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*The University of Montana*

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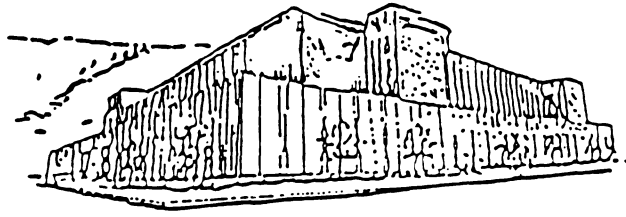
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FROM WESTWARD SPACE TO WESTERN PLACE:  
THE END OF ILLUSION AND BIRTH OF ACCEPTANCE IN  
THE AMERICAN WEST

by

Mary C. Greenfield

B.A. Barnard College, Columbia University, 1992  
presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of  
Master of Arts  
The University of Montana  
December 2002

Approved by:

Dan Flores

Chairperson

D. J. Stuebel

Dean, Graduate School

12-10-02

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From Westward Space to Western Place: The End of Illusion  
and Birth of Acceptance in the American West

Director: Dan L. Flores

D7

In order for the West to become place, initial fantasies of boundless prosperity had to be destroyed. Time and time again the cycle of dream and disillusion, boom and bust, was repeated on the individual level. This created a kind of personal frontier process, as each settler was forced to understand and accept his environment. Only through this process could the pioneer make a true home in the West, if a humbler one than that of which he or she had once dreamed.

This paper will trace that process through the lives of four people: Evelyn Cameron of Fallon, MT (1868-1928); Levi Lathrop Smith of Olympia, WA (?-1848); Everett Ruess of California, Arizona, Utah, and New Mexico (1914-1934); and Francis Marion Streamer of Ellensburg, WA (1834-1912). The next chapter gives an overview of their lives. The third explores the first phase of the space-to-place process, in which the new westerner is filled with boosterish enthusiasm. This initial excitement contains a paradox, however, as delight in the West as a place of escape and adventure collides with the desire to fulfill its commercial possibilities and thus create another East. An internal conflict then arises, as the individual attacks civilization while simultaneously striving to recreate it. Chapter four discusses the collapse of the old value structure once grand plans give way to reality. Here, the shift from space to place can be seen in the subjects' changing attitudes about their neighbors, the land, and wildlife. In chapter five we come to the final stage in the process: acceptance. Each subject came to a state that can be described as resignation tinged with revelation. They let go of the old fantasies that had ascribed meaning to their environment, and instead came to see the land as a place of religious or near-religious value.

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CHAPTER ONE  
INTRODUCTION

"Place is security, space is freedom: we are attached to the one and long for the other," writes geographer Yi-Fu Tuan.<sup>1</sup> The story of the non-Indian settlement of the American West is about the transformation of space into place. This process is marked by the end of the dream of unlimited possibilities and the beginning of grappling with the hard realities of an unforgiving geography: jagged mountains, arid deserts, and stormy seas. In order for the West to become place, initial fantasies of boundless prosperity had to be destroyed. Unfulfilled hopes are integral to the landscape of western history, just as the true landscape is littered with ghost towns and the bleaching bones of failed homesteads. In the words of historian Wallace Stegner, "The West has had a way of warping well-carpentered habits, and raising the grain on exposed dreams."<sup>2</sup> Time and time again the cycle of dream and disillusion, boom and bust, was repeated on the individual level. This created a kind of personal frontier process, as each settler was forced to understand and accept his environment. Only through this process could the pioneer make a true home in the West, if a humbler one than that of which he or she had once dreamed.

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<sup>1</sup>Yi-Fu Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977), 3.

<sup>2</sup>Wallace Stegner, *The American West as Living Space* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1987), 3.



This paper will trace that process through the lives of four people: Evelyn Cameron of Fallon, MT (1868-1928); Levi Lathrop Smith of Olympia, WA (?-1848); Everett Ruess of California, Arizona, Utah, and New Mexico (1914-1934); and Francis Marion Streamer of Ellensburg, WA (1834-1912). The next chapter gives an overview of their lives. The third explores the first phase of the space-to-place process, in which the new westerner is filled with boosterish enthusiasm. This initial excitement contains a paradox, however, as delight in the West as a place of escape and adventure collides with the desire to fulfill its commercial possibilities and thus create another East. An internal conflict then arises, as the individual attacks civilization while simultaneously striving to recreate it. Chapter four discusses the collapse of the old value structure once grand plans give way to reality. Here, the shift from space to place can be seen in the subjects' changing attitudes about their neighbors, the land, and wildlife. In chapter five we come to the final stage in the process: acceptance. Each subject came to a state that can be described as resignation tinged with revelation. They let go of the old fantasies that had ascribed meaning to their environment, and instead came to see the land as a place of religious or near-religious value.

The historical approach is one of microcosm, rather than macrocosm. An important influence on this paper is Patricia

Limerick's *Desert Passages: Encounters with the American Desert*. In that work Limerick studied larger cultural trends by focusing on the individual, who she regards as "synecdoche: the part that stands for the whole." The introduction to *Desert Passages* noted, "The major advantage of this approach is that one does not have to simplify complex patterns of thought and behavior. In close examinations of individuals, there is room to acknowledge subtlety, contradiction, and paradox."<sup>3</sup> The present study has the luxury of amplifying that strength, since it intentionally looks beyond the cultural mainstream to those who reacted against it. The American mindset has long celebrated economic expansion, technological innovation, and personal ambition. During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, questioning the value of those concepts, or suggesting that they had limits, bordered on the heretical. This was particularly true in discussions of their proper role in western settlement. The individuals studied here were all persons of unusual insight and independence. They were able to step outside their culture, comment upon it, wrestle with its contradictions, and, where necessary, reject it. They were not representatives of the larger culture, they were commentators upon it. In short, we are looking to them as the exceptions who demonstrate the rule.

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<sup>3</sup>Patricia Limerick, *Desert Passages: Encounters with the American Desert* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1985), 9.

I selected Cameron, Smith, Ruess, and Streamer for several reasons. First, each was a reflective, intelligent writer and left an informative trove of diaries (or, in Ruess' case, personal letters). Secondly, the four were all loners who spent much of their lives in isolation. The causal connection between quietude and thoughtfulness is obvious. Tuan writes, "Privacy and solitude are necessary for sustained reflection and a hard look at self, and through the understanding of self to the full appreciation of other personalities...."<sup>4</sup> By withdrawing from society, the subjects gained a more objective vantage point from which to view their own culture. Furthermore, solitude allowed for the time and careful observation needed to fully understand the natural and man-made processes that affect environment. Finally, once they obtained a degree of freedom from preconceived biases, they were able to develop a better appreciation of the landscape in which they had arrived.

It is also noteworthy that none of these subjects indulged in mythologizing the glory of their western experience. Bill Bevis decried the tendency of westerners to always look back to a mythical golden era when the West was all space and freedom: "'It's all gone now' is not the structure of the universe; it's a response to problems within *European Culture*, and if those problems can be faced, we don't have to be doomed."<sup>5</sup> These four individuals fought the

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<sup>4</sup>Tuan, 65.

<sup>5</sup>William Bevis, *Ten Tough Trips: Montana Writers and the West* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1990), 9.

West, faced it, and sometimes lost (two died prematurely and possibly violently). But they didn't give up and go home, and they didn't give in to pointless nostalgia. Instead, their writing and perceptions grew more keen, more true, and more grounded as their sense of place deepened.

This paper draws on a wide body of secondary literature in several overlapping fields. A number of historians have investigated shifting cultural conceptions of the West, among them Leo Marx in *The Machine in the Garden*, Roderick Nash in *Wilderness and the American Mind*, and Wallace Stegner in *The American West as Living Space*, along with the previously mentioned Patricia Limerick. Sherry Smith has taken a similar approach in probing changing attitudes toward Native Americans. Her *Re-Imagining Indians* was helpful in discussing the lens through which writers saw their non-white neighbors. In *Ten Tough Trips: Montana Writers and the West*, William Bevis used the tools of the literary critic to investigate depictions of the West in popular fiction. Meanwhile, cultural geographers have studied the ways in which culture affects our very perception of environment, as well as shaping our actions upon the land. Yi-Fu Tuan's *Space and Place* and *Escapism* were invaluable guides to the approach of the cultural geographer, as was Simon Schama's *Landscape and Memory*.

Additionally, psychologists and biologists have begun to delve into the ways in which our interactions with nature are

determined by our neurological wiring. *The Biophilia Hypothesis*, edited by Stephen Kellert and Edward Wilson, looks at human reactions to nature from the biologist's perspective. *Ecopsychology*, edited by Theodore Rosak, Mary Gomes, and Allen Kanner, considers the same questions from the psychologist's angle. The late Paul Shepard, who studied the relationship between humans and animals, has chapters in both volumes. His book *The Others* was helpful in discussing our subjects' varied responses to other species.

There has been a tremendous amount of writing on the tension between civilization and nature. Psychologist Sigmund Freud and philosopher Herbert Marcuse were useful in discussing the constraints that technological society imposes on modern man's ability to think and discern for himself--and what might happen when those constraints are removed. There is also a strong tradition of American diarists who chose to withdraw from the riotous pace of our ever-expanding nation. These individuals found solace in nature and, through their writing, brought that message to a wide audience. A few such authors who have become part of our cultural fabric are Henry David Thoreau, Thomas Merton, John Muir, and Emily Dickinson.

There is, however, one drawback to that tradition: a tendency to exalt wilderness as inherently superior and opposed to civilization. Cultural geographer Schama noted the desire of environmentalists to view nature as above and apart from human culture. He singles out Thoreau in particular:

"What he often urged was a sort of blessed amnesia, a liberation from the burden of the dead in order to see what was truly and naturally alive..."<sup>6</sup> The problem is that humans exist in culture and nature, and they cannot be excised from either. Rather than focusing on environment alone, this paper probes the nexus of culture, history, and landscape through the lives of four obscure but incisive observers. Landscape, says Schama, "is built up as much from strata of memory as layers of rock."<sup>7</sup> In this sense the bones of the ancestors (and of their dreams) are vital contributors to our own sense of place.

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<sup>6</sup>Simon Schama, *Landscape and Memory* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1995), 547.

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*, 7.

CHAPTER TWO  
THE JOURNEY WEST

Nested in the dream of an untouched paradise was a real jewel: the promise of a new self. A fresh land offered a fresh start for jaded Europeans. This time around we would be better people--stronger, braver, more confident, more responsible, and resplendently successful. The appeal of Frederick Jackson Turner's frontier thesis lay in its assurance that this would happen, that the challenges of western life could not fail to make glorious Americans out of effete moral cripples. Somehow, though, it never quite happened. Even today we leech the topsoil until it picks up and blows away, rip the metal from the mountain and leave the stream swimming in cyanide, and explode weapons of marvelous destruction in the silent desert. But we don't give up hope. Like drug addicts, Americans are always pinning their hopes on the next day's possibilities. "The essence of addiction, after all, is that pleasure tends to dissipate and leave the mind agitated, hungry for more. The idea that just one more dollar, one more dalliance, one more rung on the ladder will leave us feeling sated reflects a misunderstanding about human nature..." writes Robert Wright. Unfortunately, "We are designed to feel that the next great goal will bring bliss, and the bliss is designed to evaporate shortly after we get there."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Robert Wright, *The Moral Animal* (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 369.

To wake up after a few years on a barren farm in the land of alleged plenty is to face the remorse and despair of the self-deluded. Rather than face facts and adjust, however, the most common response is to move on. This is what underlies the frantic mobility of American culture. We are always chasing the mirage of Eden, flickering in the heat waves on the road ahead. Unfortunately, the conviction that the West is the future and the future is paradise has influenced the actions of many powerful people. In *The Machine in the Garden*, Leo Marx dissected the effect that the 'symbolic landscape' has had in reality. It has:

activated the stubborn settlers who struggled for years to raise crops in what was literally a desert; it led congressmen to insist upon certain impractical provisions of the Homestead Act; it lay back of the peculiarly bitter frustration of western farmers beginning in the 1870s.... It excited the imagination of Frederick Jackson Turner, not to mention all the historians who so eagerly endorsed the 'frontier hypothesis' as the most plausible explanation for the Americanness of various attitudes and institutions....<sup>2</sup>

Nevertheless the cultural gaze continues to be fixed onward and upward, convinced of an ever-rising standard of living in the next year or in the next state.

To face the fact of limited resources is to face oneself. It is to let go of the distraction offered by mass cultural delusion and begin to accept reality on its own terms. Yi-Fu Tuan pointed out that culture can offer an escape from self: "There are different ways to escape, but if

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<sup>2</sup>Leo Marx. *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Idea in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), 142.



what one wishes to escape from is the singularity, frailty, and openness to change of the self, then there is no better way than immersion in the group and its numerous anchoring devices."<sup>3</sup> It is such a relief to surrender to the ideals and values of that larger group. In exchange, one gets to live in a status quo that is unfulfilling and ungrounded—a Faustian bargain, to be sure.

The following four people did two things that extricated them from this self-defeating pattern. First, they became isolated from the greater culture. As time went on, this allowed them to form ideas on the basis of experience rather than myth. Second, they wound up in the West and stayed there. Whether through choice or chance, they were forced to adapt to the land and surrender the fantasy. True, this did not inevitably lead to happiness. It did, however, lead them to experience their world acutely, accurately, and deeply.

### Evelyn Cameron

Evelyn Cameron first came out West for a honeymoon hunting adventure. Four years later she and her husband returned, this time hoping to make a financial killing. Though the adventure materialized, the fortune never did. Instead Cameron got Montana. Over the next 35 years she grew to understand her adopted home, a process she chronicled through a wonderful series of photographs and a meticulous

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<sup>3</sup>Yi-Fu Tuan, *Escapism* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998),

daily journal. As for so many others, Cameron's flight into space eventually led to a firmly rooted sense of place.

Evelyn Jephson Flower was born in England in 1868 to a well-connected family with money. (Her half-brother would become Lord Battersea in 1892). This was a world of genteel manners and coquetry, and she could not have been less suited to it. As the *New York Sun* reported in 1900, "Ever since she was a girl on her father's place in Surrey, and elected to put in her time shooting rabbits and grouse with her brothers instead of doing fancy work and going to dancing, she has been devoted to hunting."<sup>4</sup>

Her sisters married reasonable, conventional husbands and stayed in England. Evelyn married a "genteel but penniless" Scotsman, apparently for love.<sup>5</sup> They wed in 1889 and came to Montana on a hunting honeymoon, where she became one of the first women to introduce split skirts to the West.<sup>6</sup> They loved the life and terrain, and returned in 1893 to raise polo ponies. English magazines had suggested this would be lucrative, but instead it was disastrous. The ponies that didn't die on the passage proved "too wild for English riders."<sup>7</sup> For the rest of their lives their finances would be precarious. They bought and lost several ranches, all in

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<sup>4</sup>"A Woman's Big Game Hunting: Mrs. Evelyn Cameron Tells of Her Life in Montana," *New York Sun*, 4 Nov. 1900.

<sup>5</sup>Montana Historical Society, Archives, Manuscript Collection 226, Index and Guide to Collection (Helena, MT: Unpublished), 1.

<sup>6</sup>"A Woman's Big Game Hunting."

Eastern Montana. They had a little money from Evelyn's family. The rest they made from raising horses and vegetables, as well as from the sale of her photographs and his essays on Montana wildlife and ranching.<sup>8</sup>

They had fifteen years of this routine, struggling but apparently happy. They went home a few times but always came back. Ewen Cameron published regularly in British nature magazines such as *The Auk*. They were admired by their neighbors, who were somewhat awed and bewildered by "Lord and Lady" Cameron. "He was an English nobleman and he was an army man...and she was a Jewess. She was a Rothschild...and she married this nobleman, and they turned her out," inaccurately recalled her former neighbor and photography subject Jesse Trafton.<sup>9</sup> Though the misunderstanding probably stemmed from Lord Battersea's marriage to a Rothschild, it is true that the West has often been a blank slate on which to write delusions of grandeur. Trafton claimed Mrs. Cameron introduced herself as Lady Cameron. Whether or not she actually did this, her obituary in the *Billings Gazette* did greatly inflate her position when it recorded her as "the widow of Ewen S. Cameron, a younger son of Lord Cameron of England, and in line to succession to the title."<sup>10</sup> As for the

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<sup>7</sup>Montana Historical Society, Archives, Manuscript Collection 226, Index and Guide to Collection, 1.

<sup>8</sup>"A Woman's Big Game Hunting."

<sup>9</sup>Montana Historical Society, Helena, MT. Oral History 505, Interview by Laurie Mercer, 4 April 1983.

<sup>10</sup>"Death Removes Pioneer Woman, Mrs. Cameron, Widow of Titled Englishman, Dies in Glendive." *Billings Gazette*, 5 Jan 1929.

failed pony ranch, the *Gazette* breathlessly reported that, "From his herd was trained some of the most famous horses in Europe."<sup>11</sup>

Whatever the couple's dreams, they ended when Ewen Cameron died of cancer in 1915. Despite the wishes of her family, Evelyn returned to Montana to run their ranch alone. "On March 16, 1916, Evelyn burned a stack of Ewen's old letters, then put on the Victrola and 'Danced alone.' She was to dance alone for the rest of her life."<sup>12</sup>

At this point, most women of her background would have chosen to move on. Instead, Cameron continued to live quietly, contentedly, and entirely alone on a desolate ranch in Eastern Montana. For thirteen years her life was productive and disciplined, as chronicled in a tight and precise hand with a perfectly inked fountain pen and through a wealth of photographs. Carefully she listed her daily activities, the letters written, chores done, money collected, books read. In 1917 she wrote to her friend Jessie, "I am...quite alone on the ranch but I have plenty of occupation--cattle, photography, reading etc., that I do not feel lonely." To "My Dearest Old Hil" she announced:

You ask if there is not someone who would stay with me now that Janet Williams is not available. Well, dear girl, no doubt if I wished, I could find a companion for the winter, but, as Ewen used to say, I am a '[indecipherable] old Codger' and infinitely prefer

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<sup>11</sup>Ibid.

<sup>12</sup>Donna M. Lucey, *Photographing Montana: 1894-1928* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1991), 229.

living alone. I do not make friends easily, and know of no one but Janet who would prove a congenial companion.

She went on to say that although her neighbor had a charming wife, "I do not regret the break in friendly relations, caused by the isolated tract, because I shall not be bothered by having to entertain and be entertained by them."<sup>13</sup> She even fought a fire on her ranch alone and with little comment.

Despite the terseness of her entries, the careful reader can see the changes in her thinking over time. One sign is the focus of the notes and clippings found in the flyleaves of every diary. When Cameron first moved to Montana the clippings were materialistic and ambitious. The 1894 diary contains "The Marriage of a Viscount" and "Number of Millionaires in the United States."<sup>14</sup> Later they seem to respond to specific events. The same diary that contains her husband's obituary has a bizarre collection of articles quite different from those of any other year. They include titles such as "Loses a Third of his own Brain but Soldier Doesn't Miss It," "Driven Mad by Own Cure," and "Slain by Circus Elephant."<sup>15</sup> In the later years of her life, though, Cameron became much more grounded in the immediate experience of place. She took a photograph of her hands kneading bread. She noted the consistency of the snow that she swept from the

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<sup>13</sup>Evelyn S. Cameron, Fallon, MT, copy of letter dated 12 February 1917. Montana Historical Society, Manuscript Collection 226, Box 3.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., Box 1.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., Box. 5.

door. The "Number of Millionaires" was replaced with an ecstatic "'Lilies blossomed for first time this year."

Cameron stayed on in Montana, even through the droughts of the late teens and the grasshoppers of the '20s.<sup>16</sup> She had once conceived it as a place of easy wealth and exotic adventure. But, in the words of Johnny Cash, "time had woven for her the realization of a greater truth." Her later pictures and diaries depicted the stark beauty of the Eastern Montana landscape with clarity, truthfulness, and love. She died in Fallon in 1928.

#### Everett Ruess

Everett Ruess was perhaps the most tragic figure in this collection. A would-be artist, Ruess wandered the California mountains and desert Southwest in the early 1930s, hoping to find inspiration. He hunted genius in the canyons, but found something other than what he sought. Ruess initially saw the West as a way to escape himself--his insecurities, his inadequacies, and his fears. Instead, he was forced to let go of the romantic conceptions he held about both himself and his surroundings. Unfortunately, unlike Cameron, Ruess did not have the strength or experience to build a life for himself within this new mental landscape. In 1934, at age 20, he vanished forever somewhere along the Escalante River in

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<sup>16</sup>Lucey, 236.

southern Utah.<sup>17</sup> Despite his short life, Ruess left a series of searingly introspective letters that chronicle his emotional journey.

Everett's mother, Stella, was an artist and a poet. She was apparently ambitious for her younger son, who she considered gifted.<sup>18</sup> Stella encouraged his bohemian wanderings and attempts at photography and blockprinting. Writes Ruess biographer W.L. Rusho:

It should be noted that the whole Ruess family formed a cohesive unit that gave each individual member much strength. Everett was repeatedly able to step forth into the unforgiving wilderness with neither adequate funds nor modern equipment, partly because of the moral and financial support he received from his parents and brother.<sup>19</sup>

Stella may also have been behind Ruess' rather self-conscious presentation of himself as an 'Artist,' and his aggressive (and often successful) efforts to strike up friendships with established painters such as Maynard Dixon.

Ruess didn't care much for school, was an able but not immediately brilliant artist, and had difficulty relating to people his own age. Is it any wonder, then, that he found solace on his long treks through the desert? Like a Holden Caulfield of the wilderness, Ruess' emotional vulnerability was agonizingly transparent. He had depressive tendencies,

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<sup>17</sup>W.L. Rusho, *Everett Ruess: A Vagabond for Beauty* (Salt Lake City: Peregrine Smith Books, 1983), 1. *A Vagabond for Beauty* is both a biography and a complete collection of Ruess' existing letters and journals. As Ruess' papers are still in the possession of the Ruess family in Los Angeles, I have relied on Rusho's excellent and thorough book throughout this manuscript.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., 3.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., 5.

and some letters suggest suicidal impulses. That this was a worry to his family is clear from his response to one letter: "No, I am in no danger of a nervous breakdown at present," he wrote. "How about you?"<sup>20</sup> In contrast to the anxiety he felt in society, wilderness inspired him to delighted mania. "I had some terrific experiences in the wilderness since I wrote you last--overpowering, overwhelming," he wrote to a friend. "But then I am always being overwhelmed. I require it to sustain life." He signed this letter, "Sweepingly, Everett."<sup>21</sup>

Ruess, like many a westerner, started out in flight from the world. At age 17 he wrote:

My friends have been few because I'm a freakish person and few share my interests. My solitary tramps have been made alone because I couldn't find anyone congenial--you know it's better to go alone than with a person one wearies of soon. I've done things alone chiefly because I never found people who cared about the things I've cared for enough to suffer the attendant hardships.<sup>22</sup>

It's not that he didn't try to conform; he just couldn't do it. At his father's urging he came home and spent a semester at college. Later, from Mesa Verde (Colorado), he wrote back:

I don't feel that I have the right spirit for junior college, at all. You spoke of my aloofness before. That is enforced--I want friends as much as anyone, but my ideals of friendship make it very difficult to find true friends. Four of my best friends have gone to New York, and Bill, Clark, and Cornel have become estranged, while I rather outgrew Dee. That leaves me completely friendless, and it is hard to start from the bottom again.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup>Ibid., 101.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., 89-91.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., 57.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., 87.



In the wilderness, he was alone by circumstance rather than lonely by nature. "The beauty of the wet desert was overpowering. I was not happy for there was no one with whom I could share it, but I thought, how much better than to be in a schoolroom with rain on the windows, or at home in my dreary bedroom. My tragedy is that I don't fit in with any class of people."<sup>24</sup>

But solitude can be a trap as well as an escape. Rusho observes, "His letters from Arizona and Utah in 1934, while some of his most beautifully written, reflect an air of futility and a realization that he was now trapped by his love of the wilderness, his aversion to cities, and his need for further training."<sup>25</sup> In the last year or two of his life, Ruess faced an increasingly difficult set of choices. Should he give up his dreams of artistic greatness or return home to try and perhaps fail? Should he resign himself to endless misanthropy or make the attempt to find a place in community? Like Cameron, Ruess had come to the point where he had to either cut his losses or stick it out. As early as 1932, a letter to his brother suggests which way he was leaning:

I have been thinking more and more that I shall always be a lone wanderer of the wilderness. God, how the trail lures me. You cannot comprehend its resistless fascination for me. After all the lone trail is the best... And when the time comes to die, I'll find the wildest, loneliest, most desolate spot there is.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup>Ibid., 75.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., 7.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., 78.

Ruess was last seen on November 19, 1934, 50 miles out of Escalante. Three months later a letter of enquiry from his parents raised alarm, and local residents organized a search party in early March. They found his two burros, both living, and a place where he had carved NEMO 1934 in the doorway of an Indian ruin.<sup>27</sup> There are two explanations for the 'NEMO' carving. Stella Ruess claimed it meant "nobody," and was a reference to the trick Odysseus used in escaping from the Cyclops. But a friend said it was an homage to Jules Verne's misanthropic Captain Nemo in *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea*.<sup>28</sup> "Nemo's motto for the *Nautilus* was *Mobilis in Mobile*, or 'mobile in a mobile element'.... Nemo was solitary, arrogant, sensitive, even a little romantic, but above all free. Perhaps most important to Everett was that Nemo had broken every tie upon earth...."<sup>29</sup>

Although NEMO was the last word ever heard from Ruess, he failed as miserably at being a nobody as he had at being a great artistic somebody. "Though he appeared to many to be an aimless vagabond," writes Rusho, "he was in fact driven, not only to find beauty, but to communicate an interpretation of that beauty to the world. In a real sense, he was not a free spirit."<sup>30</sup> Nor was he truly mobile. Though he traveled endlessly, his wandering was grounded in a particular place--

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<sup>27</sup>Ibid., 184-188. Ruess' camp outfit was never found, leading to much speculation of foul play or of an intentional disappearing act. The mystery remains unsolved.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., 191.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., 211

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., 208.

the desert Southwest--and the attempt to understand that place is what gave meaning to his tragically short life. Over the four years that Ruess spent in the wilderness, we can see the evolution in his thinking about the desert, including the processes and animals that shaped it and the people who made it a home. At the same time, we can watch him gradually abandon his grandiose dreams and finally come to accept himself. After several years in the desert, he attempted to justify his lack of interest in the affairs of the world.

Wrote the would-be Captain Nemo:

A year ago my Communist friends were firing it at me when I told them that beauty and friendship were all I asked of life... I consider it a hopeless, thankless task to struggle with the blind apathy of the masses. Neither can we persuade the leaders, the capitalists, to cut their own throats, so there you are.... So, instead, during this last year, I have continued to seek beauty and friendship, and I think that I have really brought some beauty and delight into the lives of others, and that at least is something.<sup>31</sup>

Most young adults come to understand themselves in relationship to family and community. Ruess' self-imposed exile from society led him to understand himself in relationship to stunning gorges and arid plains. An important part of that learning process was letting go of old misconceptions about both landscape and self. This was a great victory, and it is what makes such a young man's letters so well worth reading. Tragically, though, Ruess was unable to turn these revelations into a new way of existing

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<sup>31</sup>Ibid., 124.

in the world. Instead he gave up culture for nature, when he needed both.

### Levi Lathrop Smith

One of Washington's earliest pioneers, Levi Lathrop Smith settled near what is now Olympia, Washington in 1846. Epileptic and a bit eccentric, Smith kept a diary that is quirky, melancholy, and charming. He was initially an enthusiastic booster of Washington commerce. After his first Washington winter, however, he was forced to deal with the here-and-now rather than future prospects. Furthermore, his day-to-day life included personal struggles such as his illness and his frequent mood swings. And although he lived with a partner, a sense of loneliness--or aloneness--runs throughout the short journal, which ends with his death in 1848. Like Cameron and Ruess, Smith's western experience was not one of endless freedom, but was instead about learning to appreciate his experience within limited possibilities.

Smith arrived in October of 1846 and, with his partner, Edmund Sylvester, staked his claim on Puget Sound "two miles from the extreme head of Budd Inlet."<sup>32</sup> Smith was initially delighted by his prospects, writing excitedly in his journal:

...the facility this part of the country possesses as a commercial country need not be commented on. every person who has any idear of the locality of the country must be aware of its advantiges as a commercial country, the exporting of lumber from this part of the country at

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<sup>32</sup>James Robert Tanis, "The Journal of Levi Lathrop Smith," *Pacific Northwest Quarterly*, 43, no. 4 (October 1952): 279.

no subsequent period must form a very extensive and profitable buisness and were the country settled at the preasant I have no [doubt] but what it would soon attract shipping to a larg extent.<sup>33</sup>

As for his life before coming to Washington, little is known. According to James Tanis, "He was born in New York state; and, it was said, he had there studied for the Presbyterian ministry." Tanis doubts this, though, and the rest of his pre-Washington story is equally speculative. "He emigrated early to Wisconsin where, so the story goes, he became attached to a half-breed girl of Catholic faith. Under opposition to this affair he moved to Oregon where, in 1845, he met Edmund Sylvester."<sup>34</sup> Once Smith arrived in Washington the record is more certain. He was active in politics, and his diary records that he voted in elections and was in contact with the governor. He was also elected to the Oregon Provisional Legislature in 1848 (although he died before he could begin his term).<sup>35</sup>

On the face of it, it sounds as if Smith lived the heroic life of a pioneer founder. A closer look, however, reveals a pattern of lonely routine and quiet observation. Edmund Sylvester described the stark cabin where Smith spent most of his time:

[The house is] built of split cedar, with a stone fire-place and a stick chimney. It is covered with four-foot

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<sup>33</sup>Smith, Levi Lathrop. Personal Diary, 1847-1848. Special Collections, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, New Haven. Undated entry. Smith's idiosyncratic spelling and grammar have been left as is in all quotations.

<sup>34</sup>Tanis, 279.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid.

shingles put on with weightpoles. It has three lights and one door, with a rough puncheon floor, made of split cedar, with a closet and bed-room made of the same materials. The furniture consists of two tables, one bedstead, which is made by boring holes in the side of the house and driving in sticks, three benches and two stools. The cooking utensils consist of one frying pan and tin kettles, one twelve quart, one six quart and three quart, for boiling, and one tea kettle. The closet contains one tin pan, three tin cups, three tin plates, three knives and forks, two half-pint tin kettles, one basin and a trencher...<sup>36</sup>

It was a fairly isolated spot, though an Indian camp was not too far off. "The shore was occupied in the winter by several hundred Duwamish Indians, and whites could only reach them by tramping through the thick Northwest woods," writes Tanis.<sup>37</sup> Settlers eventually built a trail, but only a few days before Smith's death. The *Washington Centennial Commemorative Booklet* described Smith as "cultured and solitary." It is unclear if the latter was from choice or necessity.<sup>38</sup>

Although Smith oscillated between joy in his surroundings and despair in his loneliness, despair predominated in the months after his arrival. On October 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1847 he penned, "Saturday 2nd a rainy morning helth gaining. nothhing sturing one cano with a sail going down the bay and one a going up this afternoon this is melancholy." A few days later his mood improved and he recorded, "Wednesday 6th quit a fine day three or four Canoes has been up and down the bay this forenoon. this is pleasant. last night the Cow remained

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<sup>36</sup>Washington Centennial Association, *1845-1945: A Washington Centennial Commemorative Booklet* (Olympia, WA: Washington State Department of Conservation and Development, 1945), 22.

<sup>37</sup>Tanis, 279.

out. the Wind is at the Northend..." But then he again succumbed to melancholy. On November 8, 1847 he wrote, "quite a pleasant day gethering the Carrots and Beets still an gloomy nothing a sturing seen no living Mortal as yet."

Despite his loneliness, Smith seems to have had trouble getting along with others. He reported several quarrels with the Indians, and there was frequently friction with his partner, Sylvester. On March 11, 1848 he wrote, "Sylvester came last night had a contest not however many words." Elsewhere, Smith clearly uses 'contest' to describe a fight, whether physical or verbal. The Smith-Sylvester dynamic is one of the most fascinating mysteries of the diary. An undated entry (beneath a paragraph in Chinook) reads: "Edmund you are a fine fellow and that is not all. you are given to committing that heinous act so expressly forbidden by sacred writ. That lothsum practice which I much fear will cut assunder the bond of friendship between you and all virtuous persons." This is even more puzzling when compared with the entries in which Smith seems to find a strong pleasure in Sylvester's company: "Sylvester has came holm to live."<sup>39</sup>; "rainy. helth improving. remarkable still making Sylvesters vest. just started."<sup>40</sup>; "A delightful day. My Man to holm all day had a pleasant day in good helth likewise."<sup>41</sup> While a physical liaison is unlikely (the "lothsum practice" most

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<sup>38</sup> Washington Centennial Association, 21.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 1 March 1848.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 7 April 1848.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 9 April 1848.

likely refers to personal behavior that Smith found objectionable), the evidence suggests a highly charged and volatile emotional connection between the two men. Whatever the nature of the relationship, Sylvester inherited Smith's claim and founded Olympia there in 1850.<sup>42</sup>

Another contributor to his variable moods was his epilepsy. He called it "falling sickness" and frequently complained of not remembering his fits. Sometimes he heard about them from others, while on other occasions the attacks threw him out of bed. On November 15, 1847 he wrote, "A good deal improved in helth. I Must have had a Very severe time to have prostrated Me so several [days] in succession Mr Handcock was here untill 6 in the evening Sylvester did not cum. I do not feel right to day although I am about." By the next day, "My head is still confused and I sum of the time hardly know what I am doing." His illness left him vulnerable, and was perhaps a factor in his delight at seeing visitors (although he did not always get along with them once they were there). Shortly after that bad fit, "Mr Foards Sons arived last Night a Seven from Nesqually remained all night started at Six this morning. feel remarkabley brilliant in spirits [and] body liquise [likewise]. the influence which the human bodys has on each is demonstrative of wisdom to an unlimitable extent."<sup>43</sup> Smith died in August of 1848. Although some reports say he drowned and others that his body was

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<sup>42</sup>Tanis, 281.



discovered in his boat, Tanis is probably right in assuming epilepsy as the actual cause.<sup>44</sup>

Smith is another good example of a first-generation westerner who was coming to grips with the realities of place. The shift in his mood between 1847 and 1848 is clear and striking. In the first few months his diary recorded the commonplace, the commercial possibilities, and the loneliness. Later, in 1848, the tenor changed to "thank that Eternal cause of all good that moving principle of life"<sup>45</sup>, "been contemplating the heavens this Morning the Moon and the shining Stars"<sup>46</sup>, and even, "the heavens are profusions in effluvium."<sup>47</sup> Like Ruess, Smith had only a short time in which to learn about the western environment. But by the time of his death, he had turned an acceptance of the landscape into a basis for joy.

#### Francis Marion Streamer

Francis Marion Streamer (1834-1912) was by far the most prolific and eccentric of these four subjects. Streamer had been a newspaperman back East. After a nervous breakdown, the schizophrenic and alcoholic Streamer walked from Pennsylvania to Seattle by way of Mexico and California, filling page after page with shimmering but fractured descriptive prose. He started out with enormous hopes for the country and for

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<sup>43</sup>Smith, 27 November 1847.

<sup>44</sup>Tanis, 281.

<sup>45</sup>Smith, 22 January 1848.

himself, and was well versed in the propaganda of western settlement. He even wrote some of it, in exchange for railway tickets and the occasional cash payment. As time went on, however, Steamer developed a better understanding of the environmental and political realities of the West. He settled in Eastern Washington, and the racial strife and arid climate of that region influenced much of his later writing. And although his illness would never let him give up the illusion of his divine greatness, he was forced to realize his social position: alone, marginalized, and forgotten.

It is difficult to pin down Steamer's biography. While he was prone to exaggeration, he also had a knack for getting caught up in extraordinary situations and ingratiating himself with famous people. He definitely acted as a go-between for General O.O. Howard and Chief Moses, among others, and he reported much of his activity with a journalist's accuracy. But he also absolutely believed he was in direct contact with God, and was an "amanuensis" who had lived before and had access to ancient mystical knowledge. With a flair for self-dramatization he recalled, "My brother Charles named me 'Bison' for my upstanding hair, just like the American buffalo which in afterlife I walked among on Texas frontiers without stampeding them. They simply gazed at

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 25 January 1848.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 1 April 1848.

me and I gazed at them so we knew each others' viewings exactly."<sup>48</sup>

Whatever the truth of that statement, certain facts about Streamer's early life are probable. He was married and had four children. He separated from his wife in 1861 when he joined the Union army and she went home to live with her parents. There was a brief post-war reunion, and then a formal separation in 1863.<sup>49</sup> Streamer biographer Ann Briley contends that, after a period of wandering, he landed a job as commercial editor for the *Omaha Daily Herald*.<sup>50</sup> He also wrote a weekly column on western affairs for the *Chicago Times* under the name Hawkeye. In 1868 the *Herald* apparently fired him. Probably not coincidentally, it is around the same time that he reported his first vision:

It was at Sherman, the summit of the Black Hills, eight thousand-two hundred and sixty two feet high in altitudinous perspecuity of vision and Elysiancelestial lodge--many thousand feet higher--that I heard in air most rare, the prayers of the sun's coronation.<sup>51</sup>

He was briefly engaged as the night editor of the *Chicago Times*, but left shortly after. On November 11, 1875 Streamer left Pennsylvania (where he was born) and began walking to

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<sup>48</sup>Francis Marion Streamer. 30 July 1893. Washington State Historical Society, Tacoma, WA, Archives, Francis Marion Streamer and Family Papers, Box 1. In the late summer of 1893, Streamer penned a lengthy personal statement and autobiography. I have relied on this statement for much of Streamer's history, along with Ann Briley's biography *Lonely Pedestrian: Francis Marion Streamer*.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid., 10 August 1893.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid., 12 August 1893.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid., 15 August 1893.

Washington Territory, presumably because he had a brother on Whidbey Island.<sup>52</sup>

Streamer's diaries are fascinating and exasperating. Briley suggests that his penchant for rhymes and alliteration indicates hebephrenia, a type of schizophrenia marked by compulsive rhyming.<sup>53</sup> He adopted this style only infrequently, however, which leads the reader to speculate that his illness occurred sporadically in manic episodes. His diaries leave the impression of a brilliant but erratic man prone to frenzied ecstasy and confused despair. Then there are other times when he seems completely lucid, writing with perfect journalistic detachment. He apparently presented any or all of these sides to the public, thrilling or alarming acquaintances depending on the day. An early Cashmere, Washington pioneer offered this description of Streamer: "He was talking a mile a minute, a steady stream of cherries going into one side of his mouth, the pits on the other side."<sup>54</sup> Streamer was not unaware of the impression he left, although his view of himself was colored by the confidence he had in his divine mission. "I am not half so eccentric as I am mysterious and not near so full of vagaries as I am full of good intent."<sup>55</sup> Later, in March of 1882, he penned himself a message from God:

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<sup>52</sup>Ann Briley *Lonely Pedestrian: Francis Marion Streamer* (Fairfield, WA: Ye Galleon Press, 1986), 31.

<sup>53</sup>*Ibid.*, 37.

<sup>54</sup>*Ibid.*, 46.

<sup>55</sup>*Ibid.*, 80.

You are the son of a very highly cultured father and mother, both descendents of a superior race of people whose genealogy can be traced back to the most learned rulers of modern times. You are a selected son of the High Son to do and perfect a great work, and your varied travel trials and treks are intended to make you fearless and invincible; to keep you strong and healthful...you are the real John.<sup>56</sup>

Steamer's travels to Washington territory are fascinating reading. The portraits of his numerous acquaintances are well drawn and amusing; the descriptions of the wilderness are stunning. He spent days and weeks alone, whether in the Mexican desert or the Yosemite woods. When he was alone, he was more grounded in reality. He wondered at the scenery, but he was also forced to deal with the scarcity of food and water. He grew increasingly concerned over the scarce resources of western topography. Finally, he developed a profound compassion for the difficulties of Native Americans. The former railroad propagandist ultimately came to see settlement as a mixed bag that was, at best, falling far short of its promise.

Another chapter of the Streamer story began with his arrival in Ellensburg, WA. This would be his primary home for the next twenty years. Streamer entered the country still clutching his wild hopes. He was enthusiastic about everything: the agricultural and mining potential, the brightness of his prospects, the charm and intelligence of his every acquaintance. He began writing for various papers, from the local rags to the Seattle *Post-Intelligencer* to the

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<sup>56</sup>Streamer, 20 August 1893.

dailies back East. This employment must have been only sporadic, though, since in the late '70s he took a job teaching school near Ellensburg. It didn't last long; he was sacked after his first drinking binge. He then became a notary public for West Kittitas,<sup>57</sup> in which capacity he apparently doubled as Justice of the Peace. But he doesn't seem to have managed much longevity in that job, either. His last official action was in 1880 when he issued an arrest warrant for "Pop" Lyons, who, according to Streamer, "injudiciously shot and wounded an Indian who supposedly was not owning the horse he rode."<sup>58</sup>

That ruling may well have appeared mad to the people of Kittitas, and not just because of the judge's shaky mental state. Streamer's unusual compassion for Native Americans was paired with a remarkably clear understanding of their legal plight. He also spent much of his time living with various tribes. Sympathetic to the Indians and, as always, interested in his personal stature, Streamer became a go-between between the Indians and the United States Army. He met Chief Moses in 1878, and Chief Tonasket in 1880. In 1890 General Howard wrote:

Francis Marion Streamer has lived a long time up there among the different tribes of Indians, and is their constant friend. He sometimes perplexes me by the manner in which he expresses himself, but he is honest and I have found his statement of things to be most reliable.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>57</sup>Briley, 53.

<sup>58</sup>Ibid., 87-88.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid., 64.

According to Briley, Streamer did his best to make Chief Moses appear sympathetic in newspaper reports for the *Portland Oregonian* and *Weekly Oregonian*, particularly during the Chief's 1878-79 imprisonment. Streamer also became embroiled in several battles over the inheritance rights of the half-Indian children of white men.

Despite, or perhaps partially because of, these worthy activities, in 1883 Yakima authorities took Streamer into custody and declared him insane.<sup>60</sup> He spent a short time at the Western Hospital for the Insane at Steilacoom. During his incarceration, the hospital attempted to reach Streamer's family back East; an April 6, 1884 letter to Dr. Waughop, the superintendent of the Steilacoom Asylum, reads:

Dear Sir, In reply to Mr. Johnson's letter, Mama wishes me to say it will be perfectly impossible for us to allow my father to come home unless he is thoroughly right in his mind, my mother has been ill all winter the Dr says it would be the death of her to have any worry or taxation put upon her now and beside[s] being ill she is sixty two years old, just at the age to have rest...M\_\_\_ says for you to get my father any extra food that he wants, also a new suit of spring clothes.... M\_\_\_ says should it be necessary for her to come down she will come. Anything that will make things more comfortable do not hesitate in getting it for him send her the bills...Read this to my father and tell him everything is all right, that Johnnie is in school everyday and to write to us. Yours Respectfully....<sup>61</sup>

The sad letter made enough of an impression on Streamer that he transcribed it into his diary. Nevertheless, he made good progress and was soon released. In an 1884 letter to Streamer

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<sup>60</sup>Ibid., 103.

<sup>61</sup>Partial hand copy of letter to Dr. J. S. Waughop, 6 April 1884. Washington State Historical Society, Tacoma, WA, Archives, Francis Marion Streamer and Family Papers, Box 1. Streamer copied this letter into his diary, but did not include the name of the author.

the superintendent of the asylum commended him, "I was glad to be so kindly remembered by you and am happy to see you flourishing. I have seen some of your articles copied into the *PI* of Seattle and they are all very readable and enjoyable."<sup>62</sup> The letter also commented on Streamer's alcoholism. "I am sure you will not take it amiss if I say to you that your greatest enemy is strong drink?"

Streamer served as a postmaster for a time, and then attempted to have his "scrolls" and manuscript published. The rejection letter he received said, not surprisingly, that they were "too comprehensive and enlarging upon too many subjects."<sup>63</sup> The author followed with, "The readers of the *Herald* are not metaphysicians; give us something mild sort-of, devoted, if you will, to landscape, to the American Indian on his native heath, the buffalo and his extinction, the opportunities for emigrants." Growing more desperate, Streamer sent a long letter to General Howard asking for a job. In his reply the General kindly advised:

It is a curious idea that you have formed that you are an amanuensis of a higher power...Seek peace and pursue it. Lie down beside the still waters. Gather rest and refreshment from the sweetest of fountains. Otherwise your mind will lose its balance and the brittle pitcher be broken at the source.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>62</sup>Dr. J.S. Waughop, Steilacoom, WA, to Francis Marion Streamer, Ellensburg, WA, 2 December 1884. Washington State Historical Society, Tacoma, WA, Archives, Francis Marion Streamer and Family Papers, Box 1.

<sup>63</sup>Briley, 114.

<sup>64</sup>General O.O. Howard, San Francisco, CA, to Francis Marion Streamer, Ellensburg, WA, 18 August 1887, Washington State Historical Society, Tacoma, WA, Archives, Francis Marion Streamer and Family Papers, Box 1.



Needless to say, Streamer's letter seeking employment with Jay Gould also failed to meet with success.<sup>65</sup>

Streamer continued to bounce around the Ellensburg area, living sometimes with friends, sometimes with the Indians, sometimes nowhere in particular. In 1888 he was sent back to Steilacoom for a month. A friend's letter strongly suggested that Streamer's problem was, again, his binge drinking: "I saw [Judge Davis] and asked him to remove that shadow from your name; that an accidental weakness should not be a brand of dishonor...He said that the proper way to proceed was to write a petition to the Court testifying to your sobriety..."<sup>66</sup> Aging and in decline, Streamer was again released. He continued to advocate for his "Indian friends" and found shelter with various acquaintances. Finally, even those dried up. He was committed to the Medical Lake Asylum outside Spokane on October 5, 1898. He died there in 1912 of tuberculosis.<sup>67</sup>

It is hard to imagine a life more filled with colorful and spectacular failure. In a memorable obituary, the Ellensburg newspaper eulogized:

In the late '70s Francis M. Streamer arrived here, having walked every step of the way from Pittsburgh by way of Texas, Arizona, California and Oregon, and for a few years he was one of the conspicuous figures in the community. The

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<sup>65</sup> Francis Marion Streamer, Ellensburg, WA, hand copy of letter to Jay Gould, Chicago, IL, 11 June 1887, Washington State Historical Society, Tacoma, WA, Archives, Francis Marion Streamer and Family Papers, Box 1.

<sup>66</sup> J.F. Le Clerc, Ellensburg, WA, to Francis Marion Streamer, Steilacoom, WA, 23 July 1888, Washington State Historical Society, Tacoma, WA, Archives, Francis Marion Streamer and Family Papers, Box 1.

<sup>67</sup> Briley., 163.

man was addicted to the drink habit, and was also recognized as a harmless lunatic, but he was brilliant.<sup>68</sup>

Unlike the other three subjects, Streamer's madness prevented him from fully understanding the truth of his own life. This only makes it more remarkable that, despite his personal delusions, Streamer was a constant voice for environmental and political restraint. It is almost as if the dysfunctional workings of his own mind were invisible to him, but he could see their reflection in the denial-ridden culture of western settlement. The more time he spent in the West, the more he called out for understanding and compassion. Unfortunately there was little compassion, whether for the Indians, the land, or for Streamer.

Years before Raymond Carver arrived in Yakima (just next door to Ellensburg), Francis Streamer was setting the stage for Carver Country's lonely, lost-in-the-middle-of-nowhere drunks. But Streamer, along with Cameron, Ruess, and Smith, didn't think of himself as being nowhere. The lostness of Carver country is a mirage, and it stems from alienation from place. Each of these four came West with a high-rolling dream having little to do with reality. Those dreams soon vanished. Yet slowly and painfully, they all learned to live lives grounded in the demands of environment and the enjoyment of immediate experience. In doing so they also left us a

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<sup>68</sup>Ibid., 159.

valuable legacy, since it is figures such as these who open the door to our own sense of place.

## CHAPTER THREE

## CRISIS AND DISILLUSION

'Progress' was a magic word in the nineteenth century, with the kind of cachet that 'globalization' and 'synergy' carry today. The conviction that human history was marked by continual improvement motivated, masked, and justified the upheavals of industrialization. Industrialization, in turn, spurred expansionism, which provided new markets and access to raw resources. This took the form of Imperialism in Europe, and Imperialism plus Manifest Destiny in the U.S. Territorial expansion--otherwise known as 'conquering'--was also justified by the idea of progress. In the case of Imperialism, the white man was thought to be nobly conferring his superior culture on 'backward' peoples. When it came to the American West, pioneers thought they were fulfilling a God-given mandate to people the New World with civilized, hard-working, productive Christians.

This was the lens through which many westerners viewed their surroundings, as well as their origins. Yi-Fu Tuan writes, "Seeing landscape in perspective presupposes a major reordering of time as well as of space. From the Renaissance onward, time in Europe was steadily losing its repetitious and cyclical character and becoming more and more directional."<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, "On a temporal place, frontal

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<sup>1</sup>Tuan, *Space and Place*, 123.

space is perceived as future, rear space as past."<sup>2</sup> The West was forward, the forward was future, and the superiority of the future was considered a near-scientific certainty.

Sadly, though, progress can be an illusion. Forward is not necessarily better, and the future frequently contains things more evil than anything seen in the past. This became crushingly clear during World War I, and post-war culture took alienation and disillusion as a matter of course. By 1929 no one was surprised when Freud remarked, "Man has, as it were, become a kind of prosthetic God.... But in the interests of our investigations, we will not forget that present-day man does not feel happy in his God-like character."<sup>3</sup> In nineteenth and early twentieth century America, however, that kind of thinking was unpopular. Although people were no more content than they ever had been, they were immersed in a culture that insisted they were. Indeed, the system even seemed to *depend* on them being progressively happier. If life was not improving, then what was the point of the displacement, the struggle, the entire westward movement? On the other hand, the hardships of actual experience were difficult to deny.

This created, in many, a state of cognitive dissonance. Frontier psychology was colored by an unrealistic optimism undershot with suspicion and despair. As a result,

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<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 40.

<sup>3</sup>Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents* (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1961), 44-45.

contradiction abounded. New westerners would praise the open spaces and deplore the crowded East. Then, almost in the same breath, they would rhapsodize over the thriving cities to one day take root in the brutal wilderness. Dreams of unlimited prosperity and delightful ease dangled like sugarplums. They were soon followed, however, by despondence over the coming corruption of untrammelled paradise.

This illogical progression of ideas can be seen in the diaries and letters of Cameron, Smith, and Streamer, all of whom indulged in a manic boosterism that then gave way to alienation and despair. (Ruess skipped the first part, as will be explained below.) In the early phase of the process, the subjects' relationship to the larger economic culture was characterized by what ecopsychologist Chellis Glendinning calls "techno-addiction."<sup>4</sup> They regarded economic growth as an unqualified good, and personal wealth as the key to happiness. For Glendinning, capitalist greed is an addictive state marked by "denial, dishonesty, control, thinking disorders, grandiosity, and disconnection from one's feelings."<sup>5</sup> The second phase commenced with the puncturing of the balloon. Geographically isolated from the overwhelming messages of consumer society, the subjects began to realize the emptiness of those dreams of wealth, as well as the slim chance of their being fulfilled. It is important to note that

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<sup>4</sup>Chellis Glendinning, "Technology, Trauma, and the Wild," in *Ecopsychology: Restoring the Earth, Healing the Mind*, ed. Theodore Roszak, Mary E. Gomes, and Allen D. Kanner (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1995), 46.

this realization did not result in an articulated ideological rejection of capitalism. Rather, this 'withdrawal' stage resulted in a psychic void. As the old value system collapsed, it was difficult to quickly fashion a replacement from the available cultural material. Thus, disenchantment with society was temporarily followed by the pointless rebellion of reactionary primitivism, or else by simple escapism.

### Utopianism

The likelihood of disappointment was increased by the tendency of new westerners to describe their surroundings in terms to which even Shangri-La couldn't compare. Their praise of the natural landscape was strongly entwined with the gospel of commerce and technology; initially, these writers saw no contradiction between economic growth and nature. Tuan suggests that the hyperbole was simply due to the insecurity of the newcomer. He writes, "New cities, such as the frontier settlements of North America, lacked a venerable past; to attract business and gain pride their civic leaders were obliged to speak with a loud voice. Strident boosterism was the technique to create an impressive image...."<sup>6</sup> The extreme volume of the pitch, however, suggests something more is at work. Indeed, the subjects often extolled the West in the pseudo-academic language of the amateur Victorian scientist--

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<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

as if the local skill of patent medicines suddenly took up selling real estate. This may have been a subconscious attempt to add weight to impossible claims.

The gospel of industrial progress was only one ingredient in the language of western boosterism. Advertising, journalism, travel writing, and chamber of commerce brochures also all made contributions to this unique genre. The resulting blend is as laughable as it is tragic, since one cannot forget that it led many intrepid souls into disaster. Cameron, for example, was lured by magazines that declared Montana ideal for raising polo ponies. That didn't teach her much of a lesson, though, as is clear from the exaggerations in her own early letters. It is a good thing Cameron's mother-in-law was not a prospective pioneer. She most certainly would have been misled by Evelyn's declaration that their new ranch, "more resembles Barcaldine Castle being high up on a hill sloping down to a hay meadow through which a creek runs." What's more, Eastern Montana was just as pleasing to the English eye as the grand lawns of home--at least once in awhile. "[L]arge numbers of wild fruit trees grow all around and when these are in full bloom and the grass is green there are little bits of views that will equal a Kent or Sussex landscape."<sup>7</sup>

Levi Lathrop Smith's initial impressions were untainted by comparisons to far-away castles and grand parks. With

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<sup>6</sup>Tuan, *Space and Place*, 174-175.



unmistakably American optimism, Smith instead enthused over the West's commercial possibilities. Here, Smith dropped the authentic voice of his personal musings and, in his description of western Washington, picked up a tone reminiscent of Ray Bolger's scarecrow in *The Wizard of Oz*:

This soil is admirable adapted for potatoes partickually the prairie soil garden vegetables thrive most luxuriously this country taken generly possesses one great advantage the power of retaining and exhaling during the dry season a certain quantity of humidity which is emitted in great abundance [during] the warm season thereby enabling the vegetation to with stand the effects of caloric which is so strongly intermixed with the atmosphere. but the most important part of the country for agriculture unquestionably is the timberland. this is composed of an adheasive and strong clay the surface for sum considerable distance is coverd with decayed vegetation and when mixed with the clay is rich and productive.<sup>8</sup>

Streamer was, of course, a professional propogandist. Of New Mexico he breathlessly reported, "I have an exalted opinion of the country and its vast and varied mineral resources; its adaptedness to grazing and fruit growing; and coming facilities for agriculture and commercial interests."<sup>9</sup> That is positively restrained when compared with the praise he saved for his adopted home in Eastern Washington. An 1877 letter to the editor, written shortly after Streamer's arrival, enthused:

The Kittitas Valley is the grandest and most fertile valley on the Pacific coast.... In four years it will be more densely populated that any other valley in the state, on account of its valuable water, timber, mineral and agricultural resources.... Indeed, it is an Eden naturally,

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<sup>7</sup> Cameron, 30 January 1894.

<sup>8</sup> Smith, undated entry.

<sup>9</sup> Streamer, 13 May 1876.

and will be the paradise of fruits, flowers, foliage and fertility.<sup>10</sup>

The lone, important exception to all this is Everett Ruess, who skipped the boosterism stage and went straight to primitivism. This may be due to his time in history. Ruess' first impressions of the West were made well after World War I, and by a young man at that. He was writing during the Depression when questioning capitalism was common; his friends included communists, artists, and other disaffected thinkers. It is therefore unsurprising that from the start he viewed commerce with ambivalence: chiding his brother for working in the Fleischmann Corporation, disdaining the money-grubbing Indian traders, and deploring the need for artists to be troubled with money. As for technology, he wrote, "I myself would rather walk a whole day behind the burro than spend two hours on the streetcar."<sup>11</sup> It is interesting to compare the following description of the Roosevelt Dam with what Streamer or Smith might have written in Ruess' place:

April 10 (1932)  
Roosevelt, Arizona

Dear Father and Mother,  
As I write I am sitting on the Roosevelt Dam, halfway up on the lower side. Wild winds are shrieking in the wires, swirling in the dust heaps, and swishing the bushes. Clouds are scudding by, and the water from the powerhouse is roaring out like a maelstrom, whipping itself to froth before it blows to Apache Lake. The turbines are humming. Now the gale grows fiercer. The lake above is flecked with whitecaps and the willow trees bend low.

Luck to everyone,  
Everett<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Streamer, 4 July 1877.

<sup>11</sup> Rusho, 42.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 70.

Here we see nature and machine locked in battle, with the storm futilely assailing the mammoth, impassive dam. Ruess himself is an indifferent observer. Compare this to the two earlier diarists, both excited champions of technology's ability to transform nature. Smith and Streamer echo Tench Coxe, an 18th century thinker who saw no contradiction between the laws of industrialization and the mechanics of nature. Coxe, says Leo Marx, "has no difficulty blending factories and machines into the rural scene."<sup>13</sup> Nor did Streamer and Smith have difficulty imagining thriving utopias emerging from their tiny, desolate communities--no more than Cameron had in envisioning Fallon, Montana surrounded by the lush ranches of a new western gentry.

Cameron, Streamer, and Smith were encouraged in these fantasies by a larger culture that insisted that anything was possible. Culture, notes Tuan, is a delightful enchantress. "However," he adds ominously, "fantasy that is shut off too long from external reality risks degenerating into a self-deluding hell--a hell that can nevertheless have an insidious appeal."<sup>14</sup> During the nineteenth century, limitless expansion was celebrated as the source of economic prosperity, political equality, and civic peace. The implication was that when growth was not possible, neither was happiness. This was

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<sup>13</sup>Marx, 152.

<sup>14</sup>Tuan, *Escapism*, xv.

precisely the wall against which the hopeful pioneers found themselves.

### Disillusion

Ecopsychologists believe that our consumer culture is built on the illogical axiom of 'more equals better.' They liken this to an addictive state, in which the need for "more" displaces rational thought about the desired substance or the consequences of having it. The roots of this are twofold. The first cause is our disconnection from nature, and therefore from our core psyche. Glendinning thinks of "our disconnection from the earth as the 'original trauma.'"<sup>15</sup> The second cause is cultural, as our sensory world is set up to foster, rather than heal, this psychic damage.

"[Advertising]", write Allen Kanner and Mary Gomes, "creates artificial needs within people that directly conflict with their capacity to form a satisfying and sustainable relationship with the natural world."<sup>16</sup> As Tuan observes, this is culture's purpose. "Culture enables us to forget the menacing Other--weather, for instance--by constructing a house."<sup>17</sup> It allows us to "escape from nature--from the natural environment, its uncertainties and threats."<sup>18</sup> But ironically, the more control the human species achieves over

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<sup>15</sup>Glendinning, 41.

<sup>16</sup>Allen D. Kanner and Mary E. Gomes, "The All-Consuming Self," in *Ecopsychology: Restoring the Earth, Healing the Mind*, 81.

<sup>17</sup>Tuan, *Escapism*, 82.

<sup>18</sup>*Ibid.*, xiii.

the external world, the more we strive to distract ourselves from the despair of the internal one. "We find it striking that consumerism can be understood as stuffing oneself to the point of bursting in order to avoid an inner emptiness that is horrible to behold."<sup>19</sup>

As is evident from the denial-ridden rapaciousness of their early writings, three of the four subjects went west in the thrall of this addiction. Yet after a few short months or years out of the swim of mainstream society, each began to express discontent with the cultural status quo. For a time in the 1890s, the Camerons took in boarders to make ends meet. This was not to Evelyn's liking, and she hopefully wrote to her mother that if her prospects improved, "we should then be independent of these impecunious boarders who in the long run give more anxiety than their remuneration can atone for."<sup>20</sup> But despite her financial straits, it is clear that her dreams of success were no longer in the mold of the typical English gentlewoman. In the same letter, the hard-up rancher coolly wrote:

Miss B. does not appear to have mentioned what she was prepared to pay to be made comfortable on a Montana ranch. A lady that is devoted to riding could have plenty of it and enjoy herself immensely but one fond of society would of course be very much out of her element and knowing so little of Miss B's tastes it is impossible to form an opinion as to whether she would be happy in these parts.

Montana was no longer Kent or Sussex in embryo, and Cameron sounds glad of it. In 1900 she returned to England for a

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<sup>19</sup>Kanner and Gomes, 83.

<sup>20</sup>Cameron, 8 January 1896.

lengthy visit. That year's diary is a study in depression, with weather mostly 'dull' (as opposed to the frequent 'glorious' of her Montana days), remarks that she "woke [the] maids twice," or that she "felt rather blue."<sup>21</sup> Cameron had never been well adapted to refined society. Her sojourn in Montana had made it unbearable.

There is no longer any need to take Everett Ruess out of order. Ruess' suspicion of the rat race is clear and pervasive, and his language foreshadows that of the dropouts of the '50s and '60s. For Everett, money and things were unnecessary--and desk jobs led straight into the heart of darkness. When his brother, Waldo, took a promising position at the Fleishmann Corporation, Everett fumed, "As far as I am concerned, your work is quite unnecessary, since I can keep very healthy without Fleischmann's yeast, and do not need it for booze or bread, as I consume neither."<sup>22</sup> In an essay written in the spring of 1933, Ruess declared his avoidance of the capitalist temple, which he imagined to be presided over by the goddess "Work":

Although thousands are going in and I am the only one going out, I go my way firm in my inner convictions, though for a second there is a wry twist to my lips and a swifter beating of the heart in unwilling trepidation as I pause at the portals. Then, nostrils dilated in derision as I meet the eyes of the malignantly leering goddess for the last time, I go forth alone into the outer sunlight where I meet

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<sup>21</sup>Her disenchantment with grand society may have been exacerbated by family trouble. Her half-brother had embroiled the Batterseas in a scandal the previous year when he married the divorced wife of a Rothschild viscount; the newspaper clippings were kept in Evelyn's diary along with something called "Culture of the English Jew."

<sup>22</sup>Rusho, 42.

no one save stragglng contemptible fools who are hastening anxiously to the temple, eyeing me askance as they pass.<sup>23</sup>

The intensely self-absorbed nature of Levi Smith's musings makes it difficult to speculate on his attitude toward far-off civilization. We can, however, chart his shifting mood over his years in the West, which places him firmly into the pattern established by our other three subjects. Smith's diary begins in May of 1847. Throughout the summer and early fall he had few, if any complaints. During this time his diary concentrated primarily on the practical: the health of the cow, the mortality of the pigs, work done on the house, number of canoes passing, and the condition of the fields. This makes sense, as on his arrival in Washington he would have been filled with hope for the future: thus his emphasis on the homestead and livestock, which would be the basis for any future prosperity. It would not be surprising if his enthusiastic paragraph on the future of Washington agriculture was written during this period.

His mood changed abruptly in mid-fall. The cow grew ill, several pigs died, and the weather darkened. Sylvester was gone a great deal, and when he was home they may have quarreled. The first sign of Smith's despair was on October 2nd, when he recorded, "one cano with a sail going down the bay and one a going up this afternoon this is melancholy." In November he had a severe epilepsy attack, which seems to have caused his depression to worsen. On the 30th he wrote,

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<sup>23</sup>Rusho, 95.

"this is A dull way of spending wht few moments appertains to this life every day is one the less although little is thought that wee are one day nearer the fatal Gulf." It is not difficult to imagine that Smith might have been feeling disenchanted with pioneering. Manifest destiny, for him, meant a small, struggling homestead in an endless forest surrounded by hostile Indians. No wonder if his dreams were in disarray and he now believed he was wasting his life. He reached his lowest point in early December: "dull and melancholy nothing a sturing solitude of death reigning. the effect on the Mind has an unfavorable result and increasing."<sup>24</sup>

With Streamer we are again on very solid ground. Despite his early enthusiasm for progress, he was always suspicious when it came to the large conglomerates spawned by late industrial capitalism. In 1876 he wrote of Arizona working men, "these men--good as they are--cannot without much privation and suffering successfully buck against the shoddy monopolists who now hold control of the lines from Prescott to the Colorado river."<sup>25</sup> A Populist and a Jeffersonian idealist, Streamer was particularly disturbed by such purely commercial ventures as mining. Indeed, he was not far off from ecopsychologist Ralph Metzner, who reads gold and silver as addictive substances that artificially fuel the spread of

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<sup>24</sup>Smith, 2 December 1847.

<sup>25</sup>Streamer, 16 June 1876.



capitalism.<sup>26</sup> On the same day Streamer wrote the previously quoted letter praising the fertility of Washington farms, he wrote another that took up the issue of mines: "All of these mines are now paying largely, and if improved machinery were there they would be the best paying mines on the coast."

Nevertheless, in words that echo other dissenters of the age, he announced, "I am not very favorable to gold at any time, as I believe it (when used as an idol or worshipped as money) the curse of all mankind and the downfall of all nations..."<sup>27</sup>

His views on the Eastern interests grew more bitter over his years in the West. The final break occurred when he made a trip home to Omaha in August of 1890. On his return he ranted:

...I discovered Puritanical fathers had got possession of the mayoralty of the city; that Quakers were driven out; Ponca Indians carried away to Indian Territory to die with malaria; their reserve lands set aside for pale face encroachment...some of my most generous friends bankrupted, and the street publicans in possession of street corners and for pretense, making long prayers. It appears the railroad and the city carpenters had got into a juxtaposition like unto angry cats in a sack swung over a pole, and were trying to scratch out each other's ideas of who made the city--the Jews or the Gentiles. The actual Businessman had neglected to extend trade; and the entire trade of the city had relapsed into the dyspeptic condition of Women's Temperance Unions, Salvation Armies and a host of English, Irish and Hesse Gassel style of mixed drink for a sacrament--My visit lasted just three days which sufficed.<sup>28</sup>

Though a bit discombobulated (and bigoted), this paragraph manages to attack just about every aspect of mainstream

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<sup>26</sup>Ralph Metzner, "The Psychopathology of the Human-Nature Relationship," in *Ecopsychology: Restoring the Earth, Healing the Mind*, 60.

<sup>27</sup>Streamer, 4 July 1877.

nineteenth-century American culture: religion, morals, economics, and politics.

Most meaningful critique attempts objectivity; one tries to separate oneself from a body of thought in order to determine its rules and inconsistencies. One way late-industrial culture perpetuates itself is by allowing its inhabitants no mental space--no peace, no quiet--in which to critique it. In 1964, Herbert Marcuse wrote about this loss of 'private space': "The result is...an immediate identification of the individual with *his* society and, through it, with the society as a whole...In this process, the 'inner' dimension of the mind in which opposition to the status quo can take root is whittled down."<sup>29</sup> Cameron, Ruess, Smith, and Streamer were suddenly and effectively isolated from the centers of culture. This physical and mental distance allowed each to become more perceptive about the gap between what society promised and what it delivered.

#### Escapism and Primitivism

Like furious children, the first impulse of all four was to forget about the world entirely. Leo Marx suggests that this rejection was already latent in the contradictory desire to replace eastern life with something similar but somehow

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<sup>28</sup>Briley, 113.

<sup>29</sup>Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964), 10.

better. Pastoralism--in which technology exists harmoniously in nature--and primitivism are inexorably linked:

Both seem to originate in a recoil from the pain and responsibility of life in a complex civilization--the familiar impulse to withdraw from the city, locus of power and politics, into nature. The difference is that the primitivist hero keeps going, as it were, so that eventually he locates value as far as possible, in space and time or both, from organized society...<sup>30</sup>

In the cultural history of the American West, primitivism would prove to be as problematic a construct as unreflective boosterism. Bill Bevis writes, "Oddly enough, primitivism, for all its ecstatic worship of western expanse, is largely a negative model, for it demands that we reject our own past, our own people, and the most advanced aspects of our species." Primitivism also rests on an illusion--this time that happiness lies in freedom from culture. For the primitivist, "that freedom is often a childish desire to be left alone. Such an antisocial freedom, carried to its extreme, can result in the loneliness and isolation that we have idolized in the western hero, riding off into the sunset. His songs are sad."<sup>31</sup> It is as impossible to entirely escape culture as it is to escape from nature. The attempt to do either leads to grief.

Alone in the vast expanse of the horizon and disenchanted with society's promises, is it any wonder that a westerner could easily lose sight of the line between freedom and anarchy? The situation was even more confusing for those

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<sup>30</sup>Marx, 22.

writing at the end of the nineteenth century, when Social Darwinism was becoming an accepted truth. As Bevis notes, "All virtue seemed opposite to all reality....'natural law' was assumed to be a mean law, guiding the self-interest of individuals and societies." Progress as the great equalizer had given way to progress as the destroyer of the weak. "'Progress,' of course, was part of this inevitable and nasty evolutionary law. The good and the true...seemed hopelessly split. This is a terrible position for a culture to find itself in. The 'realist' must then be amoral."<sup>32</sup> With Cameron, we can see this in her detached, cavalier attitude toward the easy morality of the West. At times this is charming, as when the popularizer of the split skirt cheekily tosses into her diary the quotation from Deuteronomy prohibiting women from wearing men's clothes. But it becomes a little more disturbing when she blinks at riot and murder. In 1897, just two days after Christmas, she cheerily wrote, "Terry has been rather lively of late, cowboys shooting here there and everywhere. One saloon is riddled with bullet holes and one cowpuncher held up the Justice of the 'Piece,' (this is his spelling not mine). In fact they painted the town red and not one was arrested!"<sup>33</sup> A few years later she wrote to her mother of the routine nature of murder in the West (including an incident involving a woman who shot her ex-husband and was

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<sup>31</sup>Bevis, 27-28.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., 51-52.

<sup>33</sup>Cameron, 27 December 1897.

acquitted). "I think the West takes life more easily than the East," she wrote calmly, "excepting on certain occasions such as cattle round-ups."<sup>34</sup>

Cameron casually turned away from society, looking inward to her ranch, her family, and her own thoughts. Ruess, on the other hand, angrily and consciously rejected the world. He often contrasted himself with his friends who were political agitators, and, as previously quoted, he rationalized his selfishness: "I consider it a hopeless, thankless task to struggle with the blind apathy of the masses. Neither can we persuade the leaders, the capitalists, to cut their own throats, so there you are. Am I right?"<sup>35</sup> Ruess' father often wrote his son long, thoughtful replies, though few have been preserved. Whatever his response to that last letter, two months later his son answered:

What you say is partly true, in your remark that I have done what I wanted most in spite of the world crisis.... A few nights ago, Joe Whitnah, Ed Bates, and I had a jolly discussion, and went to bed serene in the belief that the world is hell bent for destruction, writhing from one snare into another, becoming more and more hopelessly involved in vicious, unbreakable circles, and gaining momentum on the wretched road to Ruin. One feels the need of believing something, and this is less repugnant to the intellect than the other outlooks, or so it seems to me.<sup>36</sup>

Yet however jolly and serene Everett may have felt that evening, in other letters it is clear that he equated this estrangement from humanity with annihilation. After five days alone in a canyon somewhere in northern Arizona he wrote to

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<sup>34</sup>Ibid., 8 January 1904.

<sup>35</sup>Rusho, 124.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., 134.

an acquaintance, "But he who has looked long on naked beauty may never return to the world, and though he should try, he will find its occupation empty and vain, and human intercourse purposeless and futile." Prophetically he added, "Alone and lost, he must die on the altar of beauty."<sup>37</sup>

Smith is, again, the most difficult to locate in this pattern, since he wrote little about things that were not a part of his immediate experience. He was also a very early pioneer for whom deaths by flood, fire, starvation or Indian were real threats.<sup>38</sup> He would thus be more likely to cling to eastern culture as a protector from Tuan's ominous Other. Smith's epilepsy further increased his feelings of dependence on others, and therefore on society. Nonetheless, we can make certain suppositions based on the diary in its entirety. In particular, his personal dealings are evidence of a complex relationship with society. As mentioned earlier, Smith greatly desired visitors, but quarreled with them once they arrived. In other words, he thought he liked company better than he did. As for his praise of progress, the gushing paragraph on Washington's commercial prospects appears once on a stray, undated page, but never again. From this we can conclude that his words were not lastingly felt. Finally, Smith was at first happy and hopeful in his isolated cabin.

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 148.

<sup>38</sup> The Whitman massacre occurred in 1848, Smith's second year in Washington Territory.

Then, as life failed to pan out as he had expected, he went through a period of loneliness and depression.

Streamer's relationship to civilization was always confused. He was an outsider who longed to be in, a humanist who was constantly rejected and let down by humanity. His imagination was excited by the possibilities of technology, which he attempted at times to weave into his hallucinatory cosmology. For example, in September of 1893 he wrote, "I have learned this much in 1893 that God, Christ, Shiloh, Elias, John and the rest of the Great Spirit family, have all gone to the World's Fair in Chicago to see the New Era and the Old Era combined."<sup>39</sup> On the other hand, he grew more and more bitter about the economic and political system. At about the same time he envisioned God wandering through booths at the World's Fair, Streamer penned a warning to the U.S. Secretary of the Treasury: "The people were before money made slaves of them. Every nation legalizes bills, notes of exchange and bonds. A national debt cannot exist without previous contract.... Your money laws are only Congressional laws. C X V See XI and XII Chapters Isaiah."<sup>40</sup> But what really eroded his faith in his own culture was its treatment of the Indians. These were his friends. They took him in, were kind to him, and respected him. As early as 1882 he wrote while sitting in an Indian camp:

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<sup>39</sup>Briley, 137.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., 134.

I have seen many a pleasant scene in this camp as well as in others that I have visited that cheer me in my lonely hours and cause me to blush for shame at the ignorance, duplicity and oppressiveness of my own race of people who know of no other God than a book God and who worship no other spirit than the spirit of lust, obscenity and stinginess....<sup>41</sup>

The longer he was in the West the more closely his fortunes became aligned with the tribes he championed, and the more firmly he turned his back on the values of a land-hungry nation. In June of 1892 he wrote the Commissioner of Pensions, "Can public land be donated, transferred or conveyed?.... Is there any such Constitutional power vested in Congress?.... Which was first--Earth or Congress?"<sup>42</sup> Clearly, Streamer had come a long way since his days as a railroad publicist.

After only a short time in the West, each subject began to turn away from the larger world. Cameron ceased to follow the social happenings in London, turned a cynical eye to the violence and dysfunction in her own community, and concentrated on her ranch and animals. Ruess declared he could do nothing to save humanity, so he might as well pursue his own fanciful travels. Smith sank into an inactive state of melancholy. And Streamer gave up on his own kind altogether, instead hoping for divine intervention and the victory of Indian values. Luckily, though, this was only a temporary stop on their journeys. Tuan writes, "Goal is one

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 92.

<sup>42</sup> Francis Marion Streamer, Ellensburg, WA, hand copy of letter to Green R. Raum, Commissioner of Pensions, Washington, D.C., 23 June 1892. Washington State Historical Society, Tacoma, WA, Archives, Francis Marion Streamer and Family Papers, Box 1.



of the three categories of place that can be distinguished when movement is in one direction, with no thought of return; the other two are home and camps or wayside stations."<sup>43</sup> These subjects had thought they knew where they were heading, only to lose the goal. It was now time to take stock of their surroundings, and decide if this was just a stop on the road or was, instead, home.

Up to this point, these lives have followed the classic western plotline of escape from civilization. Implicit in the desire to escape from society is the desire to escape from oneself, a freedom that is symbolized by the idea of open space. "Both ideals," observes Bill Bevis, "--the ideals of an empty space and of an empty psyche--represent a pursuit of innocence, a longing for a virgin land inside and out."<sup>44</sup> The catch is that land is never virgin, never truly empty. Even a desert, if looked at closely, is teeming with life. Nor is there such a thing as an empty psyche (not for adults, anyway). That is why this is only the mid-point of the story. The second half begins with the realization that escape from life, from history, and from one's own culture is impossible. That realization begins with the recognition of place.

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<sup>43</sup>Tuan, *Space and Place*, 180.

<sup>44</sup>Bevis, 17.

CHAPTER FOUR  
OBSERVATION AND REALIZATION

One of the themes of this paper has been the relationship between public values and private perceptions. Our cultural truths do not always hold up under close scrutiny. Nevertheless, a wide range of psychic carrots and social sticks exist to keep us from wandering too far from the accepted version of reality. It becomes difficult to think for oneself, as "Evaluations and judgments tend to be clichés.... Personal experience yields to socially approved views, which are normally the most obvious and public aspects of environment."<sup>1</sup> This is nowhere more true than in America, where the very freedom of the system necessitates strong alternate methods of social control. In the words of Herbert Marcuse, "Domination has its own aesthetics, and democratic domination has its democratic aesthetics."<sup>2</sup> At times, though, an individual may encounter a contradiction between belief and reality so piercing that she simply cannot continue in the same way. This paradigm-smashing moment could involve racism, economic disparity, the abuse of power, or environmental degradation. Whatever the nature of the event, she is faced with a choice: to plummet into despair, sink deeper into denial, or change the way she approaches and

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<sup>1</sup>Tuan, *Space and Place*, 146.

<sup>2</sup>Marcuse, 65.

understands the system. This is what happened to our subjects.

These settlers ventured into the wilderness with a fixed set of ideas about where they were going and who they would meet. The situation was further complicated by the contradictions in that set of ideas. Europeans had always seen the West in terms of a false duality--bountiful virgin versus terrifying wilderness:

The infinite resources of the virgin land really did make credible, in minds long habituated to the notion of unavoidable scarcity, the ancient dream of an abundant and harmonious life for all. Yet, at the same time, the savages, the limitless spaces, and the violent climate of the country did threaten to engulf the new civilization...<sup>3</sup>

False dualities also existed for pre-existing inhabitants, whether animals or people. Native Americans were considered either wild savages or noble savages, while earlier white settlers might be considered either lawless or picturesque. Meanwhile, animals were categorized as wild or domestic and then ranked according to their number, value and usefulness. Reality, of course, was much more multi layered and interesting. These hard and fast groupings exacerbated the difficulty our subjects had in comprehending the reality of the people, animals, and land they encountered--and completely obscured the subtle and complex relationships between them.

In addition, each stereotype, wilderness or garden, called for a different set of attitudes and behaviors. "We

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<sup>3</sup>Marx, 43-44.

might call them ecological images. Each is a kind of root metaphor, a poetic idea displaying the essence of a system of value."<sup>4</sup> For example, Cameron interpreted her environment one way when she thought of herself as a lady in a bountiful paradise, but quite another when she adopted the role of financially strapped rancher. Smith followed a similar pattern, with his self-image shifting from prosperous entrepreneur to lonely, desperate homesteader. Ruess started off seeing the West as grist for his artistic mill; it was the place that would make a man of him and bring him glory. Later, he understood his relationship to the land as something that set him alone and apart from such worldly goals. Finally, Streamer's initial impression of the West was of a Biblical paradise. But he came to see it as a place of constant struggle, whether against unforgiving nature or eastern political power. Leo Marx traced these kinds of conceptual splits back to the Puritans, writing, "Life in a garden is relaxed, quiet, and sweet...but survival in a howling desert demands action, the unceasing manipulation and mastery of the forces of nature, including, of course, human nature."<sup>5</sup>

Even the most heroic action, however, will not turn the vast howling desert into a bountiful garden. (At least not before the hydraulic miracles of the twentieth century--and then not entirely.) As we frequently saw in chapter three,

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<sup>4</sup>Ibid., 42.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., 43.

once faith and will had failed to triumph, our subjects sometimes began to fall into utter hopelessness. Fortunately, though, this was short-lived. The Puritans softened after one or two generations; as they adapted to the environment, ideological rigidity became less necessary. For Cameron, Ruess, Smith, and Streamer, none of whom ventured west in a close-knit religious community, it took only a few years or months to begin to adapt to and appreciate their surroundings. "What begins as undifferentiated space," writes Yi Fu Tuan, "becomes place as we get to know it better and endow it with value."<sup>6</sup>

Had these subjects simply moved on, as so many in the West do, they might never have circumvented the false duality of garden/desert. Wallace Stegner noted, "Especially in the West, what we have instead of place is space. Place is more than half memory, shared memory. Rarely do westerners stay long enough at one stop to share much of anything."<sup>7</sup> But these individuals didn't move. Instead they stayed, and as they stayed they observed. Observation, in turn, led to the development of a new value system rooted in the realities of people and environment. This is the shift from space to place. This chapter traces that shift in the subjects' changing attitudes toward their neighbors, wildlife, and the land itself.

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<sup>6</sup>Tuan, *Space and Place*, 6.

<sup>7</sup>Stegner, 22.

## Neighbors

Just as there were two opposing, simplistic conceptions of the western environment, there were also two main stereotypes of Native Americans. The first was that of the romantic "noble savage." His (it was almost always a 'he') character was pure, his natural dignity uncorrupted by decadent civilization. His cousin was the animalistic savage, a feral creature with no sense of morality or virtue. These two did have one thing in common, however: "Europeans coming West were often fleeing civilization; as 'primitivists' they looked at 'nature' as the opposite of civilization, and therefore expected Indians to be uncivilized."<sup>8</sup> At first our diarists vacillated between these two notions of their non-white neighbors, though with a decided emphasis toward the less flattering image. One of the most significant things the subjects learned over their years in the West was that Indians were more than stock characters out of dime novels. Indeed, they came to realize that Europeans were not the only *human beings* on the planet. From this came another significant revelation: that there was more than one way of looking at place. "We wanted an empty space for starting over, and wanted to arrive there with an empty mind.... But that was not what the Indians wanted; it was not their dream. And it was not an adaption to environment."<sup>9</sup> On the other hand, even the more generous observations of the new arrivals

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<sup>8</sup>Bevis, 93.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., 17.

were colored by their preconceptions. Sherry Smith noted an inverse relationship between an appreciation of Indian cultures and an affection for industrial capitalism. She wrote of American popularizers of Native cultures, "If they intended their works as windows into Indian worlds, they also served as mirrors into their own, presenting refracted images of their longings, desires, and sometimes neuroses."<sup>10</sup>

We will have much more to say about white-Native relations when we examine the writing of Ruess, Smith and Streamer. It is important to remember, however, that those who came before were not always Indians. For Evelyn Cameron, the recent German and Russian immigrants to Montana were as exotic as the denizens of Cairo must have been to a British Army officer's wife. How casually she writes about the natives (in this case, cowboys) "shooting here there and everywhere" over the Christmas of 1897.<sup>11</sup> The early date is important, though, for it was only at first that she regarded her neighbors as an enchanting part of the scenery. Although she wrote little about this, ample evidence of a shift in her thinking can be found by examining her photographs. Initially, Cameron regarded her subjects with the distanced eye of subject training on object. Look, for example, at the photograph of an unidentified family made in 1902 (figure 1). The figures are distant, posed in front of their small sod house, with the sheep wandering through the yard. It is a

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<sup>10</sup> Sherry L. Smith, *Reimagining Indians: Native Americans through Anglo Eyes, 1880-1940* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 8.

picture of a place--or of an idea of a place--with the people as incidental extras. There is a similar photograph of the three Stith children in 1899 (figure 2). Again they are distant and posed far apart, mere extras in the pageant of a country store. Finally, note the exciting portrait of a professional wolf hunter, made in 1902 (figure 3). His wagon and equipment are arrayed behind him while in front he holds a young wolf, partially obscuring his face. Cameron was also not above staging some local color when none could be found. According to Jesse Trafton, when she asked him to pose for her, "I said, 'I'm not a sheepherder!' I was here long enough to know that a sheepherder wasn't thought too much of. And I didn't want to be in the thing." Cameron won out, though. "She was so nice...so she stayed with me all day long, and I put the sheep wherever she wanted."<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup>Cameron, 27 December 1897.

<sup>12</sup> Trafton.



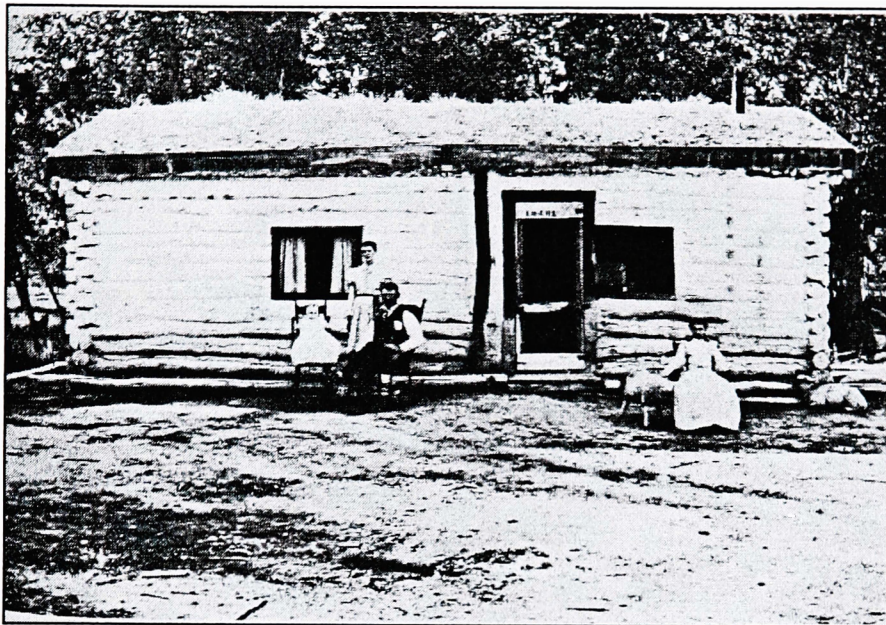


FIGURE 1<sup>13</sup>



FIGURE 2<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Lucey, 33.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 18.

FIGURE 3<sup>15</sup>

It is therefore striking to compare the photographs taken between 1895-1905 to those made after 1910. There is a lovely picture of German immigrant girls taken in 1913 (figure 4). The young women are beautiful, photographed closely, and hold a strong gaze with the camera. In the same year Cameron posed Jack Rice outside his cabin (figure 5). Compare this to the photo made of the family in 1902 (1). Here the focus is on Rice himself, and the rusticity of his surroundings seems to add, rather than detract, from his dignity. In these photographs the I It relationship has been elevated to I-Thou. These were no longer Cameron's subjects, but her friends.

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 4.



FIGURE 4<sup>16</sup>



FIGURE 5<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 188.

Everett Ruess is a stunning example of the tendency at first to despise and dehumanize earlier inhabitants, but then to learn compassion and respect. At first he was utterly contemptuous of the Navajos, possibly in an effort to emulate the old-time pioneers he so admired. In February of 1931 he wrote, "The Navajos live in filth."<sup>18</sup> In March he elaborated:

The traders around here deride the 'Indian-lovers' who drive through in cars and write articles about their picturesqueness and their wrongs. These Indians are not mistreated, but they are scrupulously dishonest, and they live in filth. The tuberculosis sanatorium is always full.<sup>19</sup>

Slowly but surely, Ruess evolved. By 1932 he was staying with a Navajo, and had a crush on his daughter to boot. While there he learned some Navajo songs, along with respect for the physical hardships of their lives. "I helped him hoe seeds in his corn fields until I was on the point of exhaustion."<sup>20</sup> In May 1934 he was able to say, "The Indians have many vices, but they are a kindly people, and I like them and admire their fine qualities."<sup>21</sup> Finally, by the summer of 1934, his views on the white traders had completely reversed:

It has come to the point where I no longer like to have anything to do with the white people here, except to get supplies and go on, and I think I shall not say any more what I do here. Living in the midst of such utter and overpowering beauty as nearly kills a sensitive person by

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 191.

<sup>18</sup>Rusho, 28.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., 32. Everett was only 16 or 17 years old at this time. Still, it shows a remarkable capacity for cognitive dissonance to say the Indians are well treated in the same breath in which he notes the appalling incidence of TB!

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., 75-77.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., 144.

its piercing glory, they are deaf, dumb, and blind to it all. Behind bars in their dirty, dingy, ill-lighted trading posts, they think of nothing but money. When they question me, it is, how much do you make, where do you sell your stuff, what prices do you get?"<sup>22</sup>

He then contrasted this behavior with the treatment he received from a Navajo woman. "When I asked Shimassohn, the grandmother, for some coffee, she beamed, asked me questions, gave me tea and coffee, pushed namskai (bread) toward me, and urged me to eat." He added, "I can't tell you how her kindness warmed my bruised heart. I felt an overflowing of tenderness for those people. They are so childlike and simple and friendly when left alone."<sup>23</sup>

That was in June of 1934. Though still patronizing, he had come a long way from his early statements. After that, Ruess went on to the Hopi villages for the August rain dances. There, "he was actually invited to participate, at Mishongnovi, in the Antelope Dance, a signal honor to a white man."<sup>24</sup> Ruess wrote delightedly of his experiences at Mishongnovi, and mailed his parents a number of artifacts. Finally, in a September letter, he wrote:

I once spent three days far up in a desert canyon, assisting and watching a Navajo sing for a sick woman. I drove away countless hordes of evil spirits but after I went away the girl died. The sand paintings, seldom seen by white men, were gorgeous.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup>Ibid., 153.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., 155.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., 167.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., 171.

No longer were the Navajos "dishonest" or even "childlike." Here Ruess showed his respect for their rituals, religion, and (most important to him) their art.

Levi Smith may or may not have been engaged to a Native girl in his youth. Regardless, there is good evidence of an evolution in his attitude toward his Chinook neighbors. In the first months after his arrival Smith recorded the passing of every Indian and every canoe. For example, his entries of October 5, 6, and 7, 1847, include: "Another loded Cano going down the Bay the Indians are all buisy catching Salmon."; "quit a fine day three or four Canoes has been up and down the bay this forenoon. this is pleasant."; "There is a Cano just a going up with three Indians in it. this is the first to day." Over time, though, the recording of insignificant comings and goings decreased. While in January of 1848 there were ten such entries, in February there were five, in March there were four, in April three, and in May only one. While part of this was due to the absence of large numbers of Chinook outside the winter months, Smith's diaries do show frequent interaction with them in the spring and summer. Casual sightings, however, were no longer worthy of comment. Clearly Smith grew more comfortable with Native Americans, no longer regarding them as notable in and of themselves.

Meanwhile, as the insignificant notations decreased, more substantive entries regarding Smith's personal and business dealings with the Indians increased. He first made

simple trades with them for food items such as cranberries and salmon. By late fall he was hiring them to pull turnips, for which he paid them in potatoes. Eventually he engaged in more complicated deals, as when he, "bought a hog of a Indian Chief for A Blanket in two months"<sup>26</sup> But as relations became more complex, trouble arose. Smith and the Indians began to have "contests." The first was in December of 1847, when he "had a little disput with an old Indian."<sup>27</sup> In January, "Indians came this Morning to traid had sum difficulty with one of them he very sone came to termes."<sup>28</sup> Then, in April of 1848, he reported: "had a contest with the [Indians]. Made them kill three dogs for goring one of my pigs and heave them into the bay. went against there grain."<sup>29</sup>

These battles could be taken as evidence of Smith's hostility toward Native peoples. On the other hand, considering Smith's cantankerous personality (and how poorly he got along with his friends), they could also be construed as a mark of intimacy with them as neighbors. That last entry is both disturbing and intriguing. While the indifferent brutality is shocking, the phrase "went against there grain" is the closest Smith comes to a cultural comment, a recognition of difference. Smith may also have had an Indian friend--an "old woman" who was mentioned in his very first entry. It seems likely that this woman eventually became

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<sup>26</sup>Smith, 27 August 1848.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., 28 December 1847.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., 16 January 1848.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., 27 April 1848.

"Esther," whose comings and goings Smith followed fondly through the winter and spring. Finally, there are the jottings in Chinook in Smith's own hand. While undated, these show a familiarity with and interest in his Indians neighbors far surpassing the detached observations of the first few months.

Like Ruess, Streamer was at first suspicious of his non-white neighbors. Then, once he had received their hospitality, his views quickly fell in line with his experience. An early example of this is Streamer's rapid revision of his opinion of Chinese miners. In Arizona in 1876, Streamer deplored Chinese labor and thought the government should ensure that those jobs went to white men. A few months later in California he was denied a meal by a white but then fed by a Chinese. He wrote, "Here is a strange contrast of hospitality to that old white Californian who refused to give even a piece of bread last night and who no doubt hates in his heart the very poor men who have made him all he is and protect all he owns."<sup>30</sup> Contact with individual Indians led to a similar reversal. In 1876 he wrote that he looked forward to the end of "mixed matrimonial alliances" between Indians and whites in New Mexico.<sup>31</sup> Compare this to

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<sup>30</sup>Ibid., 7 July 1876.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., 23 May 1876. The seeds of compassion were already sown, though, since he also complained of white squatters on Indian lands and deplored the Indian Agency and lack of supplies, writing, "it is a disgrace to the American nation to further tolerate this swindle" He added, "I am all alone with my Grand Guide and writer, and feel perfectly safe although there are in this vicinity over 4000 Apaches on the rampage for food."



August of 1880 when he wrote of a half-Indian girl, "[I] found George's grown-up daughter who is the wife of Thomas Moore to be a very gifted woman having been educated at Walla Walla and well versed in her mother's natural Indian lore.... The mother is possessed of a very close perception and quick discernment."<sup>32</sup>

It should be noted, however, that Streamer's views on Native Americans were complicated by his eccentric religious philosophy. That philosophy was heavily influenced by the beliefs of Christian subgroups such as the Mormons, pseudo-scientific nineteenth century theories, and Victorian occultism (by way of the Theosophists, with whom he corresponded). His initial encounters with Indians were probably colored by his belief that after his "reported" death and resurrection Christ "progressed on foot from Asia Minor, across Beherings Strait.... and that he found here the race descended from the original tribes of Benjamin and Joshua and lived long and died."<sup>33</sup> Streamer also employed such dubious techniques as phrenology in an endeavor to rank tribes in order of racial superiority. For example, in 1880 he wrote of a low-level chief,

"His head is oval pattern, not well balanced..." He continued:  
 I have scanned closely all the Indians of the Mt. Chopaco district.... I have found, not a superior type as I had anticipated, although they rank next in grade to the Methows, which are the superior race, and of the original stock. My own impression is, the Weatchees are entitled to the second grade, the Okanogans third and Moses will so

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<sup>32</sup>Briley, 73.

<sup>33</sup>Streamer, 26 April 1876.

have to order it, and thus place Kuck-uck-tash and Chillicus-haskett above Suscepkin in council orders....<sup>34</sup>

The passage is breathtaking in its racist pronouncements on entire groups. On the other hand, it also shows Streamer's impressive command of inter-tribal disputes and his great respect for his friend Moses. Streamer's sympathy towards the Indians can also be seen in his previously mentioned readiness to issue an arrest warrant when 'Pop' Lyons "injudiciously shot and wounded an Indian who supposedly was not owning the horse he rode."<sup>35</sup> However, his conception of the Indians always remained romantic and imperfect. While he endorsed Tonasket's view that the tribe should be liberated from the Indian bureau and the priests, he also thought the Okanagans should be "placed under the general laws and compelled to earn their own living as he [Tonasket] now does." This was because, "The 'herding system' only tends to impoverish the masses for the benefit of the few, creates dissension, encourages idleness, foments disturbance, engenders ill feeling and costs the government ten times more than would be if every Indian in the U.S. had a good farm."<sup>36</sup> But whatever his misconceptions, his good will cannot be understated. Recall his words while resting in a mountain camp:

I have seen many a pleasant scene in this camp as well as in others that I have visited that cheer me in my lonely hours and cause me to blush for shame at the ignorance, duplicity and oppressiveness of my own race of people who

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<sup>34</sup>Briley, 80.

<sup>35</sup>Streamer, 2 October 1880.

<sup>36</sup>Briley, 76.

know of no other God than a book God and who worship no other spirit than the spirit of lust, obscenity and stinginess.<sup>37</sup>

Streamer, like Ruess, had come to see Native Americans as possessors of a valuable, valid, and in some ways superior culture.

Each of these four travelers came West with a bundle of cultural projections. Those expectations colored their initial impressions. Cameron, Ruess, Smith and Streamer all believed they would find themselves isolated in the midst of an inferior culture. Their job, they thought, was to replace or improve on that culture by imposing their own. Had they been different people--less observant, less reflective, and perhaps more attuned to the restless values of their own civilization--they might have spent their whole lives attempting to do so. Instead something quite different happened, as they found themselves becoming a part of the community of people they had denigrated. It is also important to note that that community was not homogenous, nor even biracial. Western culture includes contributions from Indians of a vast number of tribes, whites of a great many nations, as well as by people of Asian and African descent. Once again, our subjects found that the West was not empty space at all. It was, rather, a place inhabited by many.

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<sup>37</sup>Ibid., 92.

## Land and Animals

Our subjects arrived with an oversimplified conception of the human landscape. Furthermore, they initially approached other peoples in the spirit of domination. This pattern of misunderstanding and arrogance is equally true of their first encounters with the western environment. The relationship was conceived in terms of ownership; the purpose of the land was to produce wealth. In other words, "The living system, on which we depend and of which we are a part, is engulfed and made into a servant."<sup>38</sup> That attitude may have yielded fruit in the lush pastures of Kentucky or Virginia, but it would not work so easily in the West. This was stubborn topography, and it became even more stubborn under the ignorant hand of a deluded master. Therefore, an important part of the space-to-place process was learning to appreciate the terrain as a complex and subtle actor.

But before the new arrival could fully appreciate the landscape, he or she had to better understand the myriad creatures that lived on it. The space-to-place process often began with the recognition of animals as sentient, ecologically vital beings who were important in their own right. Again, the initial impression was often in the context of the market. Animals were commodities: so many geese, so many deer, so many bison. But, as ecopsychologists have discovered, animals serve a much higher purpose. Paul Shepard made clear in The Others that animals are inextricably woven

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<sup>38</sup>Kanner and Gomes, 115.

into the stories and metaphors we use to describe our experience. The human brain developed in the context of other species, and a world without these 'others' is a world devoid of meaning: "The loss of the wild others leaves nothing but our own image to explain ourselves by--hence empty psychic space."<sup>39</sup> Intriguingly, Shepard posits that animals are a key to understanding self as well as environment:

Each kind of animal gives concrete representation to an ephemeral and intangible element of the human self such as assertion, intimidation, affection, doubt, determination, kindness, anger, hope, irritation, yearning, wisdom, cunning, anticipation, fear, and initiative.<sup>40</sup>

This layer of meaning is unavailable, however, if one regards animals as mere units of economic value. Instead, one must come to *know* the others--their markings, behaviors, and characters. "The true richness of these social/natural metaphors depends on knowledge of the natural behavior of the animals themselves, on the diversity and complexity of those animals, a habit of watching we have lost by stages."<sup>41</sup> Truly understanding the ecology of a given place takes years of careful observation. Cameron, Ruess, Smith, and Streamer all developed that "habit of watching," and came to comprehend their environment in a more realistic and profound way. As we shall see in chapter five, this also led them to better understand themselves and their place in the world.

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<sup>39</sup>Paul Shepard, "On Animal Friends," in *The Biophilia Hypothesis*, ed. Stephen R. Kellert and Edward O. Wilson. (Washington, D.C.: Island Press, 1993), 294.

<sup>40</sup>Paul Shepard, *The Others: How Animals Made Us Human*. (Washington, D.C.: Island Press, 1996), 83.

<sup>41</sup>*Ibid.*, 114.

Cameron came to Montana for a hunting vacation and stayed to make money. Her affection for the natural world was instinctive and genuine. It was, however, filtered through the desire for sport and profit; only after many years in the West did she learn to love land and animals outside of anthropocentric systems of value. At first, Evelyn was an avid huntress of wild things and a staunch protectress of more domestic creatures. She was exceedingly fond of her cat, Cinders, and lovingly tended to sick hens, horses, dogs, etc. Over time, though, we see this line between wild and domestic become blurred. On several occasions she became a surrogate mother to wild animals, such as the two bear cubs that were orphaned by her husband's gun in 1900.<sup>42</sup> By 1907 she admitted to her mother that some of the savage beasts in her photos and articles were actually quite tame:

I do not know if you saw my photographs of wolves illustrating an article in Country Life of September 14th. I was much amused by people asking me how I happened to get so close. Of course those were tame wolves which I brought up from the time they were a month old, but we avoided any mention of this fact in the article.<sup>43</sup>

At the same time, her professional writing begins to show a careful observation of domestic creatures--the kind of detailed noticing more often applied in the wild. "The head was drawn back," she writes of a turkey, "the tail spread like a fan, and the vibrating wings were dragged aloud the

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<sup>42</sup>"A Woman's Big Game Hunting." *New York Sun*. 2 November 1900. The cubs were later donated to the London Zoological Society.

<sup>43</sup>Evelyn S. Cameron, Fallon Montana, hand copy of a letter to her mother, 20 December 1907, Montana Historical Society, Archives, Manuscript Collection 226, Box 3.

ground, while at the same time the bird...emitted a peculiar blowing or puffing noise."<sup>44</sup> The distinction between game animals and farm animals was giving way, as each creature became an individual rather than an object of value.

Cameron also grew more aware of the repercussions of human action on the natural world. In 1904 the enthusiastic gameswoman seemed to be losing some of her passion for the sport. She wrote to her friend Betty, "We never shoot on the ranch except at prairie wolves which take the chickens."<sup>45</sup> By 1909 she was advocating loudly for hunting restrictions:

Unfortunately the great impetus given to 'wolfing' during the years above mentioned, due to the high bounties placed on wolves, caused a gradual decrease in the number of antelope, hundreds of which were ruthlessly shot down for bait alone, without counting those killed in so-called legitimate sport.... unless antelope receive complete protection for a further period of five to ten years, these graceful animals are doomed to extinction within the state.<sup>46</sup>

Her appreciation for and understanding of the land itself had also deepened. Her photographs of buttes and mountains are stark, clean, sharply focused, and decidedly unromantic. In 1894 she had enthused to her mother of the Sussex-like countryside. Her 1907 description, while still rosy, was much more appropriate and precise: "The house stands very high and we have charming views of the winding river fringed with cottonwoods. I think a big river is the next best thing to the sea."<sup>47</sup> Furthermore, in the years after her husband's

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<sup>44</sup>Cameron, "Jealousy in a Turkey Tom", *Billings' Gazette*, 22 November 1911.

<sup>45</sup>Cameron, 14 September 1904.

<sup>46</sup>Cameron, "The Prong Horn as a Pet", *London Country Life*, 2 April 1909.

<sup>47</sup>Cameron, 20 December 1907.

death she came to understand the hard work such an environment demanded. In 1916 she wrote her English relatives:

I put in an acre of garden this summer which I kept irrigated and entirely free from weeds. I mowed, raked and pitched 12 ton of hay cut on the ranch alone with the exception of the days when I hired a man to help stack. Last fall I hauled and mined 4 loads of lignite coal and hauled 3 ton of hard coal from Fallon and last fall I also hauled 182 bushels of wheat from a farm on the flat...<sup>48</sup>

In that same year, Cameron's diary contains this cryptic quotation from Isaiah: "The earth also is defiled under the inhabitants thereof, because they have transgressed the laws, changed the ordinance, broken the everlasting covenant." Cameron's West was no longer an empty slate on which to write dreams of fun and profit. Instead, she found herself in a place of fragile ecology, complicated relationships, and backbreaking labor. Yet all was not lost. Through that labor, and by understanding those relationships and that ecology, she would also find the West to be a place of tremendous non-monetary rewards.

Ruess' developing sense of the dignity of nature can be seen in his improving treatment of animals. The boyish Everett first approached them as mere playmates and tools. When toying with changing his own name, he named his donkey Everett. When he changed his name back he began to name his pack animals on a Greek theme, calling the next donkey "Pegasus." His burros were both useful and company. In 1931 he wrote, "Once as I was walking along, Peg slowed down,

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<sup>48</sup>Cameron, 28 September 1916.



looked to one side, then turned around, regarding me as if to say, 'Do you see that?' Offside was a herd of eleven antelopes."<sup>49</sup> Shortly after encountering the Grand Canyon he procured another donkey, Pericles. "Perry is a constant source of amusement. Once he stepped into a tin can and made an undignified spectacle of himself before he freed his foot. When he was tied to a tree, he scratched his chin with his hind foot, but then the foot got caught in the rope and he hopped about on three legs for a while."<sup>50</sup> Ruess also picked up a puppy, and he sounded even younger than 17 when he wrote to a friend, "Yes, I have a dog! He is a month-old Navajo puppy, whom I found lost in the night, a couple of weeks ago. He is a ball of white with two mouse-gray patches near his tail and on his head. He has blue eyes. I call him Curly, for his tail."<sup>51</sup> Unfortunately, Ruess showed less sense than an ass when it came to looking after his dog. It is both sad and exasperating to read of the end of Curly in July of 1932:

I had fed Curly a little and ate some of my supper when Pacer got away, galloping with his hobbles. I chased him for two hours by moonlight. When I came back, Curly had eaten my supper. I punished him and he went off. I called and searched for him next morning, but he was not to be found. A good dog is a fine companion, but Curly had disappointed me. I did not have enough to feed him and I didn't want to go back for him, so I went on, hoping he would trail me. He didn't and I heard no more of him."<sup>52</sup>

Despite that rather callous report, it is clear that Curly's loss taught Ruess more respect and care for his animals. Only

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<sup>49</sup>Rusho, 50.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid., 55.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid., 41.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid., 75.

a few weeks later he wrote movingly of the death of Jonathan, a packhorse.

Jonathan wouldn't eat. I doctored his cuts and he stood still awhile, then he walked around in circles with his head up. Finally he ran sidewise like an athlete putting the shot, cut his legs buckled under, and he fell to his side in a clump of cactus. He never got up. For him, Canyon del Muerto was indeed the Canyon of Death--the end of the trail, for a gentle old packhorse.<sup>53</sup>

This event seemed particularly to move Ruess. When his film was damaged in a river-fording accident, he despaired, "The pictures of Jonathan were on it."<sup>54</sup> And after turning his second horse, Nuflo, out to pasture, he kept tabs on his well-being. "Jim English sent me a card at Christmas, and said that old Nuflo was getting fat and coming down to water every day with the other horses."<sup>55</sup> His animals were now individuals, rather than projections of his own desires and needs.

Ruess was never interested in money and he disdained hunting early on. Nevertheless, his early descriptions of nature, though poetic, show that familiar tendency to classify and quantify: "We finished up by having sixty starfish in one small pool. They were of all sizes, and colored red, brown, purple, blue, yellow, and vermilion."<sup>56</sup>; "I haven't seen much wildlife yet. The list is: crows ravens, buzzards owls, bluejays, bluebirds, yellow-headed blackbirds, flickers, robins, hummingbirds, kingbirds, jackrabbits..."<sup>57</sup>;

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<sup>53</sup>Ibid., 81.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid., 84.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid., 94-95.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid., 19.

<sup>57</sup>Ibid., 38.

"I have slept under cedars, aspens, oaks, cottonwoods, pinyons, poplars, pines, maples (not the typical maple)..."<sup>58</sup> What is missing is a sense of both uniqueness and wholeness, of microcosm and macrocosm. What made each of these species unique to the West? And how did they work together in the given environment?

All three of the previous passages are from 1931. Now look at 1934, and see how Ruess' writing became more detailed and more expansive. Take, for example, this description of a foxtail pine: "I had never seen the foxtail pine before. It is a ridiculous caricature of a tree, with gangling limbs and most amusing foxtails lopping about in all directions, with no symmetry at all."<sup>59</sup> Or here is a picture of the desert at large:

"A vast expanse of brown country lay between the mesas. Far north was the silent, nearly empty canyon of the San Juan, with a vivid green strip of willows. Opposite me the mile-wide canyon was banded with blue-green, grey-blue, and delicate purple, surmounted by dull vermilion..."<sup>60</sup>

Finally, note the way the environment and life forms work together in this passage from his last letter: "Last night I camped under tall pines by a stream that flowed under a towering orange yellow cliff, like a wall against the sky, dwarfing the twisted pines on its summit and the tall straight ones that grew part way up the face of it."<sup>61</sup> Like Cameron, Ruess was a visual artist. Also like Cameron, his

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<sup>58</sup>Ibid., 52.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid., 175.

<sup>60</sup>Ibid., 162.

<sup>61</sup>Ibid., 179.

years in the wilderness sharpened his tendency to notice into an ability to see. Here we return to the work of Paul Shepard, as a better understanding of nature would grant Ruess access to the metaphors that lead to understanding of self.

Levi Lathrop Smith was a conscientious farmer. Like all good farmers, he was also an excellent observer. In particular, Smith paid close attention to the natural processes--seasons, wind, tide, moisture, the health of the animals, the progress of the vegetables--on which his livelihood depended. Although his terse jottings lack the visual sense and poetic description that make Ruess and Cameron so compelling, they nevertheless show a similar quality of careful noting, leading to a change in perspective.

Smith started out taking a fairly matter-of-fact attitude toward his stock, birthing and slaughtering with equal equanimity. On the other hand, he understandably worried over sick animals. He recorded a number of dead pigs. In the fall of his first year he fretted, "the Calf is sucking she dous not appear to have much Affection for it dous not lick it nor pay any attention to it neither does she eat much."<sup>62</sup> The calf later died. Missing animals were also a worry. "Muly and Polly Deram did not cum holm last night neither have they came yet. An they have just came."<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>62</sup>Smith, 2 October 1847.

<sup>63</sup>Ibid., 22 December 1847.

That last entry contains an important clue. As time went on it was perhaps inevitable that Smith, isolated and lonely, would make pets of some animals. The naming of his cows-- Polly Deram, Muly, and Piabald--indicates a recognition of them as more than just a source of wealth. He also had a dog for a time, but he was lost when he "followed off some Indians."<sup>64</sup> Smith later purchased a cat, a more suitable animal for such a homebound and misanthropic owner. There is one last piece of evidence that speaks to Smith's growing closeness to his animals. When one pig lost a litter, he gave her two piglets from another litter, a gesture that was both sensible and compassionate.<sup>65</sup>

"Nature is too diffuse, its stimuli too powerful and conflicting, to be directly accessible to the human mind and sensibility," writes Yi-Fu Tuan. "First man creates the circle... and then he can discern circles and cyclical processes everywhere in nature, in the shape of the bird's nest, the whirl of the wind, and the movement of the stars."<sup>66</sup> Smith arrived in the West 20 years before Streamer, 50 years before Cameron, and more than 80 years before Ruess. He was the first settler of European descent in the Olympia area. As such, he was fully absorbed in creating the circle described by Tuan. Smith delighted in building his farm, writing, "employment if not too hard has A tendency I think to bennefit the mind and to proppegate strength to the Animal

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<sup>64</sup>Ibid., 10 November 1847.

<sup>65</sup>Ibid., 16 January 1848.

<sup>66</sup>Tuan, *Space and Place*, 111-112.

functions."<sup>67</sup> He eagerly reported each addition, from sheepfold to hogpen. But his happiest moments were in tending his garden. Nearly every day spent in planting was "a fine day." Even on days that were "gloomy" or "rainy," he still felt "in good helth" if he had been in the garden. By directly working the land, Smith was establishing himself in place. And as he became established, he was more and more able to appreciate nature. Every single day Smith wrote down the weather--that, he noticed. But it was not until late winter of 1847 that he was able to see the sky. On December 11th he wrote:

A beautiful Morning. had a cold Snowy Night untill about twelve then cleard up most Hevenly. I arose at half-past two to contumplate the Heavens never did it appear to me those shining orbs looked so beautiful. the reflections brought on an enthusiastick feeling and sleep departed from me. ... This is A beautiful day I feel much better to day than I have for a long time. the Author of Nature is deserving of all Admiration.

Nature became a solace to him even on his bad days. A few weeks later he wrote, "Misty this morning. rather unwell this Morning. quite indesposed in the Night though on the whol rather better. nothing A doing. this is a glorious evening the Sun defuses his radiance in splendor."<sup>68</sup>

The schizophrenic Streamer was, in his approach to animals, something of a departure from this pattern. From the beginning he saw the natural world as enchanted, and his lyrical writing made great use of animal metaphors. In May 1876 he wrote, "I sigh at the ravens' rude croaking, whilst

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<sup>67</sup>Smith, 23 November 1847.

<sup>68</sup>Ibid., 24 December 1847.

all around near me are the chirping wrens, buzzing hummingbirds, and singing gnats."<sup>69</sup> Even on his early cross-country trek he felt he was in direct communion with wildlife: "I saw 5 deers and 4 kids on the mountain, and called them to me, by Indian calls and signs. There are also wolves, panthers and black bears in any quantity, but they disturb nor frighten one not."<sup>70</sup> Streamer never made much distinction between wild and domesticated animals, regarding each creature as having a unique personality. As he aged he grew even more sensitive to their well-being. In 1881, after a snowstorm killed "40%" of local cattle, he admonished, "In this rude nature taught all inhuman stock men the very important lesson of giving more kind care to their beasts...."<sup>71</sup> And while on a cattle drive he expounded:

As with cattle so it is as a pretty general thing with women; cross and contrary them and they will do almost everything that you don't want done and fail to do anything right that you force them to do. Here, then, is a hint to the cattle men, which put into an Arabian Maxim would read thus: the cow is Kindness personated--Woman is personated Kindness. Abuse either and neither will prove true.<sup>72</sup>

In the final days before his commitment, animals were among his few remaining companions. Around 1893 the ailing Streamer was taken in by some old acquaintances. While there he wrote:

I have an old hen--yellow Cochin of the Chinese cackle-kluck style and that old hen has seven young black Spanish chicks now about a week old--I have an old yellow cat and she has four yellow kittens and one black that she thinks the most of, as it is the first one she picks up and cares for. Cats are very affectionate and so am I.... I have two

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<sup>69</sup>Streamer, 20 May 1876.

<sup>70</sup>Ibid., 4 September 1876.

<sup>71</sup>Streamer, Letter to the Editor, *Daily Oregonian*, 13 April 1881.

<sup>72</sup>Briley, 83.

tame blue pigeons or pije-Johns to bill and coo for me each morning and evening, and glance a red-eye at my brown Arabian one. I have several large leghorn chickens and one great sensible rooster male bird to do all the crowing while the quiet hens do all the laying and hatching of the eggs. I have two big hogs of the Poland China breed that feed on the turnip patch and buttermilk.... I have calves, cows, and an old black, polled Angus bull to break down the garden fence and eat out of the cabbage patch. I have a shepherd dog, Bounce, to pounce upon me every day and I have in view many girls who come to this great garden cove to have a play and say of their own in the mountain moor...."<sup>73</sup>

None of these animals were actually his, of course, but Streamer was clearly not speaking of ownership. This link was instead about relationships, connection, emotion. Streamer observed "the others," but he also felt himself among them

Streamer understood animals instinctively. When it came to terrain, however, he needed the lessons of experience. He was more open to certain insights than some of his peers. For example, while walking through Mexico he exclaimed, "Great God, how little do the people of my native home appreciate their great supply of water."<sup>74</sup> On the other hand, he could also be absurdly boosterish. On May 13, 1876 he wrote of the dry expanses of New Mexico, "And as time moves on...the climatic influences will change [and become] more favorable for farming...." The next day he added, "I have an exalted opinion of the country and its vast and varied mineral resources; its adaptedness to grazing and fruit growing; and coming facilities for agriculture and commercial interests." For the next twenty years he seemed to struggle between his

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<sup>73</sup>Ibid., 136.

<sup>74</sup>Streamer, 16 April 1876.



keen sense of observation and his vast capacity dreaming. One month after his New Mexico comments he came to realize, "There is mesage growing on these deserts; hence, cannot be a very good country for a wise man to dwell in." And yet, Streamer continued to foresee a wonderful future:

Still, if the government or the individuals who [dwell] on these arid wastes, were to have the Artesian well in lieu of these common old fashioned affairs, the constant flow would soon form rivulets, creeks, dams, lakes, and ponds that through their refreshing moisture, and cooling vapors, would recuperate the soil, give vigor to the grasses, and cause the desert to bloom as the rose...."<sup>75</sup>

In that case his dreams converged with those of the federal government, and the Oglalla aquifer would soon--miraculously--make the area bloom. But that solution was not available in Eastern Washington, where the issue of aridity continued to plague him. On the one hand, his senses told him the land was just not meant for the kind of intensive agriculture he had been used to back East. On the other, his propensity to fantasize led him to embrace the "rain follows the plow" theory:

The spring is a month late, but the grain and grass crop is very promising of an unusual harvest of plenty.... little irrigation will be needed anywhere, and as the country develops in cultivation, the dry climate changes will be wrung into moist measures of occasional rains, and sitches and water pipes dispensed with.<sup>76</sup>

Even Streamer could not keep this up forever. Over the course of the next fifteen years, the truth was too brutally driven home. In 1892--not long before his commitment--he wrote a

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<sup>75</sup>Ibid., 15 June 1876.

<sup>76</sup>Streamer, Letter to the Editor, *Weekly Intelligence*, 16 May 1879.

fascinating, rambling denunciation of the ravages settlement had inflicted on the region:

...Life is not flesh, nor spirit, nor thought--it is an air-force in breath of health from purity of water sources. Without pure water there can be no pure life, no pure food, no pure feeling...Kittitas farmers may realize the force of this philosophy by examining the dry lands in the years to come.

The destruction of the timber forests that attract and retain moisture, the exhaustion of the [soil] and grasses, coal and lime deposits which engender heat and give life to earth in form of production of cereals, cause the earth to cool, lighten its bulk and raise it to higher altitudes among the storm waves of frozen air....

The writer remembers the time when Kittitas farmers shipped or rather freighted bacon, hams, eggs, butter, cheese and beef. They were all sociable, kind and considerate then. There was no sickness, no drugs, no famine. Everybody had all the water they wanted, and never denied the crust of bread and cup of cold water to the stranger.... No springs were filled up, no streams fenced in, no creeks drained for private speculation...<sup>77</sup>

Though the letter raves, it is also evidence that Streamer had retained his powers of journalistic scrutiny. Dan Flores has suggested that Streamer was also keeping up on his reading, as the language and ideas are reminiscent of George Perkins Marsh's 1864 classic *Man and Nature*. The first paragraph suggests the obvious truth that life is dependent on water. The second, more startlingly, shows an understanding of the importance of forests in maintaining a watershed. The third is concerned with the impact of scarce resources on human behavior, and the way that human selfishness contributes to making resources scarce. Mentally ill, alcoholic, and nearly forsaken by polite society, Streamer had nonetheless managed to understand the

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<sup>77</sup>Streamer, Letter to the Editor, *Wenatchee Localizer*, 31 March 1892.

complexities of his environment far in advance of his neighbors.

The belief that one is the center of the universe is the hallmark of the infantile personality. It has also been the downfall of modern man, who uses his power to order the world around him to his liking regardless of consequences. Cameron, Ruess, Smith, and Streamer initially interpreted the landscape in a way that put themselves at the center of value. The purpose of the land and other lifeforms was to be used. Over time, though, they came to realize that land and animals have meaning outside the scope of economic progress. Environment was more than a mine to be plundered; it was a web of complex and subtle relationships. Furthermore, people exist within that web, not above it. Once again, our subjects found themselves ensnared in place.

Those who came West had firm ideas about the life they would lead there. But that vision was essentially shallow, based as it was on wealth and comfort and not much more (except in the case of Ruess, who dreamt of fame and glory). The places where the dream has come to pass--subdivisions, malls, resort towns--are infinitely less interesting than the areas where 'success' has failed to take hold. Cameron, Ruess, Smith, and Streamer were blessed by the land's inability to immediately give them what they wanted. Their lives became filled with delightful surprises, saving them

from the cozy dreariness of seeing only what they expected to see. Once their eyes were opened to those surprises, the learning curve accelerated. They became more and more attuned to the delicate details that deepen the meaning of nature's metaphors. Paul Shepard quotes D.H. Lawrence: "Nonhuman Nature is the outward and visible expression of the mystery which confronts us when we look into the depths of our own being."<sup>78</sup> This does not imply that people are at the center of nature. Instead, it is the mystery that is at the center of all life, human and nonhuman.

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<sup>78</sup>Shepard, 80.

CHAPTER FIVE  
THE TRANSCENDENCE OF PLACE

During their time in the West, our subjects traded a worldview based on material and social progress for one that took into account such intangibles as spirit, beauty, and connectedness. Human thought has long been marked by categorization. We put these items in one box, this body part in another, that childhood experience in a third. Classification is an extremely useful mental device. On the other hand, it necessarily obscures relationships between things. The rock is tossed into the pond, the ripples extend outward, but the connection between the ripples and the hand that threw the rock is missed. Environmental degradation is one place where this disconnect shows itself. Another is in psychological disjunction. The very idea of "soul" and "body" as dichotomous implies that soul is split off from body, and "higher" functions are separate from "natural" functions. Similarly, people can become painfully alienated from the habitat that sustains them. According to the ecopsychologists, to restore the connections between body, soul, and nature is to become healthy: "The awareness of ourselves, our environment, and the relationship between them, or simply the awareness of our expanded self, is the experience of wholeness."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Steven Harper, "The Way of Wilderness," in *Ecopsychology: Restoring the Earth, Healing the Mind*, 196.

A person must feel connected to her environment in order to feel whole. Unfortunately, the frantic pace of our culture makes it difficult to notice connections. We are particularly harried by time, as our ticking clocks hurry us along from task to task, hour to hour, day to day. Even our leisure is marred by an awareness of the passage of time; 'carpe diem' becomes a compulsion, sending weekenders off to shop, frolic, drink, dance, skydive, anything, lest one precious moment become lost in the nothingness of inactivity. This freneticism is the hallmark of secular time, which is the perception of time as linear and finite. As Tuan puts it, "Secular time imposes constraints. It is felt as alternating phases of expectation and fulfillment, effort and ease."<sup>2</sup> The opposite of secular, or temporal, time is sacred time/natural time. Sacred time is cyclic. It is marked by the phases of the moon, the changing of the seasons, and the inevitability of the life cycle. Entering wild nature allows one to perceive this alternate mode of being. Writes ecopsychologist Steven Harper, "People commonly report a sense of 'timelessness' when they are immersed in nature. Time becomes less linear and more cyclic. We experience simple things such as day and night, the seasons, and the tides as a spiraling cycle rather than a linear progression."<sup>3</sup>

Each subject in this study experienced a shift from temporal to sacred time. Concurrently, they underwent a

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<sup>2</sup> Tuan, *Space and Place*, 120.

<sup>3</sup> Harper, 193.

change in the orientation of space. As time becomes reordered, so does space. To return to Yi-Fu Tuan, facing forward is facing the future. The land before us then becomes something to do, a canvas to be acted upon, rather than place. Tuan explains, "The intention to go to a place creates historical time: the place is a goal in the future."<sup>4</sup> Our subjects perceived themselves to be at one point along a road of western expansion. The settled coasts of Europe was the illustrious past, and the interior West was the grand future. This linear view imposed meaning and value on all these landscapes, East and West. But it had little to do with the physical realities of those places; instead, it obscured clear vision.

When a destination is taken out of a linear progression, it regains both its individual character and its larger meaning. For example, October 24th, 2002 can be taken out of the Gregorian calendar and instead be recorded as the day I saw two eagles and sat for a long time by a stream. On the scale of sacred time, October 24th may also be the day of the full moon, which will be repeated 12 times throughout the year and infinite times throughout eternity. In the same way, the stream by which I sat can cease to become a goal to be reached or a resource to be used. Instead it can be seen as a specific stream with unique characteristics, inhabitants, and rhythms. In a delightful paradox, experiencing the stream outside a linear progression also allows access to its

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<sup>4</sup> Tuan, *Space and Place*, 130.

greater archetypal meaning. "Space," writes Harper, "instead of being measured in linear distance, is measured in experienced distance."<sup>5</sup> In other words, this is a stream by which others have sat and will sit, and it is also one of an infinite number of streams visited by an infinite series of others. This is what Thoreau meant when he wrote, "The pure Walden water is mingled with the sacred water of the Ganges."<sup>6</sup> Out of the perception of sacred time comes the awareness of sacred space.

For Cameron, Ruess, Smith, and Streamer, time and space became less bounded by secular considerations such as the pace of progress or the value of land. Instead, they began truly to see where they were. This sounds like a small thing, but to them it was a revelation; as the present becomes the eternal, the ordinary becomes extraordinary. Frantic activity ceases, and small things can have expansive reverberations in the mind. The biophilia hypothesis posits that such a reaction to nature—this slowing of activity followed by delighted observation—is hard-wired into the human brain. One can call it God, psychological wholeness, or just human nature, but the meaning is the same: "Many people believe that religious feeling can be evoked by certain arrangements of trees and rocks or by certain landscapes. Thus biophilia may be difficult to tease apart from what some people call a

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<sup>5</sup> Harper, 193.

<sup>6</sup> Henry David Thoreau, *Walden* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), 298.



relationship with 'spirit' or God."<sup>7</sup> For millennia humans had been in constant conflict with the threatening forces of nature. By the late nineteenth century it appeared that the battle was being won, and people were becoming more and more isolated from their natural environment. It was equally clear that they had lost something important. Thoreau was one of many who went to the woods in search of themselves, only to find something much more profound.

These four people experienced a similar kind of revelation. In the final stage of the space-to-place process, each subject's despair over failures in the temporal world was replaced by religious or near-religious ecstasy at the beauty of his or her surroundings. This was foreshadowed by a shift in the perception of time, as the goal-oriented adventurer became more attuned to the rhythms of the natural/sacred calendar. The change in perception of time was soon followed by a change in the perception of space; Cameron, Ruess, Smith, and Streamer became attuned to their environments as unique places, rather than mere stops along the ever-advancing road of westward progression. Here began that process of noticing, of restoring connections between self and nature, that the biophilists and ecopsychologists suggest is necessary to well-being. Writes Kellert, "The biophilia hypothesis proclaims a human dependence on nature that extends far beyond the simple issues of material and

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<sup>7</sup> Michael E. Soule, "Biophilia: Unanswered Questions," in *The Biophilia Hypothesis*, 444.

physical sustenance to encompass as well the human craving for aesthetic, intellectual, cognitive, and even spiritual meaning and satisfaction."<sup>8</sup> The word 'dependence' is interesting, implying as it does a humility that is much out of character for our advanced technological society. Our subjects were forced to relinquish the idea that they were sole masters of their fate, but were rewarded with a much more joyous and expansive worldview.

### Evelyn Cameron

"When the sun withdraws the sand ceases to flow, but in the morning the streams will start once more.... What is man but a mass of thawing clay?" asked Thoreau.<sup>9</sup> There is despair in that question, but some relief, too. One insight that is easy to come across in the woods is that neither our successes nor our failures count for much in the larger scheme of things. Evelyn and Ewen Cameron moved to Montana in 1893 planning to raise polo ponies. We can imagine how this plan would have ordered their lives along a linear trajectory, with the goal--a big estate and a pile of money--waiting for them at the end of the line. Then the ranch failed and the line evaporated. Without the ambition that had given meaning to their labor, both time and space would have seemed disordered. This is the point at which most westerners would have cut their losses and moved on. Cameron did not.

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<sup>8</sup> Kellert, 20.

<sup>9</sup> Thoreau, 307.

Instead she remained open to this strange new world and watched for what it had to tell her.

Sensibly, Cameron dealt with the initial crisis by concentrating on the immediate. One way to deal with confusion is to concentrate very carefully on whatever is literally at hand. Work is a way to interact with the landscape and order one's hours—it places the worker in both space and time. Cameron had always known the value of work, and as early as 1893 she would list in her diary every article she had washed. After the collapse of the pony endeavor, though, she needed a more profound way to connect with her surroundings. In 1895 she bought a camera, writing to her mother, "I have lately taken up photography and work at it occasionally after the household has retired to rest. It is very fascinating work but requires a lot of practice."<sup>10</sup> Photography came to serve multiple purposes for Cameron. It was, in itself, work, and gave her something to do that she felt was worthwhile. It also required her to pay close attention to her environment, encouraging her to become familiar and friendly with a place that had lost its first meaning as a source of wealth. Finally, it enabled her to create and explain the meaning of her own life, which was lived so far outside mainstream conceptions of success. In a fascinating series of photos taken in 1904, Cameron recorded herself at work, doing such tasks as kneading bread. She sent

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<sup>10</sup> Cameron, 15 May 1895.

these pictures to England, so they could better understand both the rigors and the joy of her Montana existence.

Work also enabled her to become attuned to the daily routine of ranch life, as well as the larger rhythms of sacred time. This, in turn, led to the experience of nature as holy. Throughout the seasons there are changes in the diary, both in handwriting and tone. In summer her script became tighter and crisper while her entries grew lengthy and dense. During the long Montana winters the handwriting was looser and the tone quieter and more reflective, as she noted the very consistency of the snow she swept from the door. As time went on, Cameron's diaries began to indicate an appreciation of nature that blended with the spiritual. The daily exultations about the weather ("Glorious!") and her ecstatic "Lilacs blossomed for first time this year" (in the 1926 diary) show her expanding consciousness. The clipping and notations in the flyleaves of the notebooks are also telling. In 1913 her reading list included Fred Irvine Anderson's The Infallible God. In 1914 she recorded, "Salvation 'And every man that hath this hope in him purified himself.' St. John." A pasted entry from Bacon begins, "Atheism destroys likewise magnanimity and the raising of human nature." By the mid-1920s, secular items were largely outnumbered by items of a religious nature, although fewer are specifically Christian: The 1926 notebook defines several

Buddhist terms, most strikingly, "Om-Infinite, The Perfect, The Eternal."

Shortly after Ewen's death Cameron wrote, "I am... quite alone on the ranch but I have plenty of occupation—cattle, photography, reading etc., that I do not feel lonely."<sup>11</sup> By the end of her life Cameron had spent nearly ten years alone in the stark beauty of the Montana landscape. Yet she was comfortable in its vastness, just as she was comfortable in the humble confines of her own life. In an undated book that appears to date from the Twenties she jotted, "Finite. bounded. Having Limits. Infinite. Unbounded Endless. Unlimited." The social and financial hierarchy that had shaped her life was gone, along with her ambitions, her husband, and all the preoccupation with society and money and gossip. Still, except for a few words about Ewen, Cameron missed none of it. She had learned to be happy in the infinite, unbounded West.

#### Everett Ruess

Everett Ruess went into the desert with a heart-breaking optimism. He believed he would be able to escape from the confines of society, be refreshed and inspired by beauty, and come into his own as an artist. To an extent, he did succeed in those things. Unfortunately, though, the wilderness also brought him into confrontation with his own demons: crushing insecurity, bitter misanthropy, and

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 8 January 1917.

agonizing depression. Simon Schama described a similar crisis faced by the travel writer Louis Ramond de Carbonnieres: "Lost in exterior space, he is disconcerted to see a whole new prospect open up: the endless space of our interior self. Petrarch had thought this the landscape of his soul. Ramond envisaged it as the frighteningly roomy contours of the mind."<sup>12</sup> Ruess became disoriented as his concrete goal of artistic recognition slipped away. Like Cameron, he needed to find another system of value, another way to make sense of existence. Ruess did succeed in finding a new system of value—the beauty of the natural world. Unfortunately, he could never comprehend that he was a part of that world.

Ruess found wilderness joyously chaotic; nature seemed to have neither time nor law. In 1934 Ruess exulted, "I have the devil's own conception of a perfect time.... I find gay comradeship and lead the wild, free life wherever I am.... 'Live blindly upon the hour; the Lord, who was the future, died full long ago.'"<sup>13</sup> Early on, though, Ruess was also frightened of such freedom. When he was sixteen he wrote:

Alone I will follow the dark trail, black void on one side and unattainable heights on the other, darkness before and behind me, darkness that pulses and flows and is felt. Then suddenly, an unreal breath of wind coming from infinite depths will bring to my ears again the strange, dimly-remembered sound of the rushing water. When that sound dies, all dies.<sup>14</sup>

Far away from the comfortable, compartmentalized orderliness of civilization, Ruess had to develop ways of anchoring

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<sup>12</sup> Schama, 489.

<sup>13</sup> Rusho., 145.

himself psychologically. This was perhaps more difficult for him than it was for Cameron. Since he was not subject to the imposed order of a ranch, Ruess had to find other ways to interact physically with his environment. In 1931 he wrote to his brother, "Whenever I feel futile, impotent, a swim in an icy stream, a shower under a waterfall, or in a few gallons of water in the canyons, the forest, or the desert, with the wind and sun to dry my skin, never seems to fail to lift the depressive feeling."<sup>15</sup> Another way to pinpoint himself in the desert void was through creativity, whether writing, drawing, or even singing. Ruess' emotional response to his surroundings was so intense, it had to be expressed: "Alone on the open desert, I have made up songs of wild, poignant rejoicing and transcendent melancholy. The world has seemed more beautiful to me than ever before."<sup>16</sup> Finally, Ruess, like Cameron, anchored himself through observation. In this last letter to his brother, he carefully marked his location:

Northward is the sheer face of Mount Kaiparowits, pale vermilion capped with white, a forested summit. West and south are desert and distant mountains. Tonight the pale crescent of the new moon appeared for a little while, low on the skyline, at sunset. Often as I wander, there are dream-like tinges when life seems impossibly strange and unreal. I think it is, too, only most people have so dulled their senses that they do not realize it.<sup>17</sup>

Note that he gives his location in physical space (marked by mountains) as well as natural time (the moon).

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 60.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 39.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 179-180.

The trap was that the more Ruess saw thought in terms of wilderness, the more difficulty he had in locating meaning anywhere else. Ecstasy alternated with despair, and he began to think of himself as—quite literally—a martyr for nature's beauty. Early in 1931 he wrote to his brother:

I must pack my short life full of interesting events and creative activity.... I intend to do everything possible to broaden my experiences and allow myself to reach the fullest development. Then, and before physical deterioration obtrudes, I shall go on some last wilderness trip, to a place I have known and loved. I shall not return.<sup>18</sup>

In July 1932 Ruess was invited to attend an evangelical church service in the backcountry. He found the experience "interesting," and was particularly delighted with a song about the "Royal Telephone" to Jesus. Each attendant had to contribute a line from scripture, so Ruess quoted, "I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, whence cometh my help."<sup>19</sup> Ruess saw himself as a spiritual wanderer, and enjoyed pointing out that Sancho Pancho rode an ass, as did Christ.<sup>20</sup> He loved *Don Quixote*, and also Willa Cather's *Death Comes to the Archbishop*, about a gentle priest who makes a home in the desert Southwest. For him, the connection between land and spirit was explicit:

The beauty of this country is becoming a part of me. I feel more detached from life and somehow gentler. Except for passing flurries, it has become impossible for me to censure anyone. I wish harm to no one and occasionally try to be kind, though it seems futile striving. I have some good friends here, but no one who really understands why I am here or what I do. I don't know of anyone, though, who

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 44.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 74.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.



would have more than a partial understanding; I have gone too far alone.<sup>21</sup>

The hills were Ruess' church, his heaven, and his altar of sacrifice, too. In his final letter he declared himself a "pantheistic hedonist." He also asked: "Do you blame me for staying here, where I feel that I belong and am one with the world around me?"<sup>22</sup> On that note, he ascended into the mountains forever.

Though suicide is likely, no one really knows how Ruess died. It is therefore impossible to pronounce his life a complete tragedy, or to pin his destruction on his ideology. It is clear, however, that Ruess' worship of nature did not bring him the peace that it brought to Cameron. In nature he came to terms with the emptiness of his dreams, the finite span of his own life, and his humbleness in the face of the grand landscape. Yet his insecurity would not allow him to exist with that knowledge. He became resigned, but his resignation was also capitulation. In Arizona he wrote:

At dawn I watched the red moon set. There was a ring around the moon and I remembered the *Wreck of the Hesperus*. Shortly after sunrise I saddled the burros and rode off against blustering winds. The peak of Agathla and the buttes of Monument Valley were almost obscured by sandstorms. Vast seas of purple Loco Bloom were buffeted by the wind. The vermilion sand spread in ruffles over our tracks, obscuring them almost at once.<sup>23</sup>

Ruess had created a new value system, with natural beauty at its pinnacle. His trouble was in placing himself in that value system. Perhaps the ecopsychologists are only half

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 160.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 178-179.

right; psychological wholeness may rely on a connection to both nature and culture. By the end of his life Ruess knew where he was, he just wasn't sure who he was or how he fit in there. For this reason he preferred to let his tracks be covered as he rode into the West alone.

### Levi Lathrop Smith

Despite Ruess' fate, it was actually Levi Smith who lived the most perilous existence. His small cabin sat alone in a towering wood inhabited by numerous bears and wolves. He was near the jagged cliffs and frigid waters of Puget Sound, he was surrounded by potentially hostile Indians<sup>24</sup>, and he was plagued by a then-poorly understood and untreatable illness. But, as Schama reminds us, "Edmund Burke, the godfather of the aesthetic of awefulness, insisted that anything that threatened self-preservation was a source of the sublime."<sup>25</sup> Awe describes perfectly what Smith came to feel in the face of the terrible, wondrous forces of nature that surrounded him. Over the course of one winter he evolved from a practical American farmer into a near mystic, as he came to a new and expanded sense of time and place.

Solitude and silence at first left Smith confounded. In an undated entry that appears to be from November 1847<sup>26</sup>, Smith expressed his confusion: "Now as I sat alone viewing

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 141.

<sup>24</sup> Remember that the Whitman massacre had just taken place.

<sup>25</sup> Schama, 542.

that Most Mysterious form of Man, an intercourse commenced between those light and airy formes which once had formed the thinking part of Man it seemed a thing so strange that for some time I could not decide the reality." The meaning of the lines is obscure, but they do point to his disorientation and wonder. Initially, Smith tried to deal with this by keeping careful track of small events: number of passing canoes, names of visitors, health of livestock, etc. He also took note of the hour, frequently recording at what time he was writing or when he woke up. As time passed, Smith became less focused on such minutiae. Instead, there was an increasing emphasis on the season and the weather. Smith's farmer's habits probably led him to remark, on December 1, 1847, "This is the first day of winter." December 22, 1847 was "A beautiful day Winter Solstice..." Christmas was noted on December 25, and March 6, pleasantly, was Smith's birthday: "this is my birth day. In good health and spirits have been very busy all day."

He also began to take joy in the shifting moods of the Northwest winter. December 24 began misty, but the evening was "glorious" and "the Sun defuses his radiance in splendor." January 11, 1848 was "rainy in the Morning dull and still... Clear and sun shining some of the time in the after-part of the day and heavy showers accompanied with hail... this is beautiful weather." Smith's focus had changed. At the

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<sup>26</sup> The sentence is scribbled upside-down on a November 1847 page of the journal.

beginning of the diary, things couldn't move fast enough for him. There were never enough visitors, there was never enough progress, and he was tormented by loneliness and self-doubt. As he journeyed into winter, though, he became calmer. Despite his solitude and the glacial pace of his days, he wrote on December 31, 1847, "this is the last day of the year  
 O time how art thou fllying. rainy this Morning nothing a doing rain continues all day I have seen no person to day." Smith had begun to locate himself in nature's time, and he was learning to be content there.

Concurrently, Smith was also coming to see the natural world as imbued with religious meaning. As the months rolled on the taciturn Smith became effusive in his praise of nature as a manifestation of the divine. After an epileptic attack that left him "prostrated" for several days, Smith awoke one morning and wrote:

A Rainy Morning and indications of Rain. commensed about three in the morning. I feel much better both in Body and Mind. and can I ever render the gratitude which is due to Nature's Author for this. No Involved I am but this consolation the Benefactor is Mercy and in the harangue of the Poet to thee belongs all adoration for thy Vast form embrases all that lives.<sup>27</sup>

Smith was a religious man who went to church meetings when he could, spent time with his minister, and assisted in "raising the Priests house."<sup>28</sup> Yet the line "thy Vast form embrases all that lives" goes beyond the standard doctrine of the day, edging closer to mysticism. Like Ruess, Smith had learned to

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<sup>27</sup> Smith, 20 November 1847.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 25 July 1848.

find God in the contemplation of nature: "thank that Eternal cause of all good that moving principle of Life"<sup>29</sup>; "been contemplating the heavens this Morning the Moon and the shining Stars."<sup>30</sup>

Because of his illness and isolation, the world would always be a somewhat bewildering place for the sensitive Smith. At times he seemed on the verge of losing his senses, as he did on July 2, 1848 when he reported the appearance of "vishionary objects."<sup>31</sup> Yet nature—particularly the sky—had ceased to become a cause of Smith's confusion. Instead, it became an anchor. On December 11, 1847 he wrote:

A beautiful Morning. had a cold Snowy Night untill about twelve then cleard up most Hevenly. I arose at half-past two to contumplate the Heavens never did it appear to me those shining orbs looked so beautiful. the reflections brought on an enthusiastick feeling and sleep departed from me. and had it not have been for one thing I should have enjoyed the Sight. Mr Handcock came up in the evening to see me and remaind untill half past seven. the wind blowing quit hard when he came up and after being up a short time it increased. he however thinking he could proceed safly started holm. the wind blowing all the time but in the Morning not seeing any smoke I began to think it might have proved fatal to him and it was not for sum time before I could purswade myself but what I was subject to Mental Hallucination. This is A beautiful day I feel much better to day than I have for a long time. the Author of Nature is deserving of all Admiration.

Smith was alone, sick, and struggling on a farm in the middle of nowhere. He likely suspected he would not live to see success, and his endeavor must have seemed hopeless at times. Yet the stars gave him solace. They reminded him of something

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 22 January 1848.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 25 January 1848.

larger than himself and, as we see in the last passage, served as a beacon in his darkest moments. For Smith, the heavens really were the house of God.

#### Francis Marion Streamer

Frank Streamer's reaction to nature must be discussed within the context of his troubled mind. Tuan writes, "...one understanding of schizophrenia is that its sufferer lacks protective walls, is too much inclined to feel with others. This inclination is involuntarily--the taking on of heroic sainthood in spite of oneself."<sup>32</sup> Streamer was plagued by the sufferings and strivings of humanity. He so wanted to be the hero, to save the helpless Indian widows, cast out the plundering autocrats, and bring peace and bounty to his adopted land. These injustices and fantasies were how he ordered his world. When he entered the wilderness, those mental landmarks disappeared. Without anyone to suffer for, Streamer had to find some other way to orient himself in space and time. This often took the form of more elaborate delusions. He would scribble for days in his book, writing down intricate cosmologies like a lunatic Aquinas. At his best, though, Streamer was able to relax, become quiet, and be, for a few moments, truly happy and at peace. Alone in nature, he was, at times, almost completely sane.

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<sup>31</sup> Like Streamer, Smith's syntax could also make him appear to be a little mad, as it did when he wrote, "the heavens are profusions in effluvium."

<sup>32</sup> Tuan, *Escapism*, 142.

Unlike Cameron, Ruess, and Smith, Streamer had a ready philosophical map to guide him through unfamiliar landscapes. True, that map was a complete delusion, but it did have a certain flexibility in assigning comfortable meanings to strange places and unforeseen events. It did not, however, mean that Streamer never felt lost, confused, or forsaken. In a passage from Yosemite, Streamer described the overwhelming impression Bridal Veil Falls made on his highly-strung senses:

So, I came to this huge boulder, put a rock on it and sat down in the shadows of the great arched walls of granite and gray, [?] and decay at the foot of the misty and twisty, splashing, clashing, crashing, hailing, wailing...water falling, thunder squalling hell of a Yosemite. Glorious the rock scenery, grandiferous the pine greenery--Sublimerous the altitudinary of water sheenery, in this wonderful, ponderfull, thunderfull YoSemite...<sup>33</sup>

The compulsive need to rhyme often appears when Streamer is close to a psychotic break, although later that day he calmed down enough to revert to his persona as the reserved man of letters, writing "they are quite fascinating and truly artistic in their natural descent." A detached, pseudo-scientific tone was one way Streamer dealt with his initial confusion in the western environment. Another was to attribute historical and religious meanings to new landmarks, as he did when he wrote, "The Pilot Rock...is in itself a very special rock formation mementoing the cavalcades of Abyssinia."<sup>34</sup> Finally, there was observation and description. Streamer was a writer, and writing the world down was one way

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<sup>33</sup> Streamer, 1 August 1876.

to drain off the deluge of his impressions. He filled dozens of books with hundreds of thousands of lines. He sent articles and letters to every paper that would print them. He used words the way Cameron used pictures—to make his lonely existence in a strange world comprehensible to himself and others.

Streamer's illness interfered with his ability to develop a clear sense of direction once his grand plans had fallen through. Paradoxically, though, his idiosyncratic mind also allowed him to be more open to new ideas and impressions of place. He was the quickest observer of the four, particularly when it came to noting the effect of human action on the landscape. Streamer was also a delighted witness in the natural world, which impressed him, correctly, as a marvelously busy place filled with exciting creatures and processes. At first the manic clockwork of his mind made it difficult for him to relax into nature's rhythms. On the other hand, it did not take him long at all to see that there was a grand scale of time far beyond the human. He came on this insight suddenly and dramatically, the first time he set foot in Yosemite. Like Cameron, who equated the eternal with the spiritual, and Smith, for whom the revolutions of the stars were reminders of God, Streamer connected great age to a divine plan:

Many of these walls are so mechanically fluted and scrolled in all kinds of gothic, Arabic, Syric and Modern Mouldings as to induce the belief that great architect and builder

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 31 August 1876.



especially designed them as a whole to represent every style, color, shade, form, substance, height, bulk, width, depth.... known to the Ancients or dreamed of in the Mythology and philosophy of the moderns. It is all here...representing the whole 49,000,000 years, with all their grandeur preserved and none of their decay.<sup>35</sup>

Schama notes that this was a common Victorian response to the redwoods, which were thought to connect North America to Biblical time: "The pious notion that the Big Trees were somehow contemporaries of Christ became a standard refrain in their hymns of praise." He adds, "It was as if contemporaneity banished distance: this immense botanical mystery was part of what Muir called the 'Holy of Holies' in Yosemite."<sup>36</sup> Streamer, ever the mystic, was particularly affected by the Biblical correspondence. On his visit to the area in July 1876, the word "Yosemite" is surrounded by special signs and numbers, along with the words "great," "celestial," and "shrine."

At the time, though, Streamer still thought that the United States had a place in the universal scheme that seemed written on the walls of Yosemite. Years of observing the contrast between nature and civilization, possibility and reality, taught him something different. At that point, nature came to give Streamer a solace he never found in civilization. As Thomas Merton noted, "To be really mad, you need other people. When you are by yourself you soon get

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 2 August 1876.

<sup>36</sup> Schama, 190.

tired of your craziness. It is too exhausting."<sup>37</sup> Streamer's incoherence accelerated when he ventured into town and ebbed on his walks alone. His writing was always better in solitude—it was more reflective, more grounded, and free of boosterish babbling. Other people, whether the Tacoma, Washington theosophists (with whom he corresponded) or his dissolute drinking buddies, encouraged his manic delusions. Alone in nature, Streamer felt no pressure to do or be anything other than an observer. This gave his nature writing a lovely simplicity:

I have walked 21 miles over rock and rills, and hills, through brambles and bushes, through cedars and firs, down water gulches and rocky abysses, up thourny cliffs and stony slopes. I am neither wearried, worried or wounded...Saw 2 deers close by me and one rabbit. I am now pretty nearly over the Mountains, as I saw the grassy plains when on the mountain heights--only 2 miles of [?] the Frisco river. The sun has set in gorgeous golden chrome colors, and the whipperwill has commenced his song...<sup>38</sup>

In Streamer's best moments, God did not drive him with secret orders or lavish him with special honors and distinctions. At his best, Streamer simply felt God to be there, and felt himself to be at home. On Good Friday of 1876 Streamer was somewhere in Mexico. He wrote, "This grand view--this Buena Vista around here, re-inspires me; it lifts up my soul; it enlarges my ideas; it gives me grander thought; it enobles my virtues; it fills my heart with gratitude and glory to the

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<sup>37</sup> Peter France, *Hermits: The Insights of Solitude*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996), 181.

<sup>38</sup> Streamer, 17 May 1876.

Most High God."<sup>39</sup> Nature accepted him in a way the world never would.

Sacred time trumps secular time. Leo Marx points out that, "Thoreau's final chapters [follow] the sequence of months and seasons. This device affirms the possibility of redemption from time, the movement away from Concord time, defined by the clock, toward nature's time, the daily and seasonal life cycle."<sup>40</sup> All four of our authors followed Thoreau's pattern, expanding their conception of time beyond the merely historical. This shift is marked by joy, as the bedeviling passage of temporal time is replaced with the solace of the eternal. Still, the eternal can be a lonely place. Without the linear guide of progress, it was difficult to get one's bearings.

Cameron, Ruess, Smith, and Streamer were forced to look at the world in a new way. Instead of seeing time in the context of their own lives and material achievements, they learned to take the long view. Instead of thinking of western lands as more grist for the mill of European expansion, they learned to recognize them as something unique and unfamiliar. This was both freeing and terrifying. Stripped of their cultural preconceptions about what was meaningful, it was difficult to make sense of their own lives. One way of dealing with this problem was to concentrate very closely on

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 14 April 1876.

<sup>40</sup> Marx, 261.

the tasks at hand. Several of our authors found that work, whether practical or creative, was a place where time, environment, and individual intersected--a solid axis point for a disoriented soul. Another method of centering oneself lay in simple observation. By paying careful attention to surroundings, confusing wilderness could become a well-landmarked place. Shock and confusion could then give way to awe, as each subject learned to orient him or herself in the strange, lonely, but utterly sublime world of western space.

## CHAPTER SIX

## CONCLUSION

American life is like a snowglobe filled with shiny, multicolored confetti. It is packed with rapid-fire stimuli and a million enchanting diversions, all of which serve to distract us from the simple elements that create existence: earth, sun, air, water. In a way, our glittering sensory world keeps us eternal children, ever protected from recognizing the consequences of our actions. Marcuse writes, "Massive socialization begins at home and arrests the development of consciousness and conscience." The only way to develop into true adults is to free ourselves from the choking media assault: "The attainment of autonomy demands conditions in which the repressed dimensions of experience can come to life again; their liberation demands repression of the heteronomous needs and satisfactions which organize life in this society."<sup>1</sup> Ecopsychologist Kanner puts it more simply, writing, "The ability to find meaning and grace in a materially humble life is a hallmark of ecological sanity that has been undermined and nearly destroyed by the messages of corporate advertising."<sup>2</sup> In order to become true adults, we must disengage from the amniotic sac that surrounds us. This is what happened to our four subjects.

Cameron, Ruess, Smith, and Streamer did not intend to escape industrial civilization and its values. On the contrary, Cameron, Smith, and Streamer all hoped to recreate that civilization from the raw materials of the West. Ruess, meanwhile, planned to mine the West's store of beauty to advance his own ambitions in the art world. All were wrapped

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<sup>1</sup> Marcuse, 245.

up in the game of chasing success. In addictive behavior it is the goal, rather than existence itself, that gives meaning to life. Rozak suggests that, because our culture alienates us from the land in which we evolved, addictive behavior is intrinsic to industrialized society:

The technological construct erodes primary sources of satisfaction once found routinely in life in the wilds, such as physical nourishment, vital community, fresh food, continuity between work and meaning, unhindered participation in life experiences, personal choices, community decisions and spiritual connection with the natural world. These are the needs we were born to have satisfied. In the absence of these we will not be healthy. In their absence, bereft and in shock, the psyche finds some temporary satisfaction in pursuing secondary sources like drugs, violence, sex, material possessions, and machines.<sup>3</sup>

It is not novel to point out that external success may bring temporary joy, but it hardly ever brings peace. Driven people are rarely content when they reach one plateau. And had any of our subjects succeeded in their ambitions, they would doubtless have continued to strive and climb. Instead, though, they were unable to achieve their worldly aims. This caused them to begin to disengage from the entire system.

Each of these four saw the goal disappear long before they ever reached it. Moreover, choice and circumstance caused them to remain right where they were, goal less. Finally, they had all landed in places that were at least partially isolated from those cultural messages that, to paraphrase Marcuse, "arrest the development of consciousness." This brought on a psychic crisis, as each

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<sup>2</sup> Kanner in *Ecopsychology: Restoring the Earth, Healing the Mind*, 88.

person was forced to confront the limitations of the worldview that had structured his or her life. Marcuse writes:

...the mere absence of all advertising and of all indoctrinating media of information and entertainment would plunge the individual into a traumatic void where he would have the chance to wonder and to think, to know himself (or rather the negative of himself) and his society.<sup>4</sup>

This was true of our subjects, for whom disillusion was coupled with despair.

When they lost the cultural moorings that had shaped their reality, our subjects became adrift in a strange land. Ideals of progress and material success had given value to their environment and to their daily activities. Without these markers, life seemed confusing and meaningless. On the other hand, for the first time they could really begin to see and understand the landscapes in which they found themselves. Streamer realized that deserts would not bloom for the most industrious farmer, and that extractive industries left scars. For Cameron and Smith, animals ceased to be a mere commodity, and instead took their place in a complicated web of life. People began to look different to all four of them. Native Americans were no longer romantic remnants of a dying culture, they were human beings with emotions and agency. Earlier settlers were not rustics or heroes, they were fellow strugglers in a harsh battle for survival. With clarity came a sense of limits. Destructive behaviors could no longer be

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<sup>3</sup> Rozak in *Ecopsychology: Restoring the Earth, Healing the Mind*, 59.

<sup>4</sup> Marcuse, 245.

rationalized by the ideology of progress. Bevis writes, "No matter how pervasive the *myths* of pastoralism and primitivism out West, and no matter how silly the *expectations* of those who came, those who *stayed* soon learned to question the limits or progress on practical grounds."<sup>5</sup>

This new outlook also had intangible benefits; from personal observation came a whole new way of understanding reality. Previously, space and time had been ordered by the goal of external success. This goal was located "ahead," both in time and physicality. Then the goal disappeared. Suddenly, the subjects were forced to find another way to orient themselves. The here and now became the new center of value, as they learned to enjoy the rhythms of nature, the majesty of their surroundings, and the humble pleasures of their daily labor. This corresponds to the findings of the ecopsychologists. Kanner writes, "Many forms of pleasure that have been numbed by urban living, from bodily to perceptual to aesthetic to spiritual, come back to life in natural settings. These experiences can form the basis for an expanded sense of self, or what Deep Ecologists call an ecological self."<sup>6</sup> All four settlers expressed this new consciousness in religious terms, praising the natural environment as a font of spiritual renewal. The landscape had ceased to be a source of material wealth. Instead, it was now a place of religious value.

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<sup>5</sup> Bevis, 196.

<sup>6</sup> Kanner in *Ecopsychology: Restoring the Earth, Healing the Mind*, 90.



Awesomely powerful yet sublimely beautiful, the western landscape at first stunned and confused the settlers. A psychological crisis ensued, as Cameron, Ruess, Smith, and Streamer felt themselves alone and vulnerable in a hostile universe. The crisis in the wilderness is an ancient archetype, and parallels can be found everywhere from Dante's *Inferno* to vision quests to the *Tao Te Ching*. This is the "dark night of the soul." On the other side of this experience, however, there is always said to lie a profound feeling of peace. One does not have to be a religious believer to understand how this could arise from an encounter with raw nature. In the words of Thoreau:

We can never have enough of Nature. We must be refreshed by the sight of inexhaustible vigor, vast and Titanic features, the sea coast with its wrecks, the wilderness with its living and its decaying trees, the thunder cloud, and the rain which lasts three weeks and produces freshets. We need to witness our own limits transgressed, and some life pasturing freely where we never wander.<sup>7</sup>

Yet we also need to understand how we fit *into* nature's story by creating a culture that is grounded in place. Such a culture would not only create a climate for environmental sustainability; by restoring the connections between humans and environment, we might also come to experience our own selves as both whole and holy.

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<sup>7</sup> Thoreau, 318.

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