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NATURE WRITING AND HEALING:
RECOVERING THE WILD SOUL

by

Denice H. Turner

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree

of

MASTER OF SCIENCE

in

English

UTAH STATE UNIVERSITY
Logan, Utah

2003

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ABSTRACT

Nature Writing and Healing:

Recovering the Wild Soul

by

Denice H. Turner, Master of Science

Utah State University, 2003

Major Professor: Dr. Brock Dethier
Department: English

In this study, I explored how nature writing could be seen as healing text. I described some common problems associated with the construction of trauma and grief narratives and examined how nature writers dealt with them. The study began with my frustration at being unable to write a healing narrative for myself and progressed as I integrated research that informed my own writing.

The literature I read included a variety of perspectives, from Jungian and traditional psychotherapy to current writing theory. I used the theory to comment on the nature writing texts as I discovered them. Using the words and stories of nature writers to fuel my own, I explored how their writing was both personally reflective and socially aware. In particular, I examined the importance of the natural world as a significant “other” for the writers and analyzed how their relationship with nature brought meaning and solace to their grieving.

(71 pages)

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Foremost, I would like to thank my husband, Lan, for respecting my own wild nature, for supporting me through another degree, for believing in my writing, and for long walks of healing conversation. I thank him for growing with me and for understanding that soulful choices are often impractical. I thank my boys, Ben and Arthur, for their patience with my long hours of writing and for reminding me that to be properly wild I must continue to play.

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I thank Doug Peacock, for being willing to talk to me in person about Vietnam, and for sharing his deep love and respect for the wild. Wild souls, all, I thank you for mentoring a most awkward mending.

Denice H. Turner

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PROLOGUE

Except for a few flies buzzing the remnants of cream cheese and lunchmeat, the room is still. Outside the lake sparkles, blue with white sequins. An occasional Jet Ski glosses by, but otherwise we are uninterrupted, twenty or so English teachers, circled about in moldy orange chairs, sharing bits of our lives in writing, stories we have painstakingly rendered over the last few days. Across from me, a woman carefully reads her narrative, part of a triptych about her mother's death. She stops abruptly between paragraphs. It is too personal, too hard, to say the next words. The paper wavers in her hands and she sets her jaw, as if daring herself to continue. At last the words burst forth in strangled sobs. Her story becomes part of all of our stories.

It's the last day of the advanced Utah Writing project, the final read-through. Together we share moments of loss, courage, humiliation, joy, faith, humor, the range as varied as the participants themselves. When each writer finishes, we rally around her, whispering words of support and pointing out effective passages. By the time we finish, hours later, we will be ready to go back to our nonwriter lives, having had the grace of a listening community to hear us out.

I wait for my turn, embarrassed. I've written some lukewarm drivel about seeing JAWS in the sixth grade. It's not that the writing's necessarily terrible; it's just that it's not what I wanted to write. I wanted to write something significant; I wanted to write about loss; I wanted to leave my pain on paper. But I didn't know how. In the end I read my memoir and went home feeling awful. Later, at home I threw the writing anthology in the trash wondering if there really was such a thing as writing that heals.

INTRODUCTION: IN SEARCH OF HEALING STORY

After the workshop at the lake, I was troubled for a long time. Something had gone wrong, but I couldn't pin it down. Although I wrote occasionally in my journal, I never felt much better. I'd never heard of "expressivist logotherapy" (Johnson), but I'd often heard people say things like "I just had to write about this," or "once I write about this I can put it behind me." The secret, I thought, was to describe a moment of trauma or heartbreak in great detail and the pain would all go away. Other writers seemed to make it work as they wrote about poignant memories and read them with tearful, cathartic finality. But the more I described my past, the more I missed it. It wasn't supposed to be that way.

It turns out I was partially right, but naïve about the process. I didn't know at the time that healing narratives are complicated. They require more than description, and longer than a week at the lake. Writing to heal is not taking out the garbage. It is not simply "getting it out," nor is it just feeling better. And the pitfalls are significant: the writing can become self-absorbed, taking on a kind of "fundamental blindness" (Payne 116); it can be used simply to vent, becoming psychically counterproductive (DeSalvo 25); writers and instructors may confuse "honest" writing with "good" writing (Payne 119); writers may be silenced or begin to fictionalize if they are unable to situate their grief in an acceptable "frame" (Gilmore 26, 33); and such writing may be resisted in a class or workshop if participants feel pressured to write about painful experiences.

Because I found myself grappling with all of these problems, I began studying writing and healing in earnest. I chose theorists and writers whom I believed could help me sort out my own botched attempts at healing, while shedding light on the issues that

complicate healing narratives. My journey began in frustration. I do not know how it will end.

Journal Entry
Saturday, November 23, 2002

I don't know where to begin. The stack of books surrounding me suggests that there are many ways to live a life story. I reread a section of Kittredge's Owning it All, where he writes, "We find ourselves weathering a rough winter of discontent, snared in the uncertainties of a transitional time and urgently yearning to inhabit a story that might bring sensible order to our lives" (4). Writing is supposed to be a way of consciously inhabiting your own story. So, I sit in front of a blank computer screen and ask myself what kind of story I have lived so far and what kind of story I wish to live.

It's hard to choose among the themes and character choices. I look at journals from the early years of our marriage and see a young woman trying very hard to inhabit a story that didn't fit quite right. For her, the role of wife and mother was like trying on her mother's bra in the seventh grade. It was strangely new and exciting at first, but she finally had to admit that she just didn't fill it out properly.

I wonder what that young woman would think of the older woman I became. In those days it was easy to believe that any renegade feelings I had would go away, that eventually I'd have the right stuff. I knew the story I was supposed to live. The idea was that if I lived the "right" life long enough, eventually my feelings would fall into line. But I don't believe that anymore.

I just continue to inhabit the story I've lived so far as a wife and mother of two brown-eyed boys who begin to outgrow and out-arm wrestle me. A ten-year veteran of the Utah public schools who loves her work. It sounds so nice; so I can't figure out why I'm torn. What could possibly be wrong? Why do I surround myself with books and articles as if they will perform a magic ritual? What do I expect from others stories? And if my story is not enough, what is missing? How can they help me to tell my own?

Maybe the books have been my downfall, part of my graduate work; part of what my mother believes is a midlife crisis. If I would just go back to church I'd live happily ever after. It's the unspoken advice every time I go home, complaining that my classes are demanding or that I feel overwhelmed by the stacks of student writing that needs grading on my desk. Without a word, I hear them, "*why are you making it hard on yourself? When will you grow out of it? Why must you always fight?*"

I fight because I still don't fit a story that feels right. In the story I want to live I'm a generous and kind protagonist, someone who did something besides watch a clock, go home, and watch a television; someone who made a difference. But the other me keeps intruding, the one that doesn't give a shit about anyone else, the one who wants to sever all ties and live disastrously, the one who followed the rules for too long and wants to break them hard.

In this way the books are my salvation. They show me places where others have navigated. They are not my stories, but maybe they will help define mine.

I want to know why I'm so needy. I want to know why it should hurt so much to be grown up and have everything I ever wanted. It shouldn't be this way. From the outside looking in, it must seem strange. It doesn't matter how many marathons I run or how many "goals" I add to my accomplishment agenda, I always

come up short. I feel forty coming and I feel old. Maybe I haven't lived wildly enough and maybe I'm too old to do so. What if I spend the rest of my life in regret? That's what bothers me, really. How long? Or is it regret either way? The world whirrs by; our nation chomps at the bit of war, and all I care about is me and that's sad.

I long to inhabit a story I can be proud of, one with less regret. There isn't a handy way to compare and contrast your life with what is and what could have been. Salvation must be in the ability to live in love with the present moment and not with ghost memories of the past. So, I look to the books and the research and the theory about how it is to heal through words and story, and I write and feel empty and write some more and wonder if it ever happens: healing.

SILENCING THE VOICE: AN ABSENCE OF WILDNESS

"The greater part of what my neighbors call good I believe in my soul to be bad, and if I repent of anything, it is very likely to be my good behavior. What demon possessed me that I behaved so well?"

Henry David Thoreau "Economy" from Walden

The trouble started long before I stumbled across nature writers like William Kittredge, a man who for years defined himself by his own "dis-ease," a man who understood that a link to the land was a link to the soul. "There is in all of us an ache to care for the world," he writes in Hole in the Sky before he goes on to explain:

We don't seem to be able to understand what is generosity and what is selfishness, and in consequence we educate ourselves into two-hearted confusion as we try to define our responsibilities. We want to know: where are we, and why were we ever born? We want to understand why we need to understand. Something is wrong, part of us is missing and we know it . . . [W]e are very frightened: we are driven to the unending and utterly impossible task of trying to heal ourselves back into whatever we understand as holy. (9)

I recognized myself in his words immediately. Something was missing in my life that I couldn't define. It was something that couldn't be found by simply adhering to a set of rules, but it was something that couldn't be found by living in complete absence of them, either. It seemed that story was the key, but I couldn't see how. I was in the middle of sorting out the roots of my own two-hearted confusion, a tension based on incompatible mythologies.

Jerome Bruner explains in On Knowing, that a "mythologically instructed community" provides a range of metaphoric identities to which one may aspire (36). Without being conscious of it, I had chosen a metaphoric identity within the myth of happiness as innocence: the Christian ideal of Man before the Fall.

I didn't realize there might be problems with happiness-as-innocence until I began to lose innocence. The notion of a "range" of identities was inconceivable to me. All I knew was that I was losing the identity I was supposed have. Bruner explains that this kind of tension stems from two competing mythic plots: the plot of innocence and the plot of cleverness. The former eschews complexity and awareness, while the latter values both as part of the cultivation of competence. It never occurred to me to question the mythic plot that I lived, the one in which the gods punish knowledge as evil or hubris (Adam and Eve), so I never imagined a plot in which the gods might assist cleverness (Odysseus and Penelope). Because my mythology equated the end of innocence with the end of happiness it was no surprise that once I lost innocence I didn't become wise. I became miserable.

Growing up Mormon in rural Utah, I was blissfully unaware that there was much of a world west of the rodeo arena or east of the Crossroads Café. The mud in the irrigation ditches and the dragonflies buzzing the flooded front lawn were enough for a ten-year-old girl who figured that if her brothers could go without their shirts then she could too. It was a land of promise where there was space enough to do such things. Brigham Young had said "the desert would bloom like the rose" and he was right. We bundled together in church each Sunday, so many tame roses, clipped and even. Ours was certainty and stability. I was taught from the beginning that "wickedness never was happiness" and I believed it. I would not be spoiled by outside influences or worldly ideas. We lived the lives God meant us to, in the place He had prepared.

I left for college reluctant and frightened, trusting, as Kittredge had, in the "native straightness of things" (150). Mine was to be a "straight and narrow" path to God that

didn't allow for inconsistencies: a master Plan of Salvation. Even though I knew there was repentance in case one went astray, it was the path of misery and lacked the security of the no-fault version. The best I could do was to be good and never ever change, or I would risk an unhappy version of life, and afterlife, with no guarantees. I lived the plan of surety and the plan was evident in my speech. I learned to say, "I know" before I ever said, "I hope."

A few years later at church dance, I fell in love with Lan, a tall, freckled, returned missionary who fit all of the scribbled ideals in my journal. Together we planned our marriage and imagined our lives together. He would have his own business and I would stay home with our children in a cozy, well-kept house. I would cook meals and die happy. The trick to happiness was in doing it properly. Engaged young, Kittredge had felt the same idealism: "What we thought we were going to do, in our beginning, was get everything right and never make any mistakes, so long as we lived" (108). There was a way to live right and a lot of ways to live wrong. We wouldn't get it wrong.

With such a script, it was no surprise that I didn't know how to weather a real marriage; our story was over at the beginning. The credits had rolled the moment we walked out the front doors of the Temple. Nobody mentioned that life would go on, that it would be hard to find work, that the house would be cluttered, that the babies would shriek. It never occurred to me that staying home with children would be isolating, that the church wouldn't have all of the answers, or that both of us might want something more.

Six years into our marriage the bottom dropped out. We both had what seemed important: I had my degree; he had a career; we had a baby and attended church without fail. But I was dangerously unhappy. I had taken a position as a dorm adult at The Madeira School, the only way we could afford to live in northern Virginia. We paid for the luxury of

my being a stay-at-home mom by living with thirty-two teenage girls. But the daily dose of racial division, teenage boys in showers and under beds, mischievous pranks, and erratic screams of glee or rage, day and night, from the phone booth adjacent to our two-room apartment took its toll. I was a caged animal.

Considering the chaos we lived in, it should have come as no surprise that Lan would find more comfort in a career than a home and better companionship in a coworker than a wife. I was too naïve to believe that bad things happened to good couples like us; so when Lan told me he was involved with another woman I couldn't begin to make sense of it. We decided that to save our marriage we would move back to Utah where we could be free from the evils of the outside world. A return to a state of grace.

Even though we managed to patch our lives and muddle through, our story was getting dangerously off course. Lan became increasingly disenchanted with the Mormon Church, and the more cynical he became, the more I countered by becoming more dutiful. To balance things, I became everything to everybody: a model wife and mother, a more faithful member of The Church, an example to women on life and loving. We would survive the evil of the Last Days.

Healing for me was a matter of returning to purity. It was recovering an identity of innocence that might bring back the happiness we had lost; it was conforming to a story that was acceptable. My testimony became the common one in which Evil had made me stronger in my prescribed church roles rather than weaker. It was the Christian ideal: the suffering I endured made me more able to lovingly accept the imperfections of others. Martyrdom as healing.

It was a role that was hard to maintain. I was proud of my ability to recover so quickly, but my idealism became increasingly detached from reality. Questions began to surface that I couldn't answer: what if my quest for perfection was superficial? What if my kind of compassion was really snobbery in disguise? What if I secretly resented being nice and compliant and proper and obedient? What if I didn't like being a homemaker—not even a little bit? What if I was bored?

I became disenchanted with church sermons and my own unrealistic principles. My emotions were a coiled spring that became more dangerous as I repressed them. I had hoped that if I played the proper role my emotions would fall into line, but they didn't. I imagined that I just wasn't spiritual enough. Finally, I found myself driving recklessly around Logan in a frustrated, blind rage without being able to say why. From a pay phone at Seven Eleven I heard myself begging for something to mend my life. The antidepressants I started that night worked for a long time.

Although I'd managed to subdue my feelings, they eventually caught up to me. Seven years later in a bout of feverish rebellion, I decided that I would not miss out on anything. I was tired of trying to fit an identity that seemed worn and trite, one that my heart had left behind. Unhappy with my role, I created a new one that flew in the face of everything I ever believed. If there were rules, I would break them; if there were conventions, I would defy them. I took on a devastating affair of my own, experimented with lesbianism, stole drugs, and drank hard.

It broke my heart.

Even though I told myself I was finally living passionately, I couldn't handle the betrayal. There had to be more to me than a woman who slinked around drinking tequila

and looking for action. The poles were shifting; I loved Lan. I wanted to mend our marriage, but the only model I had for such a thing was one of Christian orthodoxy—I'd have to confess and repent. The acceptable testimony would be one of remorse. It would need to detail all of my transgressions. It would need to include my desire to return to active church attendance, and it would need to be told to the proper church authorities.

But there were problems. I didn't know how to testify to my own experience and still be truthful. The story I felt compelled to tell and the story I was supposed to tell were different. I also knew that the story I needed to tell was a shared history, and I couldn't figure out how to tell about my own experience without implicating others I cared deeply about. Besides, I was pretty sure I didn't have the right kind of remorse or desire to return to my old identity. I was sorry that I had hurt a lot of people's feelings, but I was more sorry for myself. I missed the excitement of the chase and the crazy collapse of sexual boundaries. I couldn't tell if I was sorry I had sinned or sorry I was *finished*.

After months of constant, raw misery, I realized I had to do something. I had been told all of my life that without repentance I would never feel better, so I resolved to try. It took most of a Coors six-pack before I was able to manage any kind of confession.

I admitted a few things I'd done to our Bishop, but choked when he explained that I needed to tell his counselors as well. It didn't seem right that I would tell my deepest secrets, ones that still tore me to bloody bits inside, to a panel of men that I hardly knew. He scheduled a date for a Bishop's court, but I never went. I wondered what it would be like to leave the church and redefine honor for myself. What if I decided to live every moment in all its immediacy and sensuality and love instead of holding out for a hazy eternal

reward? What if I lived in questions rather than answers? What if I didn't need approval from the church administration to change?

I couldn't live a story of reckless abandon anymore, but, after selling our home and starting over with my husband and our two boys, I realized I couldn't just go back to being a wife, mother and middle school teacher in the way I had known it before. There was a constant, nagging unhappiness, a tearing sense of loss and a screaming addiction to irresponsible wildness that I hadn't counted on. I felt like I needed to make sense of the story I had lived so that I could go on with a new one, unencumbered by the constant images and emotions that clouded my thoughts.

My education as a writing teacher came largely from expressivist mentors who advocated personal writing as a way of sorting out difficult life events. Because of their influence, I thought that if I could write about my experience then I'd be able to put it behind me. I saw the Writing Project at Bear Lake as the perfect opportunity to write and find closure.

But I quickly realized that I couldn't simply write down the year's events for a group of teaching peers, most of whom were devout Mormon women. Dori Laub makes it clear in Testimony that bearing witness to trauma is a process that includes a listener, one that is able to hear the narrative. "Testimonies are not monologues; they cannot take place in solitude" (Felman and Laub 70-71). I didn't know that having an able listener was crucial at the time, but I did know there was no way I could openly testify to my own experience, given the audience. Although there were fragments of events that I could write in just the right context with just the right spin, I couldn't get at anything I recognized as true.

I started several drafts of separate memories at the lake, but all of them were terrible. I could hardly stand to look at the writing myself, let alone share it. Everything I had written came out angry, tragic or reflectively phony. At one point, to get at a portion of the truth, I even tried lying outright. I listened while other participants read their work, and the more successfully they rendered their topics (which were often traumatic) the more I resented them for being able to find closure in narrative. Although I wanted to believe G. Lynn Nelson, that writing was “a way to tell your own stories, heal your wounds, to find a bit of peace and love” (9), I couldn’t make it work. And the more I kept at it, the more I felt like I was creating a woe-is-me monologue that was unfit for human consumption. I gave it up and went back to work.

But the ache persisted. Even though teaching a room full of hormonal teens usually blocked out any stray memories or images, I was miserable; I’d tear up in the middle of giving a spelling test; I had trouble focusing; I couldn’t find meaning in the job I used to love; I smiled less; I drank more. It was time for a change. Graduate school would fix things.

My coursework in composition theory led me to a more in-depth study of writing and healing. I found that a successful grief narrative worked, not just in the telling of story, but in a story’s ability to revisit and revision past experience. Writing to heal wasn’t a write-and-be-happy program as much as it was a process of retrieval, integration and redefinition (MacCurdy 172-173).

Leigh Gilmore describes trauma as “that which breaks the frame” (8), an “unprecedented” or “extreme” experience that may manifest itself in flashbacks, emotional flooding or dissociation (32). I had the emotional flooding, but I didn’t feel like I had the

right to call myself a trauma survivor. Survivors came back from wars or endured sexual or physical abuse or lived through the death of loved ones. I didn't have the dignity of a survivor; I had simply and selfishly screwed up my life with no one to blame but myself. But the images kept playing and the emotions kept coming in waves. They were the first thing I awoke to in the morning and the last thing I put to rest at night. It didn't matter if I spent the day teaching children or careening down a hill on a snowboard or flying a Cessna into Bravo airspace; the feelings and memories always came back. I worried that I was going to lose my resolve and find any replacement for the crazed, sexual life I missed. Although my feelings and experience didn't fit my own definition of trauma, they did fit Ian Hacking's: "Trauma," he writes, "is a wound to the soul" (Gilmore 25).

The more I read, the more I saw that Gilmore's definition of trauma was corroborated by others. Felman describes traumatic events as those that are "in excess of our frames of reference" (Felman and Laub 5); Laub explains that such events are "outside the range of associatively linked experiences (Felman and Laub 69). Given these definitions of trauma, it made sense that I couldn't find the right words to describe my experience. The story I had to tell was too shocking, too improper. It was one in which I was ashamed of my feelings and decisions rather than proud of them. It was a story where I had failed people I loved. And worst of all, it was a story that didn't feel finished.

Brain research shows that the more emotionally charged a memory is, the more deeply it becomes imprinted on the brain due to the release of stress hormones (MacCurdy 164). Intensely emotional or traumatic events also bypass the cerebrum (the rational, cognitive center of the brain) and go directly to the limbic system (the unconscious,

emotional center of the brain) where they are encoded as nonintegrated images and emotion.

The specific areas within the limbic system in which trauma becomes lodged are the hippocampus and the amygdala, both of which are preverbal and nonverbal. Marian MacCurdy describes the two this way: the hippocampus registers where on the path you saw the rattlesnake and the amygdala registers the emotional reaction to the sighting (163-164). Therefore, when the event is reexperienced, it doesn't surface as narrative, but rather intense emotion (as recorded by the amygdala) or graphic image (as recorded by the hippocampus) or both.

It makes sense in terms of species survival. Neither response is processed through the frontal lobes at first, which saves time in the event of danger, but it also means that traumatic experiences are permanently encoded nonverbally, as images and emotions rather than sequentially. Because of the non-narrative encoding, Judith Herman states, "traumatic events sever . . . normally integrated functions from one another. The traumatized person may experience intense emotion without any clear memory of the event, or may remember everything in detail without emotion. She may find herself in a constant state of vigilance and irritability without knowing why" (Johnson 88-89).

Dori Laub describes the effects this way: "Trauma survivors live not with memories of the past, but with an event that did not proceed through to its completion, has no ending, attained no closure, and therefore, as far as its survivors are concerned, continues into the present and is current in every respect" (Felman and Laub 69). For Herman, healing is a process of weaving the raw fragments of the traumatic memory into narrative (Johnson 89); for Laub, it is a process of reconstructing a history by re-externalizing the event (Felman and Laub 69).

It seemed simple enough. Once a story could be brought to the neocortex for analysis of meaning and integration (through visualization and narration) a person could finally put trauma to rest, or at least reduce its emotional impact. But I still had trouble seeing how my experience had been traumatic. The symptoms described by the trauma theorists were familiar to me, but I'd never been harmed. If anything, I saw myself more as a perpetrator than a victim.

I found myself wishing I had been victimized, only because it was a script that was available, one that I thought I could voice. Our culture had language for sexual abuse and emotional support for victims but none for participants. I needed to speak but didn't have a model. Moreover, my experience had been complicated by pleasure. I didn't realize there could be harmful effects from boundary violations that were welcome. Women simply didn't report such things. I just knew that women often wrote abuse narratives. I had never heard of Janice Haakin or read her theory on *why*: that when sexual violence is the dominant lens through which a trauma is viewed that women may feel pressured to report their pain in terms of sexual abuse when in reality they are seeking a way to express an as-yet-undefined injury (Gilmore 26).

Even though I was beginning to understand why some memories were hard to leave behind, I couldn't apply the research to my own experience. I was unable to banish my own demons and became increasingly tired of other people's. I had a carload of women's memoir at home, where all the writers stopped short of ever having to recognize themselves as antagonist. Every writer had overcome trauma or found meaning in their lives in a nicely wrapped package of narration, description and reflection.

Meanwhile, I kept writing sporadically. Whenever my feelings got too hard to manage, I tried to describe what had happened. I tried humor and fiction and poetry. I poured out my feelings, but I always ended up feeling worse. Leaving the computer, exhausted and drained, I was ready for more self-destruction. It seemed the more I wrote the worse it got.

In writing groups that inevitably fell apart, I kept my real concerns at a safe distance. Much easier to write angry monologues about growing up conservatively. I wrote and listened to trauma narratives, litanies of disappointment, betrayal, anger, loss. But the writing fell flat somehow. It was exactly what Kathleen Pfeiffer described as “a weepy world of confessions, [an] egocentric sort of self absorption” (670). I hadn’t read Louise DeSalvo’s Writing as a Way of Healing, so I didn’t know that healing work was most effective when the narrative was reflective and balanced, including both positive and negative memories (57-61).

By focusing only on our own negative feelings and experiences, I thought we were missing the boat, but I wasn’t sure how. We weren’t reflecting or integrating or establishing connections between each other and with the world (DeSalvo 43). We were wallowing. It was awful. Although we focused on iconic images, described them, and put them into narrative, it didn’t feel wholesome. I wondered if we were becoming attached to our pain in a dangerous way. We described our “dark night” encounters, but as we did so our writing turned progressively inward. The writing that we should have been using to establish healing connections was isolating us from those connections. The more I wrote about my frustration and anger, the less I focused on insight that might have helped me rethink my identity. I felt cheated and began to agree with David Bartholomae that personal writing (and clearly healing writing) was nothing short of “sentimental realism” (MacCurdy 158).

Expressivist bullshit.

With six credits to go for my MS and a projected thesis aimed at debunking the cult of “whining and healing,” I registered for a nature writing class. I didn’t know exactly what nature writers did, but the topic intrigued me. I imagined nature writers in the wild, beanies on heads, field glasses in hand, arguing over whether the finches went “teeyup” or “chideeyup.” I did not expect personal writing, or heaven forbid, healing writing, so the first day we took turns sharing our work I was horrified when the first reader began her essay by describing her depression. I wanted a graduate class not a support group. But our visiting professor, Robert M. Pyle, seemed unperturbed. He critiqued the writing and mentioned that nature writers commonly include their own painful life experiences as part of their observations of the natural world, something we were welcome to do if we liked. He brought in examples, including William Least Heat-Moon and David James Duncan. I was reading trauma narratives again.

And I was writing. For years I had been silent; I couldn’t write about what hurt the most, so I didn’t write anything at all. Now it was my job to go on walks and observe nature and write about it objectively as well as personally. For reasons that I couldn’t place, this writing mattered. Taking the time to observe and label and describe a muskrat or mallard seemed superfluous in terms of the get-to-the-heart-of-the-pain prescriptiveness of writing and healing, but it helped me get some critical distance from my unhappiness. Even though I wasn’t confronting my angst, observing and describing nature required all of my attention to be immediately in the present tense, something I hadn’t been able to do for ages.

The writing, although it didn’t fit the criteria for describing the wound, fit other criteria for a healing narrative. The free associations of people and place helped me

remember that I had wonderful memories associated with the land and with others. Without consciously doing so, I began to write narratives that were more balanced, more reflective and more forgiving. Through the writing I recalled an earlier, more joyous self, one who roamed the mountains for hours digging for horned toads and gophers, one who made it a point to look for carrots under the Queen Anne's Lace. She was a self that was formed by dirt and aspen, not by culture and role. I wondered if she could help me find my way home.

I realized that my fixation with living the "right" life interfered with my ability to live a dynamic life of continual revision. It didn't occur to me to interpret my own experience beyond the lenses of good and evil. According to my mythological framework I had been evil, so I should feel bad. Bruner explains this as a common tendency:

In our own time, in the American culture, there is a deep problem generated by the confusion that has befallen the myth of the happy man. It reflects itself in the American personality. There still lingers the innocent Christian conception that happiness is the state of the natural man . . . and that it is something we have done or failed to do as individuals that creates a rather Protestantized and private unhappiness. (39)

He goes on to suggest that as art and science progress, human experience does not handily fit into this mythological lens, creating psychic tension from the perceived incompatibility: "And so one finds a new generation struggling to find or create a satisfactory and challenging mythic image" that may take the form of a communal effort or a lone search for identity (42).

Nature writers, it seemed to me, were onto something in terms of creating meaning for themselves and within a community of others, both human and nonhuman. Not only were they redefining the traditional mythology of the Fall, rejecting the notion of pastoral nature (the Garden of Eden), innocence and uniformity in favor of wild nature, education and biodiversity; they were challenging contemporary notions of progress and community.

The natural world was not a punishment; it was not something that had to be conquered and tamed, but something that must be preserved and cherished at all costs. Yale professor Stephen R. Kellert writes:

Living diversity remains an essential element of human language, myth, and story, a vital source of our notions of beauty and understanding. The many creatures of the world inspire and instruct. They nurture us intellectually and enrich us emotionally. They provide us with a profound otherness for developing our knowledge of humanity, self, and society. To destroy these species is to replace a community of interest with a world of sadness, loss, and guilt. Kinship would be displaced by isolation, beauty and grace by homogeneity and sameness, story and myth by an enfeebled imagination and understanding. (179)

Living diversity, as Kellert illustrates, is a profound teacher. Its makeup suggests the importance of multiplicity in making meaning and creating identity—the same kind of diversity that allows for healing as T.R. Johnson describes it: “We might thus see writing that heals as writing that . . . helps us to recover the strength to awaken to the flux and flow, the multiplicity of the world” (Johnson 109).

Nature writers who were making sense of their own trauma did so, not only by traditional scriptotherapy—narrating, describing and reflecting—but also through insight gained from loving attention to a powerfully diverse “other” that was more than human. Scott Russell Sanders writes about his father’s alcoholism and premature death by attending to the weeping willow they planted together; Barry Lopez about his own sexual abuse, through careful attention to natural history; Scott Slovic about the death of his infant son, through a call for environmental valuation; Terry Tempest Williams about the loss of her mother and grandmother to cancer through attention to the rise of the Great Salt Lake and the loss of bird species; Doug Peacock about the horrors of Vietnam through becoming the voice of the grizzly.

In all of the narratives, the most striking feature to me was how the writing collapsed traditional binaries: it was intimately personal and yet public as well, scientifically sound and yet artistically rendered, concerned with the self and concerned with others as it balanced good and bad memories. The writing was remarkably healthy somehow.

I wondered what the writers were doing exactly. Were they writing to heal themselves or writing to heal the Earth? Did their stories fit within the parameters of healing narrative? If so, could their work extend the conversations within writing and healing? If Scott Russell Sanders was right when he said, "the geography of the land and the geography of the spirit are one terrain" (Allister 35), could the soul learn healing from earth?

Impressed by the literature, I began reading the research in writing and healing in earnest, shifting my focus on healing texts from potential problems to possible models. In the end, my central questions became, "how do nature writers make sense of their own trauma, and what can their writing teach me about healing narratives?"

Mark Allister explains that nature writers have a unique ability to stand "both outside and inside the text; outside in writing exposition about a subject; inside in making that exposition part of the grieving process" (2). By focusing on an external subject, they create a significant "other" that serves as a basis for reflection and imagination. This Other may serve a literal or metaphorical role, or both. For nature writers the Other, whether landscape or an animal, may serve as a witness to trauma when human agents fail; Doug Peacock, for instance "found it easier to talk to bears than priests" upon his return from Vietnam (Grizzly Years 18). Scott Russell Sanders's dead father comes back to him as a red-tailed hawk, offering solace and wisdom (929). While Terry Tempest Williams is mourning her

grandmother's death she is comforted by two screech owls, a gift she believes is sent from her grandmother (273).

Writers like these helped me realize that my definition of healing was problematic. On one hand I was fixated on a biblical notion of healing: a one time, miraculous, life-changing event. A return from a wayward identity. And on the other I was stuck on a pop psych version: a twelve step, feel-good program of prose. I had to learn that healing is not about banishing pain but about allowing oneself to be changed and informed by it. It wasn't about returning to a prior, purer identity but about navigating the interplay of multiple identities (Bruner 36). Healing wasn't the practice of erasing a wound, but a process of bringing wisdom to the wounding, a wisdom that requires the ability to constantly encounter and embrace that which is Other" (Johnson 101).

Healing in this context is not a blissful destination but rather a process of learning and changing. Its focus on development and adaptation reflects Carl Rogers's process in On Becoming a Person. Rogers explains that the more mentally healthy patients are, the less they live in a state of stasis and fixidity. They are able to construct meaning in less rigid ways. A healing person, in his view, is the one who can say, "I am the one who chooses' and 'I am the one who determines the value of an experience for me'" (122). According to Rogers, the ability to interpret and value one's own life events allows for complexity; it moves a person beyond the simple opposites of good or evil, or feeling bad and feeling better.

The nature writers I studied were able to reflect on the value of their experiences and revision themselves in the process, but they do not become endlessly happy. Terry Tempest Williams still misses her mother and grandmother; Doug Peacock worries that he still has

trouble relating to humans; Scott Slovic cannot bring himself to face his son's ashes; Scott Russell Sanders looks for the sign that will signal his own alcoholic dependency. William Kittredge wonders if the "dis-ease" that took him years to cure is, in fact, gone entirely.

Although the writers don't necessarily discover happier selves after trauma, they do encounter wiser selves illustrative of Rogers's self-as-process. They become persons who can experience new ways of being. They reflect the kind of healing MacCurdy describes when she writes, "Healing is neither a return to some former state of perfection nor the discovery or restoration of some mythic, autonomous self. Healing, as we understand it, is precisely the opposite. It is a change from a singular self, frozen in time by a moment of unspeakable experience, to a fluid, more narratively able, more socially integrated self" (7).

I believe that in order for nature writers like Kittredge, Slovic, Williams and Peacock to become more integrated they needed to write. But they needed more than writing; they needed to look to the land and its subjects for meaning. All of them become, quite literally, grounded. It is the relationship with otherness that makes their healing narratives possible and their revisioned selves more socially integrated rather than progressively isolated. Scott Slovic, for example, cannot suffer in isolation after the loss of his infant son. He integrates his own grieving with concerns about environmental valuation as he tries to see what his loss can teach others when he writes, "A single scholar—a human being—turns to narrative in order to voice his revelation of what it means to lose something dear. But the narrative turns into something broader, more encompassing—an effort to stabilize the self by perceiving and hooking into a larger pattern" (247). It is Slovic's love and concern for a nonhuman Other that leads him beyond an isolationist stance.

Nature writers show how they connect with nature and how their connections contribute to their own sense of identity; but they also show how healing writing can be outwardly focused and aware. By finding a relationship between their own trauma and landscape and animal, nature writers find more than personal insight. They manage what Michelle Payne refers to as “a critical dialogue between ‘self’ and ‘other’” (116). By doing so, the writers avoid the trap of solipsism. What they create is not a weepy, self-absorbed, world of confessions where they look inward and cry, but rather a call to awareness of story and earth.

To see how nature writers achieve balance between their inward need for healing and their attention to the outside world, I will examine Doug Peacock’s Grizzly Years and Terry Tempest Williams’s Refuge. The books, published within a year of each other, include excerpts from the writers’ personal journals as well as later reflections and additions. Both writers manage a critical dialogue between self and other as they work through the past and reach outside themselves for meaning. Both suffer from pain that they do not know how to ease and look for solace in the earth and its creatures. In the end they become advocates for the natural world. Neither is self absorbed or whiney.

The most obvious distinction is that one author is male and the other female, and at least initially, both navigate their trauma according to typically gendered roles: Peacock in paranoid machismo, Williams in obedient submission. The trauma they endure and the insight they gain from the natural world enables them to establish more fluid identities that cross typical gender boundaries by the end of their texts.

Although their own identities become less traditionally gendered as they work through their grief, they are often read by audiences that sympathize with their earlier

identities. Because of his connection to Ed Abbey and *Earth First!*, Peacock appeals to environmental radicals, often male, while Williams appeals to a wider, typically female audience. Their use in the academy is interesting too. *Grizzly Years*, a book that spans roughly twenty years of experience, is rarely studied in college courses, while *Refuge*, a book that details seven years of experience, is frequently included in courses on women's studies and memoir.

Wild nature takes on a different role in each text as well. Wildness must act as witness *to* Peacock's trauma, before he can interact with humans, while Williams manages a necessary dialogue with humans throughout her stages of grieving. The scope of the writer's pain is also radically different. Although they both deal with death and loss, Peacock must sort through combat—death on a large, immediate, often impersonal scale—while Williams' trauma literally hits home: death on an intimate, gradual scale.

Additionally, the roles each must sort out for themselves are different. Peacock must manage some kind of identity between the disparate roles of killer and healer as a Green Beret medic. Williams must assume the role of matriarch long before she is ready to relinquish the role of daughter. My intention is not to prove that one writer's triumph is greater than the other's, but to show how both must change and adapt as part of their healing, a healing that is informed by attention to wildness.

In analyzing the work of the nature writers, I will examine how they can be seen as healing texts. I will examine how the writers include feelings, reflection and description in their writing as they transform the jumbled emotions and images of trauma into coherent, linear narratives. Using Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub's discussion of witness and testimony, I will explore how the writers bear witness to, not only their own trauma, but also

an outside world in need of healing. I will examine the notion of “witness” and question how it may be applied in situations where the one who hears the testimony may be one that is more-than-human. I will explore how the otherness of nature helps the writers testify to their own changing identities and examine how reflecting on nature helps the writers cope when other means of expression fail.

So it begins. Yet for me the study isn't merely academic. By watching how the writers move through their pain, perhaps I can see through my own.

DOUG PEACOCK: A NEED FOR FIERCE HEALING

"I would not have every man, or every part of a man, cultivated, any more than I would have every acre of earth cultivated: part will be tillage, but the greater part will be meadow and forest, not only serving an immediate use, but preparing a mould against a distant future, by the annual decay of the vegetation it supports." Henry David Thoreau, "Walking" from Walden

When I first encountered Doug Peacock, he was fictional. He was the beer drinking, patrol car-stealing, bullet-dodging, bridge blasting, angry post-war lunatic of Edward Abbey's Monkey Wrench Gang. It was hard not to like his character at least a little, George W. Hayduke, a man who lived on his own terms, sabotaging bulldozers and defying authority, spitting in the face of progress, and measuring distances in beer consumption. But the caricature lacked depth; he was a self-destructive, petulant outlaw spoiling for a fight, but that was about it. A "one dimensional dolt" who never grew up.

Later, when I read "The Big Snow," by Doug Peacock, an essay that reduced me to tears in its raw love and graciousness, I was told that Abbey's character was based on Peacock. I couldn't believe the connection. Aside from the obvious—his war experience and wilderness savvy—the similarities eluded me. I found Grizzly Years, a compilation of bits and pieces from Peacock's Vietnam journal woven together with years of stories from scattered field notes on grizzlies, and tried to construct the man in my mind. What drew me to him was his ability to navigate paradox, to live extremes and learn from them. In his writing, he is at once adversary and advocate; spokesman and recluse; wounded and warrior; scientist and artist; teacher and learner. A man who is hard to pin down.

Grizzly Years is much like its writer: hard to situate. It is trauma narrative in that the author works through his psychic pain from Vietnam, and yet it is documentary as it records grizzly habitat, diet and behavior. But limiting the book to either limits its scope. As Jack

Turner observes in The Abstract Wild, the book is much more than memoir; it is a book about how wilderness and wild animals might retrieve a soul, a visionary work that can transform our beliefs and extend the possibilities of what we might come to love (94-95). Although I am situating Peacock's writing as a healing narrative for the purposes of this thesis, there is more to it than a man sorting out his own nightmarish past. It is about a man who manages a loving interchange between himself and fierce Other, and in doing so learns to speak up for both.

Peacock's account begins when he finds himself home from the war less than forty-eight hours from the jungles of Southeast Asia. After serving two consecutive tours of duty as a Green Beret medic, he stares out across the fields of Michigan where he spent his childhood hunting arrowheads and pheasants. He is back among the living, yet he doesn't feel like one of them. He doesn't know that he is "walking wounded." All he knows is that he can't communicate and that he feels strangely angry and detached. "I was not able to talk to anyone," he writes, "I felt like a voyeur, watching myself from the outside; I sat numb and speechless, all the time knowing how hard [it] was on my family" (Grizzly Years 23). Unable to talk to the people who love him most, he buys a Jeep and heads west, following gut instinct and a tattered map of Montana he had kept during the war.

Trying to escape the war that is still raging in his mind, Peacock drives as far into the Montana wilderness as he can get and proceeds on foot with a tent from there. He withdraws entirely from what he calls "syphilization," thinking that "a good dose of wild country" is all he needs. But sudden images invade his thoughts constantly: a young boy gunned down by an entire platoon, a decapitated friend, a group of refugees, mostly women and children, "mowed down" in a crossfire with the VC, an innocent man he murdered in

vengeance. He becomes ill; he refuses to find help; he finds himself fending off images in a fever. Reflecting later on his delirium, he writes, "I watched a long army of the dead march by in single file. I wanted to join them and felt lost when they marched away out of sight. Hallucinations came in waves and I could not shut them off" (69).

Suffering from classic signs of post-traumatic stress disorder, Peacock is haunted by sights and sounds no one wants to know about. He has nightmares and feels detached from the world around him; he mistrusts people and is unable to form relationships; and he doesn't understand that symptoms of PTSD intensify when survivors are, or feel, isolated from their communities (MacCurdy 4). The isolation, Peacock reflects, was worse for Vietnam veterans than for other veterans because the American public saw Nam as "fundamentally immoral. To some you were a murderer and to others you lost the goddamned war; we weren't Browkaw's 'Greatest generation'" (interview). It isn't courage but a sense of alienation that drives him to the difficult task of mending in self-imposed seclusion and silence, an environment that should be antithetical to his recovery. Wilderness is the one place he can tolerate, but it's not only that; it seems like a place that can tolerate him. It is there that he begins to question his identity.

His task is formidable if not impossible. In studying the difficulty Holocaust survivors had in testifying to their own trauma, Dori Laub writes, "it was inconceivable that any historical insider could remove herself sufficiently from the contaminating power of the event so as to remain a fully lucid, unaffected witness, that is to be sufficiently detached from the inside, so as to stay entirely outside the trapping roles, and the consequent identities, either of the victim or the executioner" (Felman and Laub 81). Although Peacock survives a different war, it is similarly polarizing to him in terms of these roles. At once he is

both medic and murderer. He finds himself "in all the wrong places at all the wrong times" as the Tet Offensive rages. He is stalked by the Vietcong and mistakenly shot at by Americans. He loses his comrades, and finds himself in the impossible position of trying to attend to too many casualties at once. He cannot save them all, and in the end he cannot save himself. He turns vengeful, killing the VC he thinks murdered and decapitated a Vietnamese friend. After learning that he killed the wrong man, he tries unsuccessfully to rationalize the incident. He is caught between the impossible extremes of life and death, without anyone who can possibly understand.

Laub believes that bearing witness to a trauma is a process that includes a listener. "[T]here needs to be a bonding, the intimate and total presence of an *other*" (Felman and Laub 70). But the political and social climate back at home makes a listening audience unlikely. In effect, he is suffering from what Laub describes as "an event without a witness." In describing this phenomenon, he writes, "one has to conceive of the world of the Holocaust as a world in which the very imagination of the *Other* was no longer possible. There was no longer an other to which one could say 'Thou' in the hope of being heard" (82). For Peacock, at least initially, the significant other could not be human: "the truth was that any last vestige of religion had been choked out of me during the last two months in Vietnam by the scenes of dead children . . . In the years that followed, I had found it easier to talk to bears than priests. I had no talent for reentering society" (Grizzly Years 18).

It is months before Peacock encounters his unlikely saviors. Soaking in a remote hot spring following what he believes has been a malaria attack, he encounters three grizzlies, a sow and two cubs, foraging for food in the coarse grass. Terrified, he climbs a nearby lodgepole and later reflects, "I sat naked, cowering, perched in the uppermost branches of

the pine tree like some large species of silly bird" (72). After an hour or so, he worries about hypothermia as the wind blows, chilling the forty-degree air even further. He slips back into the spring amazed at the restraint of the mother grizzly, which he believes should have charged him. Once he returns to his tent he realizes that something significant happened in the chance animal encounter. "I felt my mind and soul had been drained," he writes. "I was ready for a mending. Now that I knew real grizzlies lurked in the shadows, my dreams were not so important . . . [f]or the first time since returning to the world, my thoughts chose themselves without Vietnam intruding" (73).

Peacock finds an ironic comfort in the deadliness of grizzlies and begins to make careful observations and field notes. Jack Turner describes Peacock's compulsion this way: "he loves wild nature, sensing correctly that the wild will free him from his anguish. But how? Camping and fishing do not go far enough. The cure must be equal to the terror of its origin, and camping and fishing are not Vietnam" (96). The ferocious "otherness" of the bear makes it possible for Peacock to break the constant barrage of nightmarish intrusions, at least for a while, as he concentrates on his own survival and study of bears.

Robert Lifton, in studying Hiroshima survivors, noted that psychic rebuilding involves "formulation," a reparative process of imagination and interpretation that functions "as a bridge between self and world" (Hawkins 231). For Peacock, grizzlies are not only a source of imagination and interpretation, they serve as a psychic bridge in a way humans cannot. Although he enters the wilderness "armed to the teeth" he finds no need for weapons. Within a few days of his first encounter, he stumbles upon a huge "alpha" grizzly. The bear ambles toward him and stops within thirty feet. Knowing that the worst thing he

can do is run, he reaches for his Magnum and takes aim, ready to defend himself. Recalling the moment, he writes:

We stared at each other for what might have been seconds but felt like hours. I knew once again that I was not going to pull the trigger. My shooting days were over. I lowered the pistol. The giant bear flicked his ears and looked off to the side. I took a step backward and turned my head toward the trees. I felt something pass between us. The grizzly slowly turned away from me with grace and dignity and swung into the timber at the end of the meadow. I caught myself breathing heavily again, the flush of blood hot on my face. I felt my life had been touched by enormous power and mystery. (85)

That night he returns to camp and reflects on what the encounter means to him. "If I had salvaged a grain of wisdom from the agonies of combat, it had nothing to do with knowledge of killing or waging war. There was no enlightenment in homicide." For the first time since his return from the war, he remembers more than horror in Vietnam. "What was burned deepest into my consciousness was the little acts of grace, lessons that had lain dormant in memory and now were retrieving themselves from anesthetized corners of my brain" (86). He recalls being stalked through the jungle by the VC during a mission when the four Vietnamese guides insist on *poc* time, "a kind of Vietnamese siesta," after lunch. Knowing a VC tracker is only minutes away, Peacock spends the time nervously fingering his machine gun while the guides nap. Two hours later the tracker's rifle goes off, signaling the end of the reprieve and showing that the tracker had respected their rest. After three days of pursuit, he realizes that the VC could have set up an easy ambush, but didn't. Instead, he says, "It was a kind of truce: as if by mutual consent we all agreed to grant the other side two hours of grace" (84).

He notes that, like the tracker, the grizzly has granted him grace as well. He notes, "the grizzly radiated potency. He carried the physical strength and thorniness of disposition

that allowed him to attack or kill most any time he cared. But, almost always, he chose not to . . . It was the kind of restraint that commands awe—a muscular act of grace” (86).

Grace and reverence for all things wild becomes a central theme as he continues to live with and write about grizzlies. Through the bears, which he names and describes and comes to love, he interprets his war experience, self-imposed isolation and celibacy, and he wonders if he is unconsciously compensating for manslaughter (47). He rereads old journal entries and tries to make sense of them; he relates the past to the present, and in doing so, he begins an unintentional healing narrative, “one in which the writer names, describes and takes control of experiences in which the writer’s powers of naming and controlling have been explicitly annihilated” (Johnson 86).

He begins to reflect on how wild nature might be central to the human condition, and central to his own ability to make meaning. “Humans are so strongly discouraged from comparing their lives with those of other animals,” he writes, “yet everything I had experienced taught me that metaphor is the fundamental path of imagining, a first line of inquiry into the lives of other creatures that sheds light on our own” (188). He explains that ancient people saw the bear as a model of spiritual renewal and immortality, showing men how to get through the “little death” of winter by burial and rebirth. The grizzly, whom the ancient Blackfeet named Real Bear, was the most esteemed of all animals. Also known as The Medicine Grizzly, the mythological bear was seen as a spirit guide and healer (196-197). By tracking the bear of “flesh and fur,” Peacock finds the bear of spirit, the bear that begins the process of his mending.

Because of what he learns from grizzlies, Peacock rejects the mythologies of power, control and reason in favor of generosity, humility and instinct. But as he watches the

gradual disappearance of the grizzly as they are systematically removed or hunted down during the early seventies, he can no longer stay silent. In his concern, he becomes the voice of the grizzly, shifting from recluse to witness. By doing this, he begins to see his life as having meaning and symbolic integrity. He writes:

So, after years of wandering, I acquired a project: to attempt to assemble a collective portrait, perhaps the last, of the grizzlies south of Canada. I began my work in the Yellowstone backcountry on April 17, 1975. Later, I realized that that was the day the Khmer Rouge rolled into Phnom Penh and began the killing. From my slightly twisted point of view, preserving grizzlies was a radical idea; it meant putting the brakes on a world gone mad (115).

Eventually Peacock turns from his own trauma toward that of the grizzly. He worries that the public only wants to accept grizzlies as long as they don't live a fiercely protective, "bearish" life, that they "prefer a bear who fears people and runs away" (352). He quotes Thoreau's well-known line, "in wildness is the preservation of the world" and urges the reader to see that humans need wilderness as well. He argues for a change in attitude "if we are to succeed in saving grizzlies with all their wildness, we will not do it by changing the bear to meet our needs. For the first time in the history of our relatively short planet, we will have to be the ones to bend" (356).

Mark Allister points out that for nature writers, "attachment to the land and its inhabitants is equally important as attachment to humans" (29) and in Peacock's case, becoming attached to wild nature is the only way he can bring himself back to the human at all. Indirectly, he questions what it means to be humane. Whose behavior is indeed more "grizzly," the mother bear that attacks a man poking at her cub with an umbrella, or the people who blow up buildings and burn down villages? Felman notes that there are people for whom an inner force urges, or appoints them, to bear witness of their own trauma. They feel a compulsion and responsibility to tell their stories for themselves and for others.

Peacock becomes a self appointed spokesman, against his own reclusive tendencies, testifying not only to the horror of war, but also on behalf of the wild. Felman calls this need to speak out "the appointment," describing it as an obligation "to transgress the confines of the isolated stance, to speak *for* others and *to* others" (Felman and Laub 3). And Peacock does both, speaking for himself, for other veterans and for the Vietnamese as well as grizzlies and wilderness; all of which need the grace of healing.

Jack Turner believes that part of Peacock's healing comes from grizzly bears and part from writing; but he also argues the importance of Peacock's willingness to go beyond the literal for understanding, to "the point at which myth and nonlinguistic practices would be required to communicate" (97). It is not enough for Peacock to feel grateful toward the grizzly for touching his life; he must reciprocate through gift-giving ritual. When he is given the skull of a mother grizzly that has been killed by a poacher, he knows which female it is, and, knowing that her cub will be hibernating soon, he decides to take the skull home. He watches her cub disappear into the den as the first snow of winter begins to fall and recalls the nursing mother and playful cub earlier that year. "I thought about the days spent in the company of these two grizzlies, the one stretched out on the porch of his winter home, the other, encapsulated in memory, her skull wrapped up in my pack. I needed to put this small part of the universe back in order" (21).

Placing the skull on a framework of woven willow facing the den, Peacock retrieves a turquoise bear paw from around his neck and slips it over the skull. "It was a child's idea," he writes. "My little daughter had explained that bringing the skull back here would make a new bear." As he finishes draping the chain around the skull, the wind begins to whip up

the snow around him, and he meditates, "The long sleep heals. We will find a new life in the spring" (22).

As a result of performing this ritual Peacock's scenes of trauma become, at least for a moment, absorbed by a redemptive act. And redemption, as Turner defines it, is more than restoration; it's exchange.

When we redeem, we give; in return we receive—nickels for coupons, cash for stocks, salvation for our sins . . . Redemption leads to freedom and transcendence, to a higher state, not a return to a former state. Redemption is not about our ego and psychotherapy but about an anguish in the soul. (101)

Peacock's relationship to the natural world is not superficial; he does more than watch animals. He interacts with great love and respect, and by doing so he creates moments of exchange with an extreme and dangerous Other in which he soothes his soul.

Grizzly Years acts as a healing narrative according to DeSalvo's criteria: it tells a complete, coherent story; it includes explicit detail; it includes feelings, reflection and insight; and it offers more than just horror. It describes moments of beauty and grace (57-61). But, by popular notions of "healing," it falls short. Tim O'Brien, skeptical about the relationship between healing and narrative, writes, "I did not look on my work as therapy, and still don't. Yet . . . it occurred to me that the act of writing had led me through a swirl of memories that might otherwise have ended in paralysis or worse" (The Things They Carried 179). Peacock reflects the same ambivalence when he says, "grizzlies or writing didn't 'cure' me." Yet he's willing to admit that he's different from other veterans in significant ways, men he describes as "sit[ing] alone in front of a television, drinking into the night, aiming a pistol in bottomless frustration" (Grizzly Years 275). He explains that his writing implies healing because the Vietnam segments intrude less in the text as he focuses on the grizzlies, but he adds that writing does not bring endless contentment, either.

For men like Peacock and O'Brien, healing does not come with any kind of finality. Although the grizzlies help him break the stream of continual warfare going on in his mind, Peacock doesn't just leave it behind. He cannot return to a former state of ignorance and bliss, nor does he want to. He explains that Vietnam gave him a "pragmatic irreverence" that makes him able to question motives and mores. "No one can show me a photo of a mutilated body or a dead child again and tell me it is the way of the world," he writes. "I can't live in that world, but I do want to live. If this is a wound, it doesn't want mending" (*Grizzly Years* 276).

It's not in "feeling better" but in the continual process of adapting that Peacock can be said to be healing. He is not endlessly happy by the end of the book; in fact, the last "scene" in *Grizzly Years* is one of mourning. Feeling exiled, he sits on a desert ridge next to a cairn, a memorial he has built to those he has loved and lost, and grieves. This is not a book where the protagonist skips off to endless contentment or grizzly nirvana. It is a book about a man who finds the ability to grieve and words to express what matters deeply to him. Peacock is willing to live dynamically, to write his own rules and find his own rituals, even if it means living a life that doesn't "fit" into a traditional or narrowly defined mold.

As a person who is open to all of the elements of his own experience, Peacock fits the criteria of Carl Rogers's self in progress, a self that moves beyond defensiveness and rigidity, a self that can live fully in the present moment, a self that doesn't "cram and twist" experience to fit a set of preconceptions (187-189). His affinity for changingness is reflected in a much later article, "Chasing Abbey," where he writes, "When you write a book of change, you don't get to choose the last chapter" (4). His life is a book of change. He

doesn't heal by being happy; he heals by bringing wisdom to his own experience. It's not a matter of being finished; it's a matter of starting—and continuing.

Easier said than done, of course. Peacock explains, “The war shit really crippled me in terms of being a writer,” and yet he continues to write. Having just finished a memoir about his time with Edward Abbey, he wonders if he can get back to the war. “There were so many people who died unknown,” he says, “I would like to leave a record of them.” Like O'Brien, though, he worries about truth and lies, honesty and denial, choosing the right words, and facing it again. “There is a three-day black hole of memory that looms before me like a black mountain range,” he explains. It will not be easy, if it is possible at all. But, having created a space for writing about Vietnam in Grizzly Years, he's already tested the territory. He has already shown himself adept at writing moments of grace as well as moments of horror; he knows how to speak his mind; he is able to bring insight to his experience through a profound respect for otherness; and he knows how to tell a story. His most powerful stories may be the ones he still has left to tell.

TERRY TEMPEST WILLIAMS: A NEED FOR FEATHERED HEALING

"A lake is the landscape's most beautiful and expressive feature. It is Earth's eye; looking into which the beholder measures the depth of his own nature." Henry David Thoreau, "The Ponds" from Walden

I was introduced to the work of Terry Tempest Williams at a time when I began to question my religious views as a Mormon woman. I wasn't sure what we were worshipping each time we sat in well tended, comfortable pews listening to doctrinal sermons based on talks from General Authorities, a group of men called upon to interpret scripture. More often than not, our sermons seemed to revolve around adhering to principles of conduct rather than reverencing anything that could be construed as Divine. So I wondered silently, and sometimes not so silently, if we were simply worshipping ourselves. A friend of mine lent me Williams's An Unspoken Hunger; and after reading it I knew I had come upon a different kind of Mormon woman: someone who could question doctrine and howl with coyotes. Later, when I read Refuge: An Unnatural History of Family and Place, I cried with her as she lost her mother and grandmother to cancer, and wondered what the book could teach me about healing work.

Refuge begins at the end, with Williams on the floor of her study, surrounded by journals and mementos of the past: feathers, sand and sprigs of sage. Unlike Peacock, Williams consciously reconstructs the past with the expressed desire to heal from it. Years after her mother's and grandmother's deaths, she has a dream in which a doctor informs her that she, too, has cancer and that she has nine months to heal herself. In reflecting on the dream, she writes, "Perhaps I am telling this story in an attempt to heal myself, to confront what I do not know, to create a path for myself with the idea that 'memory' is the only way

home" (4). She begins her healing work with memory, and through landscape and animal and natural history, she interprets her experience.

In 1983 Williams is awakened by a phone call from her mother who informs her that she has found a tumor in her abdomen. She wants to know if Terry will accompany her to the hospital to have it checked. Her mother had cancer twelve years before and Williams does not want to believe it could have returned. She begins to associate her mother's body with her favorite body of water: the Great Salt Lake (22). The tumor within her mother's body and the water level in the lake both begin to rise, imperceptibly at first. She does not anticipate the "natural" rise in the lake nor the "unnatural" rise of the tumor, yet she senses things are about to change. "It's strange to feel change coming," she writes. "It's easy to ignore. An underlying restlessness seems to accompany it like birds flocking before a storm. We go about our business with the usual alacrity, while in the pit of our stomach there is a sense of the tenuous" (24).

Her mother is diagnosed with ovarian cancer, which the doctors believe is treatable given current chemotherapy methods. Reluctantly, Williams's mother agrees to the treatment. But the first treatment goes badly. Her mother writhes and heaves and both of them cry. Williams realizes that she is resisting her mother's illness and wonders if the military metaphors for cancer are counterproductive: the fight, the battle, enemy infiltration. She asks, "can we be at war with ourselves and still find peace?" (43).

During this stage of her mother's illness, Williams's refuge is literal: the Bear River Migratory Bird Refuge, a place she visited for the first time as a child with her grandmother, Mimi. She goes there for solace and healing. But the place that brings her comfort is as vulnerable as the people who bring her comfort. The quick thawing of mountain snow

along with heavy rain is slowly flooding the marshes where she loves to watch the birds. She cannot imagine that the Refuge may flood and she cannot imagine that her mother may die. Neither is conceivable. As she worries and thinks how both might be intertwined for her she writes, "I could not separate the Bird Refuge from my family. Devastation respects no boundaries. The landscape of my childhood and the landscape of my family, the two things I had always regarded as bedrock, were now subject to change. Quicksand" (40).

The more things change, the more Williams despairs. She notices that her mother is handling the chemotherapy better than she is herself. Her mother is able to live in present time, "in the heart of each day," while Williams realizes she cannot. And even though she senses that her refusal to accept her mother's mortality is not helping her cope, she clings to the idea that her mother will be fine

A year later the family is informed of their worst fear. The chemotherapy hasn't been fully effective; radiation is suggested and Williams runs for the Refuge wishing someone would rescue her. She watches the gulls, wondering if her refusal to believe that her mother may die has actually harmed her mother. She feels as if she has been seduced by denial and her own desires into living a comfortable lie rather than a "potency of truth" (76). The gulls fly from salt water to fresh and Williams imagines the pilgrimage with them: from denial to acceptance; from tears to life; from denial of the future to embracing the present.

The cancer progresses and retreats; the lake level rises and falls, and Williams finds herself in an endless cycle of hope and despair. Birds drown or desert the Refuge due to lack of food and habitat; she responds with empathy for their plight: "the birds of Bear River have been displaced; so have I" (97). She has a cyst removed from her own breast and, even

though it is benign, wonders if her lineage is her fate. Both grandmothers and her mother have all had breast cancer; is it avoidable?

She asks Mimi and her mother, "How do you find refuge in change?" (119) as they are picnicking on the Great Salt Lake. Her mother takes her hand and whispers, "You just go with it." Williams notices a killdeer feigning a broken wing and dragging it around in a circle and explains to her mother that the bird's behavior is just a distraction, a protective device; they must be close to her nest. Williams leaves the scene without explaining it, leaving it open for interpretation. Does Williams secretly wish her mother is just feigning illness? Are her mother's actions in direct opposition to the mother bird's? Is she pretending to be well, acting bravely, to protect her offspring?

Williams continues to be shocked at her mother's psychic resiliency. Even though the chemotherapy doesn't work and the odds are slim that the radiation will, her mother continues to laugh and learn and absorb everything that is fresh and natural and alive. Williams writes of her, "She is the bird touching both heaven and earth, flying with newfound knowledge of what it means to live" (136). Williams herself, however, has hit "rock bottom." She realizes that she is not adjusting. She wants the Refuge and her mother back the way they were. Both are her refuge, and she wants them both to be healthy and comforting. She cannot face them differently.

Her mother must have another surgery; more cancerous tissue is removed, but her buoyancy and energy is beginning to ebb. The family is exhausted as well. Once home, Williams cries on the lawn, not for her mother, but for herself. "I wanted my life back. I wanted my marriage back. I wanted my own time. But most of all I wanted the suffering

for mother to end" (164). She worries that if she accepts her mother's death as inevitable or preferable to living in illness, she will be losing her compassion.

Throughout the book, Williams continually seeks refuge in place. She leaves for an archeological dig in Boulder, Utah, a place she looks to for distraction and escape. When she returns, there is more bad news: her grandmother Mimi has breast cancer and needs a mastectomy. The potential loss is devastating, and so is the changing of role. Without these women, she no longer has the luxury of being a child (202).

Her mother's health continues to deteriorate and Williams realizes that it is only a matter of days before she will be gone. The family gathers around to say goodbye and Williams uses her original journal to portray the final moments of her mother's life. Present tense immediacy replaces reflective narrative as she breathes with her mother and talks her through the final stages of letting go. She is overcome by love and a sense that she is the midwife to the rebirth of her mother's soul. Her mother dies and the family grieves openly; yet, she is surprised by a feeling of joy. That night as she reflects in her journal, she comforts herself with the words of Erich Fromm, and finishes her entry with them: "The whole life of the individual is nothing but the process of giving birth to himself; indeed, we should be fully born when we die" (232).

Williams is not finished grieving for her mother when she loses her grandmother, Mimi, to cancer as well. Before Mimi's death, Williams asks if she will send her a sign of an afterlife, proof that she is fine. As is characteristic of Mimi, she laughs and says it doesn't work that way. During the conversation, Mimi asks if Williams has ever seen an owl nearby, since she keeps expecting to see one somehow. Williams says no and puzzles over the odd conversation until her grandmother dies. She says goodbye and walks outside to see two

screech owls circling atop a telephone pole. In her mind she hears Mimi say “*dance, dance, dance*” and she realizes that she must share her story. “If I am to survive,” she writes, “I must let my secrets out like white doves held captive too long. I am a woman with wings” (272, 273).

Refuge follows all of DeSalvo’s criteria for effective grief work. The narrative structures events in a cohesive order, detailing each event explicitly, with a richness of detail (57, 61). Williams doesn’t just say she loves her mother and grandmother; she doesn’t just say that both are sick. She renders them with loving, rich detail, from their physical characteristics to their personalities and attitudes, through dialogue, description and story. And she shows how the cancer affects each woman’s psychic and physical condition.

Williams also consciously links her feelings to events (DeSalvo 59). In fact, she continually pauses to probe at difficult feelings. As her mother’s death approaches, Williams finds herself alone and frightened with the prospect of death, something she does not understand. She writes:

The wind continues. The large bedroom windows rattle with each gust. I feel that they will shatter. The house is cold and I am alone with Mother as she is dying. And for the first time in weeks, I am afraid. The child in me, which lives as long as she does, wished the doorbell would ring, that Mimi or Grandmother or my aunts or anyone, would be there to help me. (225)

Williams admits that she doesn’t know how to face death. She wishes for rescue and for endless childhood, knowing it’s impossible.

Some of the most surprising moments in the book come when Williams includes humor and joy, satisfying the criterion that a healing narrative be balanced and well rounded, not just dwelling on negative events and feelings (DeSalvo 59). Williams recalls playing nickel slots with her mother in Wendover and losing badly enough that they both laugh until

they cry. She describes her mother's glee, cheeks wet with running mascara as Terry tries to find meaning in the experience (128). She describes taking the last family photo with her mother and how depressed everyone is until the photographer, frustrated with their inability to smile, says, "You all look so somber. What's the matter, is somebody dying?" a comment that turns their grief momentarily into sidesplitting hysteria (160, 161). Even in her mother's last moments, Williams and her siblings tease her about who was the cutest as a baby; they read bad poetry; they laugh; they gossip; they live. Throughout the book there is joy and it lends strength to the writing as well as the healing.

Although her narrative satisfies other criteria for a healing text, Williams is especially good at reflection (DeSalvo 60). The insight she gains, which frequently comes from nature, reflects her growth as a person. She clearly shows her stages of grieving, from numbness and denial, loneliness and yearning, disorganization and despair, to acceptance and hope. And she reflects on her learning along the way. Her growth is marked particularly in the way she progressively defines refuge. At first, it is literal, the Bear River Migratory Bird Refuge, a place she can go to escape the reality of her mother's prognosis. She also seeks refuge in others: her husband, friends and family. Numerous trips to the bird refuge offer insight in one way or another; but it isn't until she seeks refuge in her own inner resources that she can begin to heal. She writes, "I am slowly, painfully discovering that my refuge is not found in my mother, my grandmother, or even in the birds of the Bear River. My refuge exists in my capacity to love. If I can learn to love death then I can begin to find refuge in change" (Williams 178).

Even though the outside world can't, in the end, become her inner refuge, she finds comfort and reflection in nature. She explains:

I feel calm, having just returned from a brisk walk along the base of the foothills. The balm of the fresh air; Great Salt Lake glistened on the horizon. The valley is in focus, crystal clear. I am reminded that what I adore, admire, and draw from Mother is inherent in the Earth. My mother's spirit can be recalled simply by placing my hands on the black humus of mountains or the lean sands of desert. Her love, her warmth, and her breath, even her arms around me—are the waves, the wind, sunlight and water. (214)

By writing this, Williams shows the paradoxical nature of her experience. Her experiences have not been entirely painful, but partly joyous as well. She speculates on how her mother and mother earth might be one and how a relationship with the Earth itself can be healing.

Although she has a human audience who can hear her story, she shares the blackest moments of her grief with the natural world, which acts as witness to her grief. She describes a "den of healing," a "holy place in the desert" where she drinks from the spring, carves chevrons in stone and sings without the fear of being heard. It is a place where she can pray to the birds, believing that they will carry the messages of her heart upward. She explains, "I pray to them because I believe in their existence, the way their songs begin and end each day—the invocations and benedictions of Earth. I pray to the birds because they remind me of what I love rather than what I fear" (149). By sharing her grief with both the human and nonhuman, she receives strength from both, during a time when her pain seems too difficult to bear.

Carl Rogers, in studying the psychotherapeutic process, noted that individuals who were said to be emerging or healing were those who were fully "*received*" in a therapeutic relationship, meaning that whatever state the individual finds themselves in, they were accepted and listened to empathetically (130-131). This echoes the notion of "witness" as described by Laub. Williams has a writing journal which "receives" her highest and lowest

moments, a close husband and family who can also hear her out, and she can pour out her innermost feelings to the creatures she loves as well. While it's arguable that the nonhuman cannot respond to her in speech, she feels they respond in spirit and insight, helping her to piece together a process she cannot situate as "natural."

Rogers also noted that individuals who proceeded the farthest along his "emerging continuum" were those who were able to move from "fixity to changingness, from rigid structure to flow, from stasis to process" (131). And in this regard, Williams makes a huge leap. From the onset of her mother's illness, she is obsessed with stasis. She desperately wants to remain a child; she wants to maintain her innocence. She does not want to adapt to change; she wants to stop it. She clings to hope as if it can change a diagnosis or stop water levels from rising. Intuitively, she knows her stubborn refusal to accept her mother's prognosis is antithetical to her mother's ability to live her last months fully, but she can't help it. The more Williams fights against the reality of her mother's cancer the more it hurts them both. "Suffering shows us what we are attached to," she writes. "Dying doesn't cause suffering. Resistance to dying does" (53).

In time, Williams is able to manage a kind of acceptance, one that comes in part from observation and reflection. Upon learning that many of her beloved birds have survived and regrouped in southeastern Oregon, she writes, "All is not lost. The birds have simply moved on. They give me courage to do the same" (253). Her birds must learn to adapt; they must be resourceful in order to survive, and so must she. She goes on to say, "refuge is not a place outside myself. Like the lone heron who walks the shores of Great Salt Lake, I am adapting as the world is adapting" (267).

Her ability to change does not end with her acceptance of death, however. In her epilogue, "The Clan of the One-Breasted Women," she investigates the simultaneous outbreaks of cancer among the women in her family (nine in all), noting that all of them have had mastectomies and only two of them are still alive. She finds it hard to believe, given the Mormon alliance with "good foods" (no tea, coffee, tobacco or alcohol) that the women's futures should be so grim.

The cause of the women's deaths becomes clear to Williams as she talks with her father over dinner about a year after her mother's death. She describes a recurring dream from childhood: a flash of light that illuminated the nighttime desert. Surprised that she remembers, her father explains to her that it was not a dream. As a family they had witnessed the detonation of an atomic bomb driving home from Las Vegas. Together they had all seen the gold-stemmed mushroom cloud. Williams had been sitting on her mother's lap as the light ash rained down on the car.

At that moment, Williams feels the betrayal of obedience, of blindly following political leaders, of not questioning authority. She realizes that her LDS culture is one that values rules, and "not rocking the boat." It is a culture in which obedience is revered and independent thinking is not. But, after holding the women she loved as they vomited green-black bile and after injecting them with morphine when the pain became unbearable, she announces that she now must question everything, "even if it means losing my faith, even if it means becoming a member of a border tribe among my own people" (286).

She becomes actively opposed to nuclear testing and marches on the Nevada Test Site with women who are both dreamlike and real, women "who understand the fate of the earth as their own" (288). They are arrested and released into the desert, a punishment from

the point of view of the officials. "What they didn't realize was that we were home, soul centered and strong, women who recognized the sweet smell of sage as fuel for our spirits" (290).

Williams writes about her own experience consciously, noting where her own behavior is counterproductive. Her ability to face her own faults and record them helps her avoid denial and self-indulgent whining. She recognizes that her experience is painful, but she also recognizes that part of the pain comes from her own inability to change. She takes ownership of her feelings and attitudes, even when they are unpleasant or counterproductive or frightening, and often describes them in present tense immediacy. According to Rogers, it is this very ability to own all of one's emotions and describe them with immediacy and detail that suggests mental health (151).

Williams, like Peacock, must find her own rituals, not ones prescribed by culture, but ones that make sense to her personally. In fact, she weeps at the hollowness of the ritual during her mother's funeral. Noticing the excessive amount of makeup the funeral director has applied, she notes, "I stood at the side of my mother's casket, enraged at our inability to let the dead be dead" (235).

She feels intuitively that she needs a ritual that will bring her from death to life and finds it partly by going to Mexico and participating in *el Dia de los Muertos*, the Day of the Dead. Carrying a lit candle, she joins a night procession of masked people walking toward the cemetery on a path of marigold petals—sprinkled so the dead could follow. A woman hands her a marigold and Williams notes that it was the flower her mother planted each spring. Still, the ritual of the Mexican people is not her own any more than the LDS funeral. It isn't until she comes home that she can make ritual her own. Wearing a shawl from the

Day of the Dead, she and her husband, Brooke, take a canoe out into the Great Salt Lake where they balance on the lake and meditate. Watching the sky, birds and clouds, they sprinkle marigold petals on the water. It is a material gesture that helps her to mourn and yet realize that the women she loved are not so far away.

Williams reminds me that part of grieving is being kind to myself as I pry out meaning and look at my own motives and make my own rituals. Like Williams, I found our rituals hollow. I couldn't see how describing my sexual exploits to men in white shirts would ever lead to closure or wisdom or insight. Williams can't see how hostessing everyone else's grief during the funeral leaves the family any time to attend to their own. Likewise, I cannot fathom how adhering to a standard set of rules leaves any room to be dynamically in process. If healing is in changingness and redefinition, it seems right to move on. Unlike Williams who can take her religious background with her as she recreates her self, I will have to start from scratch. Yet she provides a model of grief work for my own, one that I believe will come in time.

WRITING TO RECOVER THE WILD SOUL

“When I would recreate myself, I seek the darkest wood, the thickest and most interminable and, to the citizen, most dismal swamp. I enter a swamp as a sacred place—a sanctum sanctorum. There is the strength, the marrow of nature. The wild-wood covers the virgin-mould—and the same soil is good for men and for trees.” Henry David Thoreau, “Walking” from Walden

If healing means forgetting, then I am not healed. I don't have a sense of “leaving it all behind” with a happy finality. There is no return to innocence. But maybe that's the way it's going to be. The usual waves of guilt and rejection and longing still come without warning, but they are less forceful. Sometimes I imagine a campfire across the river that shows me where I've been. It's still burning with stories and people who share it, and I miss them. But I don't resent the distance so much anymore. I hope they are well. I wave at them from a place no one can see, and hope what's left of the light can illuminate a path less worn with the dust of shoes. I'm looking for a place where the past and the future can meet, where the wild can inform human nature, where instinct is as important as reason, where research evolves into story. I'm looking for a place that resists easy binaries, where flowers don't grow in predictable rows. A place more like nature.

If healing means becoming more sure of myself, then I am not healed. I tend my own fire, which often goes out. Walking across USU to the Military Science building on my way to teach my first section of English 1010, I wonder if my students can tell that I'm making things up as I go. I hammer away at my thesis and wonder if it's clear that I've never written a research paper before. When my boys ask if I am going to come back and teach middle school, I don't know. The future is less sure; ideas are more slippery, and I still don't quite fit in.

I wonder what Peacock and Williams have to tell me about healing a life, not as a destination where the final, happy credits roll, but as a constant, nagging process of survival and redefinition when hard packed trail thins into jungle and marsh. How long can I borrow from their fires before I must start my own?

It's arguable that both writers simply benefit from being outdoors. Twenty years of medical literature suggests there is a positive correlation between contact with nature and mental and physical health, a phenomenon E. O. Wilson describes as "biophilia." As a sociobiologist, Wilson argues that millions of years of human evolution within nature cannot be ignored, and as a result we have a strong psychological need for earth, animal and plant life. Because of this affinity, living among steel and concrete and noise sets us up for stress-related illnesses (Baker).

Maybe. But I think it's more.

What these authors describe is more than a walk in the park. It is a need for a wildness that informs their lives and fuels their spirits and inspires them to move beyond themselves for meaning. And in some ways, the wild nature they find is their own. Although they both describe moments when the natural world brings them peace, it is not just peace that they find; sometimes it's stifling heat and freezing rain. The lessons they bring to their own experience from nature are less of a paradigm for feeling good than they are a process of discovery. By paying close attention, they learn about significant Others; but they also realize that a vital part of their being remains untamed. What they learn is more than social integration; it is versatility. It is the ability to be able to move with others and alone, and at odds with others when necessary.

The natural world teaches Peacock and Williams beauty and reverence and grace, but it also teaches them danger and harshness and death. Real life, like real nature, is not pastoral. Sudden climate changes cause flooding. Too much rainfall destroys habitat. Grizzlies kill people. Nature is not about “nice” animals, flowers and fuzzy sunsets as much as it is about diversity and fierce power. It is a power that can transform their lives. Real nature includes opposing forces; it is both hunter and prey, rabid river and muddy spring. Nature, in its complexity, mirrors the human psyche; perhaps that is why it can bring insight when feelings get complicated and simplicity fails.

Clarissa Pinkola Estes, a Jungian psychoanalyst and poet, believes nature has the power to inform and uplift:

I was lucky to be brought up in Nature. There, lightning strikes taught me about sudden death and the evanescence of life. Mice litters showed that death was softened by new life. When I unearthed ‘Indian beads,’ fossils from the loam, I understood that humans have been here for a long, long time . . . [when] a wolf mother killed one of her mortally injured pups, this taught a hard compassion and the necessity of allowing death to come to the dying. (3)

As she describes it here, wildness is a tangible, observable source of insight outside of the self. But it is more as well. The wild, as Estes further defines it, is not just external landscape; it is the sentient force within the psyche that is both intuitive and creative. It is the part of the self that resists being captured and tamed and domesticated; it is seeing with the many eyes of intuition; it is the source of wisdom and healing (11).

Estes worries that current psychoanalytic practices do not go far enough in treating the wild nature of self and soul. Women more often than men, she notes, habitually neglect their wild, instinctive selves in their compulsion to be proper and pleasing and docile. The problem with this kind of “niceness,” although it is acceptable and culturally valued, is that

literal nature and psychic nature are both places where "being nice" can also lead to being dead.

"Wild," as Estes defines it, "means to live a natural life, one in which the *creatura*, creature, has innate integrity and healthy boundaries." It does not mean to be reckless or out-of-control, and it does not suggest extremes. She explains that wildness doesn't mean replacing propriety with recklessness or piety with vice. "The wild nature has a vast integrity to it," she writes. "It means to establish territory, to find one's pack . . . to speak and act in one's behalf . . . to rise with dignity, to retain as much consciousness as possible" (11).

The creature-self archetype Estes is best known for advocating is the wolf. She describes healthy wolf behavior and explains how it might inform women who feel stuck in traditional roles of propriety. She explains:

Healthy wolves and healthy women share certain psychic characteristics: keen sensing, playful spirit, and a heightened capacity for devotion. Wolves and women are relational by nature, inquiring, possessed of great endurance and strength. They are deeply intuitive, intensely concerned with their young, their mates, and their pack. They are experienced in adapting to constantly changing circumstances; they are fiercely stalwart and very brave. (2)

The creature-self, or wolfish self, Estes explains, is what is lost to women when they turn from their own creative passions; it is what is lost when they allow others to subvert their agenda, or when they continually place another's needs before their own. It is what is lost when women try too hard to be all the right things instead of all that they are. Of this self, Estes writes, "This is not some romantic, cartoon character. It has real teeth, a true snarl, huge generosity, unequalled hearing, sharp claws and furry breasts" (34). Healthy wildness is having the ability to romp and nurture, but it also means having the ability to snarl and bite when necessary.

Estes informs her own psychoanalytical practice with metaphor and story. She uses wolf behavior to describe what may go wrong with humans when instinct is severed from intellect. She notes that wolves only kill excessively after times of famine or illness and that women tend to choose dangerous excesses after a period of soulful starvation, what she calls *hambre del alma*. According to Estes, soul famine happens when a woman's critical, spiritual attributes, creativity, sensory awareness, and other instinctual gifts are denied or silenced (231). Because the natural world mirrors the inner, wild nature of women, Estes sees it as a literal and metaphorical teacher. Nature brings insight and wisdom to those with soul hunger.

This kind of wisdom-from-wildness is exactly what Peacock and Williams pursue. Williams learns the value of privateness from curlews and grace to live with poisonous spiders (147). Peacock learns openness from wilderness and grace from the grizzly (85). The lessons the authors take from nature are more than just fable; they are integral parts of a soul-story that each one must tell. And both of them change in the telling. Both of them push the boundaries of previously defined social roles. Neither becomes more "proper": Peacock has a penchant for subversion and pulling up survey stakes; Williams has a craving for wildness and dancing in red. Nature is not merely nice, and neither are they. Their identities become particular. They seem to instinctively know that the injunction to "be proper" kills off any opportunity to expand (Estes 251).

Estes's book focuses on soul hunger in women, but they aren't the only ones famished. Robert Bly explains that men, in trying to abandon the top-heavy machismo of the Fifties male, often try to conform to models of sensitivity and "softness" that, in isolation, make them dangerously unhappy (1-3). He believes that by becoming receptive at

the expense of their own native fierceness men often lose their deep, instinctive vitality and resolve. His answer to Estes's Wild Woman is the Wild Man, a force within the psyche that is deeply masculine, wise, visceral and "un-nice," a force that isn't completely contained by civilization.

Bly, like Estes, makes a point to differentiate between what is healthily wild and what is destructively wild. He emphasizes that Wild in the case of the Wild Man doesn't mean being savage any more than Estes' Wild Woman means being out-of-control. Bly believes that for a man to lead a soulful existence, he needs to encounter his own Wild Man, who will in turn teach him how "abundant, various, and many-sided" his manhood is. Part of the process, or initiation, of coming to know the Wild Man is going out into the natural world. Bly explains nature, as part of soul retrieval, this way:

To receive initiation truly means to expand sideways into the glory of oaks, mountains, glaciers, horses, lions, grasses, waterfalls, deer. We need wilderness and extravagance. Whatever shuts a human being away from the waterfall and the tiger will kill him. (55)

Both Estes and Bly recognize the need for nature and myth as part of a person's vital life work. They both find creatures and landscapes instructive, yet as Carl Rogers notes, people are reluctant to accept a more bestial, less civilized, definition of themselves.

In his practice, Rogers found that clients resisted owning all of their emotions if it implied being evil or becoming like a beast. In On Becoming a Person, he notes the common concern that becoming who one truly is (as a continually evolving human) means to "unleash some kind of monster on the world" (177). He explains that people often refuse to accept their feelings and inherent natures when these do not correspond to ideal or proper ways of being. It is easy for them to admit to being happy and hard working and patient and loving, but they have more trouble admitting that they are persons of

complexity, who also feel angry and lustful and apathetic and hostile. To explain a healthily balanced personality, Rogers also uses animal:

I feel somewhat amused by this [fear of becoming like a beast], because I think we might take a closer look at the beasts. The lion is often a symbol of the 'ravening beast.' But what about him? Unless he has been very much warped by his contact with humans, he has a number of qualities I have been describing. To be sure, he kills when he is hungry, but he does not go on a wild rampage of killing, nor does he overfeed himself. He keeps his handsome figure better than some of us. He is helpless and dependent in his puppyhood, but he moves from that to independence. He does not cling to dependence. He is selfish and self-centered in infancy, but in adulthood he shows a reasonable degree of cooperativeness, and feeds, cares for, and protects his young. He satisfies his sexual desires, but this does not mean that he goes on wild, lustful orgies. His various tendencies and urges have a harmony within him. (177-178)

Peacock and Williams both come to terms with themselves as creatures who resist pleasant labels. They experience nature in its fierceness and not just its prettiness, and their experiences fuel their own wild natures. Whether they take their lead from wolf, lion, bear or bird, they resist the compulsion to be "tame." Their personalities and intuitive abilities adapt and expand to meet challenges where being proper and obedient and kind are not enough.

When Williams's gut tells her that the multiple deaths in her family have not been mere coincidence, she discovers the truth: all of them were exposed to radiation during the unquestioned atomic testing of the 50's. Toothy snarling replaces submission, as she exclaims, "the price of obedience has become too high" (286). She knows that the statement will put her at odds with her culture, but speaks out nonetheless. Peacock doesn't need scientific data to know that the Montana grizzlies are disappearing; his knowing is instinctual. And he is right, the grizzlies are not simply "hiding out in the back country being natural bears," as the Park Service suggests (114). They are being relocated and exterminated. Respect for the grizzlies' lives and territory brings him out of a relatively comfortable den of

seclusion to lecture halls and television interviews where he must be fierce again, this time with words and film for weapons.

The writers' lives suggest that kinship with wild nature, both inner and outer, is a changeful thing. It requires them to adapt, even as they begin to imagine that they are finished adapting. The lives they choose are hardly static. Their kinship with wildness exemplifies Rogers's notion of the self in progress and Bruner's notion of multiplicity and creative wholeness. Becoming is not about "doing it right" but about doing it passionately. It is not about "perfecting" but progressing. It is about developing the ability to examine old mythologies and invent new ones. And it is having the ability to trust in one's own intuitive nature and growth during the process.

Ironically, it is their openness to the nonhuman that makes Peacock and Williams dynamically human, people who manage to straddle the easy binaries of instinct and intellect, personal and private, self and Other. They do not simply whine; they grieve deeply, not just for their own losses, but for others' as well. They invent their own rituals of grief and remembrance. The power of their stories is not in their ability to find "Truth" or happiness or their own solopsized identity; it is in their ability to continually adapt and redefine their lives as changeful, soulful people.

Estes believes that creative work is inherently healing. To her, the labor of painters, writers, sculptors, dancers, thinkers, prayermakers, seekers, finders is sacred, because "they are busy with the work of invention . . . the instinctive nature's main occupation" (11). The "failure of the imagination" is what Kittredge believes led to his failed marriage: "We never understood that you have to save your life by making up a new one," he wrote. "We never got close to trusting our imaginations, nor to living by our wits" (117).

Estes believes all creative work is soulful, but I wonder if writing, as a tool for nurturing the creative, wild self, is especially vital. To write is to act both as recorder and interpreter of story; writing mediates between the outside world of stimulus and the inner world of response; it links literal experience to metaphorical meaning, and it can provide the solace that comes from tapping one's own intuitive wisdom. Writing opens a space for revisiting the past and imagining the future. It is the act of taking notes along our changeful paths. It is constantly revisioning the self.

The process of writing and healing is tricky because it is just that: a process. It is not immediate, and ours is a culture that values immediacy. Grizzly Years and Refuge, however, did not spring from thin air. Both authors kept careful journals, and perhaps that is why the narratives are balanced in terms of positive and negative memories. Terry Tempest Williams describes many simple, powerful moments and conversations that she might not have remembered had she not written about them earlier. If she had only documented the gradual deterioration of her mother and grandmother, we would miss their full rendering as wise, witty women who are vibrantly alive.

Similarly, if Doug Peacock had not recorded what he called "feelings and moments of grace" in his Vietnam journal, we might have missed the beauty of the Central Highlands, the scolding of the birds hidden in the jungle canopy, and the waking of the spider monkeys. Without being able to draw from his earlier writing, he might not have been able to get past the madness of Bato or Ba Hiep.

Because of the way the brain encodes traumatic events nonverbally, either as scattered images or acute emotion, re-experiencing sensory details presumably leads to verbalization, narration and recovery (MacCurdy 165). That Peacock and Williams were able

to record detailed and explicit sensory details *during* or directly following their extreme experiences suggests that they were already mid-process when they began their public texts. It's arguable that the earlier, informal writing helped the writers revisit specific moments with more clarity and insight. It's possible that for Williams, journaling her mother's death the same night was a way of coping already. And that may be why she uses her original journal entry to describe the last few hours of her mother's life. She had already lived and recorded it in all its complexity and immediacy. The intent behind writing Refuge was not to improve upon the journaled version, but rather to contextualize it.

During our interview, Peacock explained that being able to revisit his Vietnam journal mattered in terms of being able to walk himself through it again. The section in Grizzly Years that came the easiest was not an "easy" memory, but it was one he had described before. When he writes about scouting for enemies in a series of underground tunnels, "gateways to a special kind of hell," the event takes on an immediacy that his other experiences do not. It is loaded with explicit sensory detail. He describes the darkness, the claustrophobic space, the smell of death and shit and *nuoc mam*, a Vietnamese fish sauce, the severed, bloated hand he picks up and the disembodied breathing. Maybe someone is in the tunnel with him, and maybe not. It is both surreal and specific. It makes sense that he journaled it first.

Peacock and Williams remind me that insight comes through time and reflection, and this is where I make my mistakes. I don't keep a regular, detailed journal. When I write, it is usually when I am angry or hurt. I want healing and I want it fast: a burger, fries and a side of healing, please. I avoid specific detail and narration because I am ashamed of the words on the screen; the writing is awash in abstract emotion. Positive experiences rarely make an

entrance, and consequently, my writing reflects a self that is lopsided, hardly wildish or wise. It is ironic that the very non-useful, whiney narrative I decry is the one I most commonly practice. Perhaps that is why nature writing felt so healthful to me: I was finally connecting with something besides a bad mood. It didn't matter that it was moon or muskrat. I was finally practicing gratitude.

Writing about nature is reciprocal; it gives back in a way that is difficult to explain. When she can no longer describe death, Terry Tempest Williams describes wind and waves and brine (240). When Doug Peacock can no longer face the images of dead children, he describes snow and bear scat and pine (19). Elements in nature keep the narrative going when the writers have reached emotional extremes. Their writing illustrates a way of working through complex, emotional memories with a relational Other, one that works both inside and outside of the psyche, one that provides insight, and keeps the writing afloat when difficulty silences the story. I am learning that it is crucial to keep at the story; *hambre del alma*, the soul hunger, thrives in silence.

Maybe I'm healing and maybe I'm not. Maybe my desire for reckless living, hot affairs and strong alcohol will destroy the life I'm trying to save. And maybe it won't. For now though, I'm willing to trust in a process that includes writing.

Estes and Rogers, Peacock and Williams, remind me that there is something of the wild that is integral to the self. It is a wildness that is both inside and out. It is a force that informs experience and feeds the soul. By living the too good life I sacrificed my own inner wildness. I traded creativity for convention, fierceness for niceness and sensuousness for salvation.

Once I was able to question homogeny, my world changed. I wondered if the Mormon conception of Zion as a perfect place for Latter-day Saints was possible or even desirable. The closer I looked, the deeper the cracks in the canvas became; the paint began to peel and crack around the edges. What if it wasn't the dream I'd believed, but a dangerous hallucination? What if it was a lie? What if I had missed out on all that life had to offer? What if I wanted to awaken a younger, more playful self that wasn't ashamed of her body? What if I made up for lost time?

By questioning my beliefs I was discovering an earlier, more wild self, but one that had become feral. Becoming feral, as Estes describes it, is returning to a state of wildness after having been too pleasing, too proper, too domesticated. But it is returning to the wild hungry, starved for the soulful and without proper instincts. Being feral is about being free, but it is also about being famished. It is about wanting to believe that excesses will compensate for captivity, and it is about being ravenous for everything, poisonous or otherwise. Considering the restraints I had placed on my imagination, it should have come as no surprise that when wildness came back to me I would take it in any form it was offered.

It is interesting to me that the most sacred ritual in the LDS church revolves around the mythology of the Garden of Eden. To do a session in the Temple is to revisit Adam and Eve and the tree and the serpent and God. The story is told as a way things began. And maybe they did. But I never figured it out. I always wondered why God would create an impossible situation. If God wanted his children to leave the fruit alone, why put the Tree of Knowledge in the garden in the first place? Why throw in a serpent? Why punish Eve with sorrow and Adam with thorns?

Why indeed.

For me, the story is still one of how it began. Maybe I'm Eve and maybe I'm not. The cost of not maintaining my innocence was my own exile; and yet it's not so bad. Estes's Wild Woman calls to those in exile; the writings of Thoreau and Peacock and Williams call to those in exile; wild landscapes call to those in exile; wolf and bear and beaver and hawk call to those in exile; sticky geranium calls to those in exile.

Sometimes when I least expect it, the wild self sings in my bones and calls me back to places that I love. To court wildness is to embrace change and unpredictability, and, if redemption is exchange, I will exchange innocence for consciousness, a whimper for a howl, and a congregation for a lover. I will savor moonlight and magpie. I will wonder if knowledge and "many-eyed intuition" make it impossible to live only in loveliness. And I will wonder if the fruit wasn't meant to be eaten.

EPILOGUE

If I were the Wild *creatura*, I wonder what advice I'd give to my earlier self, the one sitting on the orange sofa, angrily watching the lake at the Writing Project. What insight would I give if I could go back to that morning and sit over my own shoulder and breathe a kind of healing? If I were wise, I might remind her of the joy of process and urge her to write at all costs, not just terrible moments or spectacular moments, but real, immediate, fleshy, sensory ones. And if memory crept in from the sidelines, I'd tell her to seize it and form it and tease out a meaning. I'd wish that the kid with the JAWS memoir had the ability to love her writing for what it did rather than resent it for what it did not do.

I would remind her that her creations are first for herself, and to trust that able writing and able audiences come in time. I would breathe to her to follow her instincts, to stop teaching when it is time to learn again, even if it means that her family will think she's gone crazy and even if it means doing the wrong thing financially. Perhaps I would smile and whisper that if there came a time when she would have to choose between nature writing and rhetorical theory that it should not be such a hard decision; that sometimes the least logical decision is the one that makes the most sense.

And I would hope the other women, sharing their own words from the filthy couches, would have patience with themselves. If they were trying to mend their lives in secret, or not in secret, I'd wish they could see that the words they were weaving were part of the soul story each has to tell.

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