and Southern interpretations of the war. In fact, this study calls for a broader understanding that all Americans experienced the natural comprehension phase of the war. I conclude by briefly discussing the Southern swamp as it compares to the battlefield. The challenging ambiguities that swamps present often resurface in descriptions of battlefields, reminding us that perhaps the cruelest trick nature plays during war is to be something other than what it seems.

“Man's warfare on the trees is terrible”⁴⁹

Trees are among the most easily recognizable symbols of the natural world, and they often fall victim to human actions, whether clear-cutting in the name of progress or

⁴⁹ Although Lydia Sigourney's 1844 poem "Fallen Forests" predates the Civil War and responds directly to popular poetry of her era espousing patriotic praise for the progress of civilization, her opening line seems appropriate to begin this section. I follow the lead of Karen Kilcup's *Fallen Forests: Emotion, Embodiment, and Ethics in American Women's Environmental Writing, 1781-1924*, which also invokes Sigourney's work to discuss the symbolic and material resonance of trees and the aftermath of deforestation.

conducting a military battle. Before the Civil War, Americans had never seen warfare's complete decimation of trees; indeed, almost every battlefield participant and observer comments on the spectacle of destroyed trees. This common response illustrates the importance of trees as a natural symbol and demonstrates what an important role they played in coming to terms with the war's devastation. On one hand, trees seem like a beautiful symbol of a kind and peaceful nature. They can provide respite and shade, something solid to lean against. In a military conflict, trees may provide some concealment from the enemy, and they may even protect innocent bystanders from incoming projectiles. Conversely, trees can be a threat. They can conceal enemy soldiers, such as snipers up in their branches. They can be obstacles, making it difficult to get large groups of people through wooded areas without being ambushed. Adding a third dimension to the discussion of trees, we must recognize that they can also be victims themselves.

Andrews' diary presents all three versions of trees in ways that demonstrate some of their symbolic importance. As we saw earlier, she invokes the image of the sequoia in her editorial introduction to represent the South's strength and imperviousness. Later in the journal, she presents trees as a convenient resource for Southerners: "it began to rain, so the gentlemen cut down saplings which they fitted...across the body of the wagon, and stretching the lieutenant's army blanket over it, made a very effectual shelter" (33-34). And when she travels through war-ravaged Georgia in 1864, she illustrates trees as victims of the Union Army:

Some of it [railroad iron] was wrapped round the trunks of trees, as if the cruel invaders, not satisfied with doing all the injury they could to their fellowmen, must spend their malice on the innocent trees of the forest, whose only fault was that they grew on Southern soil. Many fine young saplings were killed in this way. (47)

Note that when Southern gentlemen cut down saplings to use them for her comfort, Andrews does not cry out against the destruction. Northern men who kill trees, however, are “cruel invaders.” Witnessing the Union’s tree destruction makes Andrews recognize the slippery hold that the South has on its natural resources. She wants to believe that only Southerners like herself have privileged access to the Southern landscape, but her faith begins to waver as she views the Union Army’s destructive path.

Andrews is not the only author to describe trees as a method of comprehending war-induced change. Gregory Coco’s vast history of the Battle of Gettysburg, *A Strange and Blighted Land*, recreates the devastated battlegrounds using various first-person narratives.⁵⁰ Coco’s opening chapter presents physical descriptions of the post-battle field, focusing on the human carnage and the inexplicable human curiosity that drew thousands of visitors in the months following the fight. While the descriptions Coco provides focus on human bloodshed, we should note that the majority of those descriptions also include the natural land. The most common observations he reports involve trees, whether as the main subject or as a peripheral descriptor. Indeed, Coco’s analysis presents countless references to trees that fall into varying categories of friend,

⁵⁰ Tillie Pierce describes her home after the Battle of Gettysburg as “a strange and blighted land.” For more on Pierce’s relationship with nature before and after the Civil War, see my discussion of Pierce in the previous chapter.

enemy, and victim. These three categories remind us that the same elements of nature can be used for various purposes and understood in significantly different ways.

A tree could be an ally: a place to gain rest or sanctuary. One memoir describes a soldier “seen with his back against a tree, with arms folded calmly across his breast...He had been mortally wounded. Placing his musket against a tree he calmly, as it seemed, and resignedly sat down to die” (qtd. in *Coco* 23). The author of this description was not present when the soldier sat down by the tree, yet he ascribes calmness and resignation to the “mortally wounded” man, simply because both the musket and the soldier appeared to be peacefully leaning against the tree. The idea of peace in this description is fascinating for multiple reasons. We must consider that it is quite possible the dying soldier felt peace at his last moments. If so, was that peace related to the tree he found to lean against? Or is it more likely that the soldier was agonizing over his death and the peacefulness of the scene came much later: a feeling that a post-battle observer could describe because of the scenery and the pervasive stillness of death? Either way, the presence of the tree in this image reminds us of the prevalence and the importance of these natural symbols.

Trees also served as a safe observation point. During the Battle of Gettysburg, civilian teen Joseph Skelly “climbed up a good-sized oak tree so as to have a good view” of the battle. Skelly remained ensconced in the oak tree to watch the battle at Seminary Ridge unfold. Later, he writes his own memoir of the experience, noting that his position was initially perfect for protected surveillance: “we could see clearly on the ridge about half a mile beyond us...” However, as the skirmish line moved, “the artillery opened fire

and shot and shell began to fly over our heads, one of them passing dangerously near the top of the tree I was on” (Skelly 73). Besides being an amusing reflection from an enthusiastic youth, Skelly’s story demonstrates that trees can provide a false sense of security by creating the illusion that their leaves and boughs could protect someone from something as deadly as an artillery shell. Thus, while trees often represent imperviousness in the human imagination, they are not immune to artillery. War forces humans to reevaluate the symbolic resonance they ascribe to material objects such as trees.

One “Rebel sharpshooter” provides a good example of a soldier who trusted too much in the false sense of security trees can elicit. This sharpshooter had been hiding in the foliage to snipe the enemy. A surviving Union soldier recounts:

[I]t wasn’t easy for them to make out where he was because the thick leaves hid him. But at last they noticed a puff of smoke when he’d sent a bullet in among them...They aimed at the place the smoke came from and killed him, and after the battle, I’ll be dog-goned if he wasn’t still in the tree hanging by his belt. (qtd. in Coco 21)

Thus, trees may provide an illusion of security, but they do not always provide the safety one might expect. Nevertheless, units used trees to form defensive perimeters. Even though the wood was not impenetrable, they reasoned that having trees in front of them was better than nothing. Confederate soldier Sam Watkins describes the creation of this defense: “previous to the day of attack, the soldiers had cut down all the trees in our immediate front, throwing the tops down hill and sharpening the limbs of the same, thus making, as we thought, an impenetrable *abattis* of vines and limbs locked together...”

(162). Much to his dismay, the abattis did not prove impenetrable, and one of his fellow soldiers “was killed dead in his tracks by a treacherous Yankee hid behind a tree.” Within this one brief anecdote, we see the tree working for and against both sides of the battle, demonstrating that nature remains neutral in war. That inconstancy makes it difficult to comprehend war in natural terms.

Images of wounded trees flood Civil War memoirs, such as descriptions of “deadened woods” full of “bullet-stormed” trees (in *Coco* 17). Sam Watkins comments, “The trees looked as if they had been cut down for new ground, being mutilated and shivered by musket and cannon balls” (166); and Joseph Skelly, observing the battle from his friendly oak tree, remarks, “Ziegler’s Grove showed the effects of the Confederate artillery fire. Good-sized trees were knocked off and splintered in every imaginable way” (87). He also remembers that “the sights of havoc on the field were terrible. Wherever there was a bit of woods which had been in direct line of artillery fire of both sides, good-sized trees were knocked off, splintered and branches thrown in every direction” (92). Skelly’s narrative reminds us that trees really did become unintended victims during battle; unlike humans who at least had the potential to move out of the way, Skelly shows how any woods positioned in the line of fire suffered extreme damages.

This destruction of trees made observers uncomfortable because violence was anomalous to the peaceful beauty that trees had come to represent. One soldier describes his discomfort with the way that the “musketry fire had barked the trees until they were white, which with drooping limbs that had been cut by the bullets gave the woods a weird and dismal appearance” (*Coco* 22). Of course, the dead bodies scattered near the site of

this description probably also contributed to the area's "weird and dismal appearance," but it is noteworthy that this observer chooses to describe the trees in those terms. The kinds of damage that the trees endured is uncanny, and the observer expresses his discomfort at encountering a scene of such *unnatural* nature.

Battlefield observers continued to pay homage to the trees even years after the war ended. Indeed, as Coco explains, "the trees were always a curiosity. Thirty-one years later, all of the worst manifestations of war...had been obliterated by time and the elements, except a few of these scarred, venerated old trees which had once stood so healthy and strong" (34). Next to a picture of a small artillery round wedged into a large oak tree, Coco includes commentary from an 1875 visitor who travelled to Gettysburg to view the damaged trees. The visitor expresses that some trees are "still green and vigorous, through whose hearts tore solid shot or fragments of shell...Scores of trees that survived a cannon ball were killed by the awful volleys of musketry that rained upon the valley, stripping them of bark, so that upright and firm-rooted as ever, they died of starvation" (qtd. in Coco 34). The visitor's remarks indicate that trees remained in various stages of life and death, reminding observers of the destruction. Whether "scarred, venerated old trees," "green and vigorous" trees with holes in the middle, or "upright and firm-rooted" and dead, these trees remained as memorials of the battle that took place there.

Of course, trees also served as human memorials. At Culp's Hill, observers noted that the "trees were almost literally peeled, from the ground up some fifteen or twenty feet" where the bullets had removed the bark. On those "peeled" trees, "were the names

of several regiments—Ohio, Pa. N.Y. (3rd Wisconsin) & others,”” providing personalized battle spaces in various positions around the field (qtd. in Coco 20). Other stories tell of hastily etched names and dates next to the bodies of the fallen.⁵¹ Whether these inscriptions were made by the wounded themselves or by comrades who had to leave them is often unknown; what remains obvious is the human instinct to use available resources to meet their current need. The diversity of needs that trees fulfilled reminds us of the varying roles that nature played in the battle, and the abundance of tree imagery in discussions of the Civil War demonstrates the dominant trend of relying upon the landscape to help comprehend the event.

These assorted descriptions of trees give some indication of the prevalence and variety that Civil War narratives present. Almost everyone seems to have a memory related to a tree or at least includes trees in their Civil War memories. In the sections on Samuel Watkins and Sidney Lanier that follow, I analyze how both authors implement tree imagery for various ends. Before I move to that more specific analysis, I will discuss another natural element that holds both symbolic and material import and appears in much Civil War writing – water.

“[T]he life stream had mingled with the flow of the little gurgling brook”

As the previous chapter explored, people who experienced the war often commented about it in relation to water, which both aided and confused their ability to

⁵¹ Coco includes other examples as well: “I find it to be the resting place of the rebel dead. Close by the side of a tree has been scraped and neatly smoothed down. On the spot has been placed the following inscription: “*Forty-five Rebs Buried to the Right*” (qtd. in Coco 24).

comprehend the changes that they observed. Sarah Piatt's "Army of Occupation" invokes the melancholy associated with water in her line: "Sing tenderly; O river's haunted flood!" reminding us that water was often a location of death during the war. Violence frequently resulted in environmental changes, even if those changes were temporary. Coco quotes an observer who describes a stream "clogged with the dead bodies of Confederates cut down by the fire" (Coco 40). Heavy rains after the battle caused pooling waters where the casualties caused complete blockages of water flow. These "clogs" and resulting puddles are one minor example of the aberration of nature caused by this war. Where water had naturally flowed only days before, the battle stopped it and caused subsequent flooding. This change, while temporary, illustrates one of the significant problems that soldiers and observers faced: how could they comprehend a natural world that stops functioning as it used to?

The ability to comprehend how this changing nature affected their daily lives proved challenging for soldiers and noncombatants alike. For Sophronia Bucklin, a nurse serving during the Battle of Gettysburg, observing the mixture of blood and water caused considerable discomfort. In her memoir *In Hospital and Camp*, she explains that the nurses were often too busy doing hospital work to get outside, so the opportunities for fresh air were rare and exciting. Still working near Gettysburg in early autumn 1863 Bucklin and her nurse friends stole a chance to walk out near the battlefields. Her initial observations foreground the death count and the way that the bodies had intermingled with water to create something altogether new and unsettling:

[T]housands of brave men had gone to sleep when the battle clouds hung over them, and every grass-blade seemed to have been stained with blood. Down in the ravines, where the water trickled cold and silently over slimy rocks, they had fallen—friend and foe—with death shrieks and cries, and the life stream had mingled with the flow of the little gurgling brook...(189)

For Bucklin, the trickling water and gurgling brooks provide an opportunity to wash away the horror of the battlefield, even though the “cold,” “silent” water and “slimy” ravine bed does seem appalling. Indeed, her description mixes accounts of battlefield horror (“every grass-blade...stained with blood;” “death shrieks and cries”) and bubbling, cleansing nature (“little gurgling brook”). In another attempt at euphemism, she chooses to view the dead as “sleeping”; however, she cannot erase the horror of what happened in that scene of apparent natural beauty. Bucklin uses the water imagery in an attempt to cleanse the idea of what had happened here so she can accept the realities of the battlefield, but we see through her description that she cannot quite reconcile the horror with the beauty of nature. She tries to understand the reality of what took place in that location by describing the ravine beds, but the truth of the war remains incomprehensible.

“Woodman, Spare That Tree!”: Samuel Watkins

Samuel Watkins' early life seems to have been uneventful.⁵² Born June 26, 1829, on a farm near Columbia, Tennessee, Watkins spent his childhood working the family land and clerking at a general store in town. Although we don't know much about his early education, we do know that he attended Jackson College in Columbia before the

⁵² All biographical information in this paragraph is from Inge's introduction to the 1999 republication of *Co. Aytch*.

war, where he likely studied the classics, as the allusions in his narrative suggest. In 1861 at the age of twenty-one, Watkins enlisted in the Maury Grays, First Tennessee Regiment, where he remained until the end of the war. His longevity in the unit, including three combat injuries in Murfreesboro, Atlanta, and Nashville, is one of the elements that makes Watkins so unique. As Thomas Inge remarks, “Out of the original 3,150 men who formed the Army of Tennessee and the 1,950 recruits and conscripts who joined them, only 125 officers and men remained when the war was concluded in 1865. Out of the 120 men who enlisted with Watkins in Company H in 1861, he was one of only seven survivors” (Inge 3). Of the seven men who served in the Regiment from the beginning to the end of the war, only one wrote a first-person narrative account of his service. Watkins began documenting his stories in 1881, after marrying his longtime sweetheart, having eight children, and settling to the business of running a family farm and a general store. These stories were so popular that his local paper, *The Columbia Herald*, ran the series from May 13, 1881, for over a year before collecting them into *Co. Aytch*. High demand led to six reprints of the book, which presents Watkins’ honest, down-to-earth, and often humorous representation of the Civil War from the perspective of a young Tennessean who served in the Confederate Army.

Sam Watkins’ colorful Civil War memoir has educated and entertained thousands of readers and arguably influenced multiple works of fiction. For example, citing numerous comparisons between Watkins’ life experience and the famous realist Civil War novel, Inge argues that Stephen Crane must have read Watkins before writing *The Red Badge of Courage* (Inge vii). Ken Burns also pays tribute to Watkins in his film

version of *The Civil War*, making the young soldier a prominent character and using much of Watkins' own language to tell the story. Even with this popular following, scholarly studies of Watkins are almost nonexistent. Andrew Higgins argues that Watkins has been ignored by literary history for two reasons: because he was (only) a Confederate enlisted soldier, and because he characterizes himself as a fool. Higgins suggests that this characterization is purposeful; Watkins does not tell a romantic story of officer gallantry: "the depiction of graphic violence and deprivation in wartime along with the intense bonds of brotherhood amongst members of the same unit was not simply a sentimental memory, it was a deliberate assertion of self-worth, a claim to power in the postwar struggle between the Old and New South" (Higgins 119). Higgins intimates that Watkins writes his memoir to "[assert] the value and importance of the middle class, to which these authors typically belonged" (121). Higgins' argument has merit, particularly given the precariousness of the post-Civil War social order in which men like Watkins did not know where they would fall in the new hierarchy. Moving beyond analysis that focuses on social relations, I suggest that we need to study Watkins' memoir for what it tells us about the relationship between basic soldiering and the natural world. *Co. Aytch* provides multiple examples of a young soldier trying to understand the war in terms of the natural world. It also demonstrates, most importantly, the confusion this young man faced when that nature did not behave as expected or resisted human attempts to control it.

Perhaps the best place to look for the potential value of reading Watkins is in his narrative introduction. In the first chapter, which he titles "Retrospective," Watkins asserts that he "[does] not pretend to write the history of the war," because historians

have already done that. Instead, he “give[s] a few sketches and incidents that came under the observation of a ‘high private’ in the rear ranks of the rebel army” (19). He presents himself as an amateur so that he has complete license to discuss the subjects that interest him, rather than being bound to present an accurate history. The incidents that he chooses to recount offer not only an amusing look at a combination of mundane and farfetched experiences, but they also allow us to see how the landscape shaped his war experience. For Watkins, nature affects his daily life by determining how hard his walk is and where he can or cannot pitch a tent to spend the night. More significantly, however, the landscape determines how he responds to war. Sometimes, he can look at his surroundings and laugh. At other times nature directs him to prayer or reflection. These varying responses show us how much he relies on his environment to shape his outlook on war.

Sam Watkins begins his narrative with the history of the United States told in a manner resembling a creation myth. His story explains that the South is a construct devised by a few preachers of doctrine and then adopted by “hundreds and thousands and millions...[of] persons who lived in the direction that the water courses run” (17). He situates this idea of North and South in relation to U.S. rivers, presenting people from the North as the founders of the United States, including references to the Mayflower and the Salem Witch Trials. He develops his idea of how the South progressed based on where “the water courses run.” Because U.S. rivers naturally run north to south, Watkins suggests, the creation of the South becomes inevitable. Eventually, his account continues, the two sections divided and fought a war about the appropriate way to run the country.

Watkins begins his memoir with this brief creation myth, which, in line with his lighthearted tone throughout the narrative, serves as a somewhat comical representation of how the war began and ended. His narrative evokes Olmsted's opening to *The Cotton Kingdom*, which also discusses the north-south running rivers as a way to question the seemingly arbitrary east-west running Mason-Dixon line. While Olmsted considers the rivers using a solemn tone, however, Watkins' blatantly mocks the country's founders for allowing the nation's latitudinal separation. Both men use water as the basis of their discussion.

Watkins' creation myth also explains the postbellum changes the nation faced. Upon the war's conclusion, Watkins notes: "America has no north, no south, no east, no west; the sun rises over the hills and sets over the mountains, the compass just points up and down, and we can laugh now at the absurd notion of there being a north and a south" (19). His replacement of compass points with common landscape imagery reminds us that, regardless of how we categorize the directions, we must contextualize our location and thus ourselves, based on what we see. The landscape that we observe shapes our experience, particularly in a turbulent time of war.

Watkins' interest in rivers as boundaries stems initially from his childhood as a boy in rural Tennessee who quickly learned from his romps in the woods that some water is navigable and some is not. The idea of river as border is material fact – water that is too wide or has too swift a current may be uncrossable -- but it is also a symbolic fiction, which Watkin's anecdote from war experience demonstrates. In a discussion of encountering the Chattahoochee River in 1864, he writes: "By a tacit agreement, as had

ever been the custom, there was no firing across the stream. That was considered the boundary. It mattered not how large or small the stream, pickets rarely fired at each other. We would stand on each bank, and laugh and talk and brag across the stream” (170-1). Watkins does not indicate the origin of this “tacit agreement” or remark upon its tactical import. Instead, he illustrates how the agreement, which presents the river as an uncrossable line, is flawed. In his story, a Confederate and Federal soldier harass each other from opposite riverbanks. At one point in the exchange, the Confederate Soldier calls the other a “lying Yankee galoot,” which is an affront to honor that can only be answered with a duel. The two men load their pistols on opposite sides of the river, take their positions, and commence firing. After the seventh shot, the Confederate soldier receives a gunshot wound through the heart and dies. This account illustrates the artificiality of some natural borders. Indeed, while courtesy may have dictated that the river was an uncrossable boundary, Watkins shows that both words and bullets could traverse the distance to lethal effect.⁵³ Both armies believed it was unacceptable to engage in war activities across the river. For these men, the danger of the enemy could not cross; however, two individuals could engage in a pistol duel, ending in a material reminder that, while natural boundaries may impede *some* movement, they may only be impenetrable in the human imagination.

The idea of natural borders in the landscape occurs throughout Watkins’ memoir, and it seems appropriate that a Southern foot soldier would narrate his war experience

⁵³ I am reminded here of Melville’s timeless question, “What like a bullet can undecieve?”

through the obstacles that impede his movement. His daily activities, which often included long marches, were entirely shaped by the natural world. In addition to rivers as natural limitations, Watkins also describes mountains and forests. At times he felt as if the arduous marching would never end, such as the walk to Warm Springs, Virginia, in 1861, where “it seemed that mountain was piled upon mountain. No sooner would we arrive at a place that seemed to be the top than another view of a higher, and yet higher mountain would rise before us.” The climb was eventually rewarded: “Up and up, and onward and upward we pulled and toiled, until we reached the very top, when there burst upon our view one of the grandest and most beautiful landscapes we ever beheld” (25). Watkin’s trek through this challenging environment demonstrates one way that the natural world clearly affects his comprehension of the act of war. For this soldier, simply getting to the battle place requires challenging physical labor through an unforgiving environment. Part of his understanding is linked directly to his daily interactions via walking through the mountains and forests.

Watkins’ regiment does not merely pass through the landscape; indeed, they interact constantly with their environment, and they rely heavily on the supplies they can find in the natural world to assist them as they travel.⁵⁴ Watkins regularly participates in personal foraging and at one point is assigned to go on foraging detail for the unit near Chattanooga.⁵⁵ As a soldier accustomed to marching with the main body of the regiment, he appreciates the freedom that comes with being a member of a foraging party, and he

⁵⁴ See Ouchly for a detailed account of how military movement affected the “flora and fauna” of the nation.

⁵⁵ For more on foraging practices, see Smith’s *Starving the South*.

relates this personal sense of freedom to the beauty of the landscape, which he views as a gift from God. One day, while appreciating the abundant blueberries in his path, Watkins muses:

The Lord said that he would curse the ground for the disobedience of man, and henceforth it should bring forth thorns and briars; but the very briars that had been cursed were loaded with the abundance of God's goodness. I felt, then, like David in one of his psalms—'The Lord is good, the Lord is good, for his mercy endureth forever.' (98)

In his memories of foraging, Watkins suggests not only that the natural world could support the needs of the army, but that God was providing for them through nature. His inclusion of the Psalms reminds us of the various Christian perspectives about nature that also complicate the way individuals understand their role in the natural world. Some Christians view stewardship as a Christian responsibility, while others view dominion as a Christian right, often creating a tension between notions of appropriate land and labor use.⁵⁶ Watkins does not explicitly discuss his beliefs about proper stewardship. Indeed, he refrains from didacticism or preaching as he seeks to maintain his comical tone, but he does tell another anecdote that provides some indication of his reverence for nature.

This story involves a soldier who receives heavy fatigue duty as a punishment for an unspecified infraction of unit rules. His penalty includes a day of physical duty: cutting down trees with an ax. The soldier, however, refused to cut down any trees. Instead, he made a mark or two and then recited the opening of a popular poem by

⁵⁶ For a more thorough discussion of Christian Stewardship, view my conclusion.

George Pope Morris, “Woodman, Spare That Tree!” (1837). The poem begins: “Woodman, spare that tree; touch not a single bough; / In youth it sheltered me, and I’ll protect it now” (qtd. in Watkins 88). The anecdote’s purpose in the story is unclear; on the surface, it is just another somewhat silly representation of military life. However, the poem that Watkins references was so popular in the period that it became a well-known song. In fact, some environmental scholars consider it to be the first environmental protest song.⁵⁷ Watkins’ inclusion of this poem in his memoir suggests that he and some of his fellow soldiers embrace a protoenvironmental stance on the inviolability of trees.

It seems unlikely that Watkins was completely against tree felling; we should remember that he makes no similar complaints in his earlier description of using trees to form a necessary defensive perimeter. However, his report of this particular interaction between man and nature indicates his awareness of the landscape’s importance to his war experience. Throughout the narrative, Watkins apologizes for not remembering details. He alleges that he “cannot remember towns and battles;” instead, he says, he “can remember only the little things” (59).⁵⁸ This admission about his selective wartime memory highlights the importance of the elements that Watkins does include. His apology that he can only recall personal minutiae lends more significance to the fact that his descriptions and anecdotes are laden with landscape-oriented details. Telling stories that include these natural elements helps Watkins process the situations he narrates. By

⁵⁷ <http://www.amarantypublishing.com/woodman.htm>

<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/blog/2008/dec/18/activists-eco-protest-songs>

⁵⁸ Watkins repeatedly denies his authority to tell history throughout his memoir, which results in increased credibility through anecdote. See Higgins for more.

describing a duel over the Chattahoochee River during which one of his comrades dies, Watkins can memorialize the soldier and ascribe memory of what occurred there onto the physical landscape. Telling these stories helps Watkins comprehend what happened so that he can recover from the trauma of war.

Unfortunately, not all of his anecdotes are laughable. Watkins' last particularly landscape-heavy discussion arrives towards the end of his narrative, as he describes the ground at Chickamauga. He writes that the battlefield is "in a rough and broken country, with trees and undergrowth, that ever since the creation had never been disturbed by the ax of civilized man" (107). For Watkins, the uncivilized battlefield is easier to understand than a more cultivated battlefield, such as those where Gettysburg took place. Because the ground at Chickamauga began "wild, weird, uncivilized," the aftermath of battle on the landscape is not as difficult to comprehend. Battle activities did not transform the ground at Chickamauga quite as much as they did elsewhere, which makes it easier for Watkins to come to terms with what happened there. Unfortunately, comprehending the destruction of a battlefield is significantly easier than reconciling the guilt of surviving when so many others did not. Watkins declares, "reader, a battlefield, after the battle, is a sad and sorrowful sight to look at. The glory of war is but the glory of battle, the shouts, and cheers, and victory." He continues to describe the difficulty of enduring after a battle: "It is the living, marching, fighting, shooting soldier that has the hardships of war to carry" (109).

This idea of coming to terms with "a battlefield after the battle" appears throughout Civil War literature. One of the greatest challenges of surviving the war, as

Watkins indicates, is viewing the aftermath and having to move on. For many soldiers, viewing the literal change of field after the battle is the worst torment they could possibly endure. The way that conflict can physically affect the ground on which it occurs and change landscapes that previously seemed unchangeable proves to be one of the most difficult concepts for many soldiers to recognize. Watkins' struggle to understand the "sad and sorrowful" site of the battlefield represents the challenge of accepting the reality of surviving a war that so many did not. The Civil War, much like the landscape in which it was fought, alternately favored both sides of the conflict. Just as fickle nature inexplicably switched its allegiance, death could indiscriminately take many soldiers and arbitrarily leave others standing.

“[The] blood-red flower of war”: Sidney Lanier

I opened this chapter with selections from Sidney Lanier, whose vast collection of poetry and prose makes him a unique Civil War veteran and author. As Aubrey Starke, Lanier's second biographer, explains, Lanier is “a man having greater social significance than is usually recognized...an American hero with a message peculiarly worth listening to in the present period of economic and social unrest that I wish to present him” (vii). Writing in 1964, Starke strove to make Lanier's message heard by a greater contemporary audience. In an attempt to canonize the lesser-known author, Starke, like Lanier's previous biographer, Edward Mims, compares the writer to Walt Whitman.⁵⁹ These scholars suggest that historical studies do not fully appreciate Lanier's literary

⁵⁹ For more information, view Aubrey Starke's biography of Lanier.

value, and that we must pull him into contemporary context to reconsider his lessons. I agree that we should study Lanier's ideas in various frameworks to best understand his message's complexity. Rather than bringing the writer to a twenty-first century context, however, I argue that we should read his works for what they tell us about the changing relationship between humans and nature during and after the Civil War. As a veteran who fought for the Confederacy and personally felt the loss of fellow soldiers and family fortune because of the war, Lanier makes an excellent subject for this study.

Sidney Lanier was born in Macon, Georgia, on February 3, 1842.⁶⁰ His Huguenot ancestors were trained musicians who secured positions in royal courts, and Lanier's lineage was decidedly cultured, educated, and wealthy. Lanier, like most men in his family, had planned on going to Europe to continue his classical education when, at the age of 19, the Civil War began. Following the lead of countless romantics before him, Lanier enlisted in the Confederacy hoping for a grand adventure. He spent the first years of his Army career in the infantry, until he suffered an acute illness and transferred to the Signal Corps. After that, his military service almost fulfilled the romantic notions in his mind. Working at Burwell Bay alongside the James River, Lanier had ample time to enjoy music, begin writing his first novel, and appreciate the scenery. As a bonus, his brother Clifford was stationed there with him, and their letters indicate that they thoroughly enjoyed the arrangement. Unfortunately, the wartime folly could not last.

⁶⁰ All biography from this paragraph is from Edmund Wilson's *Patriotic Gore*.

During a blockade-running mission in 1864, Union forces captured and imprisoned Lanier. He emerged from prison a changed man.

Although he was only twenty-three at war's end, Lanier's military service and imprisonment took a serious toll on his health, which he never fully recovered. Health was not the only asset the war took from Lanier. In a postbellum letter to a friend, Lanier explains how his formerly wealthy family had to adjust to their newfound circumstances by engaging in previously unnecessary forms of labor. He writes that his family members "who used to roll in wealth are, every day, with their own hands ploughing the little patch of ground which the war has left them, while their wives do the cooking and washing" (qtd. in Starke 83). For a traditionally slaveholding family, this new relationship with labor required a major adjustment.

Not only did the Civil War affect Lanier's physical health and eventual lifespan (he struggled with tuberculosis until his death at age thirty-nine), it also affected his relationship with the natural world. Observing his family do the work that slave labor had previously handled forced Lanier to comprehend the new society that the Civil War had created. This shift in comprehension would likely not have occurred without the Civil War as catalyst. Much like the experience that Eliza Frances Andrews describes in her journal, Lanier's new understanding of the environment grows from a shift in circumstances that changes the way his family interacts with the natural world. The fact that the relationship between humans and nature can alter so drastically and suddenly demonstrates one way in which nature appears fickle; or, as Lanier's protagonist in *Tiger-Lilies* describes it: "coquette Nature."

Lanier's novel *Tiger-Lilies*, which I introduced earlier in this chapter, provides multiple examples of the unjustness of the natural world. Lanier began writing *Tiger-Lilies* while stationed with the Confederate Signal Corps at Burwell's Bay in Virginia and continued working on it during his service as a blockade-runner and subsequent imprisonment at Camp Lookout, Maryland. He completed the novel after the war and published it in New York in 1867. *Tiger-Lilies* is Lanier's first novel and perhaps his most ambitious failure. Scholars generally agree that his characterization falls flat, the plot is sentimental and contrived, and the middle section's strange Civil War realism seems discordant with the rest of the novel. Indeed, the mixture of the German romance (one of Lanier's favorite genres, which drives most of the novel's negligible plot) and the Civil War reality creates a disharmonious whole that Lanier's contemporary readers understandably did not enjoy. An 1868 review in *The Atlantic Monthly* mocks the rather sensational yet insipid story line with a thoroughly sarcastic review that comments on the unlikelihood of the events and the uncertainty of what actually happens, concluding, "as a whole 'Tiger-Lilies' will not do, though we are not sure that Mr. Lanier will not succeed better in time."⁶¹ Lanier, reading these evaluations, summed up popular opinion when he lamented that the reviews "were not on the whole favorable" (in Kimball 17).

Even though most reviewers and Lanier scholars agree that *Tiger-Lilies* is a literary disaster, I argue that we must read it for its Civil War representation of the natural world. *Tiger-Lilies* is important also as a novel because it represents the beginning of

⁶¹ *Atlantic Monthly*, XXI [March 1868], 382.

Lanier's writing career (he was twenty-three when he published it) and establishes ideas that his later poetry elaborates.⁶² Lanier relies upon much personal experience to write the novel, which begins in locations Lanier visited as a child and includes characters modeled after his family and himself. The middle section presents Lanier's war experience, and the third brings the characters together again in a postbellum conclusion. Both contemporary and later scholars take issue with the essentially absent plot. Lanier embraced his shortcomings as a novelist, justifying that the novel was the genre that "permits its Author to explain, by his *own mouth*, the "situation"" (Lanier qtd. in Harwell xii, original emphasis). Apparently, in *Tiger-Lilies*, Lanier spent so much time explaining the situation that he forgot to develop a coherent plot. Though the book falls short of critical expectations, we must not push it aside; Lanier invokes such compelling environmental rhetoric in his Civil War descriptions that we can see how his experience must have challenged his ability to comprehend nature or war.

Most scholars agree that *Tiger-Lilies* is in fact not a war-novel intended to celebrate or explore war; however, one-third of the book focuses directly on the war.⁶³ We cannot ignore his representation of such a critical period in his personal and our national history. Indeed, Lanier dedicates the first five pages of Book II to a lengthy metaphor, comparing war to a flower. Through this comparison, we quickly see that Lanier's combat experience shaped his understanding of war and the natural world.

⁶² Both of Lanier's biographers argue for the study of *Tiger-Lilies* as well (Harwell xxiii, Starke 98).

⁶³ See Kimball, Aaron, and Wilson for discussions of the novel's reception.

Tiger-Lilies highlights how natural settings that previously seemed knowable become unpredictable and confusing during war.

Lanier employs an extended metaphor that not only relies upon traditional Romantic descriptions of nature but more specifically provides insight into his opinion on war and nature:

The early spring of 1861 brought to bloom, besides innumerable violets and jessamines, a strange, enormous, and terrible flower.

This was the blood-red flower of war, which grows amid thunders; a flower whose freshening dews are blood and hot tears, whose shadow chills a land, whose odors strangle a people, whose giant petals droop downward, and whose roots are in hell. (115)

His opening description intimates that war is natural. Comprised of “roots,” “dews,” “petals,” and “odors,” war is a “blood-red flower” that “grows.” He compares this war-flower to “violets and jessamines,” which symbolize sentiment and beauty, to highlight the horrors that the war-flower represents: fear, violence, death, and hell.

Lanier describes the elements that cultivate this “war-flower.” Unlike natural flowers, which require readily available elements such as soil, water, and sunlight, cultivation of the war-flower requires human sacrifice. The author describes how human bodies are necessary to perpetuate warfare: without human death, warfare would not continue.

A most profuse and perpetual manuring with human bones is absolutely necessary to keep it alive, and it is well to have these powdered, which can be easily done by hoofs of cavalry-horses and artillery-wheels, not to speak of the usual method of mashing with cannon-balls. (115)

Lanier's discussion of "manuring" is unsettlingly scientific. He seems to invoke Thoreau's matter-of-fact attitude about the material realities of nature here, except that his subject is literally fertilization with human bodies. His imagery of the bodies being "powdered" and "mashed" by horses and wheels creates the impression of a battlefield where the ground itself becomes an amorphous substance, full of elements of battle that most observers would not want to classify.

The substance that runs among these elements, Lanier explains, is human blood. Much like the earlier descriptions we saw of mingling water and blood, Lanier argues that warfare cannot grow unless it occurs in "some wet place near a stream of human blood." Indeed, this war-flower requires significant amounts of liquid. Because the life-giving liquid of human blood isn't enough, Lanier also adds the requirements of "collecting your widows' tears and orphans' tears and mothers' tears to freshen the petals with in the mornings" (116). Thus, war requires the elements that come from dead bodies: bones and blood, as well as the elements from the living who mourn them: tears. The combination of these items creates a battleground unlike any other. On this ground grows "the grandest specimen of modern horticulture," which is a truly horrific plant. Lanier's description combines natural elements to create something thoroughly appalling, and then he continues his description by condemning the humans who insist on perpetuating such filth.

Lanier questions why anyone would engage in war, given the ingredients that must combine for war to ensue and the ultimate cost of devastation: "the cultivation of this plant is an expensive business, and it is a wonder, from this fact alone, that there

should be so many fanciers of it” (115). Clearly, Lanier questions war’s utility, noting the contradiction that people would support an endeavor of such immeasurable expense, both of money and lives. Lanier spends four pages extending this metaphor. In fact, he dedicates an entire chapter, the first of Book II, to this description to ensure that his reader understands not only that Book II will be about war but also that his anti-war sentiments are strong.

The end of his metaphor compares the war-flower to the vines of Christ and notes that the two can never grow simultaneously. Thus, war is an essentially God-forsaken endeavor that cannot coexist with Christian peace. Given Lanier’s passionate opposition to war, we must ask: why would he choose such Romantic imagery to describe it? Why compare war to a flower, blending traditional notions of natural beauty with horrific descriptions of bones, blood, and tears? The author deploys the flower metaphor to emphasize precisely how unnatural war can be and to enhance the contrast between war and natural beauty. His presentation of the war-flower extends his belief that nature can be friend or foe. While I don’t suggest that Lanier’s war-flower is intended for literal interpretation, I do think that we should read this negative representation of flora in the context of Lanier’s other representations of dualistic nature. Just as “coquette Nature” has beauty that both blesses and condemns, a flower can represent both beauty and horror and can sometimes alternate between the two.

Tiger-Lilies abounds with images of fickle nature, particularly in the mid-novel war chapters. Lanier details various natural scenes so that the reader understands how nature can fully delight the senses, even in wartime. His luscious descriptions urge the

reader to forget that anything ugly could exist in nature; however, immediately following these exquisite descriptions, Lanier juxtaposes death into the previously beautiful scenery to remind us of the ongoing war. For example, in Book II, Chapter V, Lanier spends three pages describing a traveler's horseback journey along a beautiful beach near Burwell's Bay (where Lanier was stationed before his imprisonment). The description of the area is obnoxiously bucolic. The horse and rider are so at one with nature that their presence does not even disturb the scene: "the light does not dare shine very brightly here; it is soft and sacred, tempered with green leaves, with silence, with odors, with beauties. Wandering perfumes, restless with happiness, float about aimlessly; they are the only inhabitants here" (141). The word choice is one example of how Lanier's diction can overwhelm and confuse the senses. For instance, he describes "odors" and "wandering perfumes" together as if the abundance of sensory stimulation is too complex or too overwhelming for a human to evaluate.

Even though the man on the horse is the actor in the scene, Lanier removes the observer from the setting, describing the surroundings in a way that makes the reader feel like the central subject. This depiction of nature creates sensory overload, similar to what a Civil War soldier might feel while coming to terms with the ugliness of war amid nature's beauty. Imagine the surprise, then, when Lanier's reader confronts "a sign of human death." Lanier returns the horse and rider into the scene to abruptly introduce a "Corpse, in blue uniform, saturated with water," that has "been just dragged from the waves" (141). This image of the dead body dragged from the water to the path creates several sensations. First, the intrusion of death in this natural scene ruins the peace that

Lanier's previous descriptions established. A horrific reminder of war confronts the horse and rider (and reader) who were previously enjoying the abundance and glory of nature, causing confusion and even disbelief. The observer exclaims, "Good God! Can the spirit of death inhabit the balm of this May-air in this little Heaven? Does the Devil dwell also in this rosebud of little glens?" These rhetorical questions demonstrate his (and our) astonishment at finding a surprisingly out-of-place dead body, yet the scene indicates that Lanier knows well how nature combines life and death. Just a paragraph earlier, he notes that "busy mosses do their very best to hide all rudeness and all decay behind a green velvet arras" (140). Clearly, life and death coexist in this space, and the mingling of the two creates this beautiful natural scene. In the middle of this serene natural vista we meet a sign of war. Lanier's rude disruption of the natural peace symbolizes the manner in which war disrupts all the natural scenes it touches. During war, what seems to be a beautiful beach can quickly turn into a hasty grave.

Lanier extends the ominous atmosphere into the next scene, where he describes the same beach at night: "Hundreds of huge tree-stumps, with their roots upturned in the air, lay in all fantastic positions upon the white sand...These straggling clumps had been polished white by salt air and waves. They seemed like an agitated convention of skeletons, discussing the propriety of flesh" (152). Although this imagery is not directly related to war activity, the representation of dead trees as skeletons on the beach relates directly to the discovery of the dead body from the previous scene. The author reminds us that in wartime, nothing is what it seems. A perfume is an odor, a peaceful beach is a soldier's grave, and tree stumps are skeletons.

Or, as Lanier also describes, what appears to be a quiet landscape can actually help conceal enemy soldiers. In the same scene, soldiers are camouflaged in the landscape observing the traveler on the horse. While the traveler describes the serenity of what he perceives as untouched nature, other humans are watching him undetected from their natural vantage point. They have essentially become a part of the scenery. Lanier describes their hiding place as “a sort of niche or shelf made by the uprooting of a tree from the face of the cliff. It is thickly covered with bushes and grasses and trailing vine” (142). Lanier describes the soldiers not simply as men concealed in the scenery, but as men who belong to it. The first is “a statue, which has seemingly fallen upon its face.” The other members of the scouting party emerge from the landscape one at a time in the following manner: “a tall form rose from behind a thick vine near the path. Another clump yielded another form, and so on until four men had emerged (142).” Using the landscape for camouflage is common practice for hunters and soldiers alike, so the emergence of men from the undergrowth is not by itself particularly noteworthy. What makes the concealment so remarkable is the traveler’s earlier notion that “[perfumes] are the only inhabitants here,” juxtaposed with the discovery of the dead soldier and the appearance of these living soldiers. Just as the traveler thinks he “has not seen a sign of human life,” we learn that a dead body and several living ones all inhabit the same scene. Lanier indicates within this one setting that the earth can play multiple roles at the same time, and he reminds us that nature is never definable in human terms.

Of particular interest is how the woods, the soft sand, and the murky swamp all adjoin in this particular location to demonstrate nature’s shifting forms. Lanier’s

description of the dead body exemplifies how nature can create new combinations of things that previously remained separate, such as earth and water. He emphasizes the fact that the dead body has been in the water and is now on land. The water-saturated corpse represents a mixture, with water still dripping from its uniform: “a line of moisture extends to the Water’s edge through the opening in the bluff; it is where the stream dripped through the wet clothes” (141). The waves have dragged the body onto the sand, and the corpse has created a trail of mud from the water still dripping from the corpse. Lanier further complicates this combination by adding smell. For the third time in this scene, Lanier combines “odor” and “perfume,” although this time he highlights the “odor composed of the death-smell from inside the grave, mixed with the perfume of roses growing on it” (141). Again, we have life and death intermingled in a way that confuses the senses. The coexistence of what seems mutually exclusive and even dichotomous reminds us that nature during wartime can be misleading and even frightening.

In *Tiger-Lilies*, the shoreline initially provides a beautiful pastoral landscape, but it also offers concealment for enemy soldiers and a watery grave for a washed-up corpse. The traveler’s surprise at seeing the corpse in such an Edenic spot, combined with his ignorance of the camouflaged soldiers, shows us several anomalies that can be present in what initially seemed to be an innocuous location. The combination of water and earth on the shore, while technically not a swamp, is another example of how these indeterminate natural locations can confuse humans.

“[D]ismal swamps, whose oozy sod scarce yielded footing to the most cautious step”

I close this chapter with a very brief discussion of some of the complications caused by indeterminate nature, or nature that appears to be one thing but is also partly something else. Lanier’s corpse from the previous scene is terrifying not because it is a dead body; these soldiers had become accustomed to death in battle. It is terrifying because it is out of place and unclassifiable: not quite solid or liquid, and smelling of both roses and death. Similarly, Civil War soldiers often described battlefields as frightening places because of comparable confusion. Previously in American literature, we see these uncertainties related primarily to places such as the Southern swamp.⁶⁴

Wetlands tend to be sites of ambiguity. The combination of earth and water, where taking a false step could lead to full submersion, often makes people uncomfortable. Other swamp characteristics, such as cloudy water and abundant foliage can combine to breed unpleasant odors and insects, and, at least in much popular nineteenth-century literature, the sites are historically associated with negative activities and unnamed terrors. In *Free State of Jones*, the Mississippi swamp provides a home for an entire community of runaway slaves and Confederate deserters.⁶⁵ They remain safe within the swamp boundaries because outsiders, in this case Confederate slaveowners,

⁶⁴ For a thorough discussion, see Anthony Wilson’s *Shadow and Shelter: The Swamp in Southern Culture*. Much of my analysis relies upon his ideas about the function of the swamp: “as the South undergoes the most dramatic changes in its history, the swamp adapts in various discourses to fit practical and rhetorical needs: it becomes, by turns, a tool of war, a boyhood Eden, an exiled space, a signifier of social decay, and an erstwhile escape from the tropes of civilization, depending on the perspective of its chronicler. The late nineteenth century saw a series of radical revisionings of the swamp landscape, which accompanied radical revisionings of Southern culture itself” (63).

⁶⁵ See discussion in chapter two.

cannot penetrate the formidable exterior and navigate the ambiguous terrain. Indeed, Anthony Wilson claims that the swamp becomes “a kind of loosely personified antithesis of the civilized South ... a supernatural nemesis to genteel Southern society” (62).

Eliza Frances Andrews also represents the swamp in *A Family Secret* in ways that closely resemble Lanier’s. Andrews’ group of soldiers traverse the challenging swamp terrain to avoid detection:

Their route was confined to the wildest and most unfrequented regions, now picking their way through dismal swamps, whose oozy sod scarce yielded footing to the most cautious step, now winding through trackless forests of pine, with no guide save some wandering cattle-trail, and the instincts of their own gipsy natures. (368)

Like Lanier’s rider in my earlier discussion, these men also encountered death:

More than once the major’s men, in riding through lonely places, had suddenly come upon the blackened corpse of some missing comrade dangling over their heads, mingling its putrid odors with the fragrance of the jessamine and muscadine that hung, perchance, from the self-same bough, and had already begun to wind their young tendrils about its cold, stark fingers, still clinched as they had been in the dying agony. (336)

Of course, the presence of death in the swamp serves as no surprise to these war-hardened soldiers, particularly since they had previously engaged in body disposal in the swamp: “The bodies of the fallen comrades were carried a few rods into the swamp and buried there in the slime” (366). I include Andrews here only to provide more examples of swamp imagery that presents recurring themes of unsure footing, dead bodies, odors, and slime. These themes extend to the Civil War battle memoir in unsettling ways.

Gregory Coco highlights this manifestation in his compilation of Gettysburg memoirs. He provides two detailed descriptions that highlight the horror of uncertain terrain on the battlefield. Coco categorizes these changing battlefields as possessing the “appalling *filth* on the field of battle.” The following descriptions come from two different Gettysburg observers:

the ground was trampled into a bog, and was covered with every conceivable thing....everything used in war or by soldiers, was scattered around in plenty. The grain and grass which once grew there, was almost ground to a jelly. (Cooke qtd. in Coco 79)

the surface of the ground, besides being everywhere gashed, seamed and trampled, is blackened, greased, and besmirched, until one cannot think of remaining upon it or near it. (soldier of the 27th Indiana qtd. in Coco 79)

Coco focuses on the idea of *filth* in these descriptions. He concludes that “everything was so sickeningly dirty that simply walking on the surface of the ground seemed obscene” (79). While Coco’s emphasis provides one compelling reason why walking on the battlefield would be unnerving, more importantly, both these descriptions evoke the issue of uncertain nature. The “surface of the ground” in this location was previously firm, filled with “grain and grass which once grew there.” The fact that battlefield activity has transformed this previously certain ground into what would now be considered “ a bog...ground to a jelly,” and “blackened, greased, and besmirched,” proves completely unnerving to these observers. What should be a solid field, a place where plants grow, becomes something else, something unknown, unsteady, and disgusting. In Lanier’s novel, the field of war possesses “powdered” and “mashed” bones, mixed with human

blood and orphans' tears. One can only imagine what it would feel like to walk on that battlefield, a horror that I pray none have to experience. The transformation of this landscape leads to a painful comprehension about the realities and ambiguities of war, and the memory of walking on such unsettling uncertain ground stays with these observers long after the conflict is over.

Another author who shared the horror of walking on indeterminate ground was Sophronia Bucklin, the Civil War nurse discussed earlier in this chapter, who attempts to appreciate nature's beauty even as she contemplates the horror of human blood mixing with a babbling stream. On a later excursion, she again tries to beautify the landscape; however, she finds it more difficult to overlook the shifting nature that she experiences:

I went again over the field one hazy afternoon, when autumn began to cast its leaves over the graves—the many, colored glories, yet green and tender having drifted down into the hollows, and over the trenches where dead men lay rotting. Sometimes bodies were so completely wrapped up with the fallen leaves that, unconsciously, I stepped upon them—the quivering of the loose flesh making my feet unsteady, and the thought of the awful pit below sending me away with no little amount of nervous terror. (190)

The “nervous terror” that Bucklin feels after stepping upon dead soldiers relates closely to Coco's earlier description of the inability to remain near the battlefield's “filth,” where everything had been “ground to a jelly.”⁶⁶ These gelatinous images of what should be solid ground or sturdy human flesh are horrifying, and we can see how challenging it becomes to comprehend warfare when previously certain elements become so uncertain.

⁶⁶ Note how closely this passage resembles Thoreau's discussion of uncertainty in chapter two. Interestingly, Thoreau's description reminds us that nature is ambiguous even in peace; however, war combines the benign unknown of fallen leaves with the horrific images of death.

When the solid ground beneath one's feet becomes viscous, the entire world seems unreliable. When we combine this uncomfortable ambiguity with the recognition that the nation would be forever changed by the Civil War, we begin to understand how the human relationship with nature both assisted and challenged the way people came to comprehend the war.

CHAPTER V
MELVILLE WRITES RECONCILIATION

Unlikely Advocates for Reconciliation

This chapter presents my project's final major author, Herman Melville, who lived in New York and sided with the Union during the Civil War. I begin, however, with a brief sketch of an ardent Confederate who sets the stage for this chapter's subject, *reconciliation*.

During the earliest days of secession Southern writer Augusta Jane Evans establishes her allegiance: "as a native of the Empire State of the South, my heart clings to her soil" (Letters 29). The choice of "soil" here is not careless. Indeed, Evans had a close relationship to her homeland's dirt, spending her free time cultivating flowers. Evans was a persistent gardener, so much that she created a new species of the camellia flower: a special crossbreed with a unique fragrance unlike traditional unscented camellias.⁶⁷ One Evans scholar, Brenda Ayres, views the camellia as a metaphor for Evans: "[T]o crossbreed flowers to create a new kind that has a scent bespeaks a woman with vision and determination, and it is how Evans saw herself: a woman who loved working in her floral garden but also an artist that sent forth beauty and truth grown from

⁶⁷ Brenda Ayres tells the story of the camellia in the introduction to her book of Evans' works. She compares Evans' work with the camellia to Evans' work with her fiction to argue that the writer's contributions deserve careful study (5).

her garden of words and ideas” (Ayres 5).⁶⁸ The “vision and determination” that Ayres identifies in Evans accurately captures the author’s approach to her writing. Much like the camellia, Evans saw significant beauty in the South that required cultivation and care. However, she also recognized, as with the unscented flower, that the South had areas for improvement. While Evans could not simply crossbreed her homeland to create the one that she wanted to survive, she could write the version of the South that she wished to preserve. In essence, Evans uses her fiction as a vehicle to create a species of her beloved region – the New South – that could prosper in the wake of the Civil War. Whereas Old South mythology would perpetuate the notion that the South lost the Civil War and could never forgive the Union for destroying everything sacred, the New South could offer an opportunity for national unification. Evans’ fiction implies that the nation can come together through an understanding of natural reconciliation.

Much like Eliza Francis Andrews, Evans writes with a tacit acknowledgement that the Old South as she knows it will not exist after the war. Even though Evans believes that the Confederacy will win, she recognizes that her homeland will be significantly different (Ayres 91). As one Evans scholar summarizes, “what might have worked before the Civil War simply will not work afterward” (Ayres 10). The primary way that Evans imagines success after the War is through rehabilitation in nature. Indeed, in her fiction and her personal correspondence, she repeatedly calls for a communion with nature that will lead to national reconciliation.

⁶⁸ While likely unrelated, it is interesting to note that the camellia became the state flower of Alabama in 1959.

Macaria is one novel that highlights Evans' belief that the postwar nation can prosper only if both sides turn to nature together and begin to rebuild. Evans participates in women's historical use of nature for nation-building. Scholars such as Coleman Hutchinson argue specifically that we should read *Macaria* as national literature of the Confederacy as he maps the ways that Evans participates in nation-making, albeit for a newly seceded nation. I expand upon Hutchinson's analysis to suggest that this new nation Evans describes is actually a nation where both sides of the conflict have reached peace through natural reconciliation. *Macaria* is clearly a Confederate text – beginning notably with Evans' dedication to "The Army of the Southern Confederacy." The author glorifies the South throughout her novel, which includes depictions of loyal (enslaved) servants and generous masters, Southern ladies and gentlemen and Northern villains, idealized Southern plantation towns, and a fervent belief that the South will, certainly, win the Civil War. I would not attempt to argue that Evans wasn't writing a Southern novel. Instead, what strikes me most is her novel's peculiar representation of the pastoral, in direct opposition to urban, industrial areas. Her descriptions of natural areas contribute to the idea of nation-making as she creates a New South that relies somewhat upon urban, industrial areas but predominantly appreciates the region's agricultural domain. She envisions that this New South may be able to exist as part of a unified nation and remain as glorious as the Old South it replaced.

My purpose in this chapter is not to compare Southern women writers, or even to discuss them outside the brief opening illustration from Augusta Jane Evans. In fact, in what may seem like a strange juxtaposition given my introductory example, this chapter

explores the Civil War poetry of Union advocate Herman Melville. I invoke Evans at the beginning primarily to demonstrate the prevalence of reconciliation through nature as a nation-wide postbellum interest. If a staunch and outspoken Confederate supporter can suggest that reunification is a possible and natural process after war, then it seems quite appropriate that poets from the North who have already demonstrated interest in national unification would make a similar claim. The remainder of this chapter explores how Melville approaches his concept of reconciliation through poetry.

Before focusing solely on Melville, I rely upon a common scholarly tradition of relating him to the “Father of American Poetry,” Walt Whitman. Early comparative studies of the two poets appeared in the late 1960s, noting that Melville and Whitman, both significant authors of their age, felt compelled to write about the Civil War. This scholarship, however, focuses on the differences between the two poets.⁶⁹ The consensus seems to be that the poets are so different in style and purpose that they have very few points of comparison. Peter Bellis breaks the mold in “Reconciliation as Sequel and Supplement: Drum-Taps *and* Battle-Pieces,” when he suggests that both Melville and Whitman use addendums to their primary collection to explicitly discuss reconciliation after the Civil War (original emphasis). Indeed, Bellis claims that “Whitman sees reconciliation as a task that poetry can still accomplish, given time; Melville fears that it

⁶⁹ John McWilliams argues that “both Whitman and Melville see the emergence of a stronger nation, purified through disaster, made wise through suffering,” (182). Cristanne Miller’s study of Whitman suggests that reconciliation is not only natural but inevitable in direct opposition to Melville (183). Daniel Aaron provides a biography of the two together arguing that, even though they didn’t meet in person, they were having a literary conversation throughout their careers (76). Faith Barratt directly contrasts the two poets in her book, quoted above (267). Martin Griffin discusses why Whitman’s poetry was successful and Melville’s was not (85).

may lie beyond the reach of discourse altogether” (79). Bellis’ argument aligns with the majority: almost all Melville scholarship contends that he was decidedly pessimistic about the end of the war, while Whitman scholarship emphasizes his optimism.

I suggest that the two poets are not as different as commonly believed. Both poets present the possibility of national reconciliation through natural renewal. An excerpt from Whitman helps define how I view this concept of reconciliation through nature, and I also include an example from Eliza Frances Andrews, whose editorial prologue relies on similar rhetoric. After establishing this concept of natural reconciliation through these two authors, I will move to the more complex discussion of Melville’s challenging poetry.

When we read Whitman’s conclusion to his compilation of wartime memories, *Memoranda During the War*, we see him participate in a stereotypical description of nature as a cleansing agent. He writes his conclusion in 1875:

from ten years’ rain and snow, in their seasons—grass, clover, pine trees, orchards, forests – from all the noiseless miracles of soil and sun and running streams --- how peaceful and how beautiful appear to-day even the Battle-Trenches, and the many hundred thousand Cemetery mounds! Even at Andersonville, to-day, innocence and a smile. (59)⁷⁰

⁷⁰ We should also recall Thoreau’s comments in “Autumnal Tints”: “How beautifully they go to their graves! how gently lay themselves down and turn to mould...some choosing the spot where the bodies of men are mouldering beneath, and meeting them half-way...how contentedly they return to dust again, and are laid low, resigned to lie and decay at the foot of the tree, and afford nourishment to new generations of their kind, as well as to flutter on high! They teach us how to die” (298-9).

Whitman invokes natural life cycles to remind his reader that nature will continue to thrive regardless of human interference through activities such as war. Even the horrific reminders of war, trenches and burial mounds, appear cleansed and beautiful thanks to nature's power. The appearance of "innocence and a smile" indicates that, in addition to the nonhuman flourishing he describes, humans should be able to renew as well.

Whitman continues his image of purification with a religious tone, writing, "And now, to thought of these – on these graves of the dead of the War, as on an altar – to memory of these, of North or South, I close and dedicate my book" (59). His parting dedication is important not only because it reminds us that nature, through the sun, soil, and rain, can make even "battle-trenches" appear beautiful in just a few years. His words also remark upon the reconciliation that becomes possible through those natural agents. He notes that he dedicates his book to all the "dead of the War...of North or South." The distinction is important. Though a clear supporter of the Union cause throughout the war, Whitman's goal of national unification remains. His vision of the United States from before the war holds true even ten years later, and his desire for national reconciliation is evident in his writings. Whitman clearly articulates a vision of a United States that can fully recover from the war through nature's reconciliatory powers.

Eliza Frances Andrews presents a similar vision of reconciliation in her journal's editorial prologue. While discussing a postbellum visit to the battlefield at Petersburg, VA, Andrews describes the "pit of death" containing the bodies of hundreds of soldiers. She remarks that the field is now "lined now with daisies and buttercups, and fragrant with the breath of spring" (10). The juxtaposition of the concepts of death and spring-

time revitalization indicate a natural order– the cycle of life that turns dead bodies into fertilizer for spring flowers. She continues with another vision of dead bodies nourishing plants: “tall pines, whose lusty young roots had fed on the hearts of dead men, were waving softly overhead, and nature everywhere had covered up the scars of war with the mantle of smiling peace.” Like Whitman, Andrews’ nature brings smiles to the battlefield. A landscape previously scarred by death and destruction has been “covered up” by nature. While Andrews’ Tennyson-esque vision of dead bodies nourishing plant growth may seem morbid, she presents it as a simple fact of life. And like Whitman, this scene demonstrates how benevolent “nature” can take the mess of war and create something beautiful.

Andrews also follows Whitman’s example by invoking a reverence for the dead that has overcome wartime animosity. While considering the graves of “three hundred dead Yankees,” Andrews quotes a Confederate veteran: “we are all brothers once more, and I can feel for them layin’ down thar just the same as fur our own” (10). While the image of nature renewing a battlefield makes an important claim about the ability to recover from war, Andrews’ acknowledgement of the Union dead takes her one step further – towards reconciliation. Now, she not only recognizes that nature’s cycles will do their part to cleanse the nation, but more importantly, she acknowledges that the nation must unite. Her image of the pine trees most clearly presents that reconciliation. The “tall pines” possess “lusty young roots [that] had fed on the hearts of dead men,” a concept of fertilization that implies a natural transition that we do not often discuss: from death to life. Additionally, the image of the tree roots digging deep into the graves

provides permanence. These are not simply weeds cropping up in an empty field; these are pine trees, a representation of the New South that grows from the dead of the Old South, mixed with some “Yankee” dead as well.⁷¹ Similar to Evans’ new camellia and Darwin’s evolution theory, Andrews creates new pine trees to represent growth that symbolizes national reconciliation.

Unfortunately, Melville’s position on reconciliation is not as clear as Whitman or Andrews, nor is his personal relationship to the war. Biographer Stanton Garner argues that the war affected Melville profoundly. Melville’s personal experience in the Navy placed him closer to the conflict than we often remember; indeed, the Naval frigate, named the *United States*, that Melville sailed from Honolulu to Boston in 1843-44 became the first ship of the Confederate fleet when Lee’s Army claimed the Norfolk Navy Yard. We can only imagine how Melville felt about his former ship sailing under the Confederate flag.⁷² Melville again demonstrates his interest in his fellow naval veterans by traveling to Brooklyn to pay homage to the first Union naval officer killed in action, Commander Ward, and, though the author refrained from joining the military, he did enroll on the militia list as a defender of the city should the war move that far north.⁷³ He spent the majority of the war years far from action, however, near his family home in Pittsfield, New York, visiting New York City and surrounding areas occasionally.

⁷¹ The use of the pine tree here is particularly significant, given Andrews’ love for them, which she discusses in multiple periodical publications advocating for their preservation.

⁷² “In Battle-Pieces and Vernacular Poetics,” Timothy Sweet argues that Melville’s maritime experience not only shaped his perspective about the war, but that his familiarity with sea chants and songs contributed to the vernacular of his poetics.

⁷³ Biographical information from Stanton Garner’s *The Civil War World of Herman Melville*, chapter two.

Melville appears to have read the war news voraciously, and although it is unclear precisely when he began writing the poetry that would comprise his collection, Garner suggests that the poet started in January 1863 after reading about the Battle of Fredericksburgh and a small poem from someone named only as “S.”

Painfully the people wait
For the news by flying car,
Eager for the battle’s fate,
And the aspect of the war. (qtd. in Garner 215)

Scholars criticize Melville for the artistic borrowing that his poetry presents (such as using the last line of this poem for the title of his book).⁷⁴ Indeed, these critics categorize the collection as nothing more than history told in verse form, noting that Melville relied too heavily on journalism to find the subjects of his poems. Garner argues against this critique, noting that Melville was at least as affected by the war, if not more so, than contemporary writers such as Whitman, Emerson, Longfellow, and Dickinson (389). While Melville’s knowledge of 1861-64 came mostly from publications and hearsay, he finally had the opportunity to observe a battle in the spring of 1864, when he accompanied his brother on a trip to a Union camp in Virginia, followed by a brief tour of the front lines. In mid-April, Melville participated in a scouting party which he later presented in his poem “The Scout toward Aldie.”⁷⁵ Though Melville’s experiences did not lead to the heart-rending empathy that Whitman evokes in “The Wound-Dresser” and

⁷⁴ Garner’s chapter nine discusses Melville’s creation of *Battle-pieces*, during which he relied heavily on newspaper research. Leading critics such as Edmund Wilson refer to the collection as “versified journalism” (479).

⁷⁵ See Garner’s chapter seven, “A Portrait of the Artist as a Man of War, 1864.”

other poems, Melville's willingness to visit the camps and go with the party provides his poetry some verisimilitude. He observed military life through the poetic lens that he would later use to create his collection.

While opinions about the quality of Melville's poetry vary widely, scholars include him in studies of Civil War poetry that place him in conversation with poets such as Whitman and often put his cynicism in direct opposition to the optimistic bard.⁷⁶ Daniel Aaron initiates this pessimistic reading of Melville, arguing that *Battle-Pieces* demonstrates "nature's indifference to humanity's travail," a key theme upon which many scholars expanded over the next forty years (79). Faith Barrett's comprehensive study of Civil War poetry *To Fight Aloud is Very Brave*, argues that "while Whitman and some contemporary photographers often offer redemptive visions of nature's capacity for healing human loss in the aftermath of war, Melville's war poems propose a darker and more detached vision of the natural world." Barrett's research responds partly to Timothy Sweet, who argues that the inclusion of nature in Melville's poetry "demonstrates the incongruities between the pastoral mode of representation and the realities of war" (in Barrett 267). These scholars agree that Melville's representations of nature evoke pessimism, but my analysis suggests that his complex depiction of the natural world demonstrates a hope for national reconciliation that will occur despite human failing.

Studies about nature in Melville's poetry are scarce. Thomas Dikant's 2014 article "Melville's *Battle-Pieces* and the Environments of War" offers one of the first

⁷⁶ See note 82 for more details.

examinations of the poet's natural settings. Dikant claims that "Melville thus stages the military alterations of (predominantly Southern) landscapes and in so doing challenges traditional literary paradigms for imagining the environment of the United States" (560). Dikant's approach supplants positive/negative discussions of Melville's attitude and instead considers how the environment shapes national identity. My project closely aligns with some of Dikant's key interests, though my primary concern is how Melville uses nature to present his outlook on national unification. While it would be disingenuous to implicate that Melville and Whitman share the same level of enthusiasm for reconciliation through nature, I claim that, like other unlikely advocates for natural reconciliation (including Eliza Frances Andrews and Augusta Jane Evans), Melville views national redemption as a possibility because of natural renewal. Indeed, when the poet presents images of natural renewal, growth and death, and nonhuman nature as agent, he reminds us, like Whitman, that nature will provide a path for reconciliation. If nature can cleanse the battlefield and erase the traces of war, then surely the nation can reconcile.

Herman Melville's 1866 *Battle-pieces and Aspects of War* includes four sections, with poems that cover the Civil War from before it started ("The Portent") to after its completion ("America"). The untitled first section contains the majority of the collection: fifty-three poems arranged chronologically, marking the progress of the war from different locations and perspectives. Most of these poems include a year with the title (which is often a place), ensuring that the reader can follow the conflict's timeline and trajectory. Next, Melville places an additional section, titled "Verses Inscriptive and

Memorial,” containing another nineteen poems. These additional pieces memorialize fallen soldiers from both sides while questioning the war’s conduct and the United States’ fate based on the resulting political ramifications. Lastly, the collection contains Melville’s notes, followed by the prose “Supplement” that is the focus of Bellis’ analysis. With the exception of my opening analysis included below, I address the poems in the order that they appear, because the chronological arrangement allows the reader to analyze the poet’s representations of the war’s trajectory and the eventual potential for reconciliation. I’ve selected the seven poems that most demonstrate Melville’s use of nature as a renewing force to lead to national reconciliation. Through the selected poems, we can identify a narrative arc to the collection, which first naturalizes the war, then prays for nature to cleanse the nation of war, questions the tactics of the war, and finally memorializes the war while hoping for reconciliation. While I argue that these actions appear roughly in order, we do see elements of them in some of the poems throughout. As scholars have bemoaned for decades, Melville’s collection does not allow for easy categorization or overarching truths; however, it does invite a thorough interrogation to see what we can glean from the poet’s representations of nature.

Naturalizing the War: “Aurora-Borealis,” “The Portent,” and “Misgivings”

I begin with one of the later poems, “Aurora-Borealis: Commemorative of the Dissolution of Armies at the Peace (May, 1865),” because it best illustrates Melville’s feelings about the end of the war and the life that must begin after. While much of my argument relies upon an understanding of *Battle-pieces* as a collection, this single poem

best represents the poet's naturalization of war. Here, Melville compares the Civil War armies to the Northern Lights, implying that the movements of both are determined by God, or at least a higher power.⁷⁷ The first of two stanzas asks:

What power disbands the Northern Lights
After their steely play?
The lonely watcher feels an awe
Of Nature's sway,
As when appearing,
He marked their flashed uprearing
In the cold gloom—
Retreatings and advancings,
(Like dallyings of doom),
Transitions and enhancings,
And bloody ray.

The observer equates watching two great armies disband after years of conflict to the awe of a natural phenomenon: the Aurora-Borealis. The individual watching either massive movement feels miniscule and alone in the sight of such grand forces of nature. The poem does not explicitly mention the armies; we know that they are the subject because of the title, and much of the diction connotes military movement. Both “steely play” and “bloody ray” remind us of warfare's grim realities, where metal weaponry leads to gruesome violence, and the pairings of gerunds also have military connotations. The “retreatings and advancings” and “transitions and enhancings” describe the movements of

⁷⁷ Melville compares the Northern Lights to armor in both *Moby-Dick* and *Mardi* (*Published Poems* 661). Interestingly, the Northern Lights have long been a subject of folklore among Northern indigenous peoples in the U.S. as well as around the world. The myths surrounding the lights vary greatly from tribe to tribe, but it is noteworthy that the Fox Indians viewed the lights as an “omen or war and pestilence.” Most tribes viewed the lights as some version of human spirits playing or dancing, or perhaps of gods building fires in the sky to remind their people of their presence. For more, see Lizzy Pattison

the Northern Lights but also allude to military maneuvers. This comparison provides magnitude to the armies because it implies that a higher “power” controls them, such as the “Nature” that controls the Northern Lights. Moreover, if there is a higher power controlling the movements of the armies, then the war itself must be much greater than the men who are leading and fighting in it. The analogy also implies that the war between these great armies is as natural as the lights moving in the sky.

The second and last stanza discusses the war’s end and provides hope for a movement towards national reunification described here:

The phantom-host has faded quite,
Splendor and Terror gone—
Portent or promise---and gives way
To pale, meek Dawn;
The coming, going,
Alike in wonder showing—
Alike the God,
Decreeing and commanding
The million blades that glowed,
The muster and disbanding—
Midnight and Morn. (emphasis added)

Melville’s pairing of concepts throughout this poem compares the beginning and ending of war to the beginning and ending of natural cycles, such as the “coming, going,” of “pale, meek Dawn.” I start my discussion with this poem because it most clearly demonstrates Melville’s interpretation of the relationship between war and nature: they have equivalent properties. The “muster and disbanding” of the troops has the same distinction as night and day, “Midnight and Morn.” This poem attributes both the war and natural cycles to “the God, / Decreeing and commanding / The million blades that

glowed.” The lines seem to refer to celestial bodies that light the sky, as well as the weapons that waged war. In the comparisons, however, Melville reminds us that God dictates both the war and the lights in the sky. The affiliation between nature and war that Melville establishes in “Aurora-Borealis” extends throughout the collection, and the remaining poems that I discuss demonstrate how Melville appeals to that naturalization of war in order to call for postbellum national unification.

The appearance of the lights leaves the observer feeling the “awe / of Nature’s sway.” Like any natural phenomenon, a scientific answer explains what seems inconceivable; however, for most observers, feelings of awe far outweigh any logical comprehension of the event. The Civil War had the same effect upon observers, who felt miniscule, bewildered, and out of control. The only factor that makes these mysteries comprehensible is the knowledge that a higher power controls them, which is why Melville portrays them as natural. If war is an extension of nature, then there is hope that natural cycles will lead to renewal upon its conclusion.

“Aurora-Borealis” is the forty-sixth poem in *Battle-pieces* and, as the title indicates, the “dissolution of armies” is its primary subject; however, this poem links directly to the first poem of the collection, “The Portent,” which also relies upon natural phenomena to discuss the war. At the beginning of the book, the war has not yet begun. Indeed, there are only indicators that it is coming, culminating with the execution of John Brown, which Melville names as “The Portent” of the oncoming war. In “Aurora-Borealis,” Melville uses the same noun in the second stanza, a clear reference back to the beginning of his collection. This time, however, he pairs “portent or promise” to suggest

that the war's culmination may hold promise for the creation of an improved nation. Whereas Melville's collection begins with an omen of impending war, it ends with promise for a renewed land. This allusion to the first poem of the collection reminds us that reading the book from front to back captures the trajectory of Melville's story, particularly his message regarding warfare and nature. Thus, I will return to the beginning of Melville's collection to continue the analysis of naturalized war and possible reconciliation.

In the often anthologized first poem, "The Portent," Melville warns that John Brown's execution will cause the Civil War:⁷⁸

Hanging from the beam,
 Slowly swaying (such the law),
Gaunt the shadow on your green,
 Shenandoah!
The cut is on the crown
 (Lo, John Brown),
And the stabs shall heal no more.

Hidden in the cap
 Is the anguish none can draw;
So your future veils its face,
 Shenandoah!
But the streaming beard is shown
 (Weird John Brown),
The meteor of the war.

Melville begins with a reference to a well-known and highly contested event – the execution of John Brown. Many scholars have addressed this poem, focusing on the

⁷⁸ John Brown led a small party of men to initiate an armed slave revolt at Harpers Ferry in 1859. He was captured, found guilty of treason, and executed by hanging.

rhythm, the representation of John Brown's body, and Melville's deployment of the Shenandoah River Valley.⁷⁹ Few scholars pay specific attention to the literal and symbolic use of meteor as omen. We are not sure if Melville observed the meteor that passed over New York City in 1859; however, we can assume he at least read of it in the news.⁸⁰ The meteor is a peculiar representation of oncoming war because, although it is a predictable and scientifically explainable occurrence, it was still not commonly understood. I suggest that "The Portent"'s position in Melville's collection adds to the possible interpretations of this meteor. First, the meteor naturalizes the oncoming war, which can be predicted because of the political state of the country but still defies common understanding. Additionally, Melville deploys the "meteor of war" in the first poem of the collection, so that Melville's poetry, like the war, becomes another force that has been unleashed by nature. Thus, the meteor launches both the Civil War and Melville's poetic representation of it.

The second poem, "Misgivings," has received less scholarly attention, although I contend that its position following "The Portent" and its representation of war as an oncoming storm further naturalizes the war. After the meteor passes, we turn the page to find the inevitable war moving like a massive storm:

When ocean-clouds over inland hills
Sweep storming in late autumn brown,
And horror the sodden valley fills,
And the spire falls crashing in the town,
I muse upon my country's ills—

⁷⁹ See Timothy Sweet, Faith Barrett, and Tom Nurmi.

⁸⁰ The *Berkshire County Eagle*, a paper that Melville read, published the report of a meteor sighting over New York City on Nov. 15, 1859. (*Published Poems* 625)

The tempest bursting from the waste of Time
On the world's fairest hope linked with man's foulest crime.

Nature's dark side is heeded now—
 (Ah! Optimist-cheer disheartened flown)—
A child may read the moody brow
 Of yon black mountain lone.
With shouts the torrents down the gorges go,
And storms are formed behind the storm we feel:
The hemlock shakes in the rafter, the oak in the driving keel.

Much as Melville compares the armies to the northern lights in “Aurora-Borealis,” he again relies upon hyperbole to emphasize the conflict’s massiveness. This “tempest bursting” can do real, physical damage, just like a flash flood bearing down upon buildings and boats. Here, there are “torrents down the gorges” that are so powerful they shake the foundation of buildings (“hemlock shakes in the rafter”) and challenge even the sturdiest of boats (“the oak in the driving keel”). Both meteor shower and tempest can be forecast, and Melville’s representation of both serves as his warning of what the war will bring to the nation, which he describes in detail as the book unfolds.

While “The Portent” warns that the war will happen, “Misgivings” offers a prediction of the war’s magnitude and the damage it will likely cause to the physical landscape, the manmade infrastructure, and, most importantly, the humans who are caught within its waves. The later poems will describe all of this damage. The first two introduce the collection, and they work together to present the war as a natural phenomenon of epic proportions. While Melville naturalizes war’s onset, he does not overlook human involvement, and while the poem declares that the storm is coming, the narrator hesitates to place any blame. His emphasis on humans in the storm appears in the

penultimate line: “And storms are formed behind the storm we feel.” Thus, the “storm we feel” comes first, and it is THAT storm, of human feeling, that leads to war. However, Melville seems unwilling to claim what kind of “storm we feel.” In the first stanza, the individual “I” muses upon “[his] country’s ills,” but in the second stanza, “we” feel the storm. The shifting pronoun use seems to represent an unwillingness to identify the “country’s ills.” Melville can say with certainty that the entire nation will “feel” the oncoming storm, but he can’t claim a unified national opinion about the “ills” that brought it. Timothy Sweet suggests that Melville’s pronoun use demonstrates his inability to speak for the national “we” like Whitman does. “Where Whitman presented himself as a microcosm of the United States, his one voice standing for each and all, Melville, like Emily Dickinson, “noted” multiple voices, “variable, and at times widely at variance,” as the only apt register of the war’s memory (Sweet 39). The poet’s ambiguity extends beyond pronoun use, however.

Melville’s opinion on the onset of war bears further question in the first stanza, where he describes the “sodden valley” and alludes to “man’s foulest crime.” The description of the valley as “sodden” literally refers to the water from the storm, but it also connotes over-indulgence. The adjective is often used in reference to drunkenness, but the connotation of excess could refer to multiple concepts – whether that be alcohol, a slave-owning lifestyle, or even the excess of violence that comes with the Civil War. This storm that fills the “sodden valley” with horror is an uncontrollable act of nature, but it is also retaliation for “man’s foulest crime.” Melville could mean slavery, or he could also mean the act of civil war. Arguably, his reference indicates both. While the author did not

condone the Confederacy's behavior before or during the war, he was also opposed to civil warfare. Thus, while "man's foulest crime" seemingly refers to slavery, it could also describe the killing of one's brother – to the spilling of blood to add to the "sodden valley."

Although we can read the poem in multiple ways, I don't think that Melville is being ambivalent. Instead, he presents a vision of the war that is both an unavoidable natural phenomenon in response to major sectional differences and a terrible crime, punishable by a deluge of Biblical proportions. I present these various interpretations to demonstrate the complexity of Melville's feelings about the war. In the midst of this ambiguity, one thing is very clear: war comes from "nature's dark side." Indeed, this nature wreaks war, as we see at the beginning of *Battle-pieces*, but it ultimately enables reconciliation. Melville begins his collection with "The Portent" and "Misgivings" to introduce one of his greatest characters: nature. As we see in many of the remaining poems, this character influences all elements of the Civil War, to include the human actors, the weather, the natural surroundings, and the possibility of postwar reconciliation.

The Storm of War: "Donelson"

Melville's first two poems lay the foundation for a collection that relies upon natural imagery to demonstrate the connection between warfare and nature. Many of the poems in *Battle-pieces* tell stories of specific battles, campaigns, or battle locations. Thus we expect to see depictions of the landscape in which those battles occur. However, while

many of Melville's poems use imagery to set the scene, others invoke nature as an agent in war. Melville's first poem to present nature as adversary and/or ally is "Donelson," the collection's tenth poem.

This lengthy poem creates a dual setting: the February 1862 Battle of Fort Donelson on the Kentucky/Tennessee border at the Cumberland River, and the streets of a Northern town. It tells the battle's story through newspaper coverage that the townspeople are reading. Offering the voices of the newspaper and the readers responding to different reports, the poem tells the story of both military and civilian war experience. Because the poem is so long (twenty pages in the printed collection), I quote only the portions that propel my argument, including a few sections from the beginning and one from the middle. My discussion ends with a close look at the last two stanzas, which I am the first scholar to read as reservedly optimistic. One overarching theme traveling through the poem is the way that nature affects both the military and the civilians who are having their own experiences of war in different settings.⁸¹

"Donelson" is organized around the idea of reading war news, which for many readers is as close as they will ever get to participating in war. Thus, the news obliquely connects them to the battlefield. Samuel Graber explores the relationship between newspaper and reader, questioning the newspaper's role in nation-building and arguing

⁸¹ Daniel Aaron concludes that "'nature is nobody's ally' in describing storms erupting over both military and civilian fronts during the last four days of the assault" (81). Indeed, Aaron's claim suggests that Melville would have shared Sidney Lanier's frustration at the ambivalence of nature discussed in chapter four.

that Melville is critiquing the American public's reliance upon the news.⁸² I suggest that we shift the focus. While I do see Melville implicating the American readership in a problematic consumption of war news, I want to emphasize that, instead of trying to vicariously experience the war through reading, the townspeople in fact have something physical in common with the soldiers: standing in the rain. On one hand, "Donelson" magnifies the distance between the townspeople and the battlefield, implying that reading and participating will never be the same. I contend, however, that the soldiers who are fighting the title battle will never fully understand war, either, even though they are there. One overarching theme of Civil War literature is that war is incomprehensible, which is why humans look to nature to help make sense of it.

Attempts at comprehension surface in "Donelson" as the newspaper provides weather reports to relate the battle. At the beginning,

*The welcome weather
Is clear and mild, 'tis much like May.
The ancient boughs that lace together
Along the stream, and hang far forth,
Strange with green mistletoe, betray
A dreamy contrast to the North*

The setting sounds beautiful, although Melville's language foreshadows something negative on the horizon. The "ancient" and "strange" trees clarify that the soldiers are in a

⁸² Graber also contends that Melville argues against the notions of wartime nationalism. The news cannot unify the nation, and Melville refuses the belief that the community could unify itself in the idea of a homeland. While Graber's argument does not leave much hope for national unification, his analysis does leave a slight possibility for natural reconciliation through the prayer in the final stanza.

different setting that they don't quite recognize. Indeed, the "contrast to North" indicates more than just weather and greenery. The term "betray" suggests differences that cannot be reconciled - hence, the pending battle.

At first, it seems as if the battle will be a short, easy Union victory: "the siege won't prove a creeping one"; however, the battle unexpectedly intensifies, and details continue to arrive daily. We see an overt mention of nature as agent once the battle reaches an uncomfortable peak:

*Stern weather is all unwonted here.
The people of the country own
We brought it. Yea, the earnest North
Has elementally issued forth
To storm this Donelson.*

This stanza conflates the Union Army with the cold storm that unexpectedly ransacked Donelson during the war. The report seems to boast of the Union's power to control the weather, as if the Army has some "elemental" power over it.

Of course, the soldiers know better:

*No blankets, overcoats, or tents.
Coats thrown aside on the warm march here---
We looked not then for changeful cheer;
Tents, coats, and blankets too much care.
No fires; a fire a mark presents;
Near by, the trees show bullet-dents.
Rations were eaten cold and raw.
The men well soaked, came snow; and more –
A midnight sally. Small sleeping done—
But such is war;
No matter, we'll have Fort Donelson.*

This stanza covers the creature comforts that soldiers' memoirs almost always discuss: weather, food, and sleep. Much like Sam Watkin's representation of long hard marches and cold, rainy nights, the soldiers at Fort Donelson have experienced a long, warm, march followed by a freezing storm for which they have no provisions. Their food is cold, and they didn't get any sleep. This representation does not reveal an army that controls the weather to "storm" the fort. Instead, the depiction portrays soldiers trying to survive a war that only makes sense to them in the ways they can tangibly experience it. The Northern readers can empathize with this description of warfare. Feeling cold, tired, and hungry is universally understood.

The first third of the poem connects reader and soldier at the most basic level, ensuring that they share the experience of war. After reinforcements arrive on the Friday of battle, however, the Confederate forces and the raging storm combine to create an atmosphere that alienates the soldiers from the townspeople. The remainder of the poem provides battle updates that the readers can no longer understand. After a report of the "black flag" flying over Donelson and rumors of murdered soldiers, the townspeople could take no more: "They turned and went, / Musing on right and wrong / And mysteries dimly sealed." Here, Melville illustrates the separation between soldier and reader and the incompatibility of reaching mutual comprehension of the "mysteries" of warfare. The middle of the poem divides the experience of war even as the rain that previously connected the townspeople and the soldiers continues. When the townspeople turn away from the news and go back to their homes, Melville creates a brief moment of separation that feels much like hopelessness. Indeed, Graber reads the separation between Donelson

and the northern town as apocalyptic, represented most clearly in the ongoing storm of the poem that culminates in the last stanza.

The ceaseless rain invokes the Biblical story of Noah and the flood. Water imagery abounds in Melville's poetry, and we previously discussed war's storm and the damage it can cause in "Misgivings." This poem takes us one step further in common flood mythology. Biblical scholars read the flood as punishment for human's wrongdoing, and those connotations transfer to literary allusions as well.⁸³ In Genesis, God used the rain to purify the earth of almost all humankind so that he could reestablish peace. Before God could restore order, however, He returned the earth to complete chaos through a cleansing flood. Only once the world had reached this pandemonium could God intervene and return peace. Melville establishes a trajectory for the Civil War that parallels the Biblical flood. Starting with "Misgivings," the poet compares the war to a storm that will damage everything in its path. In "Donelson," the rain continues, and the water that initially connects humans to one another eventually cannot bridge the gap between war-experience and ignorance. Once the town and the battlefield reach the point of complete desperation, the battle ceases but not the rain. Indeed, even as the townspeople read that they have achieved victory at Donelson, the Northern rain does not end. Thus, the nation cannot return to peace upon the conclusion of one battle. Instead, the war continues and so does the chaos it brings with it. Only after the war's end will the land be able to return to harmony.

⁸³ For a full interpretive reading of the flood, see chapter four in William Greenway's *For the Love of All Creatures: The Story of Grace in Genesis*.

The final stanzas of “Donelson” do offer a glimpse of that eventual reconciliation, though. “The unflagging tempest rained,” as some townspeople celebrated and others dreaded the news of the death-list. The final two stanzas culminate with the rain that serves both literal and figurative purposes:

But others were who wakeful laid
 In midnight beds, and early rose,
 And, feverish in the foggy snows,
Snatched the damp paper—wife and maid.
 The death-list like a river flows
 Down the pale sheet,
And there the whelming waters meet.

Ah God! may Time with happy haste
Bring wail and triumph to a waste,
 And war be done;
The battle flag-staff fall athwart
The curs’d ravine, and wither, naught
 Be left of trench or gun;
The bastion, let it ebb away,
Washed with the river bed; and Day
 In vain seek Donelson.

Melville’s narrator invokes God’s name in the final prayer as a reminder of the source of this overwhelming water. Following the plot of the flood story, then, God can stop the rain and return the earth to peace whenever He deems it appropriate. Thus, “Donelson” asks when the time for peace will return. Not everyone views the final appeal as hopeful, though:

[P]rayer is not merely a nostalgic flight, nor a pastoral turn, nor a call to an end of war. It is all those things, but it is also an apocalypse, a divine unmapping, an abdication of nature’s throne by a pretender nation and its news, an oceanic flood poured out upon America’s public sphere. Donelson, “curs’d” and exalted as the

seat of war, here returns in a prophetic future to the mundane grace of its natural features. (Graber 284)

While I accept Graber's acknowledgement that the prayer serves several functions, I must highlight the last part of his analysis. When he suggests that Donelson can return to "the mundane grace of its natural features," he is accepting that Melville asks for national reconciliation in this poem.

Weather provides the dominant imagery in this poem, and, as I argue above, the rain connects noncombatant readers to soldiers to the greatest extent possible. Melville acknowledges that soldiers and civilians cannot share the same war experience, but he allows for a basic relation that enables some bond between the two groups. The middle of the poem represents the detachment that occurs in the heat of the battle, but the beginning and end of the poem offer connection. Even though the bond in the penultimate stanza is heartbreaking, we can read the meeting of "whelming waters" as a collection of the rain, the tears, and the death-list as "wives and maids" mourn together. This outpouring of water leads to the final stanza, in which Melville calls for redemptive nature to do its work towards erasing the war's pain. The deluge enables the cleansing in the poem, and it has the redemptive possibility of flooding the river bed and leaving nothing of the bastion. The poem does not offer an optimistic reading of war; indeed, the battle gets quite dark, and only by deep grief and passionate prayer enable a hopeful outcome. The end of the poem, however, does explicitly call for reconciliation: "Time with happy haste / Bring wail and triumph to a waste / And war be done." According to this vision, upon war's end, no one will be either mourning or celebrating. I read the ending as expressing

cautious hope that the literal rain and river and the figurative women's tears will succeed in cleansing and reconciling the nation.

Remembering the War: "Malvern Hill" and "Sherman's March to the Sea"

After "Donelson," the next poem that highlights nature as agent is "Malvern Hill," which gives voice to the trees, suggesting that humans can commune and even converse with nature. This poem reminds us that humans are not alone in experiencing battle; war affects the trees and other nonhuman agents.⁸⁴ Most importantly, "Malvern Hill" provides an example of how nonhuman agents react to war, which allows us to consider how the nation itself, another nonhuman agent that participated in the Civil War, could respond.

The poem's speaker addresses the trees on the hill where a violent July 1862 battle occurred. His opening lines suggest that these trees appear unscathed and full of growth: "Ye elms that wave on Malvern Hill / In prime of morn and May." The second line sets a scene of springtime renewal, where the morning represents birth in a prime time of year. The reference to May indicates that the speaker has returned to the battlefield immediately after the South's surrender, which occurred in April 1865, three short years after the Battle at Malvern Hill.

The veteran asks the trees if they recall the battle that took place around them in the "forest dim," the "Cypress glades," and the "leaf-walled ways." He probes them three times with various emphatic changes. Through repetition, the veteran seeks confirmation that the battle occurred as he remembers it. He first asks: "Recall ye how McClellan's

⁸⁴ For a more thorough discussion of trees and warfare, see chapter four.

men / Here stood at bay?”. Repeating versions of the question twice more, he inquires: “does the elm wood / recall the haggard beards of blood?” and “Does Malvern Wood / Bethink itself, and muse and brood?” Barrett reads the poem pessimistically, noting that the speaker seems like a petulant child begging for validation from an unresponsive nature. The repetition of questions and place names, Barrett argues, signals the “irrelevance of human events to nature, where time continues to unfold in its inevitable and imperturbable cycles” (270). Her analysis fails to consider, however, that the very act of battle that occurred in this landscape connected the trees and the humans who acted there in unprecedented ways. The speaker does not repeat his question because the trees are uninterested, and the trees are not ignoring him because he is irrelevant. Indeed, the speaker simply cannot believe that the elm trees now waving with majestic beauty are the same trees that experienced violent battle with him. He tries to connect memories of the battle with them, but he cannot reconcile his disbelief that they stand there peacefully in a site of such previous bloodshed.

In the final stanza, the trees respond, offering solace to the speaker:

We elms of Malvern Hill
Remember every thing;
But sap the twig will fill:
Wag the world how it will,
Leaves must be green in Spring.

The trees extend consolation, even through their unemotional reply. Though the elms address the speaker condescendingly and do not present the personal comfort he requests, their response proves that nature and humanity do share experience; the primary

difference is that the elms' reality expands far beyond that of one battle. They undoubtedly remember the war, since they "remember every thing," but their job is not to dwell on the past or worry about human mistakes. Instead, their responsibility is to green and grow and beautify the earth. The trees regenerate regardless of the battle that occurred near them, which extends Melville's argument for the possibility of national reconciliation. If these trees can both "remember" the battle and regenerate according to natural cycles, then so can the nation.

Rather than viewing the elms' response as encouraging communication, Barrett argues that the response is distinctly separate from humanity. She explains: "[the] voice of the elms is detached, remote from the world of human struggles. Human dramas will unfold as they must, but nature's cycles will inevitably continue" (269). Indeed, Barrett's analysis draws a perfectly appropriate conclusion but eschews the main point. Yes, nature's cycles continue! And the continuance of those cycles brings Melville and his readers hope. These elms are not detached from "human drama." Instead, they are closely wrapped up in it. The trees have participated in the same battle as the speaker, and they respond to his questions to remind him that they were there but that they have moved on with their lives.⁸⁵ While Barrett views their response as a disappointment, I see the trees as representative of the nation itself. The nation, a nonhuman agent like the trees, has undergone a horrific war and will never forget the bloodshed. But, just as the trees can "remember every thing" and still renew themselves, so must the nation.

⁸⁵ See chapter four for a discussion of the various ways that trees participate in battle.

The trees on Malvern Hill are not the only subjects of Melville's poetry who remember. I move to the next poem that emphasizes collective memory, the late 1864 poem "The March to the Sea." This poem reflects upon Sherman's famous march across the South, waging a version of total war in a path from Atlanta to Savannah. The poem celebrates the march and the use of total war while also questioning the methods of the Union Army as they reportedly destroyed everything in their path. Much of the poem's beginning naturalizes the army, starting in the first stanza: "The columns streamed like rivers." The second stanza expands the metaphor to fully develop the army as an element of nature:

They brushed the foe before them
(Shall gnats impede the bull?),
Their own good bridges bore them
Over swamps or torrents full,
And the grand pines waving o'er them
Bowed to axes keen and cool
The columns grooved their channels,
 Enforced their own decree,
And their power met nothing larger
 Until it met the sea:
 It was glorious glad marching,
 A marching glad and free.

Much like "Donelson," this poem represents the force of water, which is so powerful that waving pine trees bow before it. An army enfeebled by the human vulnerability of its exhausted soldiers would likely struggle to move through or around "swamps or torrents full," which are not easy landscapes to navigate; however, Melville presents this naturalized army moving towards the sea by channeling grooved columns in the earth and

becoming one with the earth and water. Thus the army navigates nature easily but also changes the land as it travels by taking advantage of Sherman's policy on foraging.

At first, Melville presents the foraging positively, almost as if Southern livestock choose to go with the army:

The flocks of all those regions,
The herds and horses good,
Poured in and swelled the legions,
For they caught the marching mood.

As the army moves through the South, birds and slaves also join the march, expanding the idea of the naturalized Army following its path to the sea. Thus, the first five stanzas describe the Army's movement and the creatures that join the army in what seems to be a celebration of movement. Timothy Sweet reminds us that the poem sounds much like the chants Melville heard during his maritime service (13). We can imagine the army chanting this poem as they marched along, particularly since Melville ends seven of the eight stanzas with a celebratory "It was glorious glad marching." The repetition invokes movement, and as each stanza ends with the repeated line, the poem seems to gain momentum towards its climactic end.

By the sixth stanza, Melville begins to question the foragers' ethicality: "And they helped themselves from farm-lands-- / As who should say them nay?" By this point, the scavengers seem to be testing the limits of their policy to see what they can get away with. Glatthaar's history of the March to the Sea explains that foraging began as a

carefully regulated military policy.⁸⁶ At first, the gathering expeditions were small, organized parties following specific guidelines for the practice of taking food and animals; however, as the campaign continued, the soldiers became bolder in their foraging attempts and rules no longer applied (125). While many soldiers maintained common decency when appropriating provisions from women and children, others did not. Some Union soldiers felt no guilt over leaving families to starve: “I dont know what the wemon and children is going to do for something to eat but I dont know as I care if they nevver see eny more to eat” (qtd. in Glaather 133). Melville contests this lack of human feeling in the last stanza.

While the majority of the poem considers the army as a natural force following its designated path to the sea, the final stanza asks us to question the action of Sherman’s army. No longer does the poem celebrate with “glorious glad marching,” nor is the tone ambiguous. Melville shifts his tone completely to describe the horror that remains in the wake of Sherman’s march:

For behind they left a wailing,
 A terror and a ban,
And blazing cinders sailing,
 And houseless households wan,
Wide zones of counties paling,
 And towns where maniacs ran.
 Was it Treason’s retribution –
 Necessity the plea?
 They will long remember Sherman
 And his streaming columns free—
 They will long remember Sherman
 Marching to the sea.

⁸⁶ See Sherman’s General Order No. 10, reprinted in Glatthaar, 132.

Historians typically attribute Union victory to Sherman's successful March to the Sea, so discussions of the campaign emphasize Sherman's ingenuity and tenacity.⁸⁷ Melville's description of the march in this poem provides a more complex view as he questions the destruction's apparent excess. His note that "they will long remember Sherman" speaks not only of the trauma enacted on the "houseless households," but it also points to the memorialization that occurs as Americans repeat stories of the march throughout history. Melville understands that the survivors will retell the tale for years to come, and he uses this poem to express his ambivalence about a battle that the Union won by possibly crossing ethical boundaries. Just as the trees on Malvern Hill remember everything that happened there, the "they" in this poem will "long remember Sherman / Marching to the sea." The memory will resonate differently depending on the subject, and Melville reminds us of the dissimilar perspectives of the forager and the foraged. Yet, Melville both celebrates the march and sympathizes with the victims. This poem serves as one example of how he can do both. Thus, he can remember the victory of the march and still hope to renew and unify the nation, demonstrating his desires for national reconciliation after the war.

Renewing the Nation: "A Meditation"

The collection's last poem reiterates that reconciliation is Melville's goal for the nation. He completes the poetry section of *Battle-pieces* with "A Meditation," which reminds us that, while he wanted a quick ending to the divisive and destructive war,

⁸⁷ For more discussion, see Glatthaar's conclusion.

Melville also wanted a national peace after the war that did not involve punishment or retribution.⁸⁸ The subtitle for the poem, which is set upon the completion of the war, explains that the poem is “attributed to a Northerner after attending the last of two funerals from the same homestead—those of a National and a Confederate officer (brothers), his kinsmen, who had died from the effects of wounds received in the closing battles.” Much of the poem deals with the irony of brothers fighting on opposite sides. Melville points out that many of the officers who found themselves opposed during the Civil War had been classmates at West Point and fought together during the Mexican Wars. He calls upon his readers to remember those bonds rather than focusing on the recent division. Instead of judging and punishing the South, Melville calls for acceptance and reconciliation, especially in the penultimate stanza:

A darker side there is; but doubt
In Nature’s charity hovers there:
If men for new agreement yearn,
Then old upbraiding best forbear:
“*The South’s the sinner!*” Well, so let it be;
But shall the North sin worse, and stand the Pharisee?

Much as writers like Andrews, Evans, and Whitman call for natural balance and reconciliation, Melville suggests that the North disregard old judgment against the South to come to a new agreement that is aligned with “Nature’s charity.” He indicates that

⁸⁸ Melville discusses reconciliation in his prose supplement at the end of the collection. His rhetoric reminds readers that the war has ended and both sides must calmly unify for the nation’s benefit: “the glory of the war falls short of its pathos—a pathos which now at last ought to disarm all animosity...May we all have moderation; may we all show candor” (265).

Nature in this situation would have the two sides of the conflict forgive and unite in a way to create natural balance.

Reconciliation versus History

Although this chapter focused on Melville, I began with Evans, Whitman, and Andrews to demonstrate the prevalence of reconciliationist desires even before the war's end. Historian Jennifer Murray, in her book on Gettysburg National Military Park, reminds us that "reconciliation [was] the 'dominant mode' of Civil War memory. This willful construction of a palatable account of the Civil War emphasized the courage and sacrifice of both Union and Confederate soldiers" (13). These reconciliationist views emphasized the valiant fighting that led to national unification, failing to consider racial provocations for the war. The veterans' reunions of the 1880s and 90s enacted reconciliation by overtly displaying forgiveness and alliance. While these displays were nationally comforting, they were historically problematic because, as David Blight argues, they created "a 'whites-only brotherhood' that was achieved at the expense of Black Americans" (12). By seeking explicit reconciliation through these public exchanges, leaders failed to address what caused the war.

The specific form of reconciliation through natural cycles that this project identifies ended with the advent of veteran's reunions in the 1880s; however, the rhetoric of reconciliation as a national ideal continued to the end of the twentieth century. In 1906, the Act for Preservation of American Antiquities ordered the federal preservation of scenic natural landscapes, and by 1935, the National Park Service (NPS) became

responsible for maintaining battlefields. Cultivating parks to present military history leads to challenging questions about what Civil War story those national parks will tell, and for the greater part of the twentieth century, reconciliation was the dominant narrative. National parks presented their battlefields as sites of “‘sacred ground,’ hallowed by the sacrifice of soldiers who gave their lives in support of their ideals” (qtd. in Spielvogel 19). As historian Christian Spielvogel reminds us, though, the values provided “as justification for preservation are actually the product of values ‘frozen’ from the late 1880s and early 1890s and in no way reflected popular sentiment ‘as it was’ during the 1860s” (19). Only after a trained historian took over the NPS in the 1990s did the national narrative begin to shift.

Reconciliation became the Civil War theme as soon as writers such as Whitman and Melville deployed natural imagery of renewal, and it continued for over a century after the war, through veteran’s reunions, battlefield preservation, and the rhetoric of courageous conflict surrounding the war. Finally, in 1998, the NPS modified its emphasis to focus on “‘the unique role that the institution of slavery played in causing the Civil War’” (qtd. in Spielvogel 20). Today, battlefields and their museum exhibits include not only details of military strategy and placards to narrate the activities that occurred there, but also historical artifacts speaking to the culture of the period, the objectives of the war, and the outcomes for enslaved people and national culture. While reconciliation may have been a necessary phase for the American public to experience, particularly in the literary imagination, time’s passage allows the nation to more critically analyze and present an accurate history. Continued interrogation of the Civil War period will lead to

even more precise renderings with the eventual goal of a national narrative that addresses the ongoing challenges of equality and justice rather than simply presenting reconciliation.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION: NEW WORLDS AND CHRISTIAN STEWARDSHIP

When Eliza Frances Andrews introduces her idea of the New South into her journal's editorial prologue, she invokes the name for the postbellum South coined by Henry W. Grady in an 1886 speech, multiple articles, and the 1889 publication titled *The New South*. The tradition of naming a place "new" is hardly unprecedented. We can look to early histories of the American nation to see the beginning of the trend with places such as the "New World," and "New England." Early accounts of these "new" locations often serve to convince readers that the new place is better than the old, and an abundance of natural resources is frequently one of the documented improvements.⁸⁹ These new places rely upon descriptions of the landscape, replete with luscious flora and profuse fauna, to convince readers that moving to the new land would be profitable and wise. I conclude with a brief discussion of Henry Grady, who returns to the rhetoric of some of the earliest settlers in what was once considered a "new" land to try bringing the

⁸⁹ Michael Branch begins his anthology *Reading the Roots: American Nature Writing Before Walden* with an excerpt from Christopher Columbus: "I was so astonished by the sight of so much beauty that I can find no words to describe it. For in writing of other regions, their trees and fruit, their harbors and all their other features, I have wrongly used the most exalted language I knew, so that everyone has said that there could not possibly be another region even more beautiful. But now I am silent, only wishing that some other may see this land and write about it." Branch explains: "If Columbus's descriptions of the New World landscapes are mercantilistic and self-promotional, they also demonstrate a genuine enthusiasm for the overwhelming beauty of the new land" (3)

As Len Gougeon reminds us, Thoreau's late nature essays also invoke New World bounty in direct opposition to British society to show that new democratic and social principles surpassed the old.

nation together. Grady's works describe the resources of the South to recruit workers who could revitalize areas impoverished by war and reconstruct infrastructure and commerce without relying on slave labor. His approach relied upon Biblical concepts and promoted the idea of Christian stewardship. Many prominent postbellum voices rely upon the traditions of the earliest American settlers to try erasing the war by advocating using natural resources properly. While discussions of resource wars and stewardship are prevalent today, advocates for an environmental ethic remind us that perhaps if we can work together to steward our resources then perhaps we can one day reach the national unification for which postbellum optimists hoped.

Born in Atlanta in 1851, Henry Grady was raised by his staunch Confederate father as a privileged Southern gentleman.⁹⁰ After his father's death fighting for the Confederacy, Grady went to college to become a newspaper reporter, and following a few years of experience with small town papers, he moved to Atlanta to write for *The Atlanta Constitution*. In 1880, he purchased quarter-ownership in the paper, which is where he made famous his concept of the New South. During his time at *The Constitution*, Grady worked tirelessly to improve the status of Georgia and the New South as a whole, and his avid followers attribute every accomplishment for Atlanta's good in this period to Grady's influence (Harris 59). Grady died young in 1889, disappointing followers who had great hopes for what he could bring the South. His legacy lives through the common use of his New South ideal, of which he was "the very

⁹⁰ Biographical information from Joel C. Harris' Introduction to *Life Of Henry W. Grady: Including his Writings and Speeches*.

embodiment” (Harris, 60). Historian Paul Buck suggests that Grady’s popularity demonstrates how a son of the Old South could serve both the New South and a nation as a whole, providing new optimism for followers around the country. The collection of Grady’s writings and speeches that Joel Chandler Harris edited in 1890 further demonstrates Grady’s popularity. The collection includes over 120 memorial tributes: seventeen poems, sixteen speeches, and ninety-three newspaper articles. Most notably, those tributes originated from equal parts Northern and Southern authors and audiences, demonstrating the national popularity of this young spokesman.

Most Grady tributes focus on his energy and enthusiasm for the New South, referring to Grady as “A Model Citizen,” “A Great Peace-Maker,” “The Best Representative of the New South,” and “A Leader of Leaders,” among other accolades.⁹¹ These elegies discuss how hard he worked to enact his vision of the New South and to help impoverished fellow citizens and the nation recover from war. Because his words held such national and enduring popularity, I conclude with a brief discussion of his approach, which he borrows from one of the nation’s earliest outdoorsmen, John Smith. Indeed, Grady references Smith explicitly in the opening to his famous New South speech. He also echoes Smith’s promotional strategy as he describes the New South, relying upon a centuries-old tactic of advertising the New South as a luscious, profitable nest of resources just waiting for good labor to come harvest them.⁹²

⁹¹ These are the titles of tributes from the Northern and Southern presses that Harris published in his memorial collection.

⁹² Michael Branch places Smith’s writings in the promotional tract genre, common to the seventeenth century. Branch explains that John Smith’s descriptions of New England “created an indelible image of America as the land of plenty; in so doing, however, he also helped initiate a

Grady first describes Smith as an example of the Virginia Cavalier who represents the Old South when he relates a brief anecdote about the conflict between the Cavaliers and the Puritans who coexisted in early America. Grady concludes:

[B]oth Puritan and Cavalier were lost in the storm of the first Revolution, and the American citizen, supplanting both and stronger than either, took possession of the republic bought by their common blood and fashioned to wisdom, and charged himself with teaching men government and establishing the voice of the people as the voice of God. (85)

In Grady's anecdote, the best parts of each group remain after the war and merge to create a new kind of citizen who possesses elements of his forefathers but has been shaped by the war that defined the country. Grady extends this metaphor of the new American citizen, part gallant, bold, outdoorsy cavalier, and part staunch religious Puritan, to place these characteristics upon the merged American citizens of the New South. He shares this story of the past to invoke combined ideals of John Smith's "cavalier" expeditions with Puritan religion. This combination created the ideal citizen after the American Revolution, and Grady relies upon it again in his prescription for the New South.

For Grady, the New South involves Northerners and Southerners working together to take advantage of the available resources and improve the general husbandry, guided by Christian principles. He acknowledges that the plantation lifestyle was not ideal for crop production, and he proposes alternate agricultural methods to improve

tradition within which the natural world is considered primarily in terms of its mercantile value" (51). We see Grady participating in this tradition as he creates his own promotional tract for the New South.

Southern harvests. While providing his vision of the New South, Grady also suggests that Northern farmers should take advantage of the opportunities in the South. After describing his perfect prescription of crop growth and livestock raising, he concludes:

I know that this combination is not surpassed elsewhere on earth. Add to it perfect climate, cheap and abundant lands and labor, good schools and churches, a hospitable people, and you have conditions of advantage that ought to fill the South with thrifty farmers from the North.” (228-229)

Grady’s call for Northern emigration echoes that of John Smith from two hundred fifty years earlier, when Smith wrote his 1616 *A Description of New England*:

Here nature and liberty affords us that freely, which in England we want, or it costeth us dearly. What pleasure can be more, than...to recreate themselves before their own doors, in their own boats upon the sea; where man, woman and child, with a small hook and line, by angling, may take diverse sorts of excellent fish, at their pleasures? And is it no pretty sport, to pull up two pence, six pence, and twelve pence, as fast as you can haul and veer a line? (Smith 55)

In both cases, the “New” land has more to offer than the homeland: abundant resources and the freedom to profit from them. Grady’s description, like Smith’s, intimates that farmers should emigrate south where there are more resources available.⁹³ His suggestion implies that the regions could, indeed must, work together peacefully to profit and to best care for the resources that God has provided them.

⁹³ Edward King’s massive volume *The Great South* takes a similar approach. As King traveled throughout the South after the Civil War, he recorded the vast resources available and continuously suggested that Northern workers could profit from moving down and exploiting them.

A significant portion of Grady's call for unification relies upon what he views as a divine plan. One reason that Grady's ideas resonated so thoroughly through the nation is because he uses Christian rhetoric to describe how the country must work together. And while he does not remove any blame from the South for its part in starting the war, Grady allows the past to remain there, explaining that God has done his work and the war is over. His account of Southern revitalization implies that, after the war, God made more resources available so that citizens from both sides could work together to harvest them. As he tells the story, postbellum Southerners went directly to the work of recovery, and they were blessed by God with additional resources to allow them to thrive:

We shall see how the people of this section, reduced to poverty by a war, the causes, progress, and result of which are beyond this purview, have found honorable way to wealth and prosperity...How the waste places were clothed. How the earth smiled at their rude and questioning touch. How the mountains opened and disclosed treasures not dreamed of before. How, from chaos and desolation, the currents of trade trickled and swelled and took orderly way. How rivers were spanned and the wildernesses pierced with iron rail...And how, above all, an All-wise Hand, disclosing new resources by little less than miracles, led this God-fearing and God-loving people, whom He had chastened, into the ways of peace and prosperity. (144)

Grady's story ascribes some dignity to the fallen South and prescribes a way for them to move forward, stewarding the resources that God has given them to help them recover. He avoids alienating his audience by implying that these resources were not available before the war. Instead he indicates that, after the war, God decided to open the mountains and disclose treasures to revive the Southern economy. Giving the credit to God here allows Grady to avoid dealing with the controversial idea of the Northern Carpetbagger and simply make Southern prosperity between Southerners and their God.

God's gifts come with great responsibility, which is Grady's next concern. He continues: "no people ever held larger stewardship than the people of the South" (145). While definitions of stewardship are certainly debatable, and although notions of Christian land use have shifted over time, Grady seemingly ascribes a moral duty to the South to take care of the resources that God has given them after the war.⁹⁴ The concept of "stewardship" indicates the responsibility of Southerners to properly care for their resources. God gave these resources to humankind; therefore, humans should use them in a respectful and appropriate manner to mend the wounds of war. Grady outlines the South's responsibilities:

...It is theirs to settle the problem of the two races, vastly the most important matter with which the Republic has to deal. It is theirs to produce and enlarge the crop of the staple that largely clothes the world. It is theirs to conserve and develop the final and fullest supply of coal and iron, and to furnish from their enormous forests the lumber and hard woods to meet the world's demand until exhausted areas can be recovered. It is theirs to bring the matchless domain that is their hoe up to the full requirements of its duty to the world at large, until every debt is discharged, every right relation established, every obligation met, and industry and civilization find no obstruction from one of its limits to the other. (145-146).

⁹⁴ Notions of God-given land rights, generally coming from the book of Genesis in the Bible, have been interpreted many ways. The belief that the Earth belongs to Christians has led to resource wars and genocide, and it has also led to Green Christian efforts for preservation and conservation. Again, my intent here is not to debate the history of Christian land appropriation but to consider the implications of the stewardship ethic that Grady prescribes. For more on Christianity as the source of environmental destruction, see Karen Kilcup's *Fallen Forests*, particularly chapter one. For more on a Christian environmental ethic, see John Hart's *Sacramental Commons: Christian Ecological Ethics*. For the historical shift in Christian philosophy, see Robert Booth Fowler's *The Greening of Protestant Thought*.

The responsibility that he ascribes to the Southerners is a unique blend: he not only expects them to use their God-given resources to better themselves, but he also expects them to take care of those resources. They are called to “produce *and* enlarge,” “conserve *and* develop,” to help depleted areas replenish. Grady sees that proper harvesting of resources can provide the economic uplift that the South needs, allow other areas of the country to recover, and also, perhaps most importantly, provide ample labor to employ the multitudes who need profitable work. Grady intends for these resources to be used and developed to alleviate the nation’s pain after the war.

Properly using the resources that God has provided will do more than just bring the South out of its current state. The kind of stewardship that Grady prescribes will also atone for the sins of the past and provide for a profitable and bountiful future. For Grady, finding the balance of stewardship may indeed be the way to save the nation, as long as the path forward is governed by Christian principles. He reminds listeners, “Surely, God has led the people of the South into this unexpected way of progress and prosperity,” invoking again the image of a contrite South that has learned from past mistakes and will gladly work with Northerners to best use the abundant resources provided by God to help reunite the nation (206).

This project has examined three phases of environmental understanding in relation to the Civil War to demonstrate how humans cannot form their own identities without understanding the natural world around them. As that environment changes, so do we. While’s Grady’s prescription for national unification changes the terms of the relationship between human identity and the environment, it very clearly outlines the

necessity of human/nature interaction, whether that exchange be for conservation, development, enlargement, production, or any other way of interacting with the land and the resources it provides. Grady's notion of responsibility strikes me most as the piece of his prescription that we must carry away with us. This ecological ethic that he prescribes echoes throughout some of the writings that brought conservation back to the conversation, including authors such as Aldo Leopold and Wendell Berry. Leopold's "land ethic" situates humans as members of a larger community. For Leopold, when God said "take dominion over them," He did not intend for man to be "conqueror of the land-community" but "plain member and citizen of it" (Leopold 240; Genesis 1:1). Berry "argues that humans are responsible to use creation in a way that 'safeguards God's pleasure in His work' and allows us to participate in that pleasure" (Bilbro, with Berry 149). Each of those relationships place humans in a precarious position where we do "use" nature and its resources through the belief that God has blessed us with them while recognizing a responsibility to nature that is quite similar to our responsibility to fellow-humans.

War ravages those responsibilities in ways that seem irreversible; however, the optimism of figures such as Henry Grady reminds us that nature will provide even after wartime atrocity. Recovering from the damage requires recognizing nature's importance to our national identity, responsibly harvesting resources, and accepting the duties of stewardship that will lead to reconciliation.

As I write these words over a century after Grady spoke his, I consider that the effects of the American Civil War on this nation are recognizable still. And while I

hesitate to oversimplify an issue of tremendous complexity and gravity, I do offer the following concluding thought. After examining the way Americans have relied upon their understanding of nature to form their personal and national identities during the wake of a war that split this nation and put it back together again, I wonder if we should reimagine the relationship between humans and nature today. Perhaps if we focus on an ecological ethic and methods of stewardship rather than administering blame, we can finally move towards the reconciliation that the authors in this study longed to see.

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