NATURE, MATERIALITY, AND HUMAN AGENCY IN THE LITERATURE OF THE GREAT LAKES, 1790-1853

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This dissertation is dedicated to my son, Noah.
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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgments ii

Introduction 1

Chapter

1. Politics, Hunting, Christianity, and History: Native American Literature in the Great Lakes 32


3. Geology, Water, Fear, and Wonder: The Great Lakes Natural History of Schoolcraft, Cabot, and Agassiz 125

4. The Entanglement or Transcendence of Travel: Jameson’s *Winter Studies and Summer Rambles in Canada* and Fuller’s *Summer on the Lakes, in 1843* 155

Conclusion 207

Notes 210

Works Cited 220

Vita 227
INTRODUCTION

Literary scholarship on the Great Lakes in the American early national and antebellum periods is in short supply. Scholarly attention to Great Lakes literature is often relegated to a subordinate position in support of a larger thematic argument, so such a state of scholarship begs the question: Why haven’t the Great Lakes received the attention that other regions like New England, the South, and the West have?

Answering this question begins with defining “the Great Lakes region” during the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth centuries. Geographically, the region consists of a clearly discernable watershed that includes much of the American “Old Northwest,” northwest portions of New York and Pennsylvania, and much of southern Ontario (or Upper Canada, as it was known in the period). Culturally and ecologically, however, the Great Lakes region is not so much a clearly defined space as it is a crossroads, an axis. The water that flows into Lake Superior from the Kaministiquia River at Thunder Bay eventually empties into the Atlantic; a fur trade network during the period that stretched from Montreal to present-day Manitoba and North Dakota was only possible because the Great Lakes were its highway. Algonquian, Siouan, and Iroquoian groups; Europeans of all nations; Americans; and blacks traded, married, and fought with and amongst each other here. Some of these people were born and died in the Great Lakes, some settled permanently or temporarily, some were on the move depending on the season, and others just travelled through. And many of these people wrote: they wrote speeches, historiography, autobiography, natural history, poetry, fiction, nonfiction, and travelogue.

Despite the wide array of values, allegiances, and purposes these writers professed, the one subject they all wrote about was nonhuman nature and the human
relationship to it. As a result, they were all explicitly or implicitly concerned with
materiality, the concept that matter forms our world, that matter is contingent, and that
matter has agency, the ability to change itself and act upon other matter.

In 2010, Diana Coole and Samantha Frost described the burgeoning field of New
Materialism, its fundamental assumptions, and its critical aims. “[N]ew materialists,”
they observe, “are rediscovering a materiality that materializes, evincing immanent
modes of self-transformation that compel us to think of causation in far more complex
terms; to recognize that phenomena are caught in a multitude of interlocking systems and
forces and to consider anew the location and nature of capacities for agency” (9). A major
result of this thinking, Coole and Frost argue, is that “the human species is being
relocated within a natural environment whose material forces themselves manifest certain
agentic capacities and in which the domain of unintended or unanticipated effects is
considerably broadened,” adding, “there is no definitive break between sentient and
nonsentient entities or between material and spiritual phenomena” (10).

In 2012, Serenella Iovino and Serpil Oppermann published “Theorizing Material
Ecocriticism: A Diptych,” a foundational article that describes the basic premises for an
eccritical engagement with materiality. Iovino states, “What is at stake in the ‘material
turn’ is the search for new conceptual models apt to theorize the connections between
matter and agency on the one side, and the intertwining of bodies, natures, and meanings
on the other side” (450). Oppermann points out, “the new materialist paradigm is
premised on the integral ways of thinking language and reality, discourse and matter
together…. Material practices (physical forces in natural and social life spaces) are
always co-extensive with discursive practices (power, race, gender, class, ethnicity, identity language, narrative, etc.)” (462).

The ideas put forth by Coole, Frost, Iovino, and Oppermann are the fundamental theoretical assumptions on which this dissertation rests, as they help conceptualize the relationships between nature’s materiality and the discourses of human agency and aesthetics. This theoretical framework is a compelling lens through which to read the Great Lakes from 1790 to 1853 because, during a period of so much political, cultural, and ecological change, even upheaval, a material ecocritical stance helps us see the networks that connected so much seemingly disparate activity. During this period, major efforts to turn the swamps and forests of Michigan and Ontario into agricultural land ramped up; Native groups engaged in complex political negotiations, and armed conflict, amongst themselves as well as with the US and Britain; Niagara Falls crystalized as a monument of the sublime even as it became commercialized; cholera epidemics killed thousands: the common thread running through all these phenomena, however, is materiality.

To return to the question of why scholars in Romanticism and early national and antebellum literature have not popularly regarded the Great Lakes as a literary region. Perhaps the reason lies in the region’s transnational, transcultural, and ecological complexity. Many political entities laid claim to the Great Lakes at the time; European and American settler cultures blended with or confronted Native American cultures; biology, geology, and meteorology look vastly different on Lake Superior than they do on Lake Ontario. All of these variegations, and countless others, are reflected in the literature. So, perhaps it is these variegations that justifiably suggest to scholars that the
Great Lakes should not be regarded as a literary region, although the notion of “region” itself conveys a sense of stability, of fixedness, that is provisional and tenuous at best. What person in his right mind would consider Connecticut and Maine as part of the same region? Virginia and Florida are both in the South, but why? Any answer to this question will invariably involve human constructs and political machinations, which is not to say that such answers are not valid. However, I think considering the Great Lakes as a literary region offers many unique opportunities that include but deconstruct and move beyond human constructs and politics. One opportunity involves being able to place Native, European, and American voices in close conversation with each other during a historical moment in which these voices had some things in common and many things at odds: such a dialogue might begin to reflect the shared and divergent aspirations, motivations, and values of people distinguished but brought into contact by culture, politics, and gender. Another equally important opportunity is to further explore, as geocritical scholars have recently done, the influence of place—physical, geographical place—on the human imagination, an imagination that is never not in a place, entangled as it is in the material entity of the body. Relatedly, this approach allows us to survey the myriad interpretations that emerge from conceptualizing and perceiving the same places, thus reflecting the inherent contingency and mutability of nature, and, for that matter, culture.

A project such as this is predictably informed by Bruno Latour’s conception of “natures-cultures” as put forth in 1993 in *We Have Never Been Modern*. Latour contends that conceptualizing nature and culture as fundamentally separate is the basis for Western notions of modernity, but that this separation does not actually exist; combinations of the
two, natures-cultures, are the composites that actually constitute our lives and experiences (7, 96, 105-9). One problem, of course, is that most of the authors discussed in this dissertation did in fact view nature and culture as separate, but their various experiences in the Great Lakes nonetheless illustrate points in an experiential network at which nature and culture converge. For this reason, I use the term “nature” most often as a designation for the nonhuman world. Additionally, the concept of materiality as construed by New Materialist and material ecocritical scholars was not available in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, but theories about what matter was were, and the authors discussed herein all realized, to some extent, a form of materiality in which matter is capable of change, and in which matter is capable of deeply affecting human consciousness and corporeality. Some of the authors discussed embraced and celebrated materially; others were resistant, troubled, and felt threatened by materiality.

This dissertation is an original contribution to the fields of material ecocriticism, early national and antebellum American literature, and place-based studies. It is the first substantive study of the Great Lakes as a discernable literary region. Studying literature in the Great Lakes from 1790 to 1853 means investigating the ways intellectuals imagined drastic ecological, cultural, and political change in a region characterized by competing American, British, Canadian, and Native American interests. By way of material ecocriticism, the dissertation participates in current scholarly debates concerning Romanticism, Transcendentalism, sentimentalism, domesticity, the picturesque, the sublime, and nature. The dissertation shows that human agency in all its discursive manifestations is a product of entanglement with nature’s materiality—its physical objects and forces and this physicality’s capacity for change—and this entanglement is
understood, and sometimes resisted, through the application and/or revision of aesthetic theories. Put another way, I argue that conceptions of materiality are processed aesthetically, a discursive practice intertwined with the discourse on human agency and the visceral experience of human bodies. The implications of conceptions of materiality are deeply political and a major determinant of human conceptions of self and the human species at large.

The four chapters in this dissertation, discussed in more detail below, are loosely organized according to the extent that the authors discussed in them viewed themselves as residents of the region (or not). Thus, Chapter 1 examines the work of Native authors and voices Red Jacket, John Tanner, George Copway, and William W. Warren. Chapter 2 considers the project of domesticity in the settler accounts of Catherine Parr Traill and Caroline Kirkland. Chapter 3 examines the natural history writing of Henry Rowe Schoolcraft, Louis Agassiz, and J. Elliot Cabot. Chapter 4 analyses the travel narratives of Anna Brownell Jameson and Margaret Fuller. This introduction ends with an analysis of the poetry and stories of Jane Johnston Schoolcraft, who culturally, politically, and artistically serves as what I will call an “apex author” in Great Lakes literature; a reading of her work is thus the most appropriate entrée into my examination of nature, materiality, and human agency.

In order to accommodate depth of literary analysis, the works discussed in this dissertation represent a survey of what I contend are major contributions to Great Lakes literature, either because extant scholarly fields have already established the works’ critical import, or because I believe these works shed important light on the literary culture on nature produced in or about the Great Lakes. Accordingly, I discuss only
works that focus exclusively, or at least overwhelmingly, on the Great Lakes region. I have chosen to examine texts in the years from 1790 to 1853 because they best encapsulate the political, ecological, and cultural turbulence at the heart of Native, US, and British presence on this continent. These years also signal a chronological bracketing performed by important Native texts, the earliest speeches of Red Jacket and William Warren’s *History of the Ojibway People*.

An existing study that bears the closest resemblance to this dissertation is Edward Watts’s *An American Colony: Regionalism and the Roots of Midwestern Culture* (2002). Watts examines the American Old Northwest and the late eighteenth and nineteenth century texts written about it in order to show that thinking about this region as an American colony helps illuminate the development of its culture. The Old Northwest included much of the Great Lakes region, but it extended down to the north bank of the Ohio and of course did not include British Canada, so while Watts’s study is pertinent for thinking about the nuances of American culture in what is now the Midwest and covers a wonderfully diverse range of literature, it does not offer the explicit attention to the interconnectedness of nature and culture that an examination of the area’s materiality does.

The work of scholars who discuss Great Lakes literature as part of a larger conversation helps situate this literature historically in contemporary national trends. Eric Wilson’s chapter on Fuller in *Romantic Turbulence: Chaos, Ecology and American Space* (2000) is part of a larger ecocritical reading of American Renaissance authors’ willingness to embrace the turbulence that occupies the space between nature’s chaos and order by fusing ostensibly binary concepts such as science and myth, and empiricism and
idealism. In their departure from the Enlightenment inclination toward order, Wilson shows that American Romantics’ recognition of nature’s inherent chaos was a necessary starting point for understanding the universe. Wilson sets the stage for examining American philosophical considerations of nature, crucial for exploring materiality and human agency in the Great Lakes.

In addition to the critical framework offered by Wilson described above, that of Rochelle L. Johnson further emphasizes the problematic human relationship with nature that characterizes much American writing in the early nineteenth century. In *Passions for Nature: Nineteenth-Century America’s Aesthetics of Alienation* (2009), Johnson argues that many American intellectuals reduced the American landscape to mere metaphors for American progress, refinement, or reason by showing how aesthetic theories were responsible for alienating people from their nonhuman environments. Johnson offers Susan Fenimore Cooper’s approach to nature as more ecologically responsible for its deeper acknowledgement of what is actually there. Johnson suggests that materiality was a problem for writers in the nineteenth-century United States, and their insights are crucial for understanding why American writers represented the Great Lakes in the diverse ways they did. The work of Wilson and Johnson comprises the ecocritical lens for much of the dissertation, and it also represents a field of inquiry to which the dissertation contributes, a field that examines the tensions characterizing the convergence of materiality, politics, philosophy, and aesthetics.

Since the dissertation addresses works by British and Canadian authors in addition to American and Native American works, and since British influence was pervasive in American writing in the early national and antebellum periods, criticism in
British Romanticism is an important component of understanding the literature of the Great Lakes. Of particular importance is Onno Oerlemans’s *Romanticism and the Materiality of Nature* (2004). Oerlemans explores the interconnectedness of materiality, consciousness, and literary representation in order to examine the possibilities and limitations of the Romantic view of nature as other. I see Oerlemans’s work as being in transatlantic dialogue with Wilson’s and Johnson’s.

Considerations of and considerations voiced by Native Americans is a central aspect of the relationships among nature, materiality, and human agency in the Great Lakes. In *Moving Encounters: Sympathy and the Indian Question in Antebellum Literature* (2008), Laura L. Mielke examines the relationship between sentimentalism and representations of Native peoples, concluding that artistically mediated encounters between Euro-Americans and Native peoples established an emotional common ground, a common ground that was not available culturally or politically. In many cases, however, sympathy failed to bridge the gap opened by politics and cultural difference. Mielke’s discussions of the writings of Jane Johnston Schoolcraft, Henry Rowe Schoolcraft, and Margaret Fuller implicitly show the importance of the Great Lakes in a broader national tendency. A work that combines literary scholarship and Native Studies is Maureen Konkle’s *Writing Indian Nations: Native Intellectuals and the Politics of Historiography, 1827-1863* (2004). Konkle argues that Native intellectuals’ articulations of Native history were a major component of their political struggle against Euro-American racism, and her chapters on Ojibwe and Iroquois historiography suggest the extent to which the Great Lakes region was a center of Native resistance. In *An Infinity of Nations: How the Native New World Shaped Early North America* (2012), Michael
Witgen takes an ethno-historical approach to Native Studies by showing the extent to which the Anishinaabeg and Dakota shaped the cultural and political climate of the early stages of their interactions with Europeans and Americans. His extensive attention to the concept of “Anishinaabewaki”—the land of the Anishinaabeg as imagined, administrated, and controlled by the Anishinaabeg—is particularly useful for rethinking the political and cultural import of land in the Great Lakes region. Michael Pomedli, in *Living with Animals: Ojibwe Spirit Powers* (2014), explains aspects of the Ojibwe relationship with nature through the practices and teachings of the Midewiwin, or Grand Medicine Society, in the nineteenth century. The work of Witgen and Pomedli represents a collective emphasis on the relationship among land, politics, and culture for Great Lakes Native communities in and of themselves, but particularly in the first two hundred years of these communities’ engagement with Europeans and Americans.

Chapter 1 discusses the speeches, from 1790 to 1830, of Red Jacket (Seneca), *History of the Ojibway People* (1853, 1885) by William W. Warren (Ojibway), *The Life of Kah-ge-ga-gah-bowh* (1847) by George Copway (Ojibway), and *The Falcon: A Narrative of the Captivity and Adventures of John Tanner among the Native Americans in the Interior of North America*. It is only appropriate to begin a dissertation on Great Lakes literature with the intellectual productions of the region’s most established human inhabitants. In this chapter, I emphasize the extent to which these writers articulate distinctly Native aesthetic principles as well as the degree to which writers like Copway and Warren incorporate Euro-American aesthetic theories in order to bolster their political arguments. The work of Witgen (particularly his interpretations of a “Native New World” and “Anishinaabewaki”) and Pomedli (especially his understanding of
traditional Native discourse on nature and meaning) will guide the discussion of Native aesthetics, and the work of Konkle (her examination of historiography as political) will guide the discussion of Euro-American aesthetics in Native writing. For many scholars, Native American conceptions of nature are inextricable from spirituality in a monistic Native belief system, but I hope to show the extent to which nature’s materiality—its very physical forces, conditions, and contingency—is something that Native authors acknowledge as a source of human agency. Whereas traditional Native relationships to the land are certainly governed by spiritual beliefs, they can also be examined in ways that do not comply with Euro-American conceptions of “abstraction.” Indeed, as part of their resistance to Euro-American colonialism, as well as their confrontations with other Native groups and nations, many of these authors are compelled to represent Native relationships to the land in very material terms.

Chapter 2 examines settler domesticity in the Great Lakes as represented in Catharine Parr Traill’s *The Backwoods of Canada: Being Letters from the Wife of an Emigrant Officer, Illustrative of the Domestic Economy of British America* (1836) and Caroline Kirkland’s *A New Home, Who’ll Follow? or, Glimpses of Western Life* (1839). For Traill, botanical, Native, and ill bodies are at the heart of her effort to extend the purview of the domestic and thus participate not only in the project of colonization, but also in serious conversations about natural history. In Kirkland’s representation, what Stacy Alaimo has identified as trans-corporeality in *Bodily Natures: Science, Environment, and the Material Self* (2010), as well as what I have termed the “trans-oeconomia” of settler domesticity through objects, constitutes the materiality-based conception of feminine experience.
The third chapter discusses natural history in the Great Lakes as reflected in the writings of Henry Rowe Schoolcraft, and Louis Agassiz and J. Elliot Cabot. The texts examined are Schoolcraft’s *Narrative Journal of Travels Through the Northwestern Regions of the United States extending from Detroit through the Great Chain of American Lakes to the Sources of the Mississippi River in the Year 1820* (1821), and Agassiz and Cabot’s *Lake Superior: Its Physical Character, Vegetation, and Animals, Compared with Those of Other and Similar Regions* (1850). I argue that whereas for Schoolcraft, nature’s contingent materiality is often a point of consternation and worry, it is a source of immense gratification and possibility for Agassiz and Cabot. This difference is reflective of developments in aesthetic views as well as scientific advancement in the United States. Andrew J. Lewis’s *A Democracy of Facts: Natural History in the Early Republic* (2011) helps explain Schoolcraft’s unwillingness to think systematically as well as Agassiz’s eagerness to do so. Noah Heringman’s *Romantic Rocks, Aesthetic Geology* (2004) guides my reading of geology’s aesthetic import in the Great Lakes. Laura Dassow Walls’s *Seeing New Worlds: Henry David Thoreau and Nineteenth-Century Natural Science* (1995)—particularly the scientific approach to nature she calls “rational holism”—has significant bearing on my reading of Agassiz. Finally, Elizabeth A. Bohls’s *Women Travel Writers and the Language of Aesthetics 1716-1818* (1995), particularly her concise but informative discussion of major Romantic aesthetic theories, helps me show the prevalence of British influence in Schoolcraft’s sense of aesthetics.

Bohls’s work is even more relevant in Chapter 4, in which I discuss Anna Brownell Jameson’s *Winter Studies and Summer Rambles in Canada* (1838) and
Margaret Fuller’s *Summer on the Lakes, in 1843* (1844), particularly in that it helps me illustrate the extent to which engaging with materiality is a (rather subversive) demonstration of agency, primarily in Jameson. The travel narratives of Jameson and Fuller reveal fundamentally different conceptions regarding the meaning and purpose of travel. For Jameson, travel is an effort to viscerally engage the body with nature and peoples; for Fuller, travelling the Great Lakes is a means toward transcendence, an effort to overcome the limitations of materiality in order know spirit and the consciousness. The chapter is primarily a geocritical reading of Jameson’s and Fuller’s experiences at Niagara Falls, Mackinac Island, and Sault Ste. Marie, though I also discuss the experiential centrality of Jameson’s excursion through the islands of northern Lake Huron as well as Fuller’s journey across the Illinois prairie to Rock River.

Jane Johnston Schoolcraft

The poetry and stories of Jane Johnston Schoolcraft represent an explicit aesthetic engagement with the differences and connections between nature’s materiality and human consciousness. Although Schoolcraft’s life is often viewed as a tragic one, her literary production demonstrates emotional range as it explores the complexities of what we might traditionally identify as Euro-American and Ojibwe artistic visions, yet her politics might easily be labeled Ojibwe. Schoolcraft’s work interweaves materiality and Romantic tropes with traditional Ojibwe beliefs and postcolonial politics to create a literary oeuvre unlike any other in the nineteenth century. Schoolcraft’s status as Sault Ste. Marie literati, descended from Scots-Irish gentry and influential Ojibwe ancestors,
positions her as a keen observer of and participant in liminal politics, culture, and aesthetics.4

Schoolcraft’s poetry reflects a conception of materiality that is natural theological—nature is viewed as evidence of God’s power and wisdom—but Schoolcraft also appreciates nature for what it lacks: human evil and corruption. Both of these—natural theology and morally regenerative nature—are quintessentially Romantic, but what is significant about Schoolcraft’s poetry is the manner in which the materiality of nature substantiates protests against colonial oppression and elitism.

One consequence of Schoolcraft’s view of nature’s materiality is that she privileges the beautiful and the sublime over the picturesque. Schoolcraft-endorses the beautiful in nature as that which produces joy and admiration, and she subscribes to the sublime’s capacity to move her to wonder and awe, but she avoids employing the picturesque as an aesthetic framework because it more rigidly emphasizes nature’s conformity to human standards. Whereas the beautiful inspires and the sublime humbles, the picturesque, it seems for Schoolcraft, merely assures us that our ideas of what “nature at its finest” should be are correct. According to Elizabeth A. Bohls, the picturesque means eschewing historical particularities, the marginalization of lower classes of people, and the aesthetic and physical control of landscapes as barometers of human power, which results in a paradox when women writers employ the picturesque (66-107). For Schoolcraft, the picturesque represents the moral turpitude of threatening nature’s material agency, which helps account for her resistance to it. Schoolcraft’s work more substantially resonates with Bohls’s point, “Women writers treated [the beautiful and the sublime] opportunistically, exploiting their ambiguities through creative reappropriation.
and redefinition,” acknowledging but also challenging the “Burkean dichotomy between
the sublime, fueled by the passions of self-preservation, and the beautiful, which channels
the sociable emotions” (15). In the beautiful and sublime, Schoolcraft did not see threats
to nature, but ways to make nature’s materiality accessible to and beneficial for human
observers.

“On the Doric Rock, Lake Superior,” probably written in 1831, complicates
Schoolcraft’s natural theology by positioning a “simple Indian” as the contemplator of
God’s works. Additionally, the poem serves as a seminal example of Schoolcraft using
Euro-American Romantic tropes in order to make a sociopolitical argument for the
Ojibwe. Exercising the consciousness through the observation of nature is a prerequisite
for understanding the presence of God in “On the Doric Rock, Lake Superior.”
Schoolcraft begins the poem by characterizing the spirit of the quest for knowledge itself:

Dwellers at home, in indolence and ease,
How deep their debt, to those that roam the seas,
Or cross the lands, in quest of every art
That science, knowledge, pity can impart
To help mankind, or guild the lettered page
The bold discoverers of every age. (1-6)

The enterprises described are commendable: Schoolcraft could have very easily
disparaged scientific exploration, the colonial implications of which she would have been
aware by the early 1830s, but she seems to distinguish between the pursuits of
imperialism and humanistic science “[t]o help mankind.” Many a postcolonial scholar
might charge Schoolcraft with naiveté, but if we view her characterization as negotiating
the materiality-human agency relationship, it becomes evident that nature itself, not the quest for knowledge of it, deserves to be celebrated. Accordingly, Schoolcraft incorporates the Romantic trope of the ruin in order to point out human consciousness’s incommensurability with nature’s sublimity. She describes the “wonder and surprize” of encountering the Pictured Rocks’ impressive geology (10-2), then explains,

Not least, among those forms, the traveller’s tale,
These pillared rocks and castle pomps prevail
Standing, like some vast ruin of the plain,
Where ancient victims by their priests were slain
But far more wondrous, - for the fair design
No architect drew out, with measured line
‘Twas nature’s wildest flower, that graved the Rock,
The waves’ loud fury, and the tempest’s shock
Yet all that arts can do, here frowning shine,
In mimic pride, and grandeur of design. (13-22)

The picturesque natural ruin—as the subjugating aesthetic gesture of conceptually reducing awesome materiality to a human structure—is an insufficient analogy for the natural forces responsible for the geological marvel. Schoolcraft acknowledges that the emotional consideration of the human history tied to geographical spaces is one path toward sensibility, but why not, she implicitly asks, dwell on the magnificence of nature’s capacity to make and change itself? Lingering on this question turns the mind not to the comparatively paltry discourse of “the Vanity of Human Wishes” (Bohls 99) through the
picturesque, but to the mystery of “nature’s God” via the sublime, which even the
“simple Indian” recognizes as the appropriate aesthetic course:

The simple Indian, as the work he spies,
Looks up to nature’s God above the skies
And though, his lot be rugged wild and dear,
Yet owns the ruling power with soul sincere,
Not as where, Asia’s piles of marble high,
For idol gods the beast was doomed to die,
But, guided by a purer-led surprise,
Points to the great good sovereign of the skies
And thinks the power that built the upper sphere,
Hath left but traces of his fingers here. (23-32)

Nature’s contingency is a profound materiality functioning as revelation, and this
materiality itself is a satisfying alternative for pagan alters. The Doric Rock makes no
demands of sacrifice; it is the human observer’s job—the Indian’s job—to carefully
perceive natural processes and then consider God’s influence on them.

An understandable counterargument regarding “Doric Rock” would be that it does
not reflect a theory of materiality as much as it professes faith in God’s creation. As
Coole and Frost contend, however, the New Materialist sees no definitive division
“between material and spiritual phenomena” (10). Certainly Schoolcraft is not a New
Materialist, but Coole and Frost’s contention makes it possible to theorize that
Schoolcraft did not see a division between the material and the spiritual either. Countless
other Romantics believed in a vital, intangible but intelligible force running through all
matter, the religious or secular nature of which was not always immediately apparent. Schoolcraft’s materiality is undeniably religious, but it is no less material for that: she seems to be arguing in “Doric Rock” that materiality should be contemplated, and then God can be contemplated. Again, the poem’s organization is telling: it begins with humanist discourse, turns its attention to the grander phenomena of nature, and thence to God. If viewed hierarchically, nature’s materiality is far closer to God than science, art, history, and maybe even religion itself.

There is compelling evidence to suggest Schoolcraft’s view of nature became more and more conditioned by pessimism resulting from the increasingly apparent effects of American colonialism. This development is illustrated by the differences between “The Contrast, a Splenetic Effusion. March, 1823—“ and what Robert Dale Parker suggests is a later version of the poem—“The Contrast”—without explicitly explaining why (Schoolcraft 118). However, I am inclined to agree with Parker because the postcolonial melancholy contained in the second version is of a piece with that found in “Lines written at Castle Island, Lake Superior” from 1838, discussed later in this introduction. In the 1823 version, the “contrast” Schoolcraft addresses is between girlhood and womanhood, particularly the relative felicity of juvenile friendships as compared to the trials occasioned by romantic love in adulthood (116). The later version, however, distinguishes between a girlhood of happiness and polite learning and an adulthood burdened with political and social awareness. “St. Mary’s woodland bowers” (8) have changed dramatically:

The tree cut down—the cot removed,

The cot the simple Indian loved,
The busy strife of young and old
To gain one sordid bit of gold
By trade’s o’er done plethoric moil,
And lawsuits, meetings, courts and toil. (41-6)

Schoolcraft’s transition into adulthood has meant bearing witness to dramatic environmental, social, and economic change. Christine R. Cavalier offers a compelling analysis of “The Contrast” that demonstrates the literary strategies Schoolcraft employs in order to challenge American exceptionalism. She shows that Schoolcraft’s imagery of Native displacement by Euro-Americans is influenced in part by, and reflects her reading of, Oliver Goldsmith’s critique of aristocratic oppression of the English working class in *The Deserted Village* (105). For Cavalier, the couplets quoted above assert, “Indian removal is merely a harbinger for a degenerate civilization that ultimately transforms the métis pastoral into a chaotic scene of deforestation, avarice, and legal wrangling” (105). Schoolcraft thus draws a perfect analog between materiality and consciousness: the material effects of capitalist and racist ideologies are evident in the landscape and the oppression of Native people. The changes she witnesses are threats to domesticity as well because, as Cavalier points out, “The Contrast” shows how Schoolcraft credits “her rustic upbringing on the Great Lakes frontier with inspiring her nascent True Womanhood,” how “she learned to live selflessly for others’ gratification and approval while cultivating her spiritual excellence” (104). The themes of domesticity, materiality, consciousness, and politics all come together in the poem’s final four couplets:

Adieu, to days of homebred ease,
When many a rural care could please,
We trim our sail anew, to steer
By shoals we never knew were here,
And with the star flag, raised on high
Discover a new dominion nigh,
And half in joy, half in fear,
Welcome the proud Republic here (47-54).

Regarding the poem’s conclusion, Cavalier observes,

Undermining the discourse of American exceptionalism, she draws on nostalgic tropes and sympathetic social commentary made famous by earlier models of sensibility and thereby transforms the arrival of Euro-American progress on the Great Lakes frontier into an uncanny reenactment of Britain’s ruthless eighteenth-century land policies (106).

Finding any “joy” at all in American political ascendency at the Soo thus seems to be Schoolcraft’s acknowledgment of how one is supposed to feel about the triumph of American civilization, but “fear” more immediately—formally and conceptually—characterizes the “[w]elcome.” The final two couplets could even be read as cutting sarcasm, feeling as blindsided as she does by problems she “never knew were here.” The transformation of the Soo into an American landscape represents devastation in all spheres—domestic, natural, economic, social, moral, and political. Such American “dominion” is categorically destructive. More specifically, Schoolcraft’s acknowledgment of the threats embodied in American imperialism contrast markedly with the ethos Amy Kaplan describes as characterizing the racialized domesticity in works by mid-nineteenth century middle class white women authors: “The rhetorics of
Manifest Destiny and domesticity share a vocabulary that turns imperial conquest into spiritual regeneration in order to efface internal conflict or external resistance in visions of geopolitical domination as global harmony” (588). Schoolcraft’s métis identity no doubt underlies her ability to see through the ideology, and critique the real effects, of American imperialism, but we can also confidently presume that her Christian morality was deeply affected by an imperialism claiming the spread of Christian virtues as one of its justifications. If, as Kaplan rightly suggests, the literature of domesticity was employed by white women to promote civilizing in the home, the nation, and abroad, it was used by Schoolcraft to condemn the hypocrisy of those efforts.

The sentiments contained in “The Contrast” carry over into “Lines written at Castle Island, Lake Superior,” but the difference is that Lake Superior is figured as impervious to the American corruption described in “The Contrast.”5 Schoolcraft’s “native inland sea” provides moral regeneration because of its material purity, but also because of its geopolitical centrality for many Ojibwe groups.

Here in my native inland sea
From pain and sickness would I flee
And from its shores and island bright
Gather a store of sweet delight.
Lone island of the saltless sea!
How wide, how sweet, how fresh and free
How all transporting – is the view
Of rocks and skies and waters blue
Uniting, as a song’s sweet strains
To tell, here nature only reigns.
Ah, nature! here forever sway
Far from the haunts of men away
For here, there are no sordid fears,
No crimes, no misery, no tears
No pride of wealth; the heart to fill,
No laws to treat my people ill (92).

In a very basic sense, the material conditions of this body of water prevent it from succumbing to the human (Euro-American) corruption that has come to characterize terrestrial environments. For Schoolcraft, this quality offers solace for a consciousness reeling with fear and sadness due to greed and injustice, and it offers respite for a body plagued by illness. The problem, of course, is that the human consciousness and body can only be healed by the absence of other human consciousness and bodies. What appears at first as a sigh of relief thus becomes an unsustainable illusion, a level of isolation that cannot last. Perhaps it is for this reason that Schoolcraft ends the poem with two couplets that deny the presence of human evils at Lake Superior while simultaneously emphasizing and lamenting their undeniable existence otherwise. On the shore of Lake Superior, Schoolcraft stands in a liminal zone—at the verge of land and water, human and nonhuman, corrupt and pure—unable to attain what can be viewed: in the lake’s physical beauty, Schoolcraft sees a material reality that can no longer be a moral reality. Schoolcraft projects an abstract purity that cannot be found elsewhere onto a particular physical space—domesticating it, in a way—but on the other hand, Lake Superior is quite
literally devoid of human corruption, and thus functions as a form of materiality that is valued both for what it produces in beauty and for what it lacks in human influence.

Schoolcraft’s conception of human agency as contingent upon material phenomenon and circumstances carries over into her stories, which should be understood as examples of literary license in the retelling of traditional Ojibwe tales. Schoolcraft, according to Maureen Konkle, is one of many nineteenth-century Ojibwe writers who “present traditional knowledge as capable of beauty in the literary-aesthetic realm and as representative of the truth in history. They maintain this position at a moment when Native peoples’ traditional knowledge was being refracted, rewritten, and effaced in the invention of ethnology and reified in sentimental and popular entertainment” (166). But Konkle also asserts, “Jane Schoolcraft’s stories don’t present history or historical relations or for the most part reproduce the conventions for sentimental [in this sense, the perception that Indians are ahistorical and doomed] stories about Indians; rather they appear to be modeled on literary fairy tales” because they “are about transformation and wonder” (174).6 Yet, I would argue that traditional Ojibwe stories themselves are also often “about transformation and wonder,” so it seems reasonable to say that the stories represent a Romantic Ojibwe poet’s transmission of traditional Ojibwe conceptions of nature’s materiality and the human relationship to it. These Ojibwe conceptions could be viewed as analogous to Schoolcraft’s own conception of nature as decidedly material but capable of producing elevated human consciousness, though I do not mean for this possibility to be misconstrued as an essentialist reduction of traditional Ojibwe belief to Euro-American Christian Romantic principles; rather, I only mean to demonstrate that the prevalence of morality in Schoolcraft’s Christian conception of nature echoes the concern
for moral, spiritually-guided responsibility in interacting with nature’s materiality as illustrated in her stories. Two stories discussed below – “Mishōsha, or the Magician and His Daughters” and “The Origin of the Robin” – illustrate an important point made by Basil Johnston regarding traditional Ojibwe beliefs: “Human beings had to comply with the natural laws of the world, and although they were subject to no other men or women, they had to abide by everything else and could not make anything comply or conform to their wishes. They were among the least of the creatures of the Earth and were dependent on the manitous’ goodwill” (xxi). As Schoolcraft repeatedly demonstrates in her poetry and stories, humans are fickle, frail things that have much to learn and appreciate about nature’s materiality, beauty, and sublimity; human consciousness and agency depends on it. “Moowis, The Indian Coquette,” on the other hand, takes a hilarious view of materiality and human limitations through a scatological lens.

“Mishōsha, or The Magician and His Daughters” (1827) illustrates the benefits humans can reap when they are cognizant of how the natural world is ordered and strive to maintain that balance. At the beginning of the story, two brothers are abandoned by their parents, which is the direct and indirect result of the mother’s affair with another man (169). The eldest brother, Panigwun, takes on the role of caregiver, and in their quest for survival, they arrive at a lake where they encounter Mishōsha, the evil magician. Mishōsha lives on an island in the center of the lake with his two daughters who, unlike him, are compassionate and caring (169-70). The magician travels around the lake in an enchanted canoe that obeys his commands and moves with unearthly speed (170). As a magical, malevolent being whose realm is the lake, Mishōsha is indicative of traditional Ojibwe beliefs regarding water manitous like Mishepezhu, the scaly, horned wildcat who
claims human lives for the watery underworld. Michael Pomedli notes that many water creatures “are frequently regarded as bad medicine and are associated with catastrophic events” (169). Accordingly, Mishôsha threatens the life of Panigwun by manipulating gulls, fish, and eagles, convincing them to act contrary to their natures as dictated by Gitchi-Manito, but Panigwun’s power to overcome Mishôsha comes from the strength he harnesses in recognizing and preserving the natural order of things (171-3). He is able to gain the confidence of the animals led astray by Mishôsha by reminding them of their natural habits; he saves his own life by restoring the balance between humans, animals, and manitous, and is thus able to terrorize Mishôsha in the process (171-2). At the end of the story, Mishôsha becomes a sycamore tree because Panigwun is able to take advantage of the magician’s vanity; Panigwun “besought his Manito, to cause a storm of snow” that ultimately gets the best of Mishôsha, and his daughters “applauded the deed, agreed to put on mortal shapes, become wives to the young men, and forever quit the enchanted island. They immediately passed over to the main land, where they lived in happiness and Peace” (174-5).

If the story does not fit the definition of sentimental as applied to Indians, it certainly fits June Howard’s in its fidelity to the corporeal, social, and moral components of the sentimental. Howard notes that sentimentality in nineteenth-century America has its roots in the eighteenth-century British notion of sentiment, which “coordinates complex recognitions of the power of bodily sensations (including emotions), the possibilities of feeling distant from or connected with other human beings, and benevolence as a defining human virtue” (70). The story clearly outlines the moral triumph of allowing nature’s materiality to function without nefarious influence, and it
applauds the benevolence of Mishōsha’s daughters as socially upstanding. The story presents a version of Schoolcraft’s materiality in which human wellbeing and consciousness is a direct result of living right with and properly viewing nature. By doing right by the contingencies and laws of nature, Panigwun is able to overcome the inherent fallibility of mankind as represented in his morally degenerate parents, the antithesis of which is Mishōsha’s daughters, who function as a figurative representation of goodness begetting goodness. The daughters choose to take human forms, which reinforces human materiality as something to be desired when properly situated morally. Interestingly, whereas Lake Superior represents moral purity in “Lines written at Castle Island,” the lake in “Mishōsha” symbolizes the threat of evil forces. In Schoolcraft’s materiality, however, respect for nature’s materiality—its otherness as well as its autonomy—is the common ethical denominator that transcends culturally prescribed symbolic differences.

“The Origin of the Robin” (1827), on the other hand, is a story about the benefits of being nonhuman versus human, and suggests that some people are too morally superior to be trapped in the world of mankind. The story stresses the transience of human and animal forms, and in so doing, imbues particular materialities with greater moral significance. An old father urges his only son to perform a twelve-day fast as part of his transition into manhood; such a substantial fast would secure the son the respect of the tribe, and thus procure renown for the father. The son agrees to the fast, but begs to break it when his dreams “are of ominous evil” (163). Out of selfishness, the father convinces his son to persist, but on the tenth day, the father discovers his son painting his chest vermillion, saying to himself, “My father has ruined me, as a man; he would not listen to my request; he will now be the loser. I shall be forever happy in my new state,
for I have been obedient to my parent; he alone will be the sufferer; for the Spirit is a just one, though not propitious to me. He has shown me pity, and now I must go” (164). The father begs the son not to leave him, but the son completes his transformation into a robin nonetheless, explaining to his father that his proximity to human dwellings and his song will serve as consolation for his father and will cheer other humans (164).

In this case, an animal form is preferable to a human one (though “propitious”), but it also illustrates Pomedli’s point that in traditional Ojibwe belief, other-than-human persons are common, and one can never be certain if he is looking at an animal or a person or both when he sees a creature in the form of an animal or a human (xvii-xi). In “The Origin of the Robin,” manitous serve a pivotal role in the transformative possibilities between humans and animals (and in the case of Mishösha, humans and flora): nonhuman spirits/mysteries/forces—what, in the parlance of new materialism, might be termed “vitalities”—mediate the transitions between human and animal forms. Furthermore, the story is reminiscent of Schoolcraft’s poem “Lines written at Castle Island” in its depiction of the moral turpitude of the human realm in contrast to the innocence of nature. Also, like “Mishösha,” the story points toward the corporeal, social, and moral components of sentiment: because the son’s morality is superior to his human society’s, his body transforms in order to reflect it. Yet, in an act of true selflessness, he employs his new materiality in the emotional betterment of humanity.

In both stories, morality is a major factor in determining which beings have a healthy relationship with nature, and they could thus be interpreted as in line with the nineteenth-century practices of the Midewiwin, the Grand Medicine Society of the Ojibwe, as described by Pomedli: “The Midewiwin ritual promoted general precepts
under the rubric of *bimaadiziwin* – leading the good life of integration in all possible ways: moral, spiritual, medicinal, social, and political. That integration was founded on relationships with animals and spirits” (xxxi). The stories do not necessarily confirm that Schoolcraft intended them as representative of Midewiwin rituals or teachings, but the similarities between the stories and Pomedli’s description of the Midewiwin are striking, and Charles E. Cleland shows that Schoolcraft and her family would have been familiar with Midewiwin rituals (182). It seems to be more than mere coincidence that Schoolcraft’s stories and poems reflect a conception of materiality that has much in common with traditional Ojibwe value systems. At the very least, the stories are a Romantic writer’s literary renderings of a belief system in which morality and the contingencies of materiality are closely allied: representing an aesthetic fusion of Euro-American sentimentalism and Ojibwe tradition regarding the moral and material conditions of the human relationship with nature, Schoolcraft illustrates a conception of human agency that finds common ground between the two ideologies.

Although “Mishōsha” and “The Origin of the Robin” emphasize moral righteousness and propriety, “Moowis, The Indian Coquette” shows that, when it comes to materiality and human agency, Schoolcraft has a great sense of humor too. “Moowis” pushes the boundaries when it comes to questions regarding what types of materiality can be imbued with vital principles. Schoolcraft does not seem to be poking fun at monism as much as entertaining the hilarious possibilities of materiality, embodied in a man made of enchanted shit. The story’s title is a bit misleading: “Moowis” is the excremental man, and “The Indian Coquette” is the young woman he seduces as part of a scorned male suitor’s revenge plot. On the other hand, the title could be emphasizing the notion that
one is no better than the company one entertains. Konkle notes that Schoolcraft may have taken less creative license with “Moowis”: “While the other stories are in a recognizably idealized literary style, both the narrative and the language make the story appear closer to traditional sources” (175). Parker notes that the published versions attributed to Henry Rowe Schoolcraft after Jane’s death are sanitized and geared toward teaching what Henry calls “the danger of what we denominate coquetry,” though Parker observes that the original version is “critical of male vanity” as well (Schoolcraft 167-8). Altogether, the story should be viewed primarily as an example of Schoolcraft’s Ojibwe humor, a story about a snobby young woman being tricked into having sex with a man made of shit as a result of male vanity. On another level, it is a story about the pervasive contingencies of materiality—the blurred or absent lines between human and nonhuman—in traditional Ojibwe views.

The story begins with the coquette rejecting the sexual advances of “a noted beau or muh muh daw go” by scratching his face, deeply hurting his vanity (166). Once the beau’s village is deserted for the winter, he makes a suit of clothes that he fills with “the dirt of the village” to make it appear human in form, and when he “put the bow and arrows in its hands … it came to life” (166). The “dirt image” travels with his maker to the village where the coquette is residing, and he receives excellent hospitality, although he has to urge one of the children to sit between him and the lodge’s fire, presumably so he doesn’t stink too much or melt; even though everyone smells filth, no one puts two and two together (166). In the meantime, the coquette has fallen in love with him and “wished the stranger would visit her” (166). “Towards morning, the image said to the young woman (as he had succeeded) ‘I must now go away,’” and the image insists she
not go with him (166). The coquette covertly follows the tracks of the image and his maker as the day begins to warm and the snow begins to melt, and on their trail she is disgusted when she finds one of his mittens “full of dirt”; she eventually finds all his clothing but loses the trail once the snow is gone, and begins to cry (166-7). “She kept crying Moowis has led me astray, and she kept singing and crying Moowis nin ge won e win ig, ne won e win ig [you have lead me astray, you are leading me astray]” (167-8).

It is notable that the bow and arrow are what make the dirt image come to life, as though a male’s vitality is a matter of his ability to use them, but this symbolism is commensurate with the coquette’s inability to perceive that she is making love to a man made of excrement. By the end of the story, and only too late, she realizes that her reputation is ruined. Falling for a man of excrement while vehemently rejecting an attractive human is not only a good joke at the coquette’s expense, but it also illustrates that human perceptual limitations, when it comes to discerning forms of materiality, have a direct bearing on human agency, especially socially and emotionally.

Schoolcraft’s attention to materiality encompasses the overarching, often dichotomous elements of Great Lakes literature that will be emphasized throughout this dissertation. On the one hand, Great Lakes nature is a source of enchantment, a network of vital forces that are meant to be felt and are meant to change the human experience for the better. On the other hand, nature, in its immanence and power—in its beauty and sublimity—continually reminds human observers of the limits of consciousness and the problematic otherness characterizing the relationship between consciousness and materiality: nonetheless, Schoolcraft, like many of the authors discussed herein, is not satisfied with
this otherness and persists in looking for interconnections between the mysteries of materiality and the mysteries of human consciousness. For Schoolcraft, nature suggests the positive potential of the human condition, but it also reminds her that humans are a deeply flawed species. In large measure, Schoolcraft’s work represents Oerlemans’s premise that the discourses of Romanticism and environmentalism reflect “an openness to the materiality of the world, to its otherness. It is in part a sense of wonder, a need to take the world in, to try to know it, countered by an awareness that this otherness cannot be made a part of the singular or cultural self” (13).

In our current age of environmental crisis, we can look back to Schoolcraft and the other authors who consider the materiality of the Great Lakes during the beginning stages of the “anthropocene” and see where we got our relationship with nature right, and where we got it wrong. We can see that it was always the most humanitarian decision to question the “progress” of “civilization,” and we can see that ecological responsibility was always about seeing nature as something that pervasively affected us, but also as something much bigger than us. And, we can see that meeting and thinking about nature on its own material terms is the best way to begin thinking about the abilities and limitations of our own species.
Oversimplified understandings of Native American relationships to nature seen in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries persist in twenty-first century scholarship. For example, Daniel Justin Herman, in his otherwise astute and compelling *Hunting and the American Imagination*, argues, “Unlike Indians, backwoodsmen did not worship the natural world or its faunal denizens” (52). Such a characterization of Native peoples resonates with Brian W. Dippie’s depiction of antebellum Euro-American thought: “The ‘inexorable destiny’ of the Indians, like that of the wilderness with which they shared an almost symbiotic relationship, was to recede before civilization’s advance” (15). Similarly, Maureen Konkle has shown, “Native peoples were held to be so different, an anachronistic relic of an early moment in the history of man locked in a state of nature without history and without a future, that they would rapidly disappear when confronted with the pinnacle of human civilization, the new United States” (4). All these statements about Native peoples, to certain degrees, reflect “two Great Divides” that Bruno Latour has identified in his critique of modernity: One in which Westerners treat nature and society as though fundamentally separate, and another in which this separation is viewed as the fundamental difference between “Western” and “savage” societies (99).

The Native American literature discussed in this chapter builds on Latour’s premise, and it challenges Herman’s as well as the Euro-American conceptions described by Dippie and Konkle. These Native writings are progressive in the sense that, rather than presenting a traditionally monistic view in which everything physical is unified because infused with a conscious yet mysterious spiritual force, they offer alternative views in
which materiality and consciousness are separate but interrelated, and in many cases, interdependent. These views offer an array of conceptions regarding human agency that challenge reductive assumptions about “the Native American relationship with the land” in which spiritual and conscious constructs are inseparable from materiality.

The chapter begins with a discussion of selected speeches, from 1790 to 1797, by Red Jacket, the earliest works the dissertation addresses. My treatment of the speeches primarily emphasizes Red Jacket’s very material representation of the land. At first, my argument may seem to challenge Rick Monture’s description of Haudenosaunee spiritual relationships with the land: for example, Monture observes that the Peacemaker, a pivotal figure in the history of Haudenosaunee philosophical, cultural, and spiritual development, “allowed them to see that relationships found in the natural world could become activated in the human world as means of social and political thought” (21). Red Jacket’s speeches, however, suggest a much more anthropocentric relationship to nature that privileges human agency over nature’s, but evidence suggests that Red Jacket is so adamant about Haudenosaunee ownership and cultivation of the land precisely because of his awareness of reductive Euro-American views of Indian relationships to nature. I see Red Jacket partly demonstrating that the Haudenosaunee really do view their land as “theirs” because they occupy, administrate, and use it. At the same time, as Konkle observes, Red Jacket is challenging the Euro-American doctrine of preemptive right as “a legal manifestation of Indian difference … founded on the familiar assertion that, because Indians are inherently unable to use land as it should be used, productively and for profit, white people have a superior claim to that land” (230). Red Jacket represents human agency as dominating and conditioning nature’s materiality because showing ownership was a political
necessity. This does not mean that “Native” and “white” conceptions of nature were not
different, but it does illustrate the extent to which Red Jacket finds it necessary to identify
the commonalities between Native and white conceptions in order to make a rhetorically
durable case for Haudenosaunee ownership that whites cannot help but understand.

Although Red Jacket and John Tanner were more or less contemporaries, their
representations of nature’s materiality could not be more different. Racially, Tanner was
white; but as he reports in his *Narrative* (1830), he was kidnapped at a young age from
his Kentucky home in 1789 and subsequently adopted into Anishinaabe families in the
Great Lakes region. Tanner’s adoption and the manner in which he identified and came to
be regarded as Anishinaabe has its foundation in the Anishinaabe adaptation of the
Wyandot “Feast of the Dead” ceremony beginning in the 1660s; as Michael Witgen has
shown, this ceremony functioned as a means of ending the conflict with their Dakota and
Lowland Cree enemies (31). Witgen points out, “In the world of the Anishinaabeg there
were two categories of people—inawemaagen (relative) and meyaagizid (foreigner)”
(31). The Feast of the Dead and its continuing manifestations resulted in the possibility of
social shape shifting and a stronger but more dynamic “Anishinaabewaki,” the land
occupied, controlled, utilized, and governed by Anishinaabe groups; that dynamism and
strength were due in large measure to the ability to transform foreigners into relatives:

Real and socially constructed kinship established through trade, ritual,
language, and intermarriage crisscrossed over a vast space connecting
peoples to one another, but not in such a way that territory could be
considered a bounded space. Anishinaabewaki was not a national identity
with exclusive claim to occupy a particular physical space. It was instead a constellation of lived relationships (89).

Tanner’s life following his adoption constitutes a narrative of how Anishinaabewaki functioned. It should come as no surprise, then, that Louise Erdrich asserts, “John Tanner was culturally an Ojibwa, and as such he is claimed by many to this day, for he lived as an Ojibwa, married an Ojibwa woman, cared devotedly for his mixed-blood children, and was never able to accommodate himself to a non-Indian life” (Tanner xi). In other words, everything about Tanner and his life from age nine until his disappearance some fifty years later confirms an Anishinaabe identity. Furthermore, Gordon Sayre has argued that Tanner’s Narrative should be read as American Indian autobiography, but without an explicit awareness of Anishinaabe social and kinship networks:

As the tale of a white man among Indians, it invites white readers to imagine the possibility of culture-crossing and gives them a trusted insider’s view, a quasi-ethnographic portrait of Indian life….Yet in the text’s second part, as the tale of an Ojibwa making a difficult transition to life in the Anglo-American world, Tanner’s narrative needs to be read as an American Indian autobiography, however different from those of contemporary Christian converts (483).

Sayre’s justification is concerned with Tanner’s relationship to Anglo-American readers and life, but my justification for Tanner’s inclusion has to do with Tanner identifying as Anishinaabe and being considered as such by other Anishinaabeg.

The differences between Tanner’s and Red Jacket’s conceptions of materiality, then, are not exclusively or even primarily ethnic; they are about the very different lives
both men lived and where they lived them. I analyze Tanner’s Anishinaabe conception of
nature and its materiality through discussions of Tanner’s encounters with nonhuman
animals, in the context of hunting and otherwise. For Tanner, hunting and aggression
toward animals functions as a mediation of the divide between consciousness and
materiality. As I will demonstrate, in Tanner’s Anishinaabe world, the inability to hunt
calls into question the durability of human agency at large.

In the quote above, Sayre alludes to the fact that typical Native American
autobiographies in the American antebellum period were Christian conversion narratives,
and George Copway’s *The Life of Kah-ge-ga-gah-bowh* (1847) is a case in point. It is
somewhat ironic, however, that Copway’s autobiography comes the closest to articulating
a monistic view of nature. The natural world, for Copway, is merely a physical
manifestation of God’s grace and will, at times an obstacle that must be overcome but
only with the assistance of Providence. The same holiness for which nature is a perfect
symbol is the holiness that inspires the Christian mind. In other words, the materiality of
nature is divested of agency except for God’s. Even as Copway rejects traditional Ojibwe
spirituality and practices, his Christian consciousness is intended to demonstrate the
possibilities of Ojibwe sovereignty and civilization in the Euro-American sense. In
Copway’s explicit privileging of a life of the Christian mind, Konkle observes that
Copway realized “education provided a means—literacy—of resisting the colonial
bureaucracy” (191). When Copway figures nature as a beautiful, nurturing mother in the
service of God, he is demonstrating an aesthetic awareness that is meant to show whites
that the Ojibwe are capable of transcending what is assumed to be their innate savagery,
and hence a capacity for self-government.
William W. Warren’s *History of the Ojibway People*, completed in 1853 but not published until 1885, presents a particular version of Ojibwe aesthetics in which history, sentiment, place consciousness, and language convincingly demonstrate the Ojibwe ability to record and disseminate their own history. Warren’s work is important because it challenges the Euro-American view of Indians as ahistorical, as Konkle has pointed out. According to Konkle, Warren “disputes the misrepresentation of Indians and insists on the authority of tradition and the historicity of the Ojibwes” while maintaining “that Indians don’t tell whites everything and that whites cannot assume the superiority of their knowledge,” which compels Warren to set the record straight when it comes to misrepresentations of the Ojibwe by ethnographers like Henry Rowe Schoolcraft (199-201). Relatedly, Laura Mielke has shown that for Schoolcraft, “The lack of a written record in American Indian culture translates into historical and moral instability,” showing “how only through the mediation of Euro-American writing will the Indians be saved” (146). Warren rejects and challenges such a notion, and goes a step further by showing that Ojibwe history is inscribed in the very landscape the Ojibwe traditionally occupied, and it is also inscribed in Ojibwe language. In other words, Warren is showing mislead whites that the Ojibwe possess an aesthetic sensibility in which places have meaning because they are imbued with cultural memory (just like whites, it turns out), but he is also showing that Ojibwe history is best when written by an Ojibwe historian in the interest of the Ojibwe.

The four authors discussed in this chapter, then, show that Native conceptions of nature in the Great Lakes were in large measure politically construed, but they also complicate the very meanings of “Native conceptions of nature.” I argue that the vastly
different notions of materiality and human agency evident in these conceptions point
toward the impossibility of identifying a definitive Anishinaabe or Haudenosaunee
conception of nature in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Native Studies
scholars would probably regard such a statement as a matter of course, but extant
scholarship in literary studies does not widely recognize the reality of such a complexity.
This chapter is intended to suggest a spectrum of Native views of the Great Lakes that are
all singular because the relationship between materiality and consciousness is viewed
differently in each case. More specifically, differing conceptions of human agency
emerge in each writer’s work because, even in this one region, each writer’s
sociopolitical situation prompted him to produce a unique representation of materiality.

The Politics of Haudenosaunee Land: The Speeches of Red Jacket

The speeches of Red Jacket document the material consequences of the
Haudenosaunee—particularly Seneca—political relationship with the United States. In
large measure, these consequences have to do with land: the use of it, the ownership of it,
and the loss of it. Land politics are so pervasive in Red Jacket’s oratory that his use of
nature metaphors is almost always employed to make a political statement. Although Red
Jacket consistently reiterates that traditional Haudenosaunee lands were given to them by
the Great Spirit for their use, the colonial encroachment of the United States compels him
to conceive of that land in very material terms. Having land and using it is how Red
Jacket defines the Haudenosaunee, which is particularly problematic because the United
States defines itself largely the same way.
What may come as a surprise for some readers is the lack of materiality in Red Jacket’s conception of the land in his speeches. If we construe materiality as encompassing matter’s ability to change itself, this materiality in Red Jacket’s view is only valuable to the extent that humans can use it as a resource. A monistic view in which all land is mutable because infused with spiritual force gives way to one in which land is mutable because people have the agency to make it so. Red Jacket is remarkably tacit about his own spiritual beliefs, and he is quite general regarding Haudenosaunee spirituality at large, but perhaps these are careful rhetorical choices: it is quite possible that he was compelled to present the Six Nations relationship to the land as a pragmatic one consisting of resource procurement rather than a spiritual, “abstract” one, given the expansionist ethos of many of the Americans before whom he was speaking. It seems that he very self-consciously construes human agency as the ability to possess and use land; the land itself is not presented as having any particular agency of its own. Red Jacket’s representation of the land can thus be read as an effort to mitigate Euro-American conceptions of Indian difference regarding their relationship to the landscape.

In his very first recorded speech, at the council of Tioga Point in November of 1790, Red Jacket articulates a point that implicitly or explicitly appears throughout much of his oratory over the next four decades: diplomacy with the United States invariably leads to the loss of Native lands. Given the context of the council, such an utterance is a strong one, as the United States was working to “improve deteriorating relations with the western Indians, particularly the Miamis, who were urging a pan-Indian confederacy to resist U.S. expansion” (Ganter 1). Red Jacket recalls that making peace with whites leads to
troubles. It was the case of the Tuscaroras … to do the same & yes they were soon swept away. The reason was the same wh.[ich] we begin to experience, the taking away of their lands. So also it was with the Oneidas. The white people took them by the hand & led them from their council house. That has been the case with the Stockbridge Indians who lived among you: Their lands are all gone, & they are almost reduced to nothing (12).

Not only does Red Jacket equate “peace” with land loss; he also equates land loss with population loss, as in the case of the Stockbridge. It is significant that Red Jacket is careful to say that the Stockbridge “lived among you”: as this tribe’s traditional lands existed in what became Massachusetts, he seems to envision a kind of racial cohabitation in that region that he does not acknowledge on his own Seneca territory. Red Jacket goes on to assert, “all this land [which the US and British now occupy] belonged to [Native peoples] & we gave it to you. This Island and the game upon it, were made by the Gr.[eat] Spi.[rit] for the Indians. He gave it to them for their support. This was their money & he so ordered it that they sh[oul]d suffer a great deal in hunting for their money” (13). Interestingly, game, ostensibly the nexus of a race supposedly mired in the hunter-gatherer stage, is figured as money in order to demonstrate a Haudenosaunee sense of economy. Red Jacket makes clear the historical contrast between Native benevolence and Euro-American treachery, but more interestingly, he places Native peoples—at least rhetorically—in the role of the Great Spirit as granters of land. It might be more accurate to say that Red Jacket is establishing a *hierarchy* of ownership in which Native claims to land precede Euro-American claims, but in another clever rhetorical
move, he equates land with money, the capital on which Native economic sustainability rests. In so doing, he makes it clear that Euro-American settlement without Native consent is theft, pure and simple, in the way that stealing money would be. By accounting for land losses, Red Jacket demonstrates that political injuries incurred from Euro-Americans are quantifiable, material evidence that supports Haudenosaunee reluctance toward making “peace” with the United States.

Later in the speech at Tioga Point, Red Jacket states that it would be difficult for Native peoples to beat their tomahawks “into hoes & their guns into plowshares” as Euro-Americans insist they do, “since by them they get their living” (13), but less than seven months later, Red Jacket is able to present a rather Lockean argument that would have resonated with his American listeners. In a speech to Thomas Proctor, who led a party charged with mitigating Native hostilities that continued to fester in Ohio and attempted to urge Seneca support along the way, Red Jacket serves as spokesman for the Seneca Clan Mothers: “we are the owners of this land—and it is ours; for it is we that plant it, for our and [the sachems’] use” (Ganter16; 20). As Barbara Arneil has observed, the colonial expansionist enterprise was to a great extent justified by Locke’s point, in his *Second Treatise on Government*, that land could only be considered property if its owners improved it for the benefit of the community, i.e. through agriculture (609). Because many Euro-American colonizers and theorists believed—or at least asserted—that Indians were “stuck” in the hunter-gatherer stage of development, it was consequently believed that they had no conception of “property.” But between the speech at Tioga Point and the speech to Proctor, Red Jacket makes it clear that the Haudenosaunee draw sustenance from hunting as well as through “improvement” of the land. Before Proctor,
Red Jacket demonstrates Haudenosaunee agency through the land and thus makes that agency empirically verifiable. Americans could no longer reasonably describe the Haudenosaunee relationship to the land as consisting solely of some abstract benevolence from a Great Spirit they did not recognize; Red Jacket seems to have been very aware of the fact that, regardless of the truth he saw in traditional beliefs, Haudenosaunee ownership of their land had to be “proven” in Euro-American terms.

Red Jacket’s arguments concerning land use, ownership, and settlement continue to develop in their staunch nationalism at the Treaty of Canandaigua. These treaty proceedings in the fall of 1794 were held in large measure so that General Israel Chapin could mitigate ongoing hostilities between Americans and Native groups, but more specifically, the objective was to settle a border dispute between the US and the Haudenosaunee concerning a large area of land in western Pennsylvania along Lake Erie called “the Erie Triangle” (Ganter 61). Red Jacket’s task is particularly difficult, since the land in question was recently ceded to the US by Joseph Brant and Complanter at the treaty of Fort Stanwix, a controversial event because the two “were only war chiefs” who did not consult with the proper Six Nations authorities (64). Red Jacket argues that the Haudenosaunee want to retain a four-mile strip of the Erie Triangle along the lakeshore “on account of the fisheries” (65). Land use for sustenance stands in stark contrast with American plans for the land:

we see that you want that strip of land for a road, that when you have vessels on the lakes, you may have harbors, &c…. You white people have increased very fast on this island, which was given to us Indians by the Great Spirit; we are now become a small people, and you are cutting off
our lands, piece after piece—you are a very hard-hearted people, seeking your own advantages (65).

Once again, Red Jacket invokes the intentions of the Great Spirit, but more significant is his indictment of American greed, the ravenous pursuit of commerce. As at Tioga Point four years earlier, Red Jacket closely associates land loss and population loss and draws a distinction between land for the sustenance of a community and land for the sake of profit, a “hard-hearted” practice that privileges selfishness. One is tempted to think that Red Jacket is aware of the Enlightenment principle of humanitarian tolerance professed by Honandaganius (“Town Destroyer,” aka George Washington) and others in the American government represented by Chapin. But Red Jacket is aware that commerce is not the only American goal, for in addition to profit, he acknowledges that Americans also want the land in question in order to “build houses” and “towns” in addition to “rais[ing] provisions” and for “fields to plant on” (66). The problems concern the resulting Six Nations proximity to whites and misconceptions regarding ownership: living near white towns would increase drunkenness among the Haudenosaunee, and rather than conceiving of land use as a lease from the Haudenosaunee, Red Jacket argues, “as soon as the white people settle there, they would think the land theirs, for this is the way of the white people” (66). Red Jacket is challenging the pervasive frontier ethos that conflates settlement with ownership, suggesting that the concept of property not only has to do with notions of improvement, but also that Haudenosaunee claims to possession supersede Lockean principles. By construing the materiality of nature (land) socioeconomically, Red Jacket projects a Haudenosaunee ethos that is more readily amenable to American values.
These three speeches—at Toga Point, to Proctor, and at Canandaigua—demonstrate that Red Jacket always thought about Haudenosaunee land in political terms when it came to dealing with the United States. His emphasis on what humans do with land and why they do it shows that landscapes and human agency are inextricably linked both for the Haudenosaunee and his American listeners. Implicit in Red Jacket’s conception of human relationships to the land is an ostensible ideological discrepancy between using land for profit and using it for sustenance, but the conflict arises—paradoxically—in the fact that the Haudenosaunee and Americans both want land for the same reason: to promote community growth and wellbeing. Red Jacket realizes that the Six Nations cannot flourish as they otherwise might in close proximity to whites, and the reason, he suggests, is that whites view land ownership in such exclusionary terms: he knows that land owned by whites will only benefit whites.

Red Jacket’s speech at the Treaty of Big Tree (present-day Geneseo, New York) in 1797 maintains the centrality of land in Six Nations-US relations, but it also makes clear that intertribal perceptions are matters of land politics as well. The Treaty of Big Tree was characterized by controversial circumstances including illegal land purchases and bribery of Haudenosaunee leaders, controversies that Red Jacket himself was not exempt from: “In the end, Red Jacket signed the treaty and received $600 cash and a $100 annuity for life. Readers should be advised that most historians criticize Red Jacket for duplicitous conduct at Big Tree” (Ganter 85). The end result of Big Tree for the Seneca was that they “sold most of their lands for $100,000, reserving only ten reservations totaling about 300 square miles” (Ganter 85). Big Tree suggests that within the first two decades of US colonial pressure, things were already becoming desperate for
the Haudenosaunee, and that an “every man for himself” mentality was motivating some Six Nations leaders who had perhaps begun to feel that decisions that would benefit the community as a whole were becoming unrealistic. A primary reason for this desperation was that the Haudenosaunee reputation, and that of Native groups at large, was determined in large measure by land holdings. Red Jacket relates that Onondaga was once a Six Nations political center, but,

Now the Onondagas are nobody, have no lands of their own, but we [the Seneca] ever hospitable to our brethren, let them sit down on our lands. We are still a great people and much respected by all the Western Indians, which is allowing to our having land of our own. You wish to buy all our lands, except such reservations as you might make for us to raise corn on. It will make us nobody to accept such reservations, and where you may think proper—if this should be the case we could not say we were a free people (88).

Possessing land constitutes identity and freedom for Red Jacket, which makes the Seneca decision to sell it that much more lamentable, regardless of the degree of corruption at Big Tree. The connection between land and human agency is explicit here; the latter is effectively nullified by a lack of the former. We can only speculate about how painful Big Tree must have been for the Seneca, even though many of them reaped personal financial benefits. What is money, one is compelled to wonder, when freedom and identity are compromised? If the Seneca are allowed land only on the condition that they participate in US government-sponsored agricultural programs, the land can in no real
sense be considered theirs because, throughout Seneca history, property has been about having the freedom to do with it as the owner pleases.

Any reader of the early novels in James Fenimore Cooper’s Leatherstocking series (or of Catherine Maria Sedgwick’s *Hope Leslie*) can see that by the 1820s, Indians are presented as noble savages who relate their feelings on their inevitable disappearance due to encroaching civilization, or their less degraded past, through nature analogies. Brian Dippie has noted that despite the contemporary criticism regarding Cooper’s representations of Indians, these representations persisted and became ingrained in white American consciousness (21-5). The criticism of the likes of Cooper is that much more compelling when we consider that many Americans were already familiar with Red Jacket and his speeches prior to Cooper’s novels; if Red Jacket served as an example of “how Indians speak” for many Americans, the speech of characters like Chingachgook and Uncas would have sounded ridiculous to be sure. And as Konkle has shown, in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Euro-American representations, “Indians only have the capacity for metaphorical language, which is treated as a spontaneously occurring habit, not something that Indians might choose for logical or aesthetic reasons” (216). Red Jacket’s nature analogies, by contrast, contain nothing about disappearance or a past in which Indians were fundamentally nobler; they employ nature to make political gestures, to describe political relations between two autonomous nations in a way that is accessible to both, i.e. “for logical and aesthetic reasons.” At the same time, any sort of “Indian decline,” Red Jacket wants his listeners to understand, is occurring for material reasons.
Some of Red Jacket’s earliest nature analogies are spoken at the Council of Newtown Point in 1791. Although the United States initiated the council with the ultimate goal of convincing the Haudenosaunee that the Americans “wanted to teach them better means of agriculture” (Ganter 22), the Haudenosaunee relationship with the British became a point of contention. Red Jacket tells federal commissioner Timothy Pickering that when the American Revolution erupted, “it raised a strong wind which blew over us, and brought us into the same trouble” (24). The wind metaphor suggests that the Haudenosaunee had no control over a force that pushed them into the war on the British side. Although Red Jacket rather disingenuously portrays the Six Nations as having no decision in the matter, the metaphor suggests that the war was a force that certainly did not originate with the Six Nations. Red Jacket is upfront in confirming a continuing Haudenosaunee alliance with the British, “but [we] do not give ourselves entirely up to them; nor lean altogether upon [the Americans]. We mean to stand upright—as we live between both” (24). It is largely because of this geographical and diplomatic middle ground that Red Jacket is prompted to tell Pickering, “Let us not listen to birds, and suffer our minds to be wavering” (28). In other words, he and Pickering, as representatives of their respective governments, should be steadfast in their efforts to build trust as opposed to being influenced by disparaging gossip that might disrupt the relationship.

Red Jacket’s next use of analogy is not of his own contrivance, but instead occurs in a paraphrase of George Washington as a reminder of the US’s professed desire for peace with the Seneca. Red Jacket and other Seneca leaders were invited to Philadelphia, and during their visit in the spring of 1792, Washington greeted them with a speech in
which he desired peace with the Senecas that would be “founded on the principles of justice and humanity as upon an immovable rock” (qtd. in Ganter 34). Before Red Jacket proceeds to inform the president via Pickering that Haudenosaunee exclusion from the Treaty of Paris has caused a number of significant problems that are the US and Britain’s responsibility to fix (37-8), he favorably recalls Washington’s comparison of desired peace with the Seneca “to a rock, which is immoveable” (34). This is a common rhetorical technique for Red Jacket—revisiting what another has said before responding to those words—but the analogy also provides him with an opportunity. Whereas Red Jacket previously likened negative effects from whites on the Six Nations to a wind, he is now able to stress a desire for the tangible permanence of something that might benefit the Seneca. He seizes the opportunity to equate something positive with the weight and permanence of rock, whereas negative ideas are figured as highly mutable, like birds and wind. He may be appropriating a common Euro-American trope, but it is also clear he believes that beneficial political relationships should be made to last.

Over two weeks later, Red Jacket’s final nature analogy reflects the transience characterizing political dealings with the US. He reminds his audience that if the US wants peace with Native groups in the Great Lakes and the Ohio Valley, it is the US’s job to procure it; the Seneca should not be peace brokers to the Miami and Wabash tribes for the US, as Pickering and others had previously proposed (42). Red Jacket finishes the speech, “You see that it is a pleasant day; an emblem of the pleasure and joy now diffused thro’ all here present, for indeed it has been a counseling day—a day of business” (44). The fine weather symbolizes the good feelings “now diffused” through all present: Red Jacket takes a rather cliché figure and imbues it with contingency; the day is
a good one for the moment, but each day is always different than the last. After all, it has been “a day of business,” one of political discussion, and by 1792, Red Jacket already knows that dealing with the young United States is an exercise in precariousness. George Washington’s rock has become another capricious weather phenomenon.

Red Jacket’s literal and figurative representations of the land identify humans as the primary agential forces in his political worldview. His conceptions of possession and cultivation make land the means by which humans demonstrate agency, but the land has no discernable innate contingency. This of course presents a mutually constitutive relationship in which humans need land for identity and the land needs humans for value. Whether conceiving of land as a resource or weather and nonhumans as analogies, Red Jacket offers answers to questions regarding intercultural conceptions of power and authority.

The political circumstances Red Jacket operates under inform his conceptions of nature, just as they do his contemporary, John Tanner. Yet, their respective notions of materiality differ greatly, which is admittedly due in part to the generic differences between political oratory and autobiography. More revealing, however, is Tanner’s negotiation of an Anishinaabe world in which contact with Euro-Americans is comparatively more rare than it is for Red Jacket. I do not mean to suggest that interactions with whites per se is the major determinant of their respectively Seneca and Odawa/Ojibwe perspectives on nature and its materiality, but I do intend to suggest that contact with whites has a large bearing on how their intimacy with nature is presented. At a time when Six Nations politics were becoming more and more concerned with Euro-
Americans, the Anishinaabe political focus remained primarily internal or directed toward enemy nations to the west.

Entanglements with Animals: John Tanner’s Narrative

Tanner’s representation of his relationship with nature is less self-conscious than Red Jacket’s, with reduced explicit concern for how it might be construed by whites and more focused on reporting personal trials and triumphs. The nonchalance with which John Tanner reports harrowing encounters with large game, darkly humorous encounters with other nonhuman animals, and the make-or-break consequences of a harsh, transient entanglement with the nonhuman world is disarming for the way violence and misfortune are presented as matters of course. In Tanner’s Anishinaabe world, hunting and other encounters with nonhuman animals are liminal activities that mediate the tension between materiality and consciousness, between the agency of the natural Other and humans’ conceptions of their own abilities. Tanner’s accounts of this mediation focus on fear, cruel aggression, and the influence of dreams. The importance of such mediation-as-agency is so acute that its breakdown represents the absence of agency altogether; in Tanner’s case, this absence is grounds for suicide.

Although Tanner is persistently aware of his racial difference, he is not impervious to Anishinaabe perceptions regarding the mutability and indeterminacy of humans and nonhumans. As Michael Pomedli has shown, the Anishinaabeg have traditionally acknowledged the obscurity of the distinction between human and nonhuman animals:
A Cree or Ojibwe … might be perplexed when confronted with an animal:

Is the animal that I perceive really an animal, or is it a human that has appeared as an animal? If one perceives a being who appears to be human, the question might be: Is this really a human being or is it an animal that has appeared as a human, perhaps even deceiving the perceiver? (xix)

The questions emphasizing the subjectivity of perception when it comes to observing persons and animals continue (xix-x). The basis for such questions, according to Pomedli, lies in “the Ojibwe belief in the impermanence of all forms” (xix). Material contingency is so pervasive in traditional Anishinaabe views that there is nothing viewed as stable: everything, especially animals and humans, is potentially subject to drastic change. The very categories of “human” and “animal” generate far more questions than answers.

Human-animal indeterminacy is exemplified early in the narrative when it is unclear whether a haunting noise in the night is the hooting of owls, or if it is the cryptic communication between Sioux warriors bent on killing young Tanner and his family. Traveling by canoe at the confluence of the Red and Assinneboin Rivers, Tanner recalls, “the silence was broken” by one “owl,” which “was quickly answered by another on the right bank [of the Assinneboin], and presently by a third on the side of Red River, opposite the mouth” (39). In other words, Tanner and his family are surrounded by whatever or whoever is making this noise. Net-no-kwa says, “in a whisper scarce audible, ‘We are discovered,’ and directed to put the canoe about” (39). The passive voice of Net-no-kwa’s utterance is significant: who is doing the discovering remains unknown. The tension increases when Tanner’s party believes they see a Sioux warrior swimming toward them, but the “warrior” turns out to be a goose and her young (40). Tanner
reminisces, “I was, I remember, vexed at what I thought the groundless fears of the women; but I do not know, to this day, whether a war-party of Sioux, or three owls, frightened us back” (40). The Gothic qualities of this episode are notable: the senses prove eerily insufficient for distinguishing between real and imagined. More significantly, the event points directly toward two levels of ambiguity acknowledged in Anishinaabe epistemology. First, it underscores the instability of human-animal difference. Secondly, the possible presence of owls represents a dualistic import. According to Pomedli, traditional Ojibwe views maintain that owls could mean bad luck or the presence of evil (97-101), or they could mean protection for humans (102-3). At the confluence of the Red and Assiniboine, then, whether the unnerving hooting is made by owls or Sioux, Net-no-kwa’s decision to turn around is a good one: if Sioux, an immanent attack is well worth avoiding; if owls, Net-no-kwa may have viewed their presence as a warning against some impending catastrophe.

It is reasonable to believe that the mysterious occurrence at the confluence of the Red and Assiniboine psychologically conditions Tanner to be susceptible to a later, rather humorous case of mistaken identity with potentially serious consequences. Despite his macho posturing regarding the retreat at the confluence, it is clear that the indeterminacy of the event has an immense impact on his perception of “animals.” One day, Tanner is out hunting longer than usual, so Net-no-kwa sends Wa-me-gon-a-biew out to search for him. Upon spotting Tanner, Wa-me-gon-a-biew pulls his black coat over his head “in such a manner as to make himself resemble a bear” (42). Tanner concludes that the “bear” must be a grizzly, since a black bear would not approach him, so he flees, pausing three times to assess the possibility of shooting the “bear” (42). He never fires
only because Pe-shau-ba had advised him to fire on a grizzly only when trees are nearby in case escape is necessary, and only when the bear is deemed close enough (42). Tanner admits, “Fear must have blinded my eyes, or I should have seen that it was not a bear,” and Wa-me-gon-a-biew finally reveals himself (42). When Net-no-kwa hears of the episode, she scolds Wa-me-gon-a-biew, “telling him, that if I had shot him in that disguise, I should have done right, and according to the custom of the Indians she could have found no fault with me for so doing” (43). Net-no-kwa’s judgment is significant because it acknowledges perceptual limitation when it comes to human-animal distinctions, so much so that Wa-me-gon-a-biew’s injury or death would have been his own fault due to his conscious manipulation of that limitation. Tanner’s admission that fear adversely affected his perception is no doubt partially a hunter’s embarrassed attempt to rationalize his “error,” but the entire incident illustrates the Anishinaabe belief that such misperceptions are natural, even expected. The episode is consonant with Pomedli’s observation that in traditional Anishinaabe views, the physical and intellectual affinities between humans and bears make distinguishing the two particularly problematic (xiv-vi, 119-26).

The two episodes described above demonstrate the pervasive connections between mutability and agency, and they show that fear is a common characteristic of encounters with human-animal indeterminacy. These encounters speak to the universal human apprehension of the unknown, but they also illustrate the extent to which mutability affects human agency for the Anishinaabeg. On the one hand, human perceptual shortcomings—the inability to discern what a creature truly is—determine human actions and emphasize that people must necessarily rely on imperfect empirical
mechanisms to make decisions, although from a bio-evolutionary standpoint, fear is good in that it helps ensure survival. On the other hand, it is obvious that mutability is a source of agency for people who can employ it, even if their intentions are questionable. Considering materiality and the agencies and contingencies it implies means acknowledging human limitations and potential together.

According to the narrative, however, some animals make human agency seem resplendent with perceptual acuity by comparison, agency that can easily manifest as cruelty. Tanner’s account of a bumbling porcupine treats humor and barbarism as equal partners. Tanner states that he “had heard much of the stupidity of this animal,” hearsay that is confirmed for him when a porcupine wanders up to the fire he and his party are roasting meat over “until his nose was actually in the fire,” and remains there “for some minutes, stupidly opening and shutting his eyes. At length one of the Indians, tired of looking at him, hit him a blow in the face with a piece of moose meat he had on a little stick to roast. One of them then killed him with a tomahawk, and we ate some of the meat, which was very good” (114-5). The porcupine is “stupid” in Tanner’s view seemingly because of its lack of awareness of its surroundings: after they eat the animal, Tanner’s party tell of how at night, porcupines will eat food from a canoe paddle “without ever perceiving the presence of the man” holding it (115). The porcupine’s obliviousness (or trust?) makes it the brunt of jokes as well as a soft target; small wonder, then, that Pomedli and his Anishinaabe sources have nothing to say regarding it.

The otter, on the other hand, is a different case. Pomedli notes that in traditional Midewiwin views, the otter is held in high regard because of its emotional and dexterous affinities with people, and because of its ability to expertly negotiate seemingly
dichotomous realms, those of land and water (82, 91). Tanner relates that he has heard from many of his Anishinaabe relatives and associates that it is impossible for even the strongest unarmed man to kill an otter, so when Tanner spots an otter on the ice of the Lake of the Woods, he tests this widely held notion:

I caught the otter, and for the space of an hour or more, exerted myself, to the extent of my power, to kill him. I beat him, and kicked him, and jumped upon him, but all to no purpose. I tried to strangle him with my hands, but after lying still for a time, he would shorten his neck, and draw his head down between my hands, so that the breath would pass through, and I was at last compelled to acknowledge that I was not able to kill him without arms (208-9).

As with the porcupine, slapstick absurdity and cruelty are combined, but the tenacity of both otter and man represents an agential entanglement—literally and figuratively—that can be resolved only with a weapon. The intense physicality of this battle represents the raw energy produced when two very similar creatures engage in a vital struggle. Tanner’s description of his exertion underlines this experience as humbling: a full-grown man cannot subdue an animal one-eighth his size, demonstrating the extent to which agency is a nuanced, often deceptive complex of contingency. And, it turns out skunks and cranes are quite dangerous too (209).

The stories of the porcupine and the otter offer cultural insight into Anishinaabe beliefs and practices. Ever since James Fenimore Cooper’s Leatherstocking series, Americans were—and in many cases still are—conditioned to view Native Americans as “one with the land,” a race of people whose reverence for animal spirits makes every kill
a matter of profound insight and thanksgiving. Tanner’s stories challenge such an essentialist view, and instead show that the Anishinaabe relationship with nonhuman animals is infinitely more complicated than that. Certainly, as Pomedli has shown, the Anishinaabe traditionally did and do hold many animals in high regard for spiritual, historical, and biological reasons. According to Tanner, though, the Anishinaabe human-animal relationship is a truly entangled set of agencies characterized by respect, condescension, humility, hubris, and violence. Tanner’s contemporary Euro-American readership may have been struck by the familiarity of such human displays of aggression and assumed superiority, and so may readers today who are unfamiliar with Native peoples’ representations of their own cultures.

At the metaphysical level, Tanner is rather ambiguous when it comes to beliefs concerning human connections to animals, and his ambiguity is indicative of the nuance and complexity of negotiating what Latour calls a nature-culture. Dreams are often considered premonitions toward successful hunting, but for Tanner, they are sometimes causes for suspicion as well. Tanner’s first successful bear hunt is guided by a dream of Net-no-kwa’s, and it ushers in a rare period of bounty and contentment for Tanner and his people. Net-no-kwa dreams of a bear’s precise location, and she shares this information with the adolescent Tanner, who follows her instruction (32-3). Tanner comes to the clearing that matches Net-no-kwa’s description, but he does not see the smoke Net-no-kwa claimed would be rising from the ground: growing impatient, Tanner relates, “I unexpectedly fell up to my middle into the snow. I extricated myself without difficulty, and walked on; but remembering that I had heard Indians speak of killing bears in their holes, it occurred to me that it might be a bear’s hole into which I had fallen, and looking
down into it, I saw the head of a bear lying close to the bottom of the hole,” and Tanner
shoots the hibernating bear between the eyes point blank (33). This event is cause for
celebration: Net-no-kwa lavishes proud affection on her son, and the feasting only
becomes more jubilant when a Cree hunter in the same camp kills another bear (33-4).

The joy and awe of this event is soon overshadowed by skepticism. The following
winter, after being absent nearly two days, Net-no-kwa returns and claims to have located
another bear via dream, but this time Wa-me-gon-a-biew is the reluctant recipient of her
instruction; a disrespectful, lazy, and errant young man, he refuses to follow his mother’s
guidance, but other members of the group are willing, and the hunt proves successful (47-
8). Tanner dismisses the metaphysical luster of Net-no-kwa’s vision, though: “[T]he truth
was, she had tracked [the bear] into the little thicket, and then circled it, to see that he had
not gone out [during her two-day absence]. Artifices of this kind, to make her people
believe she had intercourse with the Great Spirit, were, I think, repeatedly assayed by her” (48). While such logic may cause disillusion in readers for the way it exposes the
reality behind enticing mysteriousness, Tanner’s pronouncement also challenges another
common contemporary Euro-American misconception of Native peoples: it shows that
rather than being “primitive” people guided by “superstition,” Native peoples are quite
discerning when it comes to the difference between divine inspiration and human-
generated ploy.

Tanner’s explanation of Net-no-kwa’s “artifices” cannot, however, be taken as a
categorical disavowal of the power of dreams: his own account of “medicine hunting”
demonstrates the extent to which he had come to believe that consciousness could not
always be materially explicated, although consciousness had to be related in material
terms in order for metaphysical influence to come to fruition. Tanner is in his early thirties, having been with the Anishinaabeg for over twenty years, when desperation and starvation compel him to seek sustenance through spiritual means: “Half the night I sung and prayed,” and then “I saw in my dream a beautiful young man come down through the hole in the top of my lodge” who reveals the tracks of two moose he is giving Tanner “to eat” (181). Tanner is excited to have been visited by the manito and calls the elder, Shagwaw-ko-sink, to smoke with him; Tanner then draws his “Muz-zin-ne-nee-suk … to represent the animals whose tracks had been shown me in my dream” (181-3). These drawings are included in the text, and they signify the importance of translating spiritual phenomena into legible material forms so that dreams can be made material reality. Muz-zin-ne-nee-suk should thus be considered conduits bridging the gaps between consciousness and materiality.

At this point in the narrative, there is a lengthy footnote by Edwin James in which the editor construes the Anishinaabe use of muz-zin-ne-nee-suk as evidence for their supposed stadial primitiveness, likening the images to what many today would call “voodoo dolls” (181-3). Relatedly, James proceeds to argue that the allegedly low intellectual development of the Anishinaabe is the result of the poor climate they live in (184), a contention popularized by Buffon in the mid-eighteenth century. Certainly Tanner’s use of muz-zin-ne-nee-suk would have been an ethnographic curiosity for James, but the length of the footnote points toward an additional interest. The footnote is by far the longest James provides, and its rather tangential nature suggests that James was compelled to mitigate Tanner’s apparent “Indianness” for a Euro-American audience unsettled by the notion of whites embracing “Indian ways”: James tellingly notes, “many
of the more ignorant of the Canadians who reside with the Indians” believe in “these charms” (183). James’ evident uneasiness must have been amplified by the fact that Tanner does indeed kill two moose, just as the manito said he would (184). James also seems to disregard the fact that, several times throughout the narrative preceding his discussion of muz-zin-ne-neen-suk, Tanner has clearly identified himself as Anishinaabe: Tanner’s situation is much more complicated than that of a white person simply appropriating Native practices.

Arguably, the most compelling study of materiality and consciousness in Tanner’s narrative is when he is struck by an illness that severely compromises his body and mind. When Tanner is twenty-two or so, his community is hit hard by a mysterious disease that begins with severe coughing, sore throat, and sometimes bleeding from the nose and mouth; acute fatigue then sets in, followed by intense ear ache and infection, then madness and/or unconsciousness, and ultimately, sometimes death (95-6). It is not entirely clear what this illness was, but it was most likely mastoiditis caused by a strep or staph infection.2 Tanner reports his ear pain was so severe that “[i]t appeared to me that something was eating into my ears,” and he spends several days “insensible” and “unconscious” (95-6). Many, including Tanner, suffer permanent injuries. Tanner states, “My hearing was gone for abscesses had formed and discharged in each ear, and I could now hear but very imperfectly” (96). However, Tanner “was not among those who suffered most severely by this terrible complaint” (98). Indeed, some were affected much more harshly:

Of the Indians who survived, some were permanently deaf, others injured in their intellects, and some, in the fury occasioned by the disease, dashed
themselves against trees and rocks, breaking their arms or otherwise maiming themselves. Most of those who survived had copious discharges from the ears, or in the earlier stages had bled profusely from the nose (98).

The empiricist in Tanner theorizes that there is a connection between otic discharge or severe nosebleeds and a person’s ability to get rid of fatal infection. Tanner seems to believe that such bodily purging actually served as a defense mechanism for the lucky ones. Although Tanner considers himself relatively fortunate, he does look upon this illness “as the commencement of misfortune which was to follow me through life” (96). The disease’s effects directly inhibit Tanner’s ability to hunt and provide, and therefore cause immense damage to his conception of self-worth:

I took my gun and went to hunt, but the animals discovered me before I could see them, and if by accident I saw a moose or an elk, and endeavoured to get near him, I found that my cunning and my success had deserted me. I soon imagined that the very animals knew that I had become like an old and useless man (96).

For these reasons, Tanner decides to kill himself. Riding his horse to a secluded spot on the prairie, he dismounts, turns his horse loose, and tries shooting himself, but he finds that his gun has been unloaded, and that his shot pouch and powder horn are empty (96-7). He also discovers that his knife is not in its usual spot on his shot pouch, and after throwing his gun in frustration, he is struck by the fact that his horse, usually an unruly animal prone to wandering when free, has remained near him (97). The implicit pathos of the horse’s loyalty in Tanner’s darkest hour is powerful, and it seems to bring Tanner to
his senses: “It is probable that in my insane ravings, I had talked of my intention to destroy myself, and on this account [Wa-me-gon-a-biew and Net-no-kwa] had been careful to deprive me of the most ordinary and direct means of effecting my purpose” (97).

Tanner’s failure to kill himself—the result of being deprived external mechanisms to do so—suggests the innate stubbornness of materiality, the body’s ability to maintain its vital principle even when consciousness is supposedly in opposition to that maintenance. There is nothing revelatory in pointing out that the health of the mind is often very contingent on the health of the body, but for Tanner, physical and mental health working in concert is a matter of life and death. Successful hunting is agency, in terms of cultural survival as well as physical survival: if Tanner cannot kill game, he endures shame and starvation, as does his family. Suicide, however, is also agency, but it is a type of agency in which one could argue that consciousness has finally overwhelmed materiality: while the body as matter continually attempts to change itself and its environment for the purpose of sustenance, suicide represents a conscious attempt to derail sustenance. The notable condition is that for Tanner, material agency must be (correctly or incorrectly) perceived as defunct before consciousness allows the body to attempt vital injury. Tanner’s consciousness is skewed both when he cannot kill game and when he desires to kill himself, and both conditions are the product of compromised physical health.

Whereas Red Jacket presents land as a possession and resource subject to human agency, Tanner describes a landscape populated by nonhumans that routinely challenge and only sometimes confirm human agency. Hunting and other interactions with
nonhumans illustrate Tanner’s conception of human agency as constituted within and outside of itself. If we view human agency in Red Jacket as linear, human agency in Tanner must be viewed as a network of forces moving in different directions.

The differences Tanner’s and George Copway’s attitudes toward nature cannot be overstated. The type of relationship Tanner has with nature—what we might loosely call a traditional Anishinaabe one—is disparagingly viewed as primitive and incompatible with the Christian life of the mind that Copway espouses.

Christian Consciousness, Christian Matter: George Copway’s The Life of Kah-ge-ga-gah-bowh

George Copway’s The Life of Kah-ge-ga-gah-bowh is representative of a Native American literary and rhetorical strategy that is widely recognized as beginning with A Son of the Forest (1829) by William Apess (Pequot): that is, it is an example of a Native American author employing traditionally Euro-American tropes and figures in order to advance Native resistance to colonial oppression, thus making political assertions accessible to white audiences. More specifically, Copway and Apess both use autobiography to tell the stories of their Christian conversions, and their subsequent spiritual journeys as admirable Christians, in order to combat the common Euro-American misconception that Native peoples could not be “civilized.” Yet, these Christian testimonials also contain declarations of Native sovereignty in their emphases on the political rights of Native nations: Apess and Copway both demonstrate that one can be a “good Christian” while also adamantly identifying as Pequot or Ojibwe.
Copway’s identity as a Christian informs his conceptions of materiality and consciousness, as is of course common for Christians. What is notable, however, are the vast differences between Copway’s pre-conversion and post-conversion relationships to material nature. Before his conversion, nature is a nurturing mother from whom he has the skills in woodcraft to procure all he needs, but after his conversion nature functions purely as symbol of God’s grace or as an obstacle that only Providence can help humankind overcome: when nature is serene and harmonious, it is the physical manifestation of God’s love; when it is harsh and unforgiving, it must be transcended through that same love. The meaning of the landscape Copway has known all his life changes radically with his spiritual developments.

Early in his autobiography, Copway utilizes a highly romanticized, Euro-American aesthetic framework to suggest that being one of “Nature’s children” and being a “savage” are in no way mutually constitutive. The paragraph is worth quoting in full because it captures the essence of Copway’s conception of himself as an educated, Christian Ojibwe:

I was born in nature’s wide domain! The trees were all that sheltered my infant limbs—the blue heavens all that covered me. I am one of Nature’s children; I have always admired her; she shall be my glory; her features—her robes, and the wreath about her brow—the seasons—her stately oaks, and the evergreen—her hair—ringlets over the earth, all contribute to my enduring love of her; and wherever I see her, emotions of pleasure roll in my breast, and swell and burst like waves on the shores of the ocean, in prayer and praise to Him who has placed me in her hand. It is thought
great to be born in palaces, surrounded with wealth—but to be born in
nature’s wide domain is greater still! (15).

Copway emphasizes the grandeur of humble beginnings, appealing to Christian
sensibilities through a likeness to Christ’s meager origins. The feminizing personification
of Nature-as-beautiful-mother alludes to the traditional Ojibwe Earth Mother—the “Me-
suk-kum-mik O-kwi” of Tanner (184)—but it is more explicitly representative of figuring
the physical realm as a transcendent ideal, the catalyst for a higher state of consciousness.
The union of pathos and sublime imagery quickly subordinates the feminized ideal to the
Christian God, and “nature’s wide domain” is thus interpreted as the physical
representation of God’s love and power. Copway makes the hierarchical distinction
between physical “nature” and spiritual “Nature” clear; the greatness of being “born in
nature’s wide domain” is the product of that domain’s sublime status as the handiwork of
God. These sentiments would have bordered on cliché for Copway’s Euro-American
readers, but they would have been novel as the spontaneous emotional outpourings of
Kah-ge-ga-gah-bowh, an Indian proclaiming his sensibility through his admiration of
God’s Nature with spiritual metaphors abounding. The physical, for Copway, exists for
spiritual contemplation.

If Tanner’s narrative represents hunting as a mediation between the material and
conscious spheres, Copway’s account presents hunting as a primitive right of passage that
he has intellectually surpassed.³ Again, consciousness is privileged over the physical, but
Copway cannot resist the opportunity to describe his early success as a hunter. Copway is
asserting his “Indianness,” as well as capitulating to the en vogue status of the hunting
tale in the United States at the time, when he describes killing a deer with a head shot in
the dead of night (20), or when he manages to kill a charging bear with a single round, with only inches to spare (21). Copway goes on to state, “I loved to hunt the bear, the beaver, and the deer; but now, the occupation has no charms for me. I will now take the goose quill for my bow, and its point for my arrow” (21). Copway assures the reader that in his gentlemanly life of the mind, there is no need for hunting. In his very self-aware bow and arrow metaphor, Copway demonstrates a wry sense of humor, but he also re-emphasizes that Indians can be “civilized” while also suggesting that literacy, in the Euro-American sense, should be the new weapon against colonial oppression for Native people. Becoming “civilized” does not have to mean a loss of autonomy.

Another theme Copway and Tanner have in common is the fortitude required in negotiating rugged landscapes, but for Copway, such physical hardships are less matters of course (as with Tanner) and are presented more as remarkable manifestations of God’s will and power. Copway’s description of the trials occasioned by his missionary work in the upper Mississippi valley from 1839 to 1842, and particularly his emphasis on the womanly Christian tenacity of his wife and sister-in-law, sometimes echo those of Mary Rowlandson in their close association between struggle and Providence. Copway’s marriage to Elizabeth Howell, an Englishwoman of Toronto, is a rather controversial curiosity for many Americans they encounter, particularly in Buffalo (75). But just as Copway defies cultural convention in his actions by marrying a young white woman of considerable status, he also does so in a literary fashion by challenging the cult of domesticity. At a time when middle- and upper class Euro-Americans understood the home as the woman’s sphere, Copway asserts that women of strong Christian faith can overcome obstacles far removed from the kitchen and the parlor. Copway reports that
while crossing Rice River in Minnesota, many of his party’s equipment and belongings are lost overboard, and his wife is the voice of determination: “she reproved us for murmuring, on account of this and other mishaps, and laughed, while our pies and cakes were sailing down the river” (77). The loss of the very symbols of domesticity—baked goods—is a source of comic relief for Elizabeth; her laughter represents a level of acceptance of the landscape’s harsh indifference and a trivialization of domesticity.

Elizabeth and Caroline’s spirited energy, and the progressive femininity contained therein, is perhaps best demonstrated when the party has to climb the bluffs of the Mississippi near St. Peters: “here we found a number of Indian deities, made of stone. Mrs. Copway and her sister tumbled them all down into the river. Their worshippers must have been astounded and mortified when they returned, and discovered that their gods had vanished” (77). Of course, there is little evidence that Ojibwe or Dakota people actually “worshipped” stone statues as “gods,” so here we see a side of Copway in which the elitism occasioned by his Christian refinement leads to a reductive and disparaging representation of Native spirituality (and, consequently, that spirituality’s relationship to materiality). Elizabeth and Caroline’s vandalism positions them as idol destroyers and alludes to passages in Old Testament books such as Deuteronomy, 2 Chronicles, Ezekiel, and Micah. Notably, in these books, idol destruction is carried out by men and directed by the word of a patriarchal God, so Elizabeth and Caroline are represented as agents of Providential force, a role that is historically denied to women. Alternatively but relatedly, the sisters’ actions can be interpreted as a Christian conquest of a savage wilderness.
Despite the occasional laugh or triumph, Copway’s tone at times reflects the gravity found in early Puritan writings, particularly when he contemplates the connections between God’s will and tribulations:

I record with gratitude that God enabled [Elizabeth] and her sister to bear up under the severest trials and hardships. We could have no earthly gain in view; the grace of God alone, therefore, supported us by day and by night, in sickness, in perils, in storms, in fatigues, in despondency, and in solitary places. At Rabbit River we laboured with considerable success; but on account of the war raging between the Sioux and the Ojibways, these two missions, with that at Ottawa Lake, had to be abandoned (79).

The success of the missionary is not materially quantifiable; the benefits of such work are metaphysical and thus appreciated only through consciousness. Suffering due to a number of environmental obstacles is endured only because it is God’s will. It is significant, however, that earthly combat between the Dakotas and Ojibwes can derail missionary work: even though this work yields no material gain, it can certainly be discouraged via material means. Copway does not explicitly acknowledge this problem, but it does demonstrate the pervasive disconnect between materiality and spiritual consciousness in his Christian view. Nothing—human or nonhuman—ostensibly contains any agency except through God, yet the threat of a relatively small-scale war seems to discredit this premise. But if the tone is reminiscent of colonial Puritan writing, perhaps readers are to infer that the threat of war is God’s will too, however inaccessible to human understanding that may be. The notable conclusion that can be drawn is that materiality has no acknowledged self-contained agency or vitality in Copway’s Christian
view; agency is only recognizable insofar as humans can contemplate God’s metaphysical presence.

The challenges posed by nature almost cost Copway his life and his son’s on Lake Ontario, but once again, in Rowlandson-esque fashion, Providence intervenes to mitigate human weakness. Copway’s three-year-old son falls overboard from the schooner into high waves, and Copway dives in after him, having to swim down seven feet below the surface in order take hold of him (90). It is hard for Copway to keep his son above the rough waves “so that he could breathe; and I was compelled at times to let him sink an instant, that I might breathe myself” (90). Copway reports that he is about to give up hope when the yawl boat arrives and rescues them with no time to spare, but Copway is critical of the “delay” due to the fright the boy falling overboard instills in the crew: “Had they luffed at once, and despatched the yawl, two or three minutes might have been saved. But I ought not to complain; our lives were spared, and thanks be to a kind Providence for his timely deliverance” (90). Copway’s admission that he was “compelled” to let his son “sink an instant” so he could breathe strikes readers as really bad parenting at first, but the underlying implication is that people are fragile creatures who must depend on God’s mercy: “nature’s wide domain” can be quite threatening, indifferent to our survival that is ultimately a matter of God’s choice. The crew members who actually, physically rescue Copway and his son from certain death are not even recognized as agents of Providence; they too are weak creatures in Copway’s view, incapable of executing the rescue expeditiously. God’s is the hidden hand that bears up humankind against material forces.

The conceptual distance between Copway’s Christian view and material nature is a wide one with many potential causes. This distance might have its impetus in what
Annette Kolodny identifies as a central paradox in Euro-American thought and writing about the American landscape throughout The Lay of the Land: Metaphor as Experience and History in American Life and Letters: that is, that American land was figured as both a ripe virgin ready for the taking as well as a nurturing mother. The nature-mother Copway recalls in reminiscing about his upbringing is obvious, while the nature-virgin that must be dominated could be construed for Copway as a metaphor of temptation; only through God’s grace should one—or is one able to—conquer this virgin, whose beauty is ultimately a façade concealing danger. In any case, it is evident that Copway’s relationship to nature changes dramatically with his conversion. Recall that as a boy and before becoming a Christian, Copway’s hunting skills seemed to have made his relationship with his beautiful nature-mother quite cohesive, but note what Copway writes regarding the morning after his conversion on a stormy night at age eleven: “As I looked at the trees, the hills, and the valleys, O how beautiful they all appeared! I looked upon them, as it were, with new eyes and new thoughts. Amidst the smiles of creation, the birds sang sweetly, as they flew from tree to tree” (46). Nature is beautiful when it appropriately reflects the beauty of God’s love, but it is the bane of existence when it does not mirror that love, as is the case during the missionary journeys and on Lake Ontario. Copway’s “new eyes and new thoughts” suggest that nature is best when it symbolizes God’s grace.

Copway’s view of nature’s agency and the view related in William W. Warren’s account of Ojibwe history represent two different approaches to ensuring the legacy of the Ojibwe occurring roughly at the same time. Copway looks toward a future in which the Ojibwe, because converted and “civilized,” might endure as a sovereign political
entity. Conversely, Warren looks to the past—in a work completed only six years after the publication of Copway’s—in order to establish a record of the landscape that asserts the Ojibwe right to exist as a people through presence and language.

Place and Aesthetic Character: William W. Warren’s *History of the Ojibway People*

Whereas George Copway espouses a conception of matter as possessing vitality only through God’s spiritual presence, William Warren examines the traditional Ojibwe emphasis on the characteristics places are imbued with because of historical events. This emphasis is reflected in the very names the Ojibwe have given places. As Warren stresses the intimate connection of the Ojibwe with their traditional territories, he illustrates an aesthetic framework in which places are discussed in terms of their moral import. It is through this framework that Warren argues for a common ground between consciousness and materiality in Ojibwe history; the meaning of a place, in his record of the Ojibwe, is in large measure a consequence of the sentiments its history inspires. Warren demonstrates that sensibility—especially the ability to correctly feel the effects of a landscape—is part and parcel of the Ojibwe worldview, and not a mode of consciousness reserved for Euro-Americans. In this way, Warren’s account of the Ojibwe participates in a wider discussion about the ways in which sensibility and aesthetics function politically as forms of land possession. Warren suggests that for the Ojibwe, however, the possession is not merely ideological—a projection-through-perception of sociocultural values onto a landscape and its inhabitants—but also very physical, and often bloody.

The foundations of Warren’s conception of Ojibwe sensibility can be traced to the differences he sees in Native American and Euro-American strategies for understanding
human origins. The key distinction between these understandings is the Native reliance on materiality and the Euro-American reliance on the metaphysical. In the aptly titled chapter “Origin of the Ojibways,” Warren claims that “the ignorant son of the forest” is neither more nor less informed than Euro-Americans who rely on the Bible respecting human origin, “for he deduces his beliefs from what he sees of nature and nature’s work, and possessing no certain proof or knowledge of the manner of his creation, he simply but forcibly styles himself ‘spontaneous man’” (29). On the other hand, even though whites have the tools of literacy, anthropology, and geology, they remain at a loss for proof “without the aid of God’s word to solve the deep mysteries of Nature—to solve the mystery of the creation of a universe in which our earth is apparently but as a grain of sand, and to solve the problem of his own mysterious existence” (29). Of course, Warren is not suggesting that the Ojibwe do not have their own creation story based on metaphysical forces—this story is indeed discussed in his chapter—but he does point out that the traditional Ojibwe belief system is not divorced from empirical knowledge in the way that Euro-American science and religion are. For the Ojibwe, directing consciousness toward materiality results in religious explanations for phenomena, as opposed to the Euro-American paradigm in which a priori spirituality is inconsistent with material empiricism, but nevertheless ostensibly answers questions that empiricism cannot. History is reconciled with spirituality for the Ojibwe in a way that it cannot be for Euro-American Christians.

The reconciliation of history and religion is possible for the Ojibwe in large measure because specific places have recorded, and interrelated, historical and religious significance. The story of the Ojibwe emigration from the shores of the Atlantic to the
northern Great Lakes is representative, and can be viewed as a historical example of Latour’s nature-culture. Warren explains, through the testimony of a Midewiwin priest, that the appearance of the white *megis*, or cowrie shell, in certain places directed the Ojibwe emigration from the Atlantic coast to La Pointe (near the western end of Lake Superior), which Warren identifies as a geographical and cultural center for the Ojibwe in the nineteenth century (43-5, 58). The appearance of the megis on the Atlantic coast; near present-day Montreal; on the shore of Lake Huron; at the current site of Sault Ste. Marie; and finally at La Pointe, coincided with stopovers and settlement during the long emigration; the megis is deeply symbolic, as the Midewiwin priest explains to Warren: “‘the megis I spoke of, means the Me-da-we religion…. while [the Ojibwe forefathers] were suffering the ravages of sickness and death, the Great Spirit, at the intercession of Man-ab-o-sho, the great common uncle of the An-ish-in-aub-ag, granted them this rite wherewith life is restored and prolonged’” (44). Ojibwe settlement coincided with the establishment of Midewiwin practices at specific sites across a great expanse of North America because these practices ensured physical health and wellbeing. The Ojibwe lived where they knew they could thrive, and their story is spiritual, historical, and reflected in rather precise geography.

What might be called religious geography is further emphasized at La Pointe. Parallel to the island of La Pointe is the peninsula of Shag-a-waum-ik-ong (often spelled “Chequamegon” in other sources), a place name that reflects geological change and the forces responsible for it. Warren relates,

It lays across the entry to a deep bay, and it has derived its name from the tradition that Man-ab-o-sho created it to bar the egress of a great beaver
which he once hunted on the Great Lake, and which had taken refuge in this deep bay. The name signifies ‘The soft beaver dam,’ as the great beaver had easily broken through it, making the deep gap which now forms the entry of the bay (63).

The physicality of the landscape and the material consequences of metaphysical events are contained in the name “Shag-a-waum-ik-ong.” Ojibwemowin is remarkable for its capacity to convey narrative, geographical character, and tradition so efficiently and simultaneously. As a language, it is particularly reflective of Serpil Oppermann’s observations on new materialism, “that things (or matter) draw their peculiarly agentic power from their relation to discourses that in turn structure human relations to materiality,” representing a “paradigm [that] is premised on the integral ways of thinking language and reality, discourse and matter together” (462). Perhaps from a traditional Ojibwe point of view, there is nothing “new” about new materialism at all: Warren shows that Ojibwe beliefs, history, relationship to the landscape, and language have been inextricable, and recognized as such, from the beginning.

Human actions, of course, are also major contributors to the character of places, and La Pointe is no exception. In the antebellum period, human history, places, and sensibility formed a pervasive theory of aesthetics in literature (see the example of Drake’s *The Northern Lakes* in the introduction), and Warren was a participant in this aesthetic conversation. Despite La Pointe’s status for Warren as an Ojibwe political and cultural center, its history is certainly not altogether positive. According to Warren, at some point in the seventeenth century, or perhaps earlier, La Pointe and its inhabitants were subject to “evil practices” stemming either from crop failures or starvation due to
being surrounded by Dakota and Fox enemies (69). The “evil practices” consisted primarily of cannibalism, as “Satanic medicine men” had “come to a knowledge of the most subtle poisons, and they revenged the least affront with certain death” (68). Warren tells of “[h]orrid feasts of human flesh [that] became a custom,” and relates anecdotes detailing how dead bodies would be disinterred and eaten, and that parents “dared not refuse their children if demanded by the fearful medicine man for sacrifice” (68). For these reasons, “from that time, the Ojibways considered the island haunted, and never resided on it till the first old French traders had located and built their trading establishment thereon” (69). The haunting quality of La Pointe did not just affect Ojibwes, however. In the early eighteenth century, a trapper in the employ of the fort’s clerk attempted to rape the wife of the clerk, but because her staunch self-defense nearly cost the rapist his life, he murdered her, her husband upon his return, as well as their six-year-old daughter; although the couple’s other child, a toddler, “had been [the murderer’s] pet” prior to these transgressions, after three days he could no longer bear the boy’s crying for his parents and murdered him as well (93-4). There are conflicting stories regarding how the murderer was brought to justice, but these stories of cannibalism and murder channel Gothic elements in order to lend credence to the Ojibwe view of La Pointe as haunted. Through an aesthetic framework that produces sentiment as a result of the relationship between history and place, Warren challenges a perceived form of difference between whites and Native peoples, namely that whites are “rational” and Indians are “superstitious.” The sensible reader, Warren presumes, will cathartically internalize the pathos of these abhorrent events; in so doing, she will experience compassion for the Ojibwe by recognizing their fundamental humanity.
To extend his argument of pathos through the relationship between human history and the land, Warren describes many other places in traditional Ojibwe territory. There is Point Iroquois just west of Sault Ste. Marie, so called because it is where the Ojibwe won a decisive victory against an invading Haudenosaunee war party in 1662 (98). There is the Lake of the Cut-foot Dakota, named because a significant battle between the Ojibwes and Dakotas took place where a Dakota was killed “whose feet were both previously cut half off either by frost or some accident” (126). Then there is the Lake of Torches, on which early Ojibwe occupants speared fish by torch light (132). And there is Ottawa Lake (133), Pillage Creek (182), and Death River (184). All of these places are significant because they help Warren make the argument that the Ojibwe have a very clear, distinct record of their history, a form of political and cultural currency that many Euro-Americans alleged Native peoples did not have. Warren is showing his white audience that the history of the Ojibwe is written in the very landscape his ancestors occupied for centuries. By appropriating a traditionally Euro-American aesthetic framework, Warren is not only emphasizing his own capabilities as a qualified Ojibwe ethnographer and historian, but he is also demonstrating that these qualifications are a product of his people’s conception of themselves and their material and discursive relationship to the landscape.

Warren emphasizes the commonalities between the Ojibwe and his Euro-American audience further when he points out the criteria that determined why the Ojibwe chose to occupy and/or conquer the territories they did: resources and aesthetic quality. Mille Lacs (Missi-sag-i-egan, the lake that spreads all over), in present-day central Minnesota, is noted for its clear waters, considerable size, “pebbly beach,”
abundance and diversity of fish, and its connection to several smaller lakes that support plentiful wild rice (104). Furthermore, “Its picturesque shores are skirted with immense groves of valuable sugar maple, and the soil on which they grow is not to be surpassed in richness by any section of country in the northwest” (104). “It is not to be wondered at,” Warren concludes, “that for nearly two centuries, it has formed a bone of strife and contention between the Ojibways and Dakotas” (104). The territory about 100 miles to the northwest, near the headwaters of the Mississippi, is valued for similar reasons. “The shores of these beautiful lakes” are rich in sugar maple, birch, and wild rice, and once boasted huge populations of large game animals (119). Because of its beauty and usefulness, “this country has always been a favorite home and resort for the wild Indian, and over its whole extent, battle fields are pointed out where different tribes have battled for its possession” (119). So aesthetically and materially valuable was this area that the Ojibwe endured “many years of severe fighting” in order to wrest it from the Dakota (119).

Warren’s historiography seeks to make the Ojibwe relatable for Euro-Americans by paradoxically emphasizing their uniqueness as a people. Theresa Schenck observes that because Warren believed Native peoples were disappearing, his goal was “to call the attention of the American people to the true condition and character of its native inhabitants, to arouse their sympathy and even to encourage their philanthropy” (Warren xvii). Warren’s call to attention, however, does not describe a pathetic or fragile people, but rather an Ojibwe nation that has fought hard for its territory and established meaningful material and discursive relationships with that territory. He makes the Ojibwe relatable by illustrating their sensibility that is both aesthetic and pragmatic, but he also
emphasizes their uniqueness in their particular connection to their lands. Ojibwemowin itself reflects Ojibwe land possession, and Warren recognizes that the *logos* is entangled with the *oikos*. Significantly, when Warren was writing, the Ojibwe had managed to avoid what many tribes could not: removal.

When we consider Warren’s attention to place and aesthetic character, what we’re really considering is a testimonial of resistance, an effort to lay claim to Ojibwe history and land so that they might remain as such. It is widely recognized that representations of the land are always to some extent political, but for Warren, the stakes were quite high. Since he believed that Native peoples were disappearing, his discussion of the Ojibwe material-discourse relationship should be viewed as a quest for Ojibwe survival in the face of colonial oppression; a daunting quest from his view, but one for which there was hope.

The diverse conceptions of nature derived from the relationships between materiality and consciousness described in this chapter suggest that human agency—even for the population with the longest history in and most intimate knowledge of the Great Lakes region—is a multifaceted phenomenon. Red Jacket’s focus on politics, Tanner’s suggestion of self-constitution through interactions with animals, Copway’s spirituality, and Warren’s aesthetic historiography suggest a wide array of criteria for determining what human agency is through representations of nature. Moreover, these Native voices indicate the controversies and complexities of negotiating natures-cultures, even in non-Western societies, which should further prompt us to reject essentialist views of the Native American relationship to nature in the early national and antebellum periods.
Questions about human agency and nature help us understand how Native peoples conceived of themselves in a region at times represented as under threat of Euro-American expansion, at other times construed as Native space in which Euro-Americans are absent or only minor actors. This chapter, through its investigation of the relationship between nature’s materiality and human agency, offers a methodology that literary scholars might adopt in order to complicate their conceptions of Native views of themselves and landscapes.
CHAPTER 2—MOONLIGHT AND THE AGUE: THE PROJECT OF DOMESTICITY IN TRAILL’S THE BACKWOODS OF CANADA AND KIRKLAND’S A NEW HOME, WHO’LL FOLLOW?

Just over halfway through A New Home, Who’ll Follow? (1839), Mary Clavers, the narrative persona of Caroline Kirkland’s satirical rendering of settlement in Michigan, complains about the difficulties of making her account attractive to sophisticated readers because, for all its rustic charm (as well as ugliness), Michigan lacks the stuff of true, idealized romance found in, for example, English pastoral literature (114-5). Clavers resolves the problem with a deceptively simple observation: “Moonlight and the ague are, however, the same everywhere” (115). This statement captures the problematic nature of reconciling the real with the ideal that both Kirkland and Catharine Parr Traill, in The Backwoods of Canada (1836), face in their efforts to establish homes in the Great Lakes region. The fact that moonlight and the ague are the same everywhere is a metaphor for the concurrent hospitality and hostility of landscapes in which Europeans and Americans are trying to establish themselves. The metaphor captures the inherent complexity of conceptualizing nature in landscapes that display profound beauty and harmony, and troubling violence and ugliness, often simultaneously. This chapter is about the ways Traill and Kirkland reckon with the materiality of the Great Lakes landscape in order to forge new conceptions of domesticity; it is also about the extent to which, in the process, they each discover the inextricable relationship between the ostensibly separate realms of the cultivated human home and nonhuman nature.

Although The Backwoods of Canada and A New Home are essentially about domesticity, femininity, the difficult process of Euro-American settlement, and the
complex networks that comprise them, the profound differences between the texts cannot be overstated. On the one hand, these differences should be expected, especially in terms of genre and subject position: Traill’s text is epistolary; Kirkland’s is satirical; Traill is writing from a genteel British perspective and as a natural historian; Kirkland from the position of an upper-middle class, east coast American for an audience more explicitly interested in the literary. And while Traill does periodically reveal a sense of humor, it is not the irreverent, continuous kind displayed by Kirkland.

Bodies, however, are the most important thematic intersection between the texts, and yet, they are perceived and represented very differently. Traill’s attention to bodies plagued by illness and Native American bodies ultimately serves the purpose of justifying a colonial agenda in Upper Canada at the heart of which is English genteel femininity and the home. Traill’s attention to botanical bodies, on the other hand, is more personal, for it makes controversial claims about Traill’s feminine scientific authority while at the same time physically and conceptually extending the purview of the domestic. Kirkland’s text, however, mainly reflects what Stacy Alaimo has identified as the “trans-corporeality” of bodies, which stresses the inseparable entanglement of bodies and their environments (2, 11): Kirkland is particularly interested in the way the materiality of pregnancy and motherhood constitute a network of domesticity and the profound mutability of that materiality. Additionally, Kirkland is attentive to what I am calling the “trans-oeconomia” of domesticity, or the manner in which homes are not isolated entities in frontier Michigan, but rather connected through trans-corporealities and the exchange of objects. At the core of my analysis of Traill’s and Kirkland’s works is the premise that forging new paradigms of domesticity in the process of settlement necessitates careful
attention to various materialities, or the agential capacities of matter including but extending far beyond the human and its cultural discourses. In effect, the project of domesticity reflects forms of what Bruno Latour identifies as “natures-cultures” (7, 96, 105-9) and, alternatively, “collectives” (4, 107), which serve to dissolve the imagined distinction between nonhuman nature and human culture, presented by Latour as a foundational myth undergirding Western notions of modernity. This chapter engages with scholarly work on the discourse of domesticity, science studies, natural history scholarship, and critical studies of the literatures of the frontier in order to highlight the intersections of domesticity, nature, materiality, and human agency.

The Bodily Natural History of Domesticity in Traill’s *The Backwoods of Canada*

On August 12th, 1832, Catharine Parr Traill and her husband admired the scenery on the shore of Gros Isle, “a beautiful rocky island,” as they proceeded up the St. Lawrence toward Quebec on board the *Laurel* (25). Traill was aware of the quarantine measures being carried out in an effort to curb smallpox, measles, and cholera outbreaks, but she was still pleased with the view Gros Isle presented, one of natural beauty in aesthetic harmony with encamped emigrant families, children at play, and blue smoke from cooking fires rising above (26). Traill’s husband mentions “the picturesque appearance of the scene” to an officer from the nearby fort that had come aboard, but the officer sets the newcomers straight: “‘Believe me,’” he says,

> [I]n this instance, as in many others, ‘tis distance lends enchantment to the view. Could you take a nearer survey of some of those very picturesque groups which you admire, I think you would turn away from them with
heart sickness; you would there behold every variety of disease, vice, poverty, filth, and famine – human misery in its most disgusting and saddening form (26-7).

In one sense, the officer’s pronouncement is prophetic: Traill discovers that the more familiar she becomes with her new country, the more difficulties she is exposed to. On the other hand, Traill also attempts to reverse the consequences of looking closer throughout the rest of the book. She takes on the task of understanding the causes of human misery as part of an effort to produce a useful resource for future settlers. Furthermore, since Canada’s dense forests are lacking in picturesque quality—a point Traill makes throughout The Backwoods of Canada—she is compelled to search for beauty and instruction through attention to more minute detail. In this respect, Traill is a typical figure: as Susan Scott Parrish indicates, since at least the middle of the eighteenth century, women were considered valuable potential contributors to natural history because of their supposed penchant for minutiae (185). Elizabeth Thompson suggests, in her analysis of the illustrations included in the book, that Traill deals with the lack of traditional picturesque views by either assigning the picturesque to an imagined future of prosperous settlement, or by breaking it into fragments through a closer study of nature (42). Relatedly, D.M.R. Bentley observes that the “settler picturesque” in British Canada focuses on pleasing landscapes reflecting human productivity and prosperity (72). Bentley also describes “settler sublimity” that usually manifests as the firing of brushwood for clearing land, a teleological indication of the human capacity “to develop the natural world in accordance with God’s injunction to Adam and Eve in Genesis 1:28” (69). Connecting the settler picturesque, settler sublime, and empiricism for Traill, I
would suggest, is a distinct attention to the presence and description of bodies, human and otherwise. Through considerations of bodies—Indian bodies, botanical bodies, and sick bodies—Traill is able to produce a natural history of the domestic.

Understanding the materiality of organic bodies is, for Traill, the means by which a morally and physically healthy home is built and maintained; relatedly, it is the means by which beauty and pragmatism are rendered informative and amusing. The materiality of bodies consists of changes, functions, and aesthetics: how bodies are materially altered; what they are capable of; and the extent to which they are ugly or attractive. Whenever Traill encounters a body, particularly a human or botanical one, the implicit questions are, “How is this body affected by its environment, how does it affect its environment, and how pleasing are these effects?” And Traill is asking these questions because she knows how much success in settlement depends on materiality in a country supposedly devoid of human history, civilization, legends, and poetry (128). Traill admits, “[M]y only resources are domestic details and the natural history of the country” (240). Bodies, as I will show, are her entrée into those resources.

In some respects, it would be reasonable to call Traill’s considerations of bodies “proto-ecological,” and these considerations represent her participation in extant traditions of literary responses to nature. Chronicling as she is the emergence of Canadian settlement on a continent that was in many respects still new or unknown to Europeans, her ecological tendencies in observation are to be expected. Yet, the “unimproved” condition of her surroundings would not have been the only impetus for a proto-ecological approach, for as Marianne Gosztonyi Ainley notes, Traill was influenced by the natural history of Gilbert White (81). White’s *The Natural History of Selborne* (1788)
eschews the grand systemizing of Enlightenment natural history and natural philosophy in order to privilege the local, limited environ as the point of departure for investigating nature’s interrelated wonders, large and minute. Like White, Traill maintains a local focus, and also like White, she employs an epistolary form and organization for the book. Additionally, Theresa M. Kelley observes that, following Rousseau’s patriarchal and pedagogical Lettres élémentaires sur la botanique à Madame de L— (1782), British women authors published works of epistolary instruction on botany: “This inversion of Rousseau’s gendered scene of instruction puts women into positions of pedagogical and moral authority, inasmuch as lessons about plants nearly always prompt lessons about a good life” (94). As I will discuss below, Traill engages in many contemporary botanical debates in The Backwoods of Canada, but her epistolary instruction on a variety of natural history topics, as well as traditionally domestic ones, demonstrates a claim to authority commonly reserved for men while at the same time reinforcing her status as a lady. Like White, she engages in botany, ornithology, ethnography, and the investigation of local curiosities; on the domestic front, she teaches her ostensibly female, future-settler reader the value and necessity of hard work, promotes spousal devotion, and explains how to make maple sugar and candles, among other household necessities.

In her natural history of domesticity, Traill participates in early nineteenth century debates regarding the politics of subject and object statuses. Her aesthetic, moral, and empirical attention to organic bodies promotes a gendered claim to authority-as-subject over her household, marginalized peoples, and the landscape. Elizabeth A. Bohls points out, “British culture of [the late Enlightenment and early Romantic] period pervasively aligned women, the laboring classes, and non-Europeans with body as opposed to mind,
matter rather than form, and the particular rather than the universal,” arguing that “these dualities govern the construction and disqualification of aesthetic subjects” (80). Traill challenges these patriarchal alignments by presenting her British womanhood as a subject position, objectifying bodies, matter, and the particular. She is a colonizer and a natural historian, but she is also a wife and mother, all authority positions that are mutually constitutive out of settler necessity in her view. Agency—female European settler agency—in this circumstance is very much a matter of power and subversion; by privileging the material over the abstract, Traill makes the political gesture of demonstrating that objects in the patriarchal gaze—European women—can become subjects by turning their own gazes toward other bodies, human and nonhuman. The problem, of course, is that women claim one form of social justice while perpetuating other injustices, in addition to espousing a distinct anthropocentrism that undermines an otherwise proto-ecological project. Onno Oerlemans gestures toward this issue when he states, “While the cultural connection of femininity and nature is undoubtedly real, and in much need of deconstruction, ecofeminism seems caught between a desire to reveal and resist the double binding of women and nature, and a simultaneous but contradictory desire to celebrate exactly this connection” (7). It is debatable whether or not Traill can in any firm sense be regarded as an early proto-ecofeminist, but Oerlemans’s point illustrates the problematic character of her subject position, a femininity in which other others, human and nonhuman, are objectified in order to meet colonialist, homemaking ends. Traill, as readers of The Backwoods of Canada are well aware, is only too eager to keep the Irish, Native peoples, and lower-class Britons in their perceived places even as she enacts feminist subversion through her botany.
Bodies for Traill, then, are political, aesthetic, moral, and ecological as a result of their materiality. They help her maintain her status as a genteel English colonizer; they are the foundations upon which her domestic authority rests; they are the means by which she challenges the scientific patriarchy; and they are presented as proof that women like her are aesthetic subjects. The conception of nature suggested by Traill characterizes Upper Canada as a place in which bodies must be carefully situated and perceived in order for the British colonial project—and the women performing it—to be successful.

As indicated at the beginning of this section, Traill’s introduction to the condition of the human species in Canada is characterized by “misery in its most disgusting and saddening form,” and it is not long before her own body becomes the site of misery and an object of class-conscious attention. While in Montreal at the Nelson Hotel awaiting passage to Coburg on Lake Ontario (and thence inland to Peterborough), Traill becomes a victim of the 1832 cholera epidemic. Her sickness is severe, but because of her social status, she receives much more medical attention than other emigrants would have; she explains that cholera is in fact most fatal among the poor, and the doctor who treats her admits being “interested in [her] recovery” precisely because, Traill reports, “I was the wife of a British officer emigrating to the Upper Province” (39, 45). The doctor’s treatment includes “bleeding, a portion of opium, blue pill, and some sort of salts – not the common Epsom. The remedies proved effectual, though I suffered much from sickness and headache for many hours” (45). Traill’s recovery is almost miraculous, especially considering that blue pill was one-third mercury and probably caused her to have even more diarrhea, which we can only hope was mitigated at least a little by the opium. Of equal interest is the motherly attention she receives from Jane Taylor, the
landlady’s sister, who, Traill relates, “never left me … but, at the peril of her own life, supported me in her arms, and held me on her bosom, when I struggling with mortal agony, alternately speaking peace to me, and striving to soothe the anguish of my poor afflicted partner” (45). Traill is clearly grateful that Jane is willing to risk her own life in order to soothe her and her distraught husband, but Jane’s motherly arms and bosom are only part of a wider network of care surrounding Traill: “two Irish girls,” who “[i]nstead of fleeing affrighted from the chamber of sickness … almost quarreled which should be my attendant” (44-5). The Irish girls are nameless, characterized only by their nationality and corresponding status of eager servitude, whereas we can safely surmise Jane Taylor is English or of English descent: throughout the book, anyone who is not of English stock is described as such; all Scots, Irish, French, Italian, and Chippewa people are identified accordingly. Additionally, Jane’s physical contact with Traill further suggests equality at least in terms of nationality, if not necessarily social or class status. Traill does not divulge the precise nature of the Irish girls’ service, but she is forthright regarding Jane’s body as a therapeutic support for her own, suggesting that such physical proximity can only exist between women who are in some sense equals. Finally, although Traill’s body is the most fragile in these scenes, it remains a marker of superiority in its centrality for everyone else involved.

Traill’s suffering from and survival of cholera functions in a larger sense as a rite of passage; it suggests that she is of sufficient physical constitution for enduring the challenges of emigration to a Great Lakes region where European settlement merely has a foothold. By attributing her class-conditioned recovery to a merciful God (44), she implies that her survival is teleological, an inevitable and necessary step toward ensuring
her contribution to a moral and refined process of colonization. One could postulate what
the implications of this view are for the poor, fatally ravaged by cholera as they are and
thus excluded from the providential telos. In any case, it is clear that Traill’s body is
offered as a symbol of fortitude and righteousness, even as the vitality of that body is
preserved, at least in part, through class distinctions. Notably, Traill would live to be
ninety-seven.

Traill’s emigration to Upper Canada occurs at the end of a period in which the
English female body had ideologically, in the popular English imagination, undergone a
transformation from eroticized and sensual to maternal and productive, a perception
Traill endorses as the most conducive to settlement. In an examination of the thematic
connections between poetic form, garden aesthetics, and perceptions of the female body,
Rachel Crawford notes that toward the end of the eighteenth century and continuing into
the early nineteenth century in England, the female body “was enlightened as science
revealed its reproductive depths,” but simultaneously became “more guarded as it was set
apart by the ideology of domesticity” (219). Addressing the historical roots of “New
Domesticity,” Valerie Padilla Carroll observes that with the rise of industrialism in the
United States and Western Europe in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, a
paradox developed in which “the role of the homemaker was perceived as economically
value-less” while “her morality was established as essential to the functioning of society”
(54-5). The industrious settler domesticity promoted by Traill, on the other hand,
represents a return to what Carroll identifies as a pre-industrial “craft tradition and
oeconomea of the home,” a departure from the “bourgeois model of domesticity” that
was developing in more industrialized spaces in Europe and the US (55). As Traill learns
early on, settlers’ wives cannot cling to the bourgeois model, dwelling on leaving friends and family behind and lamenting the absence of “little domestic comforts” that make them unable to “endure the loneliness of the backwoods”; by contrast, Traill asserts, “I know I shall find plenty of occupation within-doors, and I have sources of enjoyment when I walk abroad that will keep me from being dull. Besides, have I not the right to be cheerful and contented for the sake of my beloved partner?” (90). In other words, stop complaining, stay busy, and remember your vows.

Traill promotes a conservative view of her body’s purpose as productive and maternal, physical but asexual. As she frames it in “Letter XI,” dated August 2, 1833, which functions as a series of answers to questions put forth by a “dear friend” back in England, Traill states, “a settler’s wife should be active, industrious, ingenious, cheerful, not above putting her hand to whatever is necessary to be done in her household, nor too proud to profit by the advice and experience of older portions of the community, from whom she may learn many excellent lessons of practical wisdom” (149). The next letter, dated exactly three months later, begins, “Many thanks, dearest mother, for the contents of the box which arrived in August. I was charmed with the pretty caps and worked frocks sent for my baby; the little fellow looks delightfully in his new robes” (157). The sudden appearance of Traill’s first child, with no previous indication of her pregnancy, indicates a level of propriety reflecting the view of the female body as asexually maternal. Whereas Traill is rather descriptive when it comes to her cholera symptoms, her pregnancy is narratively nonexistent. It seems that for the female body to bear the burden of settlement successfully, it must be maternal and productive: that is, it must be industrious and active in creating and preserving domestic order while maintaining a
moral reserve regarding the bodily nature of maternity. Readers are privy to the bodily effects of surviving cholera because they reflect a sort of herculean patriotism; the bodily effects of pregnancy, one supposes, are too common but also too suggestive to mention.

The seemingly spontaneous appearance of Traill’s child certainly does not mean the author is averse to sexualizing other female bodies, however. The local Chippewa beauty, Jane, functions at first as the aesthetic foil to a dazzlingly pure winter landscape of starlight and frost that is traversed by sleigh to the Native encampment (174, 172-3). Jane is the daughter of the highly regarded Chippewa man Peter and his wife, “Mrs. Peter,” who Traill calls “my old squaw” (174). Traill guesses Jane is about eighteen and admits to being “greatly struck with the beauty” of her nascent Chippewa womanhood:

[h]er features were positively fine, and though of gipsey darkness the tint of vermillion on her cheek and lip rendered it, if not beautiful, very attractive. Her hair, which was of jetty blackness, was soft and shining, and was neatly folded over her forehead, not hanging loose and disorderly in shaggy masses, as is generally the case with the squaws. Jane was evidently aware of her superior charms, and may be considered as an Indian belle, by the peculiar care she displayed in the arrangement of the black cloth mantle, bound with scarlet, that was gracefully wrapped over one shoulder, and fastened at her left side with a gilt brooch (174).

The description of Jane is the longest physical description of any person in *The Backwoods of Canada*, and it is also the most sexualized. Traill eroticizes Jane’s beauty through the gypsy analogy, as the deep, suggestive red of her cheeks and lips is, “if not beautiful, very attractive,” pointing toward Traill’s reluctance to align the beautiful and
the exotically erotic so closely. The black of Jane’s hair and her red lips and cheeks are mirrored in the black and scarlet mantle that provocatively leaves one shoulder exposed, completing a balanced aesthetic of dark sexuality and making Jane’s body the paradoxical locus of her “quiet dignity” (174). Significantly, Traill describes Jane while she is engaged in quill- and beadwork on buckskins and seated between her (pretty but not as beautiful) cousin and a well-dressed young Indian man to whom she is betrothed (174-5). Traill thus objectifies a “perfect” Indian femininity, highly sexualized within the confines of her impending marriage, nobly savage yet contained by Indian domesticity. In her colonizer’s gaze upon Jane’s body, Traill represents her as a sexualized but domesticated object, aesthetically exotic while engaged in the productive work of the female sphere.

Traill further privileges colonization and domesticity by requesting the Chippewa family to sing a hymn. Traill “had so often listened with pleasure to the Indians singing their hymns of a Sunday night,” and the pleasure is evident on this occasion as well, but the visual aesthetic quality of Jane and her cousin temporarily turns Traill’s attention away from the sound and meaning of the hymn “sung in the Indian tongue”: Traill could not but notice the modest air of the girls; as if anxious to avoid observation that they felt was attracted by their sweet voices, they turned away from the gaze of the strangers, facing each other and bending their heads down over the work they still held in their hands. The attitude, which is that of the Eastern nations; the dress, dark hair and eyes, olive complexion, heightened colour, and meek expression of face, would have formed a study for a painter (175).
To complete the essentialist aesthetic objectification, Traill relates that she is pleased with how much reverence the older Indians display in listening “to the voices of their children singing praise and glory to the God and Saviour they had learned to fear and love” (175). I do not mean to suggest that the Christian faith displayed by Jane and her family is solely the result of colonial oppression, and that their spiritual agency is merely a manifestation of European missionary efforts. Traill does, however, mitigate Jane’s sexuality by emphasizing stereotypical Indian female modesty within the framework of Christian conversion. In effect, Traill performs something similar to what Amy Kaplan calls “manifest domesticity” in her examination of domesticity’s role in US imperialism: “The rhetorics of Manifest Destiny and domesticity share a vocabulary that turns imperial conquest into spiritual regeneration in order to efface internal conflict or external resistance in visions of geopolitical domination as global harmony” (588). Relatedly, Traill’s vision of the British colonization of Canada includes acknowledging the morally threatening sexual potential of the beautiful non-white body, but then transforming that potential into a harmonious, picturesque scene of shared values between colonizers and colonized through the medium of Christianity as displayed in the confines of the happy, productive home. Yet, in describing the manner in which Jane and her cousin turn “away from the gaze of the strangers,” Traill implies that what is ostensibly harmonious is actually a clear manifestation of political authority, a recognition of the distinction between female subject and female object. Jane’s body—her red lips singing Christian hymns; her olive shoulder leading down to an olive hand doing quillwork; her jet-black hair satisfying European taste; her submissive facial expression—is for Traill a site on
which morality, productivity, and beauty converge to reflect an improved, colonized Upper Canada and its possibilities.

The other notable Native body under Traill’s scrutiny is that of Maquin, noted not for its beauty, but for its deformity and absurdity. Traill describes Maquin as “a sort of Indian Flibberty-gibbet: this lad is a hunchbacked dwarf, very shrewd, but a perfect imp” who teases babies and dogs, and speaks and writes English well: as Maquin informs Traill, “‘Indian name Maquin, but English name ‘Mister Walker,’ very good man’” (136). In addition to poking fun at the irony between moniker and bodily form, Traill further emphasizes the feminine propensities of this “Flibberty-gibbet” by pointing out that he often joins the Indian women on their visits to whites, acting as their interpreter, and, “In spite of his extreme deformity, he seemed to possess no inconsiderable share of vanity, gazing with great satisfaction at his face in the looking-glass” (136).Additionally, Traill expresses doubt about Maquin’s professed hunting abilities (136). Maquin talks too much, closely associates with women, is vain on account of his looks, and is not a good hunter—an emasculated if not feminine figure in Traill’s view. But as Brigitte Georgi-Findlay points out, the feminization of Native men through “rhetorically domesticating” them is not unusual in women’s writing of the period: “The way Indian men are aestheticized and feminized in women’s texts illustrates how discursive conventions of colonialism can work in the service of women’s empowerment,” as “the description of Indian men as effeminate dandies or as aesthetic objects forms part of the rhetorical de-legitimation of Indian cultures and lifeways” (xv). Maquin is the antithesis of the picturesque, stoic hunter-warrior noble savage; he is merely an innocuous local oddity, a
source of comic relief, and he poses no threat whatsoever to British colonialism and the women ensuring its success.

The two examples of bodily domestication—the tempering of Jane’s feminine sexual mystique and the feminization of Maquin—can be viewed as contemporary versions of the story of Chiboya, a local melodramatic account of the resolution of cultural difference through the domestication of the foreign. According to Traill, during the War of 1812, the fully armed warrior Chiboya enters the home of a widowed settler woman and her children, who are paralyzed by fear at his sudden, stealthy appearance (177-8). For quite some time the woman fears she and her children will be slaughtered, as Chiboya takes off his leggings and moccasins and inspects his weapons, until he is able to communicate that he means them no harm and only wishes to seek shelter from the snowstorm for the night (178). Chiboya is hospitably fed, and he is introduced to a European bed in which he “curl[s] himself up like a dog”; from that night on, Chiboya and the children become great friends (178-9). The lesson of this parable is that, by experiencing the domestic comforts and hospitality of whites, Chiboya is rendered less threatening and becomes part of a harmonious, intercultural domestic sphere. Whereas Chiboya’s rifle, knife, and tomahawk were once symbols of menacing savagery, they now become objects of amusement for the white children, who were “no longer terrified at his swarthy countenance and warlike weapons” and now received pats on the head from him (178-9). Just as Chiboya’s “swarthy countenance” is divested of the threat of murder (or worse), Jane’s beauty is mitigated by modesty and piety, and Maquin is deprived of masculinity—all due to the influence of a feminine domestic order. Whereas Indian bodies were once material manifestations of the savage ideal, they are now for
Traill material representations of the civilizing influence of settler domesticity. And even though Indians are making great advancements in “civilization” and “agriculture,” these people “are slowly passing away from the face of the earth, or mingling by degrees with the colonists,” so that there will scarcely be evidence of their existence in a few hundred years (179). Such rhetoric was passé by the time Traill was writing, but what is significant is that, in the ethnographic component of her natural history of domesticity, Traill offers Native bodies as empirical proof of British colonialism’s ensured success and durability in Upper Canada. If Native bodies can be integrated—aesthetically, morally, and/or comically—into British domestic paradigms, women become powerful arbiters of the colonial enterprise.

In Traill’s natural history of domesticity, botanical bodies are as important as Native American ones for establishing women as aesthetic subjects and important contributors to cultural progress. Traill’s botanical project is perhaps the most obvious evidence of a nature-culture in her account because it demonstrates the entanglement of material nature, gender politics, scientific debate, and domesticity. The British woman settler, Traill suggests, should engage in botany to assert female aesthetic subject status, improve the quality of her domestic realm, and participate in scientific knowledge creation, but she must do so through close empirical attention to botanical bodies in very carefully chosen language. Before proceeding with a discussion of Traill’s analyses of botanical bodies in particular, however, it seems pertinent to situate Traill in the transatlantic botanical network she participated in.

Traill is in Canada less than three months before she establishes a pattern of presenting her botany as a conservatively domestic and progressively scientific
enterprise. In “Letter VII” from October of 1832, and five months before Traill and her husband move into their own house (they have been staying with relatives since their arrival in the Peterborough area), Traill explains that her hortus siccus, despite the season, already “boasts of several elegant species” of ferns, flowers, and creeping plants (101-2), suggesting that natural history is a worthy occupation even if the domestic realm is as yet unsettled. Traill observes, however, that “Americans ornament their chimney-glasses with garlands” of festoon pine, but in the next sentence she relates that in her “rambles in the wood,” she has “discovered a trailing plant bearing a near resemblance to the cedar, which I consider has, with equal propriety, a claim to the name of ground or creeping cedar” (102). Traill’s botany is concerned with décor and domestic aesthetics, but it also reflects a claim to scientific authority reaching beyond the household: she is “discovering” and naming plants, activities she knows may be viewed as controversial in a patriarchal scientific community and thus requiring justification: “As much of the botany in these unsettled portions of the country are unknown to the naturalist, and the plants are quite nameless, I take the liberty of bestowing names upon them according to inclination or fancy” (102). Later, in April 1833 (she has just moved into her own house), she reports that the local wild strawberries “make excellent preserves, and I mean to introduce beds of them into my garden,” but again and characteristically, she pairs the domestic with the scientifically authoritative by describing a plant she has “called … the ‘trailing raspberry’” and justifies her claims to authority:

I suppose our scientific botanists in Britain would consider me very impertinent in bestowing names on the flowers and plants I meet with in these wild woods: I can only say, I am glad to discover the Canadian or
even the Indian names if I can, and where they fail I consider myself free to become their floral godmother, and give them names of my own choosing (120).

With the term “scientific botanists,” Traill refers to those for whom botany is a profession and/or those with institutional sanction, and designating herself as the “floral godmother” is a tongue-in-cheek acknowledgement of patriarchal scientific politics: she recognizes that as a woman, she is denied institutional or professional credit while at the same time implying that her field work is as meticulous and productive as anyone else’s.

Furthermore, she argues that her aesthetic sensibilities are acute enough to determine when existing nomenclature “fail[s].” Altogether, Traill performs the domestic role assigned to a woman of her status in a burgeoning British Canadian culture, but she also subverts the scientific marginalization of women that was a consequence of those domestic expectations. She is arguing that a woman can be an expert in domestic economy as well as participate in serious natural history conversations.

Marianne Gosztonyi Ainley claims Traill “quite consciously … both distanced herself from European centers of botany and defined herself as a woman botanist” (86), and while Traill is forthright about her status as a woman botanist, there is no compelling evidence in The Backwoods of Canada that she sought to distance herself from the metropoles of botany. Quite to the contrary, I would argue, Traill saw herself as an active participant in the creation of Eurocentric botanical knowledge. In “Letter XIV,” devoted entirely to botany and discussed in detail below, Traill relates, “I have promised to collect some of the most singular of our native flowers for one of the Professors of Botany in the Edinburgh University” (81). Ainley surmises that this professor is Robert Graham (81),
and if she is right, agreeing to collect specimens for him could hardly be regarded as
Traill distancing herself from European centers of botany: Graham was Regius Keeper of
the Royal Botanic Garden at Edinburgh at the time. Although Traill does not namedrop,
she evidently regards her assignment from Edinburgh University as a sort of institutional
endorsement and thus a form of botanical authority, not something she would have
consciously dissociated herself from. Simultaneously, the need for such an endorsement
and the fact that feminine claims to botanical authority were controversial in the
androcentric scientific establishment clearly vexed Traill.

“Letter XIV” delineates a turbulent relationship between gender and scientific
authority through explicit acknowledgement and subversion of traditional roles in these
categories. Traill begins with what had become a standard rhetorical device in women’s
natural history and travel writing: expressing modesty regarding expertise and
knowledge. It was “polite” for women to express such humility, but the gesture almost
always served as a sarcastic acknowledgment and rejection of patriarchal prescriptions
regarding women’s knowledge and education. “Letter XIV” is addressed to “my dear
sister,” whom Traill deems a “true prophetess” because she laments her lack of skill in
botanical illustration: “Deeply do I now regret having so idly neglected your kind offers
while at home of instructing me in flower-painting,” as “I cannot make faithful
representations of the flowers of my adopted country, or understand as you would do
their botanical arrangement” (206, 190). This expression of regret is deeply political
because it reflects a lack of compliance with scientific pursuits designated for women and
it occurs within an exclusively female pedagogical context. As Kelley has pointed out,
“Women who wrote about or illustrated plants during the romantic era did so … at a time
when the relation between women and plants was understood to be ornamental…

Women were expected to look ornamental when drawing plants” even at the risk of inviting criticism for “calling too much attention to themselves by displaying their accomplishments” (93). Traill regrets the *utilitarian* deficit occasioned by her lack of drawing skills, downplaying the ornamental consequences and thus social directives for what women are scientifically “qualified” for. Furthermore, this lament is foregrounded in an extensive history of ideological contradiction regarding women and science. As Parrish has shown, since the beginning of the Enlightenment, British women were discouraged from practicing science because of their supposed intellectual insufficiencies, but at the same time, they were encouraged to engage in “polite” forms of science: however, “[s]ocial qualifications for testimonial credibility were loosened, especially for colonials, because American specimens and ‘facts’ were so coveted in London,” and thus women’s writing “shows them both manipulated by and manipulating the divide that placed women on the side of nature and men on the side of knowledge production” (176-7). Traill’s statement reflects the social conventions with which her sister’s unheeded suggestion is imbued, but it privileges knowledge creation over the more “womanly” purpose of ornamentation. On the other hand, painting plants does have mimetic value. Later in “Letter XIV,” Traill laments the fact that dried specimens of plants do not do justice to the living originals, reminiscing, “You always called, you know, your dried specimens corpses of plants, and said, that when well painted, their representations were far more like themselves” (200). Painting flowers is about ornamental qualities, yes, but ornamentation does not preclude attempts at scientific
accuracy and preservation. The corporeal metaphor emphasizes the scientific and
aesthetic duties of maintaining plants’ vitalities, materially or artistically.

Traill’s ostensible claims to modesty in her lead-in to “Letter XIV” also serve to endorse a more vernacular botany through objecting to the institutional privileging of Latinate taxonomy. In addition, Traill employs a commonplace use of irony by claiming a lack of scientific knowledge and then demonstrating otherwise later in the text. “I … have,” Traill relates,

    hardly confidence in my scanty stock of knowledge to venture on scientific descriptions, when I feel conscious that a blunder would be easily detected, and expose me to ridicule and contempt, for an assumption of knowledge I did not possess. The only botanical work I have at my command is Pursh’s North American Flora, from which I have obtained some information; but must confess it is tiresome blundering out Latin descriptions to one who knows nothing of Latin beyond what she derives through a knowledge of Italian (190).

Traill is clearly aware of the risks she is taking in her writing on botany. One is tempted to interpret Traill’s reference to (and subsequent references to) Frederick Pursh’s Flora Americae Septentrionalis (1814) as an anti-Linnaean stance in a debate about plant taxonomy that, according to Kelley, occupied crucial cultural territory in the Romantic period (19-24). Pursh, in his English preface, makes it clear that he eschews Linnaean nomenclature in favor of that of Michaux and others whenever possible (xix), and given Traill’s conservative stance regarding the impropriety of sexual suggestion or display, perhaps she was attracted to Pursh’s rejection of Linnaean nomenclature and its focus on
reproduction. In any case, Pursh’s is the only work of botany available to Traill, and she found Pursh’s Latin descriptions taxing, suggesting Traill means for the botany she is about to present to be more accessible and more enjoyable, aimed as it is toward those like her—women who are interested and quite adept at botany but struggle with the social strictures on their acquisition and presentation of knowledge.

And yet, in her botanical descriptions, her attention to the entirety of the plant’s body, not just its reproductive organs, indicates that Traill did endorse a Natural System approach to botany over a Linnaean one. “Letter XIV” has a distinct organization: Traill begins with conventional modesty; she then proceeds to employ conventional botanical analogies; Traill’s descriptions then become much more scientifically technical; and then she finishes by playfully returning to more traditionally domestic subject matter. All the while, Traill pays minimal attention to stamens and pistils in favor of describing other physical traits and the generic and special affinities they suggest.

The water lily is one of the first flowers Traill discusses, and the description contains the only sexualized feminine analogy in “Letter XIV.” Traill describes “the half-blown flower, ready to emerge from its watery prison, and in all its virgin beauty expand its snowy bosom to the sun and genial air” (192). According to Crawford, adoption of the Linnaean system in the mid-eighteenth century “made requisite an increasingly specific sexual language in garden manuals,” and, I would add, botanical writing at large: “congruent with social expectations for women, this sexual language focused attention on the reproductive function of plants and assisted in the classification of sexual behavior while naturalizing distinctions between the sexes” (211). As the Natural System gained acceptance, however, the language of botany became less sexualized and more bodily and
comprehensive. Traill gestures toward the Linnaean scientific past by highlighting the water lily’s bosomy virginity, but then moves on, as British science had, to considering botanical wholes in more technical language. Traill’s attention to the materiality of botanical bodies, not just their sexual characteristics, transcends the conflation of femininity with sexuality and demonstrates Traill’s awareness of trends in scientific inquiry.

Traill’s discussion of a species of honeysuckle that Americans call “’twinflower’” (194) is part of her transition into more technical, bodily botanical description. Traill relates that this plant “is one of the most ornamental shrubs we have” and that she transplanted some into her garden the previous spring, which promise to be successful (194). Traill goes on, “I do not find any description of this shrub in Pursh’s Flora, but know it to be a species of honeysuckle, from the class and order, the shape and colour of the leaves, the stalks, the trumpet-shaped blossom and the fruit; all bearing a resemblance to our honeysuckles in some degree” (194). As is expected of her, Traill comments on the plant’s aesthetic quality and domesticates it for this reason, but what is notable is that she has already domesticated a plant that is as yet unknown among more established botanists like Pursh and his sources, and she is able to specially identify the plant because of previous empirical observation. The twinflower is thus a signature representation of Traill’s bodily natural history of domesticity in which womanly taste and labor are combined with scientific authority. Ironically for Traill, this twinflower’s Latinate designation is *Linnaea borealis* subsp. *americana*.4

Traill’s observations on the “lily tribe” further her use of more technical jargon, displaying a stylistic approach in which aesthetics yield more ground to scientific
description: such a style was common in Romantic natural history, but readers would have found Traill’s—a woman’s—lopsided registers intriguing, even controversial. The white and red varieties of the plant Traill renames the “douri-lily” are called by Americans white and red death respectively: “Wherefore it bears so formidable a name has not yet transpired. The flower consists of three petals, the calix three; it belongs to the class and order Hexandria monogynia; style, three-cleft; seed vessel of three valves; soil; dry woods and cleared lands; leaves growing in three, springing from the joints, large round, but a little pointed at the extremities” (203). Here, Traill combines taste, botanical anatomy, taxonomy, and ecology. She describes the botanical body, provides brief aesthetic commentary, and situates that body in its material and taxonomic environments.

The last few pages of “Letter XIV” represent a dénouement in technicality through a return to more aesthetic (one might say “feminine”) concerns: having discursively spent time in the field in anatomical and taxonomic pursuits, Traill brings her botany back into a more gynocentric domestic idiom. She begins by describing the “Cypripedium pubescens” species (yellow) of the moccasin flower, and how, “on raising a thick yellow fleshy sort of lid, in the middle of the flower, you perceive the exact face of an Indian hound” (204). In the purple and white species of the moccasin flower, “the face is that of a monkey,” complete with the “comical expression” so accurate that it draws a smile from all who see it (204-5). This, however, is a point of playful contention with Pursh: “These plants belong to the class and order Gynandria diandria; are described with some little variation by Pursh, who, however, likens the face … to that of a sheep: if a sheep sat for the picture, me-thinks it must have been the most mischievous of the flock” (205). Traill eventually moves on to describing the various wonderful
“perfumes” provided by the plants in her area (205), and relates that some local grasses “would look very graceful on a lady’s head; only fashionists always prefer the artificial to the natural” (206). Finally, Traill closes with a return to conventions: “though it is very probable some of my descriptions may not be exactly in the technical language of the correct botanist, I have at least described [the flowers] as they appear” (206). Traill then mentions that her young son has already taken an interest in flowers, which Traill “shall encourage as much as possible. It is a study that tends to refine and purify the mind, and can be made, by simple steps, a ladder to heaven, as it were, by teaching a child to look with love and admiration to that bountiful God who created and made flowers so fair to adorn and fructify this earth” (206). I have no doubt Traill’s natural theological sentiments are genuine, but they conspicuously close a letter on botany in which no other mention of God appears, which suggests that they are, at least in part, intended to mediate the impact of botany that supposedly transcends prescribed strictures. Traill situates herself in the end as the maternal, moral educator, the role deemed socially appropriate for women interested in botany in the Romantic period, but only after she has made brief but substantial claims to scientific authority.

In practicing a Natural System approach to botany, Traill manages to extend domesticity into the woods, fields, and lakes of Upper Canada. Or, put another way, the natural world comes under the purview of the domestic. In either instance, Traill demonstrates the manner in which a more holistic attention to botanical bodies can position a woman as scientifically erudite while at the same time improving the quality of her ever-expanding domestic range.
To close this section on *The Backwoods of Canada*, I examine what might be the book’s most significant intersection of botanical knowledge, illness, and domestic preservation. In “Letter XVII,” after having spent nearly two years in Upper Canada, Traill offers a convincing theory regarding the persistence of “various forms of agues, intermittent, remittent, and lake-fevers” (244). The problem, she concludes through both empirical investigation and second-hand advice, lies not in the swamps and marshes, but in settlers’ very own cellars (242, 244). Traill’s entire family, as well as her servant, become ill due to a perfectly threatening combination of melting snow flooding the cellar and rotting the vegetables stocked there, the fermentation of which is accelerated by heat from the stoves above in the kitchen and the parlor (242). In order to mitigate the problem, Traill realizes, the decayed vegetable matter in the cellar must be constantly cleared out (244). There is perhaps no better support in the entire book for the argument that a woman’s scientific curiosity and knowledge can improve the health of her home. Understanding nature’s material processes and their relationship to the everyday lives of people is something Traill must learn; as she repeatedly reminds her female audience, the Englishwoman has to be prepared to think differently—holistically—about her domestic realm in order for settlement to be successful.

For Traill, considerations of sick bodies, botanical bodies, and Native American bodies is a matter of domestic *and* national economy. Materiality and its bodily forms serve colonial ends in a process that takes empirical observation and construes it ideologically to make the home the epicenter of settlement. Illness, Native peoples, and plants are all politicized, but, Traill seems to realize, political theories are best supported
The Network of Femininity in Caroline Kirkland’s *A New Home, Who’ll Follow?*

From the first chapter of *A New Home*, Kirkland urges her readers to reimagine the meaning of femininity in the frontier landscape of Michigan. Through comedy, tragedy, romance, and realism, Kirkland demonstrates that womanhood is a network of materialities. The notion of domesticity as a separate, feminine sphere is represented as an illusion; in its place, Kirkland describes domesticity as a concept in which human, nonhuman, and inorganic materialities constitute and are constituted by feminine agencies. The network of materialities Kirkland illustrates is by turns troubling and comforting, turbulent and cohesive, but within it, feminine agency is an apex natural-cultural force. As Kirkland exposes and/or challenges the fallacies of social hierarchies, bourgeois propriety, and romanticized landscapes, forms of matter are revealed as the essence of womanhood.

Many major female figures in *A New Home* are constituted and defined by their relationships to material forms and their corporeality. Mary Clavers (Kirkland’s persona), Polly Doubleday, Mrs. B—, Mrs. Rivers, Amelia Newland, and Cora (Mansfield) Hastings all embody forms of agency as a result of their negotiations of their own bodies as well as other organic and inorganic bodies. Femininity and domesticity are as much matters of mud and toads as they are pregnancy and food preparation.

Analyzing the ways in which femininity and domesticity are composed of networks of materiality in *A New Home* has much to do with paying attention to what
Stacy Alaimo identifies as “trans-corporeality.” For Alaimo, trans-corporeality is a state of being and thinking “in which the human is always intermeshed with the more-than-human world,” and it emphasizes “the extent to which the substance of the human is ultimately inseparable from ‘the environment’” (2). Put another way, “trans-corporeality … insists that the human is always the very stuff of the messy, contingent, emergent mix of the material world” (Alaimo 11). The concept of trans-corporeality, particularly in Kirkland’s representations of pregnancy and illness, makes more apparent the extent to which materiality directs discourse about social expectations for women: as Kirkland demonstrates, Michigan in the 1830s is a place and time in which the norms of the metropolitan east coast are routinely subverted and exposed as fragile and insufficient for women who are trying to establish frontier lives. Such cultural turbulence occurs because these norms are incongruent with the materialities women engage with and are cognizant of in Michigan. Feminine agency in *A New Home* is construed as the recognition of the female body’s trans-corporeality, for better or worse.

The kind of trans-corporeality Kirkland represents with the female body should be viewed through the lens of what Latour identifies as natures-cultures. In *A New Home*, female bodies can be understood as natures-cultures because they function as networks in which nature and culture are mutually constitutive: the material, biological, and physical being of the female body exists in the cultural, psychological, and conscious purview of human constructs—and vice versa. Both conditions are always entangled. The same argument could be made for any body in *A New Home*, but Kirkland shows female human bodies as particularly exemplary because, in her view, life in frontier Michigan is more psychologically and physically demanding for women than for anyone or anything
else, particularly for emigrants like Clavers (146): in the dissolution of cultural norms and class distinctions that are viewed as so ingrained back East, the agencies of nonhuman nature become more recognizably pervasive and, in some cases, invasive. Certainly the East is comprised of other natures-cultures, but the illusion of modernity makes the existence of natures-cultures and trans-corporeality less obvious.

As early as “Chapter I,” Kirkland juxtaposes supposedly disparate natural and cultural elements in order to establish them as mutually constitutive, emphasizing their effects on the body-psyche of the natural-cultural woman in the process. Flowers and mud holes are aesthetic opposites, but they are both presented as material matters of course. “The wildflowers of Michigan deserve a poet of their own,” and for this reason it is worth risking mud holes in order to pick them, but the adjacent discussion of mud holes is much more extensive, and when Clavers and her husband fall victim to one, they are covered “with hieroglyphics, which would be readily decyphered by any Wolverine we should meet, though perchance strange to the eyes of our friends at home” (5-6, 8). Mud holes are as culturally and naturally significant, perhaps more so, than wildflowers in Michigan: they produce material circumstances and consequences, but they also produce narratives for those familiar with them. Residence in the Michigan landscape predicates the ability to read mud hole hieroglyphics. Clavers’s body is the trans-corporeal site of natural-cultural meaning.

Situated within the mud hole-wildflowers scenes is a juxtaposition in which two human manifestations of natures-cultures, a French woodsman and the “master” of an inn, problematize conceptions of “wild” and “civilized.” The Frenchman, “as wild and rough a specimen of humanity as one would wish to encounter in a strange and lonely
road,” turns out to be a model of civility in expertly helping the Claverses cross a large mud hole, “declining any compensation with a most polite ‘rien, rien!’” (6-7). Clavers documents this act of generosity “for the benefit of all bearskin caps, leathern jerkins and cowhide boots, which ladies from the eastward world may hereafter encounter in Michigan” (7). In the next paragraph, the master of “a wretched inn, deep in the ‘timbered land’” whose “horrible drunkenness” and “insane fury” causes his wife and children to be “in constant fear of their lives” (7) is clearly intended as a foil for the Frenchman. Clavers is struck by the ague-worn figure of the drunk’s nameless wife: “I can never forget the countenance of that desolate woman, sitting trembling and with white, compressed lips in the midst of her children” (7). She is haunted by the woman’s story—one of prosperity in Connecticut degenerating into her current situation—a story that ends (in the book, at least) with a juxtaposition of justice and tragedy: Clavers soon hears of the husband “in prison in Detroit, for stabbing a neighbour in a drunken brawl, and ere the year was out he died of delirium tremens, leaving his family destitute. So much for turning our fields of golden grain into ‘fire water’—a branch of business in which Michigan is fast improving” (7). At a very basic level, each anecdote is about the female subjects who enjoy or suffer the consequences of a productive or destructive nature-culture (knowledge of the land yielding human compassion versus using the land as a resource to fuel devastating alcoholism). Admittedly, in these scenarios, women are represented as rather passive, at the mercy of the abilities and attitudes of the men around them. But these are early vignettes, introductory instruction about the range of experiences possible for women (and men) in Michigan. As A New Home progresses, and as Clavers develops a better understanding of her surroundings and its inhabitants, the
agency of women becomes more complex, more comical, more tragic, and more trans-corporeal.

Annette Kolodny, Sandra A. Zagarell, and Brigitte Georgi-Findlay have all commented on Kirkland’s desire to present Michigan in a truthful manner, and my argument about the materiality of domesticity, trans-corporeality, and natures-cultures as comprising womanhood in *A New Home* is conversant with but diverts from all three analyses of Kirkland’s realism. Kirkland herself is forthcoming regarding the misleading, romanticized representations of Michigan and the West in works by Charles Fenno Hoffman and James Hall (6). *A New Home* is set against such inaccuracies as “very nearly … an unimpeachable transcript of reality,” “very nearly” because, while the “unnatural” and “incredible” portions of the narrative are nothing short of fact, it is “the most commonplace parts” that have received some embellishment (1), for satirical and dramatic effect one supposes. Kolodny argues that while Kirkland is interested in mitigating the disappointment of future women settlers through realism (134), she also psychoanalytically interprets *A New Home* as Kirkland’s fantasy of an “incipient Eden” that does not achieve the romanticized ideal, but nonetheless offers the frontier as a potential site of gratification for future “Eves” with the right cultural, aesthetic, and domestic expectations (135-48). Kolodny is right to view *A New Home* as both a cultural and physical negotiation of a frontier space, but her focus on the notion of fantasy—“the process of projecting resonant symbolic contents onto otherwise unknown terrains” (xii)—looks past the extent to which Kirkland presents women as materially entangled entities in a landscape where cultural expectations and social order prove tenuous at best.
Sandra A. Zagarell, in her introduction to *A New Home*, focuses on Clavers’s preoccupation with community building, which Zagarell characterizes as Clavers’s sense of a need for social order in a frontier society plagued by flux and turbulence (xxxi). Zagarell cites Clavers’s corrective attitude toward “Romantic-based literature about the West: the actual frontier, seldom sublime and often filled with physical discomfort, is rendered in a literal language that ironizes her European and East-Coast American mentality,” but proceeds to observe the ways in which Clavers uses both “demotic” and “genteel” poetic language to satirically document the process of her adjustment to a “strange landscape” (xxxii-iii). Unlike Zagarell, I emphasize the entanglement of that “strange landscape,” the human community, and language in order to show how materiality constitutes and connects these three elements in Kirkland’s representation of frontier womanhood. Clavers demonstrates the primacy of materiality as she experiences ravenous hunger while riding through the “softest and stillest of spring atmospheres, the crimson rays yet prevailing, and giving an opal changefulness of hue to the half-opened leaves … but,” she maintains, “alas! who can be sentimental and hungry?” (15) The immediate, visceral reality of hunger renders genteel sensibility ridiculous by comparison; corporeal necessities trivialize picturesque discourse.

Brigitte Georgi-Findlay’s analysis of *A New Home* is predicated on her assumption that “Kirkland had focused on the West as a social space” (37), and while this assumption is true, it is also reductive. “Kirkland’s West is a social space in which different classes of settlers interact,” Georgi-Findlay observes, “and power relations, based on differences of class and gender, are set in motion. Class-based definitions of womanhood and standards of domesticity—the establishment of a middle-class home in
the West—form the centers around which these power relations evolve” (29). And yet, Georgi-Findlay recognizes that there is an equalizer in the midst of these power relations: “The appreciation of beauty and nature, Kirkland suggests, is neither universal nor specifically gendered, but conditioned by a particular kind of education open to all classes” (35). Human politics, then, can be mitigated by appreciating nature, suggesting that Michigan is much more than merely a “social space” for Kirkland. In my view, Kirkland’s “appreciation of nature” is less about the discourse of education and more about the immanence of nature itself which, Kirkland seems to realize, everyone is inextricably entangled with.

As is the case with Traill, the entanglement with nature Kirkland documents consists in part of the ravages of illness. Just days after Clavers’s visitor, Fanny, kills a rattlesnake in the Claverses’ back yard, Clavers and company are enjoying the flight of game birds against the backdrop of a beautiful sunset, but as it gets late, Clavers retires inside, where she steps on what she believes is a snake and faints (59-60). When she regains consciousness, she is informed by her daughter that she has actually stepped on the toad that, unbeknownst to Clavers, “always sits behind the flour-barrel in the corner” (60). The next morning, Clavers is laid low with ague, though she insists her illness is due to the toad; in his effort to keep the domestic ship afloat, Mr. Clavers is rendered a buffoon: “the hot side of the bowl always would come to his fingers—and the sauce-pan would overset, let him balance it ever so nicely. And then—such hungry children!” (61). Mr. Clavers also succumbs to ague, and over the next several weeks, just when they think they have recovered, “did the insidious enemy renew his attacks” (62). The situation extends far beyond the Claverses though: “My neighbours showed but little
sympathy on the occasion. They had imbibed the idea that we held ourselves above them, and chose to take it for granted, that we did not need their aid. There were a good many cases of ague too, and, of course, people had their own troubles to attend to” (61). Notice the manner in which Clavers attributes the community’s abandonment of her family to a social cause when, in reality, the cause is very environmental and material: the entire town has been stricken with ague; the neglect is not personal. The vanity displayed here is intended to be just as ridiculous as blaming her illness on a toad. Fortunately, a handful of doctors are able to treat the sick, even though there is much prejudice against “Doctor’s physic,” while Lobelia, and other poisonous plants, which happen to grow wild in the woods are used with the most reckless rashness. The opinion that each region produces the medicines which its own diseases require, prevails extensively,—a notion which, though perhaps theoretically correct to a certain extent, is a most dangerous one for the ignorant to practice upon (62).

To some degree, this passage resonates with Georgi-Findlay’s observation that for Kirkland, education is a pathway to a more enlightened and cohesive culture. What is really at stake, however, is the trans-corporeal body’s dependence on a range of environmental materials for health. Somewhere between modern and folk medicines, the human immune system’s susceptibility to ague is mediated: the knowledge of one’s habitat’s materiality, and the materiality of the human body, is crucial. Additionally, productive domesticity collapses when illness incapacitates women. The sphere of the home is actually a network of materialities, the agencies of which can be harmful or helpful.
The network of materialities comprising domesticity also consists of a sub-network of object borrowing. The communal nature of this practice, however, is as annoying as it is risky. Clavers notes that one woman’s kitchen utensils are as much her neighbors’ as they are her own, “but bedsteads, beds, blankets, sheets, travel from house to house, a pleasant and effectual mode of securing the perpetuity of certain efflorescent peculiarities of the skin” (67). Lending as a cause of skin disease highlights the (troubling) trans-corporeality of Michigan living, and lending in general suggests what we might call the trans-oeconomia of frontier settlements. “Sieves, smoothing irons, and churns run about as if they had legs,” Clavers complains in a suggestive, personifying simile, while “one brass kettle is enough for a whole neighbourhood; and I could point to a cradle which has rocked half the babes in Montacute” (68). Clavers goes on, “For my own part, I have lent my broom, my thread, my tape, my spoons, my cat, my thimble, my scissors, my shawl, my shoes; and I have been asked for my combs and brushes: and my husband, for his shaving apparatus and his pantaloons” (68). It is worth noting that Clavers says she has “been asked for” instruments of her toilet, not that she actually lent them: perhaps the borrowing line is drawn at the very private and materially intimate coiffure. Given that sharing linens spreads skin diseases, one can only imagine the extent to which lice and the like might proliferate. Also, Mr. Clavers is probably wise in avoiding the potential contamination of his razors by foreign blood borne pathogens.

The pervasiveness of borrowing offends fellow Montacutian Polly Doubleday through a disregard of the sanctity of motherhood. Prior to the birth of her first child, Polly is represented as a rather tyrannical and severe wife, but her new baby causes Clavers to observe “the softened aspect, the womanized tone of the proud and happy
mother. I never saw a being so completely transformed. She would almost forget to answer me in her absorbed watching of the breath of the little sleeper. Even when trying to be polite, and to say what the occasion demanded, her eyes would not be withdrawn from the tiny face” (69-71). Certainly pregnancy can cause profound hormonal alterations in women, functioning as an example of materiality so powerfully agential that it changes the very consciousness of mothers. The scene changes dramatically with the entrance of Ianthe Howard, a little girl whose mother is constantly and quite rudely sending her all over Montacute on borrowing missions. Ianthe informs Clavers and Polly “that her mother ‘wanted Miss Doubleday to let her have her baby for a little while, ‘cause Benny’s mouth’s so sore that’—“ but Polly cuts her off in understandable incredulity: “‘LEND MY BABY!!!’” is all she is able to say before “Ianthe wisely disappeared” (71-2). Fortunately for Mrs. Howard and her painfully full breasts, Clavers is able to lend her a “glass-tube … which,” predictably, “frail as it is, threaded the country for miles in all directions” (72). Polly Doubleday understandably refuses to release her baby into the trans-oeconomia network, but the glass-tube is a sufficient, non-vital substitute. This story is, of course, humorous first and foremost, but it is also a telling representation of the ways in which women struggle to manage materialities and the extent to which they are constituted by them.

In addition to the trans-oeconomia and trans-corporeality of borrowing, another theme that persists in A New Home is that of lovely appearances shielding less savory realities, foreshadowed early on in the wildflowers-mud holes example. The remote home of “Mr. and Mrs. B—“ and their children is stumbled upon by the Claverses during a joy ride through the country. Clavers is immediately struck by the picturesque excellence of
the property, with a nearby “silver mirror” of a lake, the log house “embowered in oaks,” an “expanse before the house” that “looked like a smooth-shaven lawn,” the rays of “sunset” that “fell on beds of flowers of every hue,” the “narrow windows” of the house with “curtains of French muslin,” and to top it all off, “on a rustic seat near the door lay a Spanish guitar, with its broad scarf of blue silk” (74). The charm is manifest in objects within the home as well, where Clavers discovers a harp, French chintz, “a fowling-piece over the chimney,” and “fossil specimens, mosses, vases of flowers, books, pictures, and music” all piled on “a French pier-table” (74). In the traditional picturesque ideal, the creators and appreciators of the picturesque view and home reflect the moral and aesthetic refinement suggested by their taste for landscapes and the dwellings upon them, but this is not the case with Mr. and Mrs. B—. “Pride and passion, and reckless self-indulgence” are evident in the face of Mr. B—, “and fierce discontent and determined indolence”: in his hands there are “no marks of labour,” and “certain indications of excessive carelessness [are] discernable in his dress and person” (75). Clavers later discovers that Mr. B— never had any other intention than leisure and living off his inheritance when he emigrated from the east coast to Michigan (76-7). As for Mrs. B—, she makes her entrance “in an undress, but with very ladylike grace of manner, and the step of a queen. Her face, which bore the traces of beauty, struck me as one of the most melancholy I had ever seen; and it was over-spread with a sort of painful flush, which did not conceal its habitual paleness” (75). Clavers finds out that Mrs. B— is the only provider of what few comforts her family enjoys. The house’s cupboards and pantries are empty, and though Mrs. B— strives to uphold the appearance of luxury before her distant neighbors, she “had brought up five children on little else beside Indian meal and
potatoes; and at one time the neighbours had known the whole family live for weeks
upon bread and tea without sugar or milk;—Mr. B— sitting in the house smoking cigars,
and playing the flute, as much of a gentleman as ever” (77). One is compelled to suspect
that “the painful flush” on Mrs. B—‘s face is due to embarrassment, her knowledge that
Clavers has seen through the picturesque façade into what is essentially a domestic
disaster. The presence of five children and the absence of food suggest the extent to
which Mrs. B— is little more than an object for her husband: it is easy to imagine that her
“melancholy” is due in part to Mr. B—‘s sexual “self-indulgence” and his “indolence”
when it comes to both sustenance and his wife’s emotional wellbeing. Yet, it is Mrs. B—
who bears the burden of shame, nearly destitute of the basic necessities for survival
behind a picturesque projection of moral and pecuniary stability. Despite her challenges,
Mrs. B— has “allow[ed] her neighbours to disc over that she considered them far beneath
her” (77), which represents an attempt to isolate herself from the trans-oeconomia
network on which so many other Michigan households depend. The repercussions of this
isolation are exacerbated by her husband’s refusal to engage with his land in a resourceful
manner.

The crucial importance of acknowledging and participating in Montacute’s
feminine network is the greatest lesson Clavers teaches Mrs. Rivers, who, along with her
husband, are new arrivals in the area bearing similar class status as the Claverses. But
Mrs. Rivers, green as she is to a frontier life, is as much the brunt of Clavers’s jokes as
Clavers is herself. Mrs. Rivers is utterly terrified the first time she sees a Native
American (85), and she needs careful instruction about how to navigate the new social
space she has entered (65). Both Clavers and Rivers struggle with the belief that they are
above their neighbors in terms of bourgeois domesticity and polite learning, but
“however we may justify certain exclusive habits in populous places,” Clavers admits,
“they are strikingly and confessedly ridiculous in the wilderness. What can be more
absurd than a feeling of proud distinction, where a stray spark of fire, a sudden illness, or
a day’s contre-temps, may throw you entirely upon the kindness of your humblest
neighbour?” (65) Clavers demonstrates that hierarchical cultural distinctions can only
exist in places thought to be at a remove from the immanence of nature and the
precarious necessity of constant work and vigilance. Where the materialities of the
landscape and the body must be more readily acknowledged, the discourse of class
distinction becomes a joke. Womanhood and domesticity are more dependent, in this
instance, on environmental concerns than cultural concerns; put another way, Clavers
suggests here that culture is determined by material environment.

The human body, it is important to remember, is an environment too, especially in
the sense that its materiality conditions cultural responses to it. This point is made evident
by Clavers’s discussion of Amelia Newland. As a sort of counterpoint to the B— family,
the Newlands project poverty in order to take advantage of their neighbors’ assistance
and hide the evidence of their economic security (108-9). As the oldest daughter, Amelia
is particularly spoiled: among the surprises when the Claverses unexpectedly drop in on a
Christmas celebration at the Newland house is the extravagant habiliment of Amelia,
who, Clavers reports, “had lived with me at one time, had been lately at a hotel in a large
village at some distance, and had returned but a short time before, not improved either in
manners or reputation” (109). Two months later, Clavers is even more shocked to hear
that Amelia is dying, but Amelia is already dead by the time Clavers arrives in an effort
to help and sees a body “quite different from that of any corpse I had ever viewed before” (110). No one is able to communicate the cause of death, but Amelia’s mother is extremely defensive when Clavers states that she was unaware of any illness in Amelia: “‘What,’” Mrs. Newland exclaims, “‘you’ve heard their lies too, have ye!’” (110).

Clavers goes on, “Rumour was busy as usual; and I have been assured by those who ought to have warrant for their assertions, that this was but one fatal instance out of the many cases, wherein life was periled in the desperate effort to elude the ‘slow unmoving finger’ of public scorn” (110-1). Having not improved in “reputation” during her absence, Amelia has become pregnant out of wedlock and is the victim of a botched abortion. The tragedy, of course, is culturally induced: cultural norms of morality prompt the attempted elimination and concealment of the biological, material realities of sex and pregnancy. Ironically and sadly, Amelia’s death exposes the truth of culture’s failure to effectively mediate nature.

Much as it does for Polly Doubleday and Amelia Newland, pregnancy and the concept of motherhood radically changes Cora Hastings’s constitution, physically and mentally, reflecting the extent to which the body and consciousness are intertwined. In Michigan, Cora and Everard Hastings are living the picturesque ideal. Everard is the epitome of the American Woodsman, a handsome, skilled, and cultured sportsman, while Cora represents the perfect combination of beauty, practicality, and sophistication (151-3). Their log home, inside and out, is the perfect compliment to the picturesque landscape in which it sits (151-2). But things were not always so flawless for Cora and Everard.

As teenagers in New York’s refined society, Clavers discovers, Cora Mansfield and Everard Hastings were dreamers who envisioned realizing the romantic ideal they
encountered in pastoral literature, especially Cora, who “was even more deeply tinged with romance than Everard himself. She lived entirely in an ideal world” of the mind and imagination (153, 155-6). Quite naturally, the two run away together in pursuit of the perfect picturesque landscape in which to live an idyllic life together, but all too soon, the heretofore-inconsequential details of money and food become vulgar obstacles (160). Nonetheless, in southwestern New York State, with the baffled permission of a kindly innkeeper who doesn’t understand their idealism, Everard builds a house on a “rocky, and glenny, and streamy” piece of land, “just the very place for a forest-home for a pair who had set out to live on other people’s thoughts” (164-166, 161). However, boredom, winter and its “deep, tenacious, hopeless mud,” and a lack of communication from their respective families back in New York begin to take their toll on the young unmarried idealists: “But now a new interest arose. The prospect of becoming a mother awakened at once the most intense delight and terror amounting almost to agony,” and Cora finally caves and writes to her mother (166). The daughter is born in the spring, but the baby, as well as Everard, becomes ill; when a caretaker tells Cora that the baby is going to die, Cora collapses, believing she is being punished for all her transgressions (167). When Cora recovers, her forgiving parents are there, and her daughter is recovering; over the next few weeks, “Cora was a new creature, a rational being, a mother, a matron, full of sorrow for the past and of sage plans for the future” (168-9). Soon, however, the family fortunes that had sustained Cora and Everard diminish and are replaced by losses, and Cora’s father suggests the young family move out to his lands in Michigan, where “with a fine large fertile tract, managed by a practical farmer and his family, [the Hastings
family] find it possible to exist, and are, I had almost said the happiest people of my acquaintance” (169).

The story of Cora and Everard is essentially one about transformation and agency. Cora’s transformation hinges on the realization that the romantic ideal is about much more than appreciating the picturesque; it is also about negotiating economic flux, the mutability of landscapes, and embracing the realities of femininity and motherhood. The latter, I would argue, has the most profound influence on Cora: one can hardly conceive of a more efficient corrective for a fanciful, immature imagination than the very visceral experiences of pregnancy and motherhood, along with the practicality these experiences require. Once Cora’s world is transformed from an idealist to a more corporeal and thus “rational” one, the picturesque ideal ironically becomes more accessible (in Michigan).

The Hastings tale, however, remains cautionary: Cora and Everard have a history of wealth in their favor; they are even able to assign the agricultural labor required in Michigan to “a practical farmer and his family.” Still, that the land must be worked—not simply gazed upon idyllically—is further confirmation of the materialities undergirding the Michigan pastoral life Cora and Everard have developed. In the process of achieving a version of her pastoral dream, Cora has discovered that her femininity could not develop in idealized isolation and imagination, but depends very much on a network of motherhood, family, and informed conception of place.

In *A New Home*, Clavers and the women she describes should be viewed as agential beings in trans-corporeal, trans-oeconomical, and material networks that condition, resist, and problematize cultural discourses. In these networks, domesticity becomes not a sphere unto itself, but rather a product of networks encompassing human
and nonhuman agencies, bodies, subjects, and objects. Essential to domesticity are complex perceptions and representations of pregnancy, sustenance, illness, and landscapes. Montacute is a nature-culture, but so too, for example, are Mary Clavers’s kitchen, Amelia Newland’s body, and the “glass-tube” that circulates amongst the women in and around Montacute. In the feminine threads Kirkland follows and documents through various natures-cultures, it is possible to see the ways in which she envisions womanhood as concerned with much more than class and society.

The 1998 issue of *American Literature* containing Amy Kaplan’s “Manifest Domesticity” (cited herein) is titled “No More Separate Spheres!,” a critical reveille that resonates nearly two decades later and finds a methodological response in this chapter. My readings of Traill and Kirkland are intended to emphasize the extent to which nineteenth-century domesticity, and the womanhood it is so often aligned with, is a concept that should be understood in terms of the dynamic networks that constituted it, rather than as a theoretical category associated with the insular, private human home. When the trappings of long-established cultural paradigms are dissolved as they are in Ontario and Michigan in the 1830s, it becomes especially evident that domesticity is a system of natures-cultures; almost two hundred years later, we are able to witness the very formation of those natures-cultures as Traill and Kirkland perceived them.

There is no denying that Traill and Kirkland are both deeply preoccupied with class, yet they both recognize the extent to which it is contrived and tenuous. It is no surprise that they both turn their attention toward various materialities in order to understand other ways in which domesticity might be construed. After all, in their rather
privileged understandings, domesticity was something class-based, a marker of culture and status. “How,” they both implicitly ask themselves, “are we to carry out the project of domesticity in a place where what we know as ‘culture’ is nascent at best?” For Traill, a holistic view of organic bodies was at the heart of domesticity; for Kirkland, it was an elaborate network of exchanges. For Traill, natural history—particularly botany—was paramount; for Kirkland, the focus centered on the spaces between dualities like health and sickness, appearance and reality, happiness and sadness, life and death, nature and culture.

Notably, domesticity is a network both authors view as characterized by subversive potential. Whereas Traill adheres to convention regarding the sexualizing of Native American bodies and desexualizing her own, her botany challenges status quo in claiming feminine authority. And whereas Kirkland persistently reminds readers there is a cultivated, civilized, bourgeois way of running a household, her candid discussions of topics like breastfeeding and abortion feel rebellious and irreverent. But as Traill and Kirkland knew all too well, such liberties were possible in large measure because of location: the Great Lakes offered Traill and Kirkland the opportunity to do new things and create new knowledge because it was a region still largely beyond the bounds of European and American cultural norms and expectations. Nineteenth-century Great Lakes domesticity is ultimately about the ways women reimagined their agential capacities where the materiality of their existence was so much more immediate; however, it is also about the ways in which materiality made the struggles of daily life much more apparent. In either case, we are able to see the extent to which women in the
Great Lakes viewed “the home” as extending far beyond four walls and a garden out across the landscape and into the bodies occupying it.
CHAPTER 3—GEOLOGY, WATER, FEAR, AND WONDER: THE GREAT LAKES
NATURAL HISTORY OF SCHOOLCRAFT, CABOT, AND AGASSIZ

For much of the early national and antebellum periods, the Great Lakes were considered a frontier, a liminal stage for the political and ecological changes wrought by Euro-American settlement. Mineralogist, geologist, and ethnographer Henry Rowe Schoolcraft was one of several naturalists whose explorations were conducted in the interest of US expansion. By contrast, naturalist Louis Agassiz, along with his assistant J. Elliot Cabot, travelled Lake Superior in large measure to gather evidence for his theory of glaciation, motivated more explicitly by scientific inquiry than a nationalist agenda. For all three of these writers, however, the materiality of the region was the source of human agency broadly construed: whether they were contemplating the possibilities of a Euro-American future, the moral and cultural conditions of Native peoples, or their own places in the worlds of science and history, agency was determined by engagement with physical nature. This engagement represents what Karen Barad has identified as “‘intra-action,” denoting ‘the mutual constitution of entangled agencies’” (qtd. in Iovino 453). The term “constitution” is significant in that it expresses the contingency of intra-action and materiality in general. Change in physical nature is the primary condition Schoolcraft, Cabot, and Agassiz confronted and interpreted, and scientific theories as well as aesthetic theories inform their interpretations.

The writings of Schoolcraft and Agassiz reflect an aesthetic turn in antebellum natural history writing, a turn in which sublimity and picturesque qualities go from being produced by aesthetic objects (as in Schoolcraft) to being produced by natural systems (as in Agassiz). In Schoolcraft’s Narrative Journal of Travels Through the Northwestern
Regions of the United States extending from Detroit through the Great Chain of American Lakes to the Sources of the Mississippi River in the Year 1820 (1821; hereafter Narrative Journal of Travels), materiality is interpreted through theories of the picturesque and the sublime that originate in British Romanticism and are employed in conjunction with distinctly American conceptions of these discourses. Elizabeth A. Bohls observes that in Britain, “Land shaped by people and serving their needs through agriculture, or even industry, is not the stuff of picturesque description,” since “[a]esthetic discourse about the land both assumes and reinforces the status of land as the foundation of sociopolitical power” (95, 85). At times, Schoolcraft labels nonhuman scenery as picturesque as a demonstration of his gentlemanly sensibilities, but instead of always disinterestedly excluding humans and their toil from the aesthetic landscape, Schoolcraft also articulates the American picturesque: as Rochelle L. Johnson observes, “a passion for nature was a passion for progress … conjoin[ing] landscape depiction with the nation’s need for reassurances about what America might become,” so that “in the United States, the picturesque was nearly formulaic in its depiction of landscape scenes that also evinced evidence of thriving, rural settlements” (79, 72).

Schoolcraft also employs the British Romantic topos of the ruin in order to organize his perceptions of geological formations. Bohls argues that the ruin in Britain came to embody a convergence of the picturesque and the Burkean sublime (99); this convergence is visible in Schoolcraft, but Schoolcraft’s method of intellectually overcoming awe and fear is to abstractly defer to a future of American progress. Toward arguing “Romanticism and geology spring from a common source, landscape aesthetics,” Noah Heringman shows that the works of Percy Shelley and geologist William Smith
“expand the scope and utility of a rapidly accumulating body of geological knowledge, linking it to existing notions of social and economic progress” (xv, 163), an observation reflecting transatlantic implications as applied to my reading of Schoolcraft. Johnson devotes a chapter of Passions for Nature to “the metaphor of progress” in order to support her larger argument concerning alienation from nature as produced by aesthetics, convincingly demonstrating the pervasiveness of this effect in nineteenth-century American literature. My reading of Schoolcraft, however, reveals that although the consequence of aesthetics might be alienation, geological inquiry frequently serves as a strategy of reorienting consciousness toward nature while nonetheless privileging American progress.

If Schoolcraft represents a period in American natural history in which naturalists privileged what Andrew J. Lewis identifies as the “democracy of facts” over the perceived European penchant for “system building” based too much on theory and not enough on empirical observation,5 Agassiz is representative of American natural historians’ willingness to use empiricism as a means toward a systematizing end. Lewis observes that the 1840s saw the beginning of a period of professionalization and disciplinary divisions in American natural history, setting the stage for natural history’s transformation into modern science (154). Laura Dassow Walls identifies Agassiz’s approach to understanding the natural world as “rational holism,” which “conceived the mechanico-organic whole as a divine or transcendent unity fully comprehended only through thought” (4).6 While Agassiz reflects the crucial role of empiricism in rational holism, Cabot’s narrative is more indicative of the importance of aesthetic perception in
rational holism’s negotiation of the American sublime. Together, the two men’s writing documents an entanglement with materiality that is the source of human agency.

Natural history never was objective, and it is not in the texts discussed in this chapter, but that is precisely what makes material ecocritical consideration of the work of Schoolcraft, Cabot, and Agassiz so illuminating. As all three search for empirical evidence of the law or process that governs physical change on earth, the Great Lakes nature they examine compels them each to think very differently about the entanglements that constitute the natural world, and how they view their own places in those entanglements. This analysis is intended to show the ways in which the materiality of nature emphasizes the central, defining characteristic of natural history itself, for natural history is a field of inquiry in which nature demands political and emotional responses from people who make it their ostensible mission to empirically study nature’s ways.

The Problem of Change in Schoolcraft’s *Narrative Journal of Travels*

Regarding Schoolcraft and earlier naturalists such as John Bartram, Richard W. Judd notes that “[t]he story” they read into the American landscape was a beginning point for American natural history: nature was not static and timeless but rather dynamic and directed. Geology underscored the nation’s strength and the spiritual value embedded in … uncultivated landscapes [like Niagara Falls and the Appalachians], setting the scene for a Romantic reinterpretation of nature at the middle of the century (132).
While it is certainly reasonable to see in *Narrative Journal of Travels* the Romantic impetus toward American nature, I would argue that the manner in which geology relates to national interests for Schoolcraft does not have to do with “the spiritual value embedded in … uncultivated landscapes,” but rather the *moral* value that can be infused into “uncultivated landscapes” through American settlement. Furthermore, Schoolcraft is not as celebratory regarding nature’s dynamism as Judd’s observation might suggest: a key element that makes Schoolcraft’s natural history Romantic is the *problem* that material contingency in nature poses for nationalist claims to knowledge and resource potential, a problem Schoolcraft negotiates through aesthetic principles. *Narrative Journal of Travels* is the record of Schoolcraft’s effort to regulate Great Lakes nature through a project that defers to geology when aesthetics is unsettling, and likewise defers to the future when the past is illegible. Ultimately, aesthetic principles are the means by which Schoolcraft views science as a path toward an expansionist future.

En route from New York City to Detroit, Schoolcraft passes through territory once occupied by the Haudenosaunee, and doing so prompts his first philosophical considerations of physical change in the landscape. Between Albany and Utica, Schoolcraft comments approvingly on the area’s Euro-American cultivation with a historical caveat: “while [the features of the landscape] experience the most striking physical revolutions, [they] preserve a moral character, which no change can obliterate; and we cannot pass through the country formerly possessed by the Mohawks, without recurring to the savage cruelties and murders, the battles, and ambuscades, of which it was so long the conspicuous theatre” (*Narrative* 36). Memory of human history transcends the physical changes that would otherwise relegate such history to obscurity,
and as an aesthetic subject, Schoolcraft has an obligation to contemplate the “moral character” of the land. In other words, the current materiality of this landscape must be conceptually overcome in order to access its full aesthetic value via history. As Rochelle Johnson observes of Archibald Alison’s directives on taste—which Schoolcraft seems to follow here—“The truth of nature … does not reside in its physicality, but lies in the human capacity for association” (123).

Alternatively, the cultivated landscape between Utica and Geneva reflects remarkable “progress” that has occurred in just forty years of American settlement, a timespan that “has already rendered it difficult to distinguish between those tumuli, ancient fortifications, and other antiquities which owe their origin to an anterior race of inhabitants, and those marks of occupation left by the Iroquois, or attributable to the French” (39). Here, Schoolcraft articulates the popular contemporary theory that pre-contact structural evidence of advanced civilization could not be the work of ancient ancestors of current Native peoples, and physical change of the land has made ancient American history even more mysterious and illegible. Clearly, there is a limit to the imagination’s ability to access the moral character of history the deeper the past becomes. This limitation, for Schoolcraft, however, is not as aesthetically significant as the inevitable, morally sanctioned progress of American settlement.

The observations noted between Albany and Geneva directly precede Schoolcraft’s arrival at Niagara Falls, where his aesthetic sensibilities shift from emphasizing the elusive moral-historical character of the landscape toward the picturesque and sublime impressions provided by the falls. Observed from “the Island of the Iris” in the middle of the river, the falls offer “beautiful and picturesque” views, “but
it is here that the tremulous motion of the earth, the clouds of iridescent spray, the broken column of falling water, the stunning sound, the lofty banks of the river, and the wide spreading ruin of rocks, imprint a character of wonder and terror upon the scene” (42-3).

The traditional rules of aesthetics as determined by Burke and others might prompt criticism of Schoolcraft’s judgment, as he describes the same scene as both “beautiful” and characterized by “terror”—while also incorporating the picturesque “ruin of rocks,” thus infusing melancholy into an already seemingly contradictory description—but it is also possible that Schoolcraft is implying Niagara’s incompatibility with established aesthetic criteria.7 Indeed, Schoolcraft admits he was “something like” disappointed in leaving the falls, in large measure because “every thing I had previously read, had failed to create” the “impression of the scene” developed in person (43). Elizabeth McKinsey notes that the type of reaction Schoolcraft had was not uncommon during the period (189-90), but Schoolcraft goes so far as to challenge Oliver Goldsmith by asserting that ducks do not in fact commit suicide by plunging over the falls (43).

As Niagara reflects multiple aesthetic categories but fits neatly into none, Schoolcraft resorts to geology to regain his aesthetic bearings. He suggests that if the falls transcend aesthetic definition in their current state, perhaps they can be better understood with an investigation of their history, though such an understanding is by no means definitive. Schoolcraft employs Wernerian, or Neptunist, geological theory when he asserts the water’s gradual power to effect geological change. After a Neptunist-oriented description of the region’s strata, Schoolcraft states,

> Nothing in the examination of the geological constitution, and mineral strata of our continent, conveys a more striking illustration of its remote
antiquity, (still doubted by many) than a consideration of the time, it must have required for the waters of Niagara, to have worn their channel, for such an immense distance, through the rock. It is true, we are in possession of no certain data, for estimating the annual rate of their progress, or for comparing the results with the Mosaic history of the earth. All that can be presumed is, that this progress, is now as rapid, as it was in former ages (47).

Schoolcraft looks to deep time in estimating the geological age of North America, but he is not prepared to argue against a biblical timeline for the earth’s existence. His resistance toward a theoretical commitment reflects Andrew J. Lewis’s point that early national naturalists “disdained systematic thinking and theory” because many felt that “European closet philosophers” were “system builders” who drew “definitive conclusions prematurely from insufficient facts” through “rigidly hierarchical natural history practices”: early American naturalists privileged the “democracy of facts” instead (11, 15). Schoolcraft does confidently presume, however, that the types of geological changes for which water is responsible have been happening for a long time, and the same types of changes are happening now, thus offering a “striking” conception of “remote antiquity” as startlingly accessible. Schoolcraft goes on to propose a method of measuring the rate of Niagara Falls’ recession and then asserts, “Distant ages would thus be furnished with data, the precision of which, would probably enable them to throw new and important lights on the history of the earth, and the changes it has undergone. Is this suggestion of too visionary a nature, to merit the consideration of geological societies?” (48). Schoolcraft is concerned about his suggestion being “too visionary” because, as
Mentor L. Williams points out, proof of Niagara’s recession was feared because it could call into question the veracity of Genesis (Narrative 48 n.28). Such theoretically ambivalent comments function as a motif throughout the rest of Schoolcraft’s Narrative, underlying his strategy of investigating the changes of the geological past with an eye toward the American future.

Schoolcraft’s natural history is without question guided by colonialism, which is part and parcel of his aesthetic sensibilities, his conception of materiality, and the manner in which he construes human agency—of Americans, of Native peoples, and of himself. His discussion of the “White Rock” on the west shore of Lake Huron offers a notable illustration of these colonialist sensibilities. This “enormous detached mass of transition limestone” is a welcome novelty on a shoreline presenting “little diversity in [its] natural appearances”; Schoolcraft pauses to acknowledge in a footnote that the term “transition” has fallen out of geological favor, but he insists that the term is the most geologically accurate for describing the anomaly while admitting that he cannot conclusively conceive of how the White Rock was “transported into a region, to which it appears foreign” (66-7). The empirical limits of his inquiry prompt an ethnographic departure. He reports that Native people make offerings at the White Rock, but insists, “In the true acceptation of the term, the Indians have no religion,” and proceeds to offer a reductive and disparaging portrait of Native spiritual beliefs and practices (67-9). This derision results in a theory regarding the corrupting attractiveness of Catholicism—“striking as it has always appeared to the illiterate and vulgar, by its splendid ceremonies and external signs”—as introduced to Native people by French Jesuits (69). But Schoolcraft has a proposal: “It is necessary that letters, arts, and religion should go hand in hand. It is probable, also, that a
pler and more familiar mode of explanation than that commonly practiced in refined
society, would be found productive of its advantages, at least, in the commencement of
moral and religious instruction” (70). Once again, when the geological past is obscure,
Schoolcraft resorts to the American future, a future in which Indians will be taught
“letters, arts, and religion” by Protestants who realize the supposed intellectual
limitations of Native peoples. The White Rock, an aesthetic anomaly in terms of its
physical location and a mystery in terms of the geological changes that occasioned its
situation, becomes the catalyst for envisioning an American future in which Indians are
mercifully rescued from the clutches of damnation and ignorance. Geological materiality
may sometimes have an enigmatic past, but the American future does not appear so
uncertain. Schoolcraft’s confident futurism is seemingly validated in the Straits of
Mackinac.

Schoolcraft’s arrival at Mackinac Island is described in aesthetic terms that
demonstrate the elevated sensibilities that come with the perception of overcoming
nature’s materiality. The island is a “picturesque” and “refreshing spectacle” after “the
lifeless monotony of a canoe voyage through Lake Huron,” a spectacle further
agrandized by the American flag waving above the forts and “a beautiful harbour
chequered with American vessels at anchor, and Indian canoes rapidly shooting across
the water in every direction” (78). Note that the American vessels connote permanence,
because “anchored,” while the Native canoes convey transience in their chaotic
movement. Although these images somewhat accurately symbolize fundamental
principles of Euro-American and Anishinaabe modes of living, another implication is the
perceived entrenchment of the American colonialist agenda: Mackinac has been settled
by Americans once and for all. Of equal significance is the opportunity Mackinac affords the naturalist for self-congratulation:

Independent of its imposing features, and its pleasing novelty, we feel an inexpressible degree of delight, after traversing an Indian wilderness of nearly four hundred miles in extent, to find ourselves once more approaching the seat of a civilized population, with all its concomitant blessings. It can only be known to those who have traversed savage regions—who have subsisted long without the most common conveniences of life—with what feelings the traveller approaches such scenes, where, even for a few days, he is to renew former modes of living, and to partake of the advantages of a refined society (78).

Schoolcraft presents himself as the gentleman naturalist who has endured the rigors of fieldwork in an aesthetically and physically challenging landscape, a process that has assured him of his sensibilities. The dichotomous nature-civilization picturesque of Mackinac, reflecting what Johnson identifies as the metaphor of progress, is indicative of another dualism: the interplay between change and stasis required for conceptually overcoming nature’s materiality. Yet, Schoolcraft also privileges the anthropocentric particulars of the scene: Mackinac is picturesque precisely because of its conformity not only to aesthetic principles, but also to the principles of “refined society” one would expect in locales more removed from the “wilderness.” In essence, Schoolcraft appreciates the difference Mackinac reflects insofar as it represents homogeneity; in the process, he reveals the extent to which his conception of his own agency is derived from internalizing stasis: abhorring perceived landscape tedium is translated into fortitude, and
appreciating a familiar picturesque union of human and nonhuman becomes “an inexpressible degree of delight.” Although the aesthetic conundrum of Niagara made leaving it difficult, Schoolcraft is clearly more comfortable with the more pedestrian aesthetics of Mackinac.

Lake Superior, on the other hand, proves to be much more aesthetically and geologically complex than Lake Huron, and Schoolcraft’s recognition of its material complexity makes it much more difficult to interpret. The entrance into Lake Superior from the St. Mary’s River functions as aesthetic and geological foreshadowing. Point Iroquois and the Grand Cape are “two high promontories … which appear, at some remote period of the creation, to have been rent asunder, by one of those unaccountable convulsions which have produced so much confusion upon the surface of the earth” (102). Schoolcraft draws his hypothesis from observing the “chain of mountains” along the lakeshore but, as is often the case, time does not permit more careful examination that would make the hypothesis more than “conjectural” (102). The catastrophist language here is more explicitly violent than Schoolcraft’s Wernerian observations elsewhere in the Narrative. Suddenly, geological materiality is not nearly as legible as it was at Niagara Falls, where the steady action of water seems easy to conceptualize and measure. Schoolcraft suggests that more time for inspection would clear up some of the mystery at Lake Superior’s gateway, but such a statement reads like sheepish wishful thinking and less as genuine faith in empirical methodology: he merely proposes that closer observation would yield proof of a convulsion, not necessarily what type of convulsion, and there is no evidence to suggest that such observations would render the earth’s surface any less difficult to interpret. Disaster and disorder are now primary
characteristics of a Great Lakes materiality that was boring at worst, and cozily picturesque or a novel combination of beauty and sublimity at best. The sublimity of the earth’s material otherness—its mysterious violence and its illegibility—has emerged in full force in Lake Superior. Significantly, there is no moral accessibility to human history evident here as there was between Albany and Utica, and there is no moralizing futurism as there was at the White Rock. There is only the agency of the earth’s forces.

At the Pictured Rocks, near present day Munising, Michigan, Schoolcraft discovers a more accessible sublimity through the topos of the ruin. Although the Pictured Rocks are notable in their particularity, and aesthetically comprehensible through metaphor in their chaotic appearance, geologically, they are remarkably homogenous. Mentor L. Williams, using the description of the Pictured Rocks as an example, critiques Schoolcraft’s style by stating, “The juxtaposition of scenic and scientific description is often unpleasant” (Narrative 23), but as Noah Heringman has shown, “Romanticism and geology spring from a common source, landscape aesthetics; and … rocks become the period’s privileged aesthetic objects because its aesthetic discourse negotiates the place of consciousness in a physical environment increasingly understood in geological terms” (xv). “Scenic and scientific description” do not represent a stylistic dualism so much as a single style comprised of mutually constitutive empirical and literary forms. Yet, in the case of the Pictured Rocks, Schoolcraft recognizes the contingency of materiality by problematizing the relationship between aesthetic appearance and geological character.

The aesthetic-geological disconnect Schoolcraft perceives is the result of a chaotic “ruin” created not by catastrophe or “convulsion,” but by the ancient, slow, and steady
effects of water. The Pictured Rocks “present some of the most sublime and commanding views in nature” because “of overhanging precipices, towering walls, caverns, water falls, and prostrate ruins, which are here mingled in the most wonderful disorder” (106). The mixture of human-derived and nonhuman imagery establishes, early in the description, a seeming inextricability between scenery and science for Schoolcraft. He proceeds to explain, “This stupendous wall of rock, exposed to the fury of the waves … has been prostrated at several points, and worn into numerous bays, and irregular indentations. All these front upon the lake, in a line of aspiring promontories, which, at a distance, present the terrible array of dilapidated battlements and desolate towers” (107), and he quotes Walter Scott in order lend his observations credence. Despite this sublime particularity, these features are of sandstone—the work of water—so “although a great variety of surface is presented, there is, in reality, none in its geological character” (107). Schoolcraft’s use of “in reality” is telling: what meets the distant eye as catastrophic sublime chaos is merely, upon closer examination, evidence of aqueous consistency. Aesthetic principles condition the observer to imagine such geological change as violent and cryptic upheaval, but geological principles reveal change in terms of slow repetition over an indeterminate amount of time. The mystery of what happened becomes the mystery of how long in the turbulent discursive network of empiricism and aesthetics. As a geologist and mineralogist, and also as a gentleman of taste, Schoolcraft suggests that agency is realized in the ability to divorce aesthetic effect from geological fact, privileging what he perceives as consistency in change—via a Neptunist examination—over the aesthetic trompe-l’oeil that even he enjoys.
The copper country along the Ontonagon River, at the western end of Michigan’s Upper Peninsula, offers another occasion for Schoolcraft to defer to science when aesthetic character becomes overwhelming. Whereas the Pictured Rocks offer a pleasing view demystified by geological investigation, the Ontonagon is presented as a ghastly landscape that can only be redeemed by a mineralogical assessment of resource potential. The famed copper mass of the Ontonagon does not measure up to expectations, though it is indicative of mineralogical promise (122); its location, however, is lamentable:

The masses of fallen earth,—the blasted trees, which either lie prostrate at the foot of the bluffs, or hang in a threatening posture above,—the elevation of the banks,—the rapidity and noise of the stream, present such a mixed character of wildness, ruin, and sterility, as to render it one of the most rugged views in nature…. [11] One cannot help fancying that he has gone to the ends of the earth, and beyond the boundaries appointed for the residence of man (123).

With imagery bordering on Gothic, the scene makes Schoolcraft “shudder” (124). Humans have no business living in this hellish wasteland, but this conclusion prompts a consideration of a fundamental difference between organic and inorganic matter, namely that while flora and fauna types are environmentally determined, “inorganic masses of the earth are confined to no particular latitudes, and are uniform in their compositions” (124). In other words, a landscape’s conduciveness to life bears no relation to its value as a mineral resource, so “[i]t is [in the northwest] that the stunted growth of vegetation, and the rocky and elevated nature of the country, leads us to look for those treasures in the mineral kingdom which nature has denied in soil and climate” (125). Schoolcraft
argues for the reliability of a “geognostic matrix” that establishes “associations” between metals and rock strata, which can often enable the geologist “to predict, with considerable certainty, from the examination of the exterior of a country, whether it is metalliferous, or not” (125). Schoolcraft looks beyond threatening sublimity and ecological sterility toward chthonic possibility, thus presenting the geologist/mineralogist as a sort of Herculean figure who can contribute to American progress when even “soil and climate” are stacked against him, a hero who goes “to the ends of the earth” out of patriotic and civic duty.

Not as catastrophic and intimidating as Lake Superior, the Mississippi River nonetheless serves as another diluvial repository of aesthetic and geological interest. Between Fond du Lac (near present-day Duluth, Minnesota) and the Falls of St. Anthony on the upper Mississippi, there is very little in the landscape that Schoolcraft considers aesthetically or economically valuable. Indeed, many locations are described as categorically miserable. The Falls of St. Anthony function as a point of picturesque transition, because it is here that the prairie joins the limestone bluffs of the river, and “this change of geological character” means a corresponding change in “vegetable productions,” so “the eye embraces at one view, the copses of oak upon the prairies, and the cedars and pines which characterize the calcareous bluffs” (192). These bluffs quickly become the moral, aesthetic, and geological focus of Schoolcraft’s descent to Prairie du Chien and Dubuque.

On Lake Pepin—essentially a widening of the Mississippi—Schoolcraft’s unnamed interpreter points out “a high precipice” and tells the story of Oola-Ita, or Winona, a Sioux girl whose vow of love for a “young chief” was threatened by an
arranged marriage to “an old chief,” and rather than break her oath, she “threw herself from [the] awful precipice, and was instantly dashed to a thousand pieces”: this story serves as “an instance of sentiment … rarely to be met with among barbarians” (216). As with the landscape between Albany and Utica, Schoolcraft discovers moral character in material nature through human history, moral character that is produced by contemplations of violence. A key difference lies in the types of violence: the Albany-Utica violence is represented as Mohawk butchery, whereas the story of Oola-Ita’s suicide reflects “sentiment” that is unusual for “barbarians.” The features of the landscape are crucial to the ways in which Schoolcraft represents these two types of violence. Physically, the most notable aspect between Albany and Utica is the Euro-American cultivation; Schoolcraft acts on the colonial impulse to justify progress as the triumph over savagery in order to imbue the landscape with American meaning. The bluffs along Lake Pepin, however, are already materially and aesthetically impressive, but conveniently, there is a sentimental story that serves as a startlingly pertinent analog for the physical: it is only fitting that such a lofty precipice should also reflect the lofty sentimentality contained in a tale of love and suicide; the fact that Oola-Ita was Sioux, for Schoolcraft, only adds to the idealized wildness of the physical place.

Between Prairie du Chien and Dubuque, the bluffs function as the sublime core of a picturesque landscape: Schoolcraft’s employment of the ruin topos to describe them is not so much an effort to sentimentally emphasize human fallibility as it is an attempt to elevate the moral currency of Euro-American civilization. The bluffs are at some points “spiral columns, naked and crumbling,” at other points “grouped in the fantastic forms of some antiquated battlement, mocking the ingenuity of man,”¹³ and thus the source of the
upper Mississippi’s “grandeur and significance” (232). The flora, fauna, “the savage,”
and the picturesque prairie (231-3) merely ornament “and give effect to the imposing
outline, so boldly sketched by the pencil of nature, in these sublime and pleasing bluffs”
(232). As nature imitates human skill and imagination in its perceived reproduction of
Euro-American structures, a geological feature that bears no explicit physical evidence of
Euro-American presence is imbued with Euro-American history via aesthetic analogy.
The analogy is predictable, given Schoolcraft’s adherence to the popular notion that if
Native peoples once maintained a higher level of civilization, such an ancient state is
obscured by time (219-20). And given Schoolcraft’s commitment to American progress,
one can see why he is anxious to Americanize a geological feature so permeated by Sioux
history through the story of Oola-Ita.

Over the course of Narrative Journal of Travels, Schoolcraft sees meaning in the
landscape in terms of degrees of American progress. As he journeys through regions
more and more removed from American settlement, nature’s history and mysteries are
interpreted through an aesthetic framework based on teleology. The process of
interpretation often requires replacing empirical limitations with abstracted possibilities.
Faced with the immanent but sometimes unfathomable materiality of nature, Schoolcraft
seeks epistemological stability in aesthetic principles and futurism. The changing face of
nature is ironically negotiated through another type of contingency that is construed as
inevitable status quo, the unstoppable force of American progress. For Schoolcraft,
human agency is derived from the power to homogenize dynamic nature physically or
ideologically with American presence and meaning. Perhaps Schoolcraft’s Wernerian
view of the gradual and persistent force of water lays down a metaphor for American progress.

Desolation and Holism in Agassiz’s Lake Superior

Christoph Irmscher has noted, in comparing Lake Superior to William Bartram’s Travels, “If … storytelling had easily merged with scientific description, and description in turn had frequently gained narrative momentum as well as poetic brilliance, the different genres were kept strictly separate in Lake Superior. The literary and the scientific inhabited, at least in principle, different parts of the book” (241). Indeed, the book is conspicuously divided into Cabot’s “Narrative” and Agassiz’s “Natural History,” and it does suggest a growing disparity between scientific and literary writing as a result of the increasing professionalization of American science, but I think Irmscher oversimplifies this separation. Cabot’s section narrates the journey, but it is also replete with natural history observations—particularly geological ones—and it is punctuated by what I call Agassiz’s “field lectures,” moments in which “the Professor” speaks to his party of gentlemen concerning some aspect of natural history inspired by Lake Superior. And although Agassiz’s “Natural History” consists of substantial sections on physical description and Latinate taxonomy, each chapter also contains prose in which Agassiz works natural history categories into a holistic system of nature. If Cabot is telling the story of the 1848 trip, Agassiz is telling the story of the earth’s deep time, and the two stories are epistemologically intertwined. The overall impression the book provides is that engaging with Lake Superior’s materiality is usually arduous, sometimes comedic, and occasionally invigorating, but the implications of that engagement contribute to a
conception of the earth’s materiality as a grand system that raises consciousness to its highest level.

I wish to focus primarily on those “invigorating” moments in Cabot’s “Narrative” and Agassiz’s holistic articulations in order to demonstrate that even in 1850, aesthetic principles remain central to the practice and representation of natural history, and that aesthetics was the means by which Cabot and Agassiz conceptualized the relationship between material contingency and human agency.

Niagara Falls occupies an important aesthetic position in Cabot’s text, the imagery of which can be read as recognition of water’s Noachian power and capacity for brilliance, a representation of God’s vital energy materially manifested for the benefit of the perceiving, imaginative mind. Like Margaret Fuller just five years before him (discussed in Chapter 4), Cabot emphasizes the violent and haunting character of Niagara’s imagery, reflecting Patrick V. McGreevy’s emphasis on the importance of “the death metaphor” in writing on Niagara: “Certain physical features of Niagara Falls—the brink, the plunge, the abyss, the rising mist, and the rainbow—have been consistently regarded in terms of prevailing notions of the afterlife,” a symbolic discourse due in part to “the presence of actual danger and death” (42, 41). Cabot comments on “the distance to which the water is projected, the rocket-like bursts of spray from the falling sheet, and the sudden spouting up of the mist at intervals from below, as if shot from a cannon. These sheets of mist rise high above the Fall, and move slowly down the river in perpendicular columns, like a procession of ghosts” (15). The cannon simile likens the cataract to an instrument the sole purpose of which is to cause human death, and the ghost simile completes the death analogy with imagery of the supernatural.
The sublimity of nature, true to aesthetic convention, compels the human observer to contemplate life’s frailty and finitude, but Cabot’s perception is novel in that there is dark humor in death’s immanence, particularly via suicide. He and some companions take a moonlight bath at the ‘‘Hermit’s Fall,’ a little cascade” named for “a crazy Englishman” who “finally drowned” at the spot, but because the water there is so shallow, Cabot suspects the drowning was no accident: “The ‘Hermit’ was probably tired of his own society at last, as he had been already of other people’s, and took his method of getting rid of it. The place, indeed, one could conceive might be dangerously attractive to one tired of life” due to its nighttime seclusion (16-7). This noir humor is only an interlude, however, for Cabot proceeds with the death metaphor’s transcendent implications while closely associating it with sensual pleasure. Near Hermit’s Fall, Cabot relates,

The power of the water was greater than I expected, and difficult to bear up against, even in a sitting posture. It was not a simple pressure, but a muscular force, like a kneading or shampooing by huge hands…. Afterwards, in walking round the island, we saw on the cloud of mist over the English Fall, a lunar rainbow, glimmering with a pale, phosphorescent, unearthly light, and showing prismatic colors (17).

Materiality generates two types of force in this situation, one primarily physical and another primarily visual, but both result in a pleasurable experience. The forceful massage of the water affecting the body is juxtaposed with the water—in the ethereal form of mist—gently affecting the vision with beauty. Immanent physical force and
visual death symbolism are related manifestations of water’s literal and figurative fluidity.

The Emersonian quality of Cabot’s rational holism is evident at Niagara, and it surfaces again near the entrance to Lake Superior. At Pointe-aux-Pins, Cabot attempts to account for the invigoration he feels in a desolate landscape by aligning his sensations with “Indian nature.” In a sandy, windswept, “bleak, desert situation” with “[n]o vestige of human habitation in sight, and no living thing, except the little squads of pigeons scudding before the wind,” Cabot nonetheless feels as he stands “before the camp-fire, an unusual and unaccountable exhilaration, an outburst, perhaps, of that Indian nature that delights in exposure, in novel modes of life, and in going where nobody else goes” (40). Of course, believing that one could experience “Indian nature” without identifying as Native American requires a reductive conception of Native identity and a rational holist’s faith in the transcendent power of the (Euro-American) mind. What is nonetheless aesthetically striking is the “exhilaration” a “bleak” landscape produces instead of the more conventional melancholy or awe. The individual is filled with ideas of possibility in a landscape that seems to resist divulging its meaning. Whereas Niagara’s materiality is more epistemologically flamboyant with its forces felt and seen, the materiality of Pointe-aux-Pins imbues the viewer with more agency through the uniqueness he perceives in his situation. The physical and mental entanglement with materiality is different in kind, but its ability to constitute agency remains absolute.

On the north shore of Lake Superior near Pic Island, Cabot experiences peaceful solitude rather than exhilaration in the primordial quality of the landscape, but evidence of previous Native American presence functions as a disruption of that quality. Cabot
writes, “Our little point was as silent as a piece of the primeval earth…. A heavy stillness seemed to hang over it and weigh down every sound, so that a few paces from the tents one forgot that he was not alone. It was as if no noise had been heard here since the woods grew, and all Nature seemed sunk in a dead, dreamless sleep” (109). Organic processes seem dead in silence so pervasive that Cabot imagines an epoch before organic life, and yet the silence persists even after “the woods grew.” Sound thus functions as a tool for temporal orientation; without it, the mind is capable of imagining distant epochs that might not be as accessible otherwise. Native presence forces Cabot grudgingly to return to the present: “Yet is was clear we were not the first visitants, for the fire-weed had sprung up here, and close at hand we found lodge-poles, and the remains of fires. Here also was an Indian sweating-house” (110). The colorful flowers and evidence of Native habitation and practices quickly remind Cabot of the landscape’s organic present and its recent past so legible by comparison with its primeval history. The fireweed is a pretty indication of recent destruction; the plant frequently appears in areas ravaged by fire. The remains of campfires and the sweat lodge point respectively toward Native sustenance and culture. The dualistic nature of fire—its capacity for destroying and sustaining organic life—symbolizes both a lament for the disappearance of primeval tranquility, and an acknowledgement of the natural beauty and anthropological interest the organic present provides.

Such beauty and interest should in no way be interpreted as indicative of Cabot’s belief in the region’s habitability. Near the end of the “Narrative,” Cabot makes it clear that the north shore’s value lies in its primeval character and not in its conduciveness to Euro-American civilization. Cabot acknowledges, “In geographical position the lake
would naturally seem to lie within the zone of civilization,” but the north shore’s “Northern” character renders it “the land of voyageurs and trappers” only: “Unless the mines should attract and support a population, one sees not how this region should ever be inhabited” (124). In the region’s relative lack of animal life, Cabot envisions the primeval past yet again: in these quiet woods, “[i]t is like being transported to the early ages of the earth, when the mosses and the pine had just begun to cover the primeval rock, and the animals as yet ventured timidly forth into the new world” (124).

Cabot’s pronouncements mark an important point of contrast between his view of the future and Schoolcraft’s: whereas Schoolcraft defers to a future of settlement when the present materiality is aesthetically threatening, Cabot is enchanted by the same type of desolation and seems under less institutional pressure to foresee settlement. Of course, Schoolcraft was essentially on US government orders in his travels of 1820, and the American Cabot has no qualms about deeming British dominions uninhabitable in 1848. It is nonetheless significant that landscapes indicative of the earth’s primordial past produce diametrically opposed aesthetic impressions. For Schoolcraft, this past represents an obstacle of stasis threatening progress because its history of change is illegible; for Cabot, it is inspiring to imagine the grandeur of such a past. Familiarity with Agassiz’s more formal and professional natural history, as well as his theory of glaciation, no doubt helped make the earth’s primeval past something to celebrate rather than fear for Cabot, and this conception of material contingency shapes Cabot’s aesthetic preferences. The strangeness of the primordial past is precisely what makes it the ideal object of the imagination.
The field lectures of Agassiz interspersed throughout the “Narrative” are examples of rational holistic thinking that signify the broad implications of scientific evidence gathered in the specific confines of Lake Superior. Early in the “Narrative,” Agassiz articulates the role of geology in holistic understanding via an analogy with history. Regarding observations of physical geological characteristics, Agassiz states, “These details of facts are to be looked upon in the same light as a mere list of dates or occurrences in history. But geology aims at a full illustration of all these details” (13). In other words, it is the goal of science to create a comprehensive narrative of the earth’s inorganic history out of scattered empirical observations. A major component of Agassiz’s holism is his recognition of both igneous (10) and aqueous (12) geological forces as contributing factors to the present geological characteristics of the Niagara region, although throughout Lake Superior, heat is privileged as the primary cause of rock composition. The story Agassiz develops is thus primarily one of fire and ice: Plutonic formation, and glacial shaping and distribution, comprise the bulk of Agassiz’s theory on the geology of North America and Europe, and geological character is a major determinant of flora and fauna distribution.

A boulder near Sault Ste. Marie represents, in miniature, Agassiz’s geological network of Plutonism and glaciation as “an epitome of all the rocks [Agassiz and his party] have seen [along the north shore of Lake Superior]” (126). The lack of fossils in the boulder, together with its “vitrified” igneous components, leads Agassiz to conclude that “the plutonic action on the lake commenced before the introduction of animal life” (126-7). Furthermore, its uniform smoothness precludes the work of water because the “harder stones would be left prominent,” and due to its similar appearance “to the rocks
of the present glaciers of Switzerland,” Agassiz has “no doubt … that it has been firmly
fixed in a heavy mass of ice and moved steadily forward in one direction, and thereby
ground down” (127). Agassiz is able to build a more compelling case by making explicit
connections between the geological present (as in Switzerland) and the geological past (in
the Sault), thereby capturing the grandeur and scope of his proposed natural system in the
context of a single rock.

Not everyone was as enthusiastic as Agassiz regarding such a seemingly
reasonable theory. Cabot reports that Agassiz gave his field lecture on this boulder in the
main cabin of the steamboat Gore, and there were Anglican clergymen in his audience,
one of whom “took the Professor to task” for claiming the earth’s creation occurred over
long epochs and became “quite indignant” when Agassiz refused to concede that the
Bible proved otherwise: “[The clergyman’s] tone on this occasion, (for otherwise he
appeared to be a well-bred and educated man,) seemed to indicate a different position of
the old theologico-geological question here, a question one would have thought finally
disposed of among men of liberal training” (127). Cabot is likely referring to the geology
of men like Edward Hitchcock and Benjamin Silliman, who employed Neptunist theories
toward supporting the creation story of Genesis in the 1820s.15 Cabot’s condescension
and Agassiz’s resolve suggest a progressive turn in American natural history in which
Mosaic theories would be less and less accepted by professional men of science.

Agassiz’s refusal to acknowledge the empirical truth of the bible is by no means a
disavowal of the Creator’s role in nature. As a rational holist, Agassiz is adamant about
the crucial function of a “Supreme Intelligence” in nature’s material formation and
operations, a function analogous with the power of the human mind’s epistemological
pursuits. For all of Agassiz’s rigorous empiricism, his privileging of a higher power may seem uncharacteristic until it becomes clear that he perceives a distinct *logic* at work in material phenomena. The “Natural History” section of *Lake Superior* is an effort to prove the mind-nature correspondence through a teleological view of material contingency.

In the first chapter of “Natural History,” “The Northern Vegetation Compared with that of the Jura and the Alps,” Agassiz begins by acknowledging the influence of climate on the distribution of flora and thus an organic-inorganic holism of sorts (137-41), but climate is merely an effect of a larger cause: it is only “under the guidance and influence of man” that “anything new” has been produced or that anything has been “call[ed] into existence … that did not exist before,” and Agassiz cites “domesticated animals and cultivated plants” as evidence (142). For Agassiz, this “shows indeed that the influence of the mind over material phenomena is far greater than that of physical forces, and thus refers our thoughts again and again to a Supreme Intelligence for a cause of all these phenomena, rather than to so-called natural agents” (142). Agassiz makes the analogy between the “Supreme Intelligence” and the mind of man more explicit when he argues that nature reflects “such wonderful order” in its “benefits, material, intellectual, and moral, which man derives from nature around him” because there is “an omnipotent Ordainer of the whole” (144). “There will be,” Agassiz asserts, “no *scientific* evidence of God’s working in nature until naturalists have shown that the whole Creation is the expression of a thought, and not the product of physical agents,” which is demonstrated by the fact that flora distribution does not follow strict climatic and geographical guidelines, and the naturalist thus finds himself in the role of antiquarian so that (again by analogy) the “higher Intelligence” is to nature as man’s intelligence is to “works of art”:
“[The naturalist] beholds indeed the works of a being thinking like himself, but he feels at the same time that he stands as much below the Supreme Intelligence in wisdom, power and goodness, as the works of art are inferior to the wonders of nature” (145). There could scarcely be a more explicit articulation of a rationally holistic view of nature.

Agassiz detects another manifestation God’s creative thought via embryological investigation. In Chapter III, “Classification of Animals from Embryonic and Palæozoic Data,” Agassiz critiques Cuvier’s system of classification “according to natural affinities of animals as ascertained by the investigation of their internal structure” as one in which, despite constituting a major taxonomic advancement, “so much is left … to the arbitrary decision of the observer” (191). Agassiz asserts that classification should proceed instead according to the changes animals undergo from the embryonic state to maturity, employing the development of birds as a key example: noting that all birds have webbed feet as embryos, Agassiz proposes that the extent to which a bird’s feet remain webbed in maturity should be a primary factor in determining its classificatory position (192-5). Furthermore, Agassiz, ever the proponent of analogy, notices “manifold relations which exist among animals” in “facts derived from the development of the whole animal kingdom in geological epochs, as well as the development of individual species in our epoch” (196). In other words, fossil evidence of ancient special development is reflected in the changes from embryonic to mature state in current species: “If there is any internal evidence that the whole animal kingdom is constructed upon a definite plan, we may find it in the remarkable agreement of our conclusions, whether derived from anatomical evidence, from embryology or from palæontology” (196-7). Agassiz’s rational holism represents a more formally scientific natural theology, but evidence of a “Supreme
Intelligence” is found in the logical progression of fauna development. If one has faith in the a priori existence of a Creator, one’s faith can be turned to proof by perceiving the extent to which nature corresponds in form and process to human conceptions of logic. Nature is no chaotic accident, nor is it a climatically predictable composite of phenomena, but is instead the work of a conscious plan empirically discernable.

In Schoolcraft’s resistance to systematic theorizing, while at the same time acknowledging Neptunist possibilities, the Great Lakes region is presented as a material stage for American progress. His writings reveal, however, that ideology is predicated upon entanglement with the materiality of nature. Representing a turn toward holism and systematizing, Agassiz and Cabot demonstrate the importance of materiality in comprehending the grandeur of nature’s logic, which stipulates that the agency provided by human consciousness can only proceed from an understanding of nature’s material agencies. Nature’s capacity for change—a point of confrontation for Schoolcraft and cause for celebration and awe for Agassiz and Cabot—determines human agency and conceptions of the power of consciousness.

In the observations of Schoolcraft, Agassiz, and Cabot, it becomes possible to see the ways in which the natural wonders and pressures of the Great Lakes compelled men of science to offer radically different views on the basic human concerns of truth and history. These naturalists, through differing interpretive lenses, understood the meanings of nature in fundamentally different ways.

From the standpoint of intellectual history, the natural history of the Great Lakes reemphasizes the crucial influence systematic theories have had on aesthetic
considerations of the natural world, and thus the extent to which those theories inform how humans interpret their place in that world. The work of Schoolcraft offers the material ecocritic a way to see the alienation resulting in the entanglement of nature and nationalist politics; the work of Agassiz and Cabot offers the material ecocritic an illustration of how a Creator, systematizing, and nature form an entanglement that humbles the human observer even as it suggests the power of his consciousness.
CHAPTER 4—THE ENTANGLEMENT OR TRANSCENDENCE OF TRAVEL:
JAMESON’S WINTER STUDIES AND SUMMER RAMBLES IN CANADA AND
FULLER’S SUMMER ON THE LAKES, IN 1843

Because travel writing so eagerly offers itself up to the benefits of geocritical
analysis, this critical methodology guides the first part of this chapter. Whereas the other
chapters herein discuss authors in separate but interrelated sections, the body of this
chapter begins by examining Jameson’s and Fuller’s representations of places they both
visited, most notably Niagara Falls, Mackinac Island, and Sault Ste. Marie. As Ralph
Crane and Lisa Fletcher explain in their geocritical analysis of representations of Fingal’s
Cave in the nineteenth century, the “guiding principles of geocriticism” are that it is
“focused on particular places rather than the authors or artists who have depicted them,”
it “promotes comparative analysis of a diverse corpus of texts about particular places,” it
emphasizes “the extent to which the human experience of space involves all the senses,”
and, lastly, it stresses “that thinking about space always involves thinking about time”
(781). Although this chapter is limited to substantively considering Great Lakes places as
represented by only Jameson and Fuller, it privileges places as the bases of these authors’
writing, it focuses on the role of the senses in place representation, and it situates these
authors in their historical-cultural frameworks. The second portion of the chapter
examines where Jameson’s and Fuller’s itineraries diverge, most notably in Jameson’s
journey through the Manitoulin Islands of northern Lake Huron, and in Fuller’s visit to
the prairie west of Chicago. These places, as much as Niagara, Mackinac, and the Soo,
are integral parts of the respective authors’ conceptions of nature, materiality, and human
agency.
Onno Oerlemans observes some fundamental characteristics regarding the way travel writing negotiates the relationships between materiality and human consciousness in the Romantic period. “Regardless of intention,” Oerlemans asserts, “the effect of travel is to put the world in motion, and this inevitably involves noting the changing physical presence of the world” (151). Travel is also about the pursuit of authentic experience: “Seeing unfamiliar landscapes makes one aware of the limits of one’s knowledge. New landscape seems alien and authentic because it seems consistent only with an awareness of the larger permanence and materiality of the natural world” (Oerlemans 152). Finally, Oerlemans observes, “Travel is not just about encountering other cultures, or imposing culture and consciousness, but also about recognizing the contingency of consciousness, and perhaps even the relative fragility and impermanence of consciousness and culture” (155). In many respects, Jameson’s travel writing reflects all of Oerlemans’s observations, but I would suggest that for Jameson, the body of the traveller, the visceral, corporeal entity that is doing the travelling, is the locus of all of the processes Oerlemans describes: understanding the physicality of the world; the pursuit of authenticity; and recognizing the mutability of consciousness and culture. Fuller, by contrast, seeks to show that all of these processes are a function of consciousness; as the transcendental embodiment of spiritual potential, the human mind renders physical movement subordinate in light of the larger objectives of recognizing the ideal as represented in physical phenomena and asserting the limitless power of consciousness, despite its contingency.

Like other British Romantic travel writers, Jameson reveals a considerable amount of culturally-conditioned, discursive influence in her representational
methodology, but this influence is always subject to revision, challenge, or dismissal in
her negotiation of materiality. Admittedly, the materiality she documents is often a point
of contention and confusion, but these effects are precisely what make her account of
travel so striking: Jameson deliberately embraces the exploration of the relationships
between ideology and materiality to illustrate the ways in which travel is, at its core, a
matter of a body operating in and moving through physical space.

The corporeality and materiality of travel for Jameson is easy to misconstrue as a
matter of course until we understand the pervasiveness of anthropocentric ideology in
early-nineteenth century travel writing. Jameson is contributing to a travel writing
tradition in which aesthetics and consciousness are widely accepted as the primary
motivations and objectives. Elizabeth Bohls has shown that travel writing for British
women, for much of the Enlightenment and Romantic periods, consists of appropriating
as well as challenging male-authorized aesthetic paradigms, such as the subject status of
the disinterested observer and the theoretical discourse of the beautiful and the sublime
(3-19). Additionally, Patricia Jasen argues, in her analysis of tourism in Ontario from
1790 to 1914, “that being a tourist means being in a state of mind in which the
imagination plays a key role, and each variety of tourism [examined] reveals the central
and enduring importance of the ‘romantic sensibility’ to the culture, economics, and
politics of the tourist industry” (4). Jameson is without question concerned with
aesthetics and consciousness, and with questions about femininity and the imagination,
but she reveals an understanding of these conceptions as explicitly predicated on bodily
and material sensations, and this is suggested by the very structure of her narrative.

“Winter Studies” primarily documents exercises of consciousness, “Summer Rambles”
the materiality of travel, but it would be inaccurate to believe Jameson sees a Cartesian dualism here: she goes on excursions in the winter and, of course, engages in mental refinement in the summer. In large measure, however, the two-part structure of the narrative is about mobility and immobility. “Winter Studies” is first and foremost about the mental rigor undertaken by a woman stuck inside during a harsh Toronto winter, making the best of what could easily be called domestic isolation. This section often reflects the somber mood underlying the reason for her presence in Canada in the first place. As Clara Thomas explains in her afterword in the edition cited herein, at the request of her estranged husband, the attorney general of Upper Canada, Anna Jameson had come to Toronto to improve his image and keep up appearances in light of the upcoming election for vice-chancellor, but she was also on a mission to obtain a legal separation (589-91). In contrast, “Summer Rambles” is about a woman’s constant movement across landscapes and the entanglements with materiality that occur in them; this section reflects the immense freedom Jameson must have felt after spending the winter with a husband she found incompatible.

Although the discussion of Jameson in this chapter is primarily concerned with “Summer Rambles,” it is important to stress that section’s tandem relationship with “Winter Studies,” for “Winter Studies” reveals the mental conditioning that Jameson took with her on her summer journey of material entanglements. On March 15th in Toronto, Jameson is alone and in “a very dismal and fantastic mood” when her thoughts turn to ghost stories and the existence of ghosts generally, which prompts some provocative commentary: “How far are our perceptions confined to our outward senses? Can anyone tell? – for that our perceptions are not wholly confined to impressions taken in by the
outward senses seems the only one thing proved; and are such sensible impressions the only real ones?” (129) Here, Jameson wrestles with the relationship between the empirical and the imagination while asserting that perception means much more than empirical observation. Rather than discounting my argument concerning the locomotive and corporeal materialities that constitute travel for Jameson, her commentary on perception enriches this argument. Jameson, like many other British Romantics, realizes that the senses are entangled with a mysterious, intangible consciousness: just because her consciousness is just as mobile as her body does not diminish the importance of bodies and physical motion in her conception of what travel fundamentally is. As Onno Oerlemans has shown, the Romantics “were fully aware [that] our experience of the physical world comes through first-hand experience (though that experience is shaped by expectations arising from previous experience of the natural world and from various forms of education), and through recreated experience (memory and its modes of representation)” (13).

Not relying on the senses, however, can be dangerous in Jameson’s view. Recalling a visit to Weimar while staying at Goethe’s house, Jameson and other guests of the grand duke engage in telling creepy tales and conversing about them; recalling the discussion about the “various illusions, and the superstitions of various times and countries,” Jameson surmises, “The thing was always there, forming, as it seemed, a part of our human nature, only modified and changed in its manifestations, sometimes by outward influences, sometimes by individual temperament; fashion, or in other words sympathy and imitation, having produced many ghosts, as well as many maniacs, and not a few suicides” (132-3). Very sardonically, Jameson suggests that this seemingly
archetypal penchant for superstition in human nature is not necessarily a good thing; just because this predilection keeps reappearing over human history does not make it something to be desired.

During the long Toronto winter, Jameson kept herself busy by reading and translating Johann Peter Eckermann’s *Gespräche mit Goethe* (*Conversations with Goethe*, v. 1 and 2, 1836; v. 3, 1848), the “most extraordinary thing” in which is Goethe’s conception of “Das Dämonische” (148). In Jameson’s understanding, *Das Dämonische* is whatever exercises a power, a fascination over the mind, whatever in intellect or nature is inexplicable, whatever seems to have a spiritual existence apart from all understood or received laws, acknowledged as irresistible, yet mocking all reason to explain it – a kind of intellectual electricity or magnetism – in short, whatever is unaccountable (148).

In Jameson’s interpretation, *Das Dämonische*, as I will suggest below, strikingly resonates with Fuller’s concept of transcendent consciousness: this resonance is not surprising, considering, as Eric Wilson points out, “Fuller’s study of Goethe was a profound event in her development” (57). Despite finding it “extraordinary,” however, Jameson is skeptical of *Das Dämonische*. She calls it “a very convenient way, and a truly very poetical way, of getting rid of what one does not comprehend” (148). The examples Goethe gives of this concept in terms of “things” are “music in itself and in its effect on the mind” and “poetry of the highest order; and in characters he instances Shakespeare, Napoleon, Byron, the late Grand Duke, (his friend, Karl August,) and others. But it is dangerous almost to go on playing thus with his and one’s own deepest, wildest thoughts – and I cannot follow them” (148-9). At some point, Jameson believes, human
consciousness becomes too mysterious, and to probe too deeply only leads to confusion. It is tempting to view Jameson’s reluctance to pursue Goethe’s meaning as an intellectual copout, but it is important to view this gesture as pragmatic: why, Jameson implicitly asks, attempt to reason out something that the reasoning person himself admits is beyond reason? I suggest that the Gordian knot of inexplicable consciousness Goethe presents compelled Jameson, when it came time to do her summer rambling, to seek easily accessible pleasure in her senses and immerse herself in the physical environments she encountered, letting her consciousness do with these sensations what it would.

On March 29th, Jameson makes a rather prophetic statement that foreshadows the extent to which, in “Summer Rambles,” she will engage in closing distances in her travel, engaging with what she observes. She asserts, “To those who see only with their eyes, the distant is always indistinct and little, becoming less and less as it recedes, till utterly lost; but to the imagination, which thus reverses the perspective of the senses, the far off is great and imposing, the magnitude increasing with the distance” (153). Jameson is contemplating the effects of moving away from things, claiming that the imagination functions as a projection onto scenes, whereas vision is merely a means to take scenes in. Put most simply, “Summer Rambles” responds to this statement by asking, and then showing, what happens for the vision and the imagination when the thinking viewer moves closer to peoples, lands, and waters: she discovers that much is gained, nothing is lost, and things become more accessible rather than more imposing.

Margaret Fuller found herself in the Great Lakes for reasons much different than Jameson’s. Susan Belasco Smith explains, in her introduction to the edition cited here, that Fuller had been thinking about the benefits travel would provide in terms of “needed
perspective” when her friends, siblings James Freeman Clarke and Sarah Ann Clarke, invited her along for their trip “to the West” (viii). In *Summer on the Lakes*, Fuller is in pursuit of transcendence, the project of elevating the mind beyond the material in order to arrive at an understanding of the ideal, the spiritual essence of existence and the mysterious, intelligible but intangible forces driving creation. Fuller’s tour is fundamentally an exercise in consciousness; the materiality of travel is ancillary at best. As an Emersonian Transcendentalist at the time of her journey, Fuller believes that the human mind is the pinnacle of creation:

The fashioning spirit, working upwards from the clod to man, proffers as its last, highest essay, the brain of man. In the lowest zoophyte it aimed at this; some faint rudiments may there be discerned: but only in man has it perfected that immense galvanic battery that can be loaded from above, below, and around;— that engine, not only of perception, but of conception and consecutive thought,— whose right hand is memory, whose life is idea, the crown of nature, the platform from which spirit takes wing (98).

What at first seems like a hyperbolic rendition of the Great Chain of Being is more accurately described as cyclic, for the human mind produces and is produced by a sort of electric force that charges the universe; this charge, however, is most powerful in the human brain. Although this concentration of spirit, of transcendental potential, is most active in human consciousness, “[i]t did not mean to destroy his sympathies with the mineral, vegetable, and animal realms, of whose components he is in great part composed,” but nonetheless, the human “was meant to be the historian, the philosopher,
the poet, the king of this world, no less than the prophet of the next” (98). Fuller acknowledges the materiality of people, but this materiality has nothing to do with purpose; the meaning of humanity, its raison d’être, is consciousness and the understanding of the consciousness’s energy. Thus whereas Jameson emphasizes the corporeal materiality of travel more so than many other women travel writers of the period, Fuller takes travel to the conscious extreme, relegating materiality to the status of a façade.

Because of her privileging of spirituality and consciousness over the limitations of the material, Fuller’s account of the Seeress of Prevorst occupies a considerable portion of Summer on the Lakes, beginning exactly at the halfway point of the book and suggesting “animal magnetism,” or spiritualism and psychic ability, as of central interest in her Transcendental worldview. Fuller draws her discussion and philosophical endorsement of Justinus Kerner’s book on the Seeress, Frederica Hauffe, by paying attention to the ways Hauffe, despite her physical illnesses, demonstrates supernatural mental capacity through visions and prophecies (78-97). For Fuller, Hauffe is the embodiment of transcendental philosophy, displaying as she does the power of the mind against the frailty of the material body. In Fuller’s view, the mind is about unlimited potential, and materiality is about restriction, despite the considerable geographical extent of her tour from Niagara, through lakes Huron and Michigan, deep into Illinois, and back again. The trip, however, never was intended to be about the places themselves, but ironically, Fuller’s transcendental revelations very often occur precisely in response to particular geographical locations, and the book’s chapters bear geographic names (except for “Chapter 3,” an anomaly discussed below).
Consider for example Fuller’s prediction that “a new poetry” will emerge as she documents her stopover on the Manitou Islands of northern Lake Michigan. When she visits the “slovenly huts” of the woodcutters on the desolate islands, she thinks “of such a position, from its mixture of profound solitude with service to the great world, as possessing an ideal beauty,” and proceeds to explain that in such scenes she will seek “to foresee the law by which a new order, a new poetry is to be evoked from this chaos” (17-8). Her objective is to find a transcendental “law,” but the inspiration for this prophecy issues from the material circumstances of the woodcutters’ isolation, way of life, and labor that constitutes their humble—but very wooden and material—contribution to “the great world.” Thus far, however, this scene is one of “chaos,” and it needs the ordering mechanisms of consciousness to become as poetic as it could and should be, a point rather sardonically emphasized via analogy: “The poet must describe, as the painter sketches Irish peasant girls and Danish fishwives, adding the beauty, and leaving out the dirt” (18). In other words, the poet’s job is to surpass materiality’s vulgarity by producing an ideal representation that reflects the truth found only in transcendental consciousness: “slovenly huts” that materially exist on material islands have no place in the idea of where the woodcutters live and what they do. Eric Wilson argues that for Transcendentalist writers like Emerson, Thoreau, and Fuller, human existence is fundamentally an attempt to find stability in the universe’s inherent chaos while recognizing that order, patterns, and laws emerge from chaos; the quest for order thus begins with the generative embrace and acceptance of nature’s turbulence, an “abyss [that] thrives in polarized forms” (xiv-v, xxi). It is perhaps more accurate to say that, for Fuller, her poetic mission is to organize the chaos of nature through art and
consciousness; that is, according to the law that is already there but hidden, waiting to be discovered.

The goal of this chapter is to emphasize the dramatic differences in two travel narratives that both discuss the Great Lakes and are written by women who were contemporaries. Although Anna Jameson is British and Margaret Fuller an American, the differences highlighted have more to do with philosophies regarding nature’s materiality than nationality. Because Jameson and Fuller viewed nature and the materiality of themselves so differently, they evince radically opposed conceptions of human agency, which is comprised of the capacity for self-creation and the ability to exercise the will while negotiating entanglements with environments. Whereas Jameson emphasizes the importance of visceral experience and presents herself as a traveller materially entangled with the Great Lakes region, Fuller values the transcendence of materiality in an account that presents the Great Lakes as a stage on which her consciousness is spotlighted.¹ At stake in this argument is the divergent ways Europeans and Americans were induced to think about cultural and environmental turbulence as presented in the accounts of two educated women viewing the Great Lakes through a lens of transience. I engage with the work of scholars who examine the cultural and environmental implications of travel writing as well as scholars who critically consider antebellum and Romantic conceptions of nature.

Niagara

Unlike many tourists of the Great Lakes in the nineteenth century, Anna Jameson has the ability to visit Niagara in both summer and winter. The differences in her
experience occasioned by seasonal variation are a significant demonstration of the material, visceral lens through which she understands and represents her travel.

Jameson’s initial response to Niagara Falls in January of 1837 is disappointment, which she immediately attributes to a deficiency in her own sensibility. She professes shame in her disappointment, that she “could beat” herself because she does not experience the “astonishment, enthusiasm,” and “rapture” she has read of in other accounts that she nonetheless believes are genuine (53). She elaborates,

Something is gone that cannot be restored. What has come over my soul and senses? – I am no longer Anna – I am metamorphosed – I am translated – I am an ass’s head, a clod, a wooden spoon, a fat weed growing on Lethe’s bank, a stock, a stone, a petrifaction, – for have I not seen Niagara, the wonder of wonders, and felt – no words can tell what disappointment! (53-4).

In her brief account of Jameson’s initial reaction, McKinsey cites commercialization and “the old rhetoric of astonishment and wonder” as causes for Jameson’s and others’ disappointment (189). The sublimity of Niagara was recoverable, McKinsey argues, but in the middle of the nineteenth century, it was “less spontaneous, more self-conscious, more personal and deliberately artistic” for figures like Hawthorne, Fuller, Thomas Cole, and Frederic Church (190). Recovering the sublime for Jameson, I would argue however, is a matter of motion and proximity. The analogies Jameson uses to figure her transformation and translation evoke stasis or, at the very least, something valuable only insofar as it can be used. Jameson’s use of the term “translated” is significant here, because it aligns stasis with a discursive practice rather than a material process, though it
is something organic as well as inorganic. Jameson is culturally conditioned to expect more of her first impression of Niagara, but because wonder and astonishment fail to manifest, she presumes this signals an entropic stagnation in her “soul and senses.” Jameson soon realizes that to recover the sublime, she has to move closer.

Nearer to the raging falls, Jameson discovers tranquility can function as the sublime compliment to awful turbulence. Strapping “crampons” to her feet in order to keep from slipping on the ice and snow, Jameson and her party venture out onto the Table Rock, where heaps of snow routinely slip away into the falls, exposing the rock beneath (57-8). This is where Jameson finally experiences the sublime:

> It was very fearful, and yet I could not tear myself away, but remained on the Table Rock, even on the very edge of it, till a kind of dreamy fascination came over me; the continuous thunder, and might and movement of the lapsing waters, held all my vital spirits bound up as by a spell. Then, as at last I turned away, descending sun broke out, and an Iris appeared below the American Fall, one extremity resting on a snow mound; and motionless there it hung in the midst of restless terrors, its beautiful but rather pale hues contrasting with the death-like colourless objects around; it reminded me of the faint ethereal smile of a dying martyr (58).

In this moment, Jameson emphasizes stillness as she does in describing her initial reaction, but now, she sees a material manifestation of order surrounded by chaos, a metaphor for herself, in the iris. The iris, though “motionless,” is only possible because of the material mingling of light and moisture: just as the sublime terror of the falls “held
all” of Jameson’s “vital spirits bound up,” the iris is and represents material vibrancy in suspension. The martyr analogy captures the peaceful awe, the “dreamy fascination” that occurs when materiality and motion overwhelm and stun the viewer. Is it ironic, however, that the iris evokes the “ethereal”? Perhaps, but it is after all an analogy, a mechanism for explaining in language the sensations produced by being so close to the danger of nature’s violence.

If, as I argue, Jameson’s Great Lakes experience is more associated with the visceral than Fuller’s pursuit of transcendence, is not Jameson’s winter experience of Niagara transcendental? I do not think so: Jameson lapses into a sort of tranquil stupor precisely because her body and its senses are pushed to their material limits as a result of moving closer to the falls. Rochelle Johnson, as I have cited elsewhere, correctly emphasizes alienation as a consequence of conceptualizing nature in metaphors, but in Jameson’s case, the ethereal martyr metaphor is a characterization of the iris and Jameson’s experience: rather than alienating Jameson, the metaphor is an attempt to describe the deep impact of nature’s materiality on the human consciousness. Anthropocentrism is a condition of the sublime to be sure, but Jameson is profoundly physically affected, not consciously alienated.

Judith Johnston notes that Jameson’s winter account of Niagara was preceded by Basil Hall’s (1829) and Harriet Martineau’s (1837), and followed by Frederick Marryat’s (1839) and Charles Dickens’s (1842), in order to highlight the gender neutrality of writers’ voices when describing the falls (104, 109), which is due in part to the fact that men and women both “are governed by a romanticism that enjoins upon them the need to feel this moment in the blood and along the heart” (110). Johnston points out, by way of
endnote, that she is paraphrasing line twenty-eight from Wordsworth’s “Tintern Abbey” (123). It is important to consider, however, that Wordsworth situates this line in the context of memory that evokes physical sensations more so than physicality itself. The “beauteous forms” of “[f]ive years” ago (22, 1) may seem distant,

But oft, in lonely rooms, and ‘mid the din
Of towns and cities, I have owed to them,
In hours of weariness, sensations sweet,
Felt in the blood, and felt along the heart; (25-8)

By contrast, what Jameson feels is very immediate and more explicitly sensory, and though it unquestionably generates a strong recollection, she stresses that feelings, as generated at Niagara, must be visceral before they can become situated emotionally and in the memory.

During Jameson’s summer visit to Niagara five months later, her appreciation of the falls is more immediate but just as visceral and proximate. Rather than being less impressed through familiarity, she is eager to return to Table Rock and experience the “very, very beautiful, and strangely awful” sight (214-5). This time, Jameson is alone, it is dusk, “and in spite of the deep-voiced continuous thunder of the cataract, there was such a stillness that I could hear my own heart’s pulse throb – or did I mistake feeling for hearing?” (215) The immanent material force of the falls makes sensory discernment difficult in what might be called a trans-corporeal moment: the forces within and without the body become indistinguishable.²

The primary focus for Jameson in this summer visit is not the falls themselves, however, but the rapids preceding them, and she regards her experience of them as a rite
of passage, an exercise in fortitude that will prepare her for nature’s unknowns. Jameson describes the rapids in vivid, personifying imagery that captures the “wildly, magnificently beautiful” motion of the rapids (216). The thought that anything caught in these rapids will be “swallowed up” and “annihilated” “thrills the blood,” and even though she “could have burst into a wild laugh” as she “trembled and admired” the scene, it soon proves to be too much: “the giddy, infinite motion of the headlong waters, dancing and leaping, and reveling and roaring, in their mad glee, gave me a sensation of rapturous terror, and at last caused a tension of the nerves in my head, which obliged me to turn away” (216-7). Like the ambiguity between her own pulse and the falls’ vibration, the rapids are powerfully internalized through the senses because of their frantic, perpetual motion. Although Jameson is fortunately able to “turn away,” the “tension of nerves in [her] head” suggests something closer to a subject-subject relationship between Jameson and the rapids rather than a subject-object dichotomy. Not only is she consciously affected by her experience, a central theme of travel writing, but she is also physically affected in an unexpected, unwanted way. Perhaps this is the reason she asserts, “I shall never see again, or feel again, aught like it – never! I did not think there was an object in nature, animate or inanimate, that could thus overset me now!” (217).

The internalization of nature’s material force here is unique for her, and she reminisces that she saw the experience as steeling her against future, nonhuman invasions of her vital, material frame. Her use of the term “object” illustrates the fundamental materiality of nature in her view, its ability to be seen and felt but also to “overset” the seer, and she seems to be alluding to the word’s original Latin connotation of “something thrown in the way of.”
But how is Jameson’s experience any different from any other writer who shows that she is materially affected by nature, sometimes negatively? In many ways, it is not different, but reading Jameson’s account of the physically pervasive materiality of nature suggests that perhaps most extant criticism on travel writing focuses too heavily on the discursive ideologies of aesthetics and taste, failing to substantively account for the ways travelers saw their tours as opportunities to physically engage with, and be physically engaged by, nature and other people. As I will show throughout this chapter, a motif that emerges in Jameson’s account is a type of self-objectification, not in the sense that she sees herself as an object without agency, but rather in a way demonstrating her awareness that she is viewed, acted upon, and/or changed by the very objects, “animate or inanimate,” that she encounters. Jameson seems to have realized that the transience of travel did not equal detachment; instead, travel consists of a network of entanglements all the more variegated because the sites of entanglement are often changing. Standing still at Niagara, these entanglements are so intense that Jameson knows she needs to keep moving.

One of the most famous passages in Fuller’s *Summer on the Lakes* is her representation of Niagara’s savage sublimity, an exemplary illustration of the ways in which the senses are subjugated by the imagination in order to produce an exercise in transcendence. Unlike Jameson and in the tradition of her Transcendentalist circle, the senses for Fuller are a material stepping stone toward an ideal, an archetypal concept, in which the individual demonstrates her ability to envision a greater intuitive principle. Fuller begins her account of Niagara by describing a sort of tedious grandeur, in which “there is no escape from the weight of a perpetual creation” (3). And yet, perhaps rather
masochistically, Fuller has to view the falls day after day before she sees “the full wonder of the scene”:

After awhile it drew me into itself as to inspire an undefined dread, such as I never knew before, such as may be felt when death is about to usher us into a new existence. The perpetual trampling of the waters seized my senses. I felt that no other sound, however near, could be heard, and would start to look behind me for a foe. I realized the identity of that mood of nature in which these waters were poured down with such absorbing force, with that in which the Indian was shaped on the same soil. For continually upon my mind came, unsought and unwelcome, images, such as never haunted it before, of naked savages stealing behind me with uplifted tomahawks; again and again this illusion recurred, and even after I had thought it over, and tried to shake it off, I could not help starting and looking behind me (4).

The sensory aspects of Fuller’s experience are situated within, and subordinate to, her imaginative experience. The death analogy and the transcendence it suggests emphasizes this experience as one of consciousness and transformation, the sensory consequences of which are just as “unsought and unwelcome” as the imaginative ones. Although Fuller is overcome with paranoia, she has achieved her goal: in seizing “the mood of nature,” she has come to an understanding of Niagara’s meaning, the savagely sublime ideal with which it is imbued. The mind has grasped what the senses in the moment cannot, which is that the creation of this place, as well as of “the Indian,” was conducted in a mood of violence and terror. The lesson here is something akin to “ignorance is bliss”:
understanding nature’s spirit at Niagara is revelatory, but the price to be paid is unmitigated fear. Fuller’s transcendence of materiality, and the resulting knowledge of nature’s meaning she professes, are a paralyzing, pervasive, and a crippling detriment to her agency as a thinking, feeling human being.

Like Jameson, Fuller is impressed with Table Rock, going so far as confessing that sitting upon it was what she “liked best,” and her reasoning demonstrates her continued attempt to transcend Niagara’s materiality (5). On Table Rock, Fuller relates, “all power of observing details, all separate consciousness, was quite lost” (5). Fuller appreciates Table Rock as a place in which sensory experience—“observing details”—dissolves into pure intuition. Sensory experience, the vulgar corporeality of the human body, is a “separate consciousness” that serves as a distracting alternative to true consciousness, the consciousness that functions beyond the material realm in the sphere of the ideal. Fuller suggests here that it was her materiality, specifically the ability to experience fear under the imagined threat of death, that was so detrimental in her perception of nature’s “mood,” but on Table Rock, this fear dissipates with the transcendence of visceral response.

Also like Jameson, Fuller is deeply affected by Niagara’s rapids, but again she is in pursuit of something well beyond their materiality and their impact on her corporeal self. In particular, she is drawn to the “fountain beyond the Moss Islands,” and she “return[s] many times to watch the play of its crest” (5). Compounding its enchanting beauty for Fuller is “the little waterfall beyond” and its significance as an urstruktur, a physical form illustrating the original organizing principle of a transcendental ideal and much akin to Thoreau’s leaf in Walden (1854) and, to a lesser extent, the spine in
Ishamel’s belief in *Moby-Dick* (1851) (Thoreau 204-7, Melville 276). In this small cataract, Fuller asserts,

> nature seems, as she often does, to have made a study for some larger design. She delights in this,—a sketch within a sketch, a dream within a dream. Wherever we see it, the lines of the great buttress in the fragment of stone, the hues of the waterfall, copied in the flowers that star its bordering mosses, we are delighted; for all the lineaments become fluent, and we mould the scene in congenial thought with its genius (5).

When the *urstruktur* is identified, the perceiving human mind is in correspondence with nature’s ideal, producing a holism with unlimited transformative potential. In other words, once the *urstruktur* is found, the human mind can imagine nature as nature consciously intended for itself to be seen. For this reason, I take issue with Wilson’s assertions regarding Fuller at Niagara: “No harmonizing principle, no *eidos* can contain these waters. The falls are flux,” and the rapids in particular are “destroying and creating, stable and transient, they harvest the virtues of all water,… of all creation…. Nature is incomplete, a work-in-progress playfully revising itself” (61). Certainly Fuller extols the virtues of creation-in-progress and the delightful turbulence thus produced, but her identification of an *urstruktur* suggests that there is very much an “*eidos*” that can, at least conceptually and imaginatively, “contain” Niagara’s waters. All she has to do is view nature primarily as representative, and as material in an ancillary sense.
Mackinac Island

The positive depiction of Mackinac Island that Jameson presents occurs in the way she revises the distance implied by the picturesque into an assertion that the picturesque can also produce feelings of immediacy and intimacy. Undergirding this revision is the sense of community Jameson experiences as a result of visceral contact with other people and the subject-subject relationship with them she perceives.

The morning of her arrival at Mackinac Island is one of Jameson’s most memorable in all her travels because of the stunning, mesmerizing beauty she witnesses, and it sets off a trope of enchantment through which she relates her profound sensory experiences for the rest of the narrative. The amber and pink sunrise; the pale moon in the west; the foliage of the island; the gleaming whiteness of the fort; the Anishinaabeg wigwams all along the shore; the glassy surface of the Straits: “O how passing lovely it was! how wondrously beautiful and strange! I cannot tell how long I may have stood, lost – absolutely lost, and fearing even to wink my eyes, lest the spell should dissolve, and all should vanish away like some air-wrought phantasy, some dream out of fairy land” (399). For the rest of her travels among the islands of northern Lake Huron, Jameson employs the “fairy land” motif to describe picturesque scenes that strike her with idyllic wonder. Certainly this motif is a Romantic convention of which Jameson is all too aware, “but I despair,” she admits, “unless words were of light, and lustrous hues, and breathing music” (398). Citing the inadequacy of words for conveying profound beauty is yet another literary convention, but Jameson frames this inadequacy in words’ material shortcomings, stressing the gap between the visceral and the discursive. After a satisfying visit to the Cave of Skulls, however, Jameson finds a way to creatively merge
the sensory with enchantment: “This is a bijou [punning on “bojou,” the Anishinaabe corruption of the French greeting] of an island! – a little bit of fairy ground, just such a thing as some of our amateur travellers would like to pocket and run away with (if they could) – and set down in the midst of one of their fish-ponds” (423). By asking her reader to imagine the act of putting the island jewel in his pocket and transplanting it, Jameson is able to frame something magical as physically pedestrian, thus foregrounding considerations of materiality as the basis for imaginative possibilities (precisely the inverse of Fuller’s general approach).

Jameson’s bojou/bijou pun is indicative of the great extent to which her interactions with Native peoples on Mackinac Island direct her experience there, a result of an intimate exchange of gazes and contact. On the one hand, Jameson performs the role of elitist colonizer in her rather invasive observation of the Anishinaabeg. As visiting working-class cottages had become part and parcel of the middle- and upper-class tourist’s effort to experience the picturesque and the pastoral in Britain,³ Jameson brings this aesthetic, class-conditioned paradigm with her to the Great Lakes. For just about any British visitor in the period, Indians, rather than peasants, were the human embodiments of the picturesque. Jameson is interested in the domestic operations of Anishinaabe families, and she is struck by the fact that—as is the case anywhere something like an economy exists—there are impoverished, poorly dressed Native people as well as wealthy, fashionable Native people (401-2). One family in particular was “preparing to embark, and were dismantling their wigwams and packing up their goods, not at all discomposed by my vicinity, as I sat on a bank watching the whole process with no little interest” (403). It is hard to imagine that these Anishinaabeg weren’t at least a little
annoyed by the subtle intrusiveness of Jameson just sitting there and watching their routine, but then, by the late 1830s, most Anishinaabeg passing through Mackinac would have been well acquainted with the habits of European and American visitors, including tourists. Later in Jameson’s stay on Mackinac, a severe storm batters the island. She reports, “I was anxious to see how the wigwam establishments had stood out the storm, and was surprised to find that little or no damage had been done. I peeped into several, with a nod and a bojou, and found the inmates very snug” (413). Certainly Jameson would not do such a thing to people of her own race and class, but she does evince a genuine concern for the wellbeing of these Anishinaabeg, and there is a touch of humor in the image of her poking her auburn head through the entrance flap and saying hi in their language.

Jameson has cause, though, to feel considerably familiar with these Native people, and she very purposefully presents herself as the object of the Native gaze. Jameson explains how she is in the parlor of the Schoolcraft house in which she is staying, reading a newspaper article in which young, east-coast American women are being urged to move to Wisconsin in order to resolve the gender disparity there: “I was … thinking that women must certainly be at a premium in these parts, when suddenly the windows were darkened, and looking up, I beheld a crowd of faces, dusky, painted, wild, grotesque – with flashing eyes and white teeth, staring in upon me. I quickly threw down the paper and hastened out” (408-9). It is of course ironic that being the object of curiosity unsettles Jameson, but in my view, this irony is deliberate and predicated on her awareness that being the tourist does not mean she is the only viewing subject. Brigitte Georgi-Findlay observes that this scene “reverses the relations of power involved in seeing and being
seen,” and this “‘darkening-of-the-window’ moment is so often repeated in women’s western narratives that it assumes the status of a topos” (61). With Jameson situating this moment within her feminist reaction to the proposed importation of women to the Great Lakes suggests that she is the brunt of this joke. In the discourse of gender norms, Jameson’s gesture here is subversive: she is turning the tables on herself, and it is meant to be funny. Upper-class white women, in the European androcentric view, were objects of taste and critique, but they weren’t supposed to delight in it and laugh about it. Describing herself as the center of Native male attention is less about vanity and more so commentary about gender politics, particularly the gender politics of travel. Jameson is suggesting the reality of travel contradicts constructs regarding social expectations of women, but that this contradiction should be celebrated as an assertion of women’s rights.

Jameson is observing a young, handsome, well-dressed Ottawa man as a fine example of Native fashion when his notice of Jameson initiates an exchange that moves beyond the visual to the physical. “Seeing my attention fixed upon him, he came up and shook hands with me, repeating ‘Bojou! Bojou!’ Others immediately pressed forward to shake hands, or rather take my hand, for they do not shake it; and I was soon in the midst of a crowd of perhaps thirty or forty Indians, all holding out their hands to me, or snatching mine, and repeating ‘bojou’ with every expression of delight and good-humour” (410). Again, a comical moment, but perhaps more importantly a subversive one because of Jameson’s physical contact with the Ottawa men and her status as the center of their attention.
All of Jameson’s physical encounters with the Anishinaabeg on Mackinac are not so comedic; in her meeting of Jane Johnston Schoolcraft, Jameson emphasizes the pathos occasioned by physical contact and its meaning. With Schoolcraft, physical contact is presented in the context of gender politics and the trans-racial, trans-cultural solidarity of women Jameson perceives. Jameson is made aware that Schoolcraft is suffering from illness, so her intercourse with her is limited, but deeply affecting. By the summer of 1837, Schoolcraft’s laudanum addiction was probably debilitating, and she had begun to experience depression because of an increasingly difficult marriage and because she was still haunted by the death of her first child a decade earlier. Nonetheless, Jameson is impressed by her “true, lady-like simplicity,” her beauty, and her unique accent (which probably consisted of the king’s English colored by subtle Scots-Irish and Ojibwe intonations) (405). Jameson relates, “The damp, tremulous hand, the soft, plaintive voice[,] the touching expression of her countenance, told too painfully of resigned and habitual suffering” (405). Jameson is self-conscious about Schoolcraft’s obligation to entertain her, “but she is good, gentle, and in most delicate health, and there are a thousand quiet ways in which woman may be kind and useful to her sister woman” (405-6). One imagines that, as a fellow well-educated woman writer, Schoolcraft’s talks with Jameson would have been intellectually sophisticated, but that is not what Jameson addresses; instead, she highlights the sensory pleasure Schoolcraft provides her, the corporeal intimacy of Schoolcraft’s body and voice, and the feeling of womanly unanimity thus produced. Jameson’s and Schoolcraft’s interactions reflect what Laura L. Mielke calls “moving encounters, scenes in which representatives of the two ‘races,’ face-to-face in a setting claimed by both, participated in a highly emotional exchange that
indicated their hearts had more in common than their external appearances or political allegiances suggested” (2). The moving encounter here is emotional due in large measure to its sensory qualities.

Jameson’s conception of the travel narrative as documentation of the traveler’s visceral experience of nature, other bodies, and her own body is extremely subversive in the context of late Enlightenment and early Romantic aesthetic theories that had hitherto informed the travelogue. In Bohls’s analysis of aesthetic contemplation as put forth by Kant, she observes, “To regard an object aesthetically, one cannot desire to eat it, embrace it, own it, or otherwise draw worldly benefit from it. One must be entirely indifferent to the object’s material existence, regarding it solely as an ideal form” (68). Of course, the claim to disinterestedness, as Bohls shows, is very much the product of vested interests, particularly patriarchal ones (9-10). Travel writing was also a forum for considering the ethics of cultures, and, in her reading of Adam Smith’s conception of ethical judgment, she shows that “particulars must be set aside,” especially “the body and its desires. Since bodily appetites are transient as well as idiosyncratic, they are difficult or impossible for others to enter into” (81). Fuller, as is already evident, subscribes to all of these conditions of aesthetic contemplation, but Jameson patently rejects every one of them, especially at Mackinac Island. This small island at the northwestern extremity of Lake Huron is thus a site of revolution for Jameson, a complex entanglement of materialities that capture the passionate interest of her feminine, ravenous senses and function as a protest against male-dominated discourse.

Fuller also addresses the picturesque qualities of Mackinac Island and has numerous encounters with the Anishinaabeg, but she is more interested in viewing this
place in terms of the idea of nature it suggests and the spirit of the Indian she presumes is interconnected with it. Contrary to the manner in which Jameson, despite being a tourist, celebrates Mackinac Island by way of the materially constituted sense of belonging she develops, Fuller is in pursuit of the universal truths Mackinac represents; her attitude toward Indians is thus elitist and condescending because she is interested in knowing them abstractly, not personally, and certainly not physically.

Fuller’s attention to nonhuman elements and phenomena is primarily directed toward Mackinac Island’s caves and the arched rock because they form a likeness to human-made ruins, but Fuller takes the analogy to its transcendental extreme. The figuring of the geological ruin places Fuller in a long tradition of seeking the beautiful and sublime in nature by imbuing natural forms with anthropocentric meaning. And yet, Fuller’s ruin analogies revolve around nature’s processes. She is struck by the “architectural forms” of Mackinac’s bluffs: “In this stone, caves are continually forming, from the action of the atmosphere; one of these is quite deep, and with a fragment left at its mouth, wreathed with little creeping plants, that looks, as you sit within, like a ruined pillar” (106). Although “the atmosphere” occasions geological change of course, the analogy of human construction and decline seems irresistible. And the arched rock is notable for its geometric perfection viewed from any angle, one of many Mackinac formations “carefully decorated” by “Nature” with flora: “These natural ruins may vie for beautiful effect with the remains of European grandeur, and have, beside, a charm as of a playful mood in nature” (106). Despite the analogies to human structures, the natural ruins are just a bit better because they reflect that “playful mood in nature.” These “ruins” then are not beautiful because of the melancholy they evoke as “the remains of European
“grandeur” do—although they do that too by simply being referred to as ruins—but because nature’s playfulness is a thing of beauty. For the European Romantic, art, at its highest level of genius, should reflect nature, showing a correspondence between the ingenious human mind and the forces of nature; Fuller sees this correspondence, but with a difference: that the “caves are continually forming” is the source of nature’s playfulness, its ability to constantly alter the same form over time. The European architectural ruin does not exhibit the same never-ending force in man, but rather the inevitable limitations of man’s physicality and that of what he constructs. It is important to remember that prior to her observations on Mackinac, Fuller has already pronounced that the human mind is where spirit is at its finest, the same spirit that is so playful and creative, but not as perfect, in nature (98). When Fuller makes the case that natural ruins are more aesthetically pleasing, what she is really arguing is that humanity has far more intellectual and spiritual potential than has been demonstrated thus far.

The views on Native peoples Fuller explores at Mackinac Island reveal a conception in which Indians are the physical human ruins that best exhibit the failure of humankind to live up to the promise of spirit. McKinsey rightly points out Fuller’s deep concerns with symbolism and history in *Summer on the Lakes*, but adds, “for the Indian is [the book’s] focal point and her journey westward is a journey into Indian territory and a quest for the roots of Indian culture” (219). Certainly Native peoples are an important component of Fuller’s experience, but, as I will show below, Fuller’s concern for Indians is only one of many avenues toward transcendence. Relatedly but alternatively, Mielke sees Fuller’s “moving encounters” with Native people as part of her “highly personal testimony regarding humanity’s place within an organic universe” and her “quest to
transcend the false divisions between the material and the spiritual” (94). In my view, Fuller already intuited “humanity’s place within an organic universe” well before she met a Native person in the Great Lakes, and the path toward the spiritual depends on transcending the material for Fuller. Like any other material entity or phenomenon in her narrative, Indians for Fuller are representative, a way of accessing a larger energy of consciousness. Suggestively, Fuller’s discussion of Native people in the “Mackinaw” chapter contains more about her reading on Indians than it does her actual experiences with them; I focus on the latter, however, in order to stress the pervasive nature of her transcendental ideology when it comes to the material conditions of humanity.

Like Jameson, Fuller arrives on Mackinac Island during the annual gathering of Anishinaabe groups there, but unlike Jameson, she arrives at night to a scene that is sublime in the way it unsettles even as it pleases. To signal their arrival, the captain of Fuller’s steamboat fires off rockets that receive an enthusiastic reaction from the Indians (105). Fuller relates,

[M]y sensations as I walked with a stranger to a strange hotel, through the midst of these shrieking savages, and heard the pants and snorts of the departing steamer, which carried away all my companions, were somewhat of the dismal sort; though it was pleasant, too, in the way that everything strange is; everything that breaks upon the routine that so easily incrusts us (105).

One can understand Fuller’s attraction to the novelty of this experience—never has she been surrounded by two thousand Anishinaabeg, much less in a foreign place under the cover of darkness—but this scene establishes the motif at Mackinac of Fuller’s
uneasiness and presumed cultural superiority in her close encounters with Native peoples. The next morning, out “among [her] Indian neighbours,” Fuller is charmed by the flute music pervading the domestic scene, and “thought it not unworthy comparison, in its graceful sequence, and the light flourish, at the close, with the sweetest bird-songs; and this, like the bird-song, is only practiced to allure a mate” (105-6). This scene resonates with McKinsey’s observation that Fuller’s “most characteristic metaphor for nature’s expressiveness” and her search for meaning in nature “is not visual but aural” (218). In sounds she is able to detect the poetry of spiritual force, but this particular metaphor is an essentialist gesture, reducing a complex social and artistic medium to nothing more than an Indian mating song. On the one hand, Fuller quite possibly intends this analogy as a compliment; on the other hand, she apparently has not read her Audubon, because birds sing for many other reasons than attracting mates. A third possibility is that she is subtly stressing the vulgar animality she sees, and hears, in Indians and birds, creatures that presumably do not possess the conscious capacity to make art for any other reason than procreation, one of the most entangled manifestations of materiality, as it were.

Compare the condescension characterizing the aforementioned physically proximate experiences to the picturesque ideal Fuller perceives when she views Native people from a distance. “[L]ooking down from a near height” at “the fair, curving beach,” Fuller relates, “I felt that I never wished to see a more fascinating picture” (107). She describes the pastoral harmony between the beach and the Anishinaabe lodges; the beautiful sunset; the women happily employed in cooking, laughing, and conversing with each other; the carefree children playing in the water and the sand; the canoes at rest on the beach; the canoes of newcomers gliding in from the Straits (107-8). Fuller concludes,
“It was a scene of ideal loveliness, and these wild forms adorned it, as looking so at home in it,” and although she is looking on while the Native people tell stories around campfires, she is “so taken up with the spirit of the scene” that she is unable to figure out what “these weather-beaten, sullen, but eloquent figures” are talking about (108). Only at the distance required by the picturesque is Fuller able to access “the spirit of the scene,” but individuals, in their eloquent sullenness, only provoke confusion. This scene resonates with Bohls’s point regarding the disinterestedness and the ignoring of particulars presumably required for appropriate aesthetic contemplation, suggesting what might be called a symbiotic relationship between disinterestedness and transcendence, and between particulars and materiality.

When Fuller actually does interact with the Anishinaabeg, one cannot help but notice the extent to which she represents herself as impressing whom she assumes are naïve savages. Like Jameson, Fuller enjoys being the center of their attention; however, Fuller more explicitly emphasizes her intellectual and cultural superiority over Anishinaabe women, whereas Jameson presents her relationships with Anishinaabe men in a language of reciprocity. Perhaps it is the “steady gaze” Fuller observes in Native men that makes the “soft and wild but melancholy” though “shy, sweet expression” in the eyes of Native women more appealing for her (111, 112). Certainly, given Fuller’s insistence on being the aesthetic subject viewing aesthetic objects, the eye of the Indian female would be much more conducive to the project of transcendence than the Indian male’s. Fuller reminisces that Indian females used to crowd round me, to inspect little things I had to show them, but never press near; on the contrary would reprove and keep off the children.
Anything they took from my hand, was held with care, then shut or folded, and returned with an air of lady-like precision. They would not stare, however curious they might be, but cast sidelong glances (111).

Fuller stresses a lack of physical and visual contact that keeps her at the center of an exchange predicated on the movement of inanimate objects from Fuller’s hand, to theirs, and back to Fuller’s; the objects are surrogates for contact between her and the Anishinaabe women. Some objects are supposedly more impressive than others:

A locket that I wore, was an object of untiring interest; they seemed to regard it as a talisman. My little sun-shade was still more fascinating to them; apparently they had never before seen one. For an umbrella they entertain profound regard, probably looking upon it as the most luxurious superfluous a person can possess, and therefore a badge of great wealth (111).

Fuller’s conclusions are purely speculative, and they are made in order to further her representation of Native people as naïve and the degraded remnants of nature’s spirit and history. In all actuality, these Anishinaabe women are likely very aware of the value of whatever metal Fuller’s locket is made of, and to presume they had never seen a sun-shade when many white women tourists have preceded Fuller on Mackinac is frankly ridiculous. Georgi-Findlay goes so far as to suggest that personal contact with Native people makes Fuller realize that the power of her own gaze is “a mere illusion of power” (60). But Fuller’s status as an aesthetic subject depends on the paternalist stereotypes; her search for transcendence of nature’s materiality requires a view of Indians as primitives who have degraded from an ideal rather than progressed. Indeed, Fuller’s white “lady
acquaintance” on Mackinac cannot understand how Fuller can “endure the dirt, the peculiar smell of the Indians, and their dwellings” (113). Fuller does acknowledge that “abhorrence” of Indian poverty makes whites forget how much Indians have suffered, but her own admission of dissatisfaction with the way Indians live now makes the above claim against prejudice nominal at best.

When Fuller returns to Mackinac after a trip to Sault Ste. Marie (discussed below), she observes the departure of the Anishinaabeg at the end of the annual gathering, which is “not quite so pleasant” as seeing them arrive because of the lack of aesthetic quality. Fuller complains, “[T]hey left behind, on all the shore, the blemishes of their stay – old rags, dried boughs, fragments of food, the marks of their fires. Nature likes to cover up and gloss over spots and scars, but it would take her some time to restore that beach to the state it was in before they came” (152). Here, Fuller alludes to the theory of inevitable Indian extinction that preoccupied Euro-American intellectuals in the nineteenth century. Furthermore, and more pertinent to my argument, Fuller sees nature as placing the very evidence of Indians’ material existence under erasure; Indians are now so far removed from the spirit of nature that their history is something nature itself wants to “cover up,” though this will be a difficult job, so extensive is the Indians’ littering. Nonetheless, Fuller maintains, “I feel acquainted with the soul of this race; I read its nobler thought in their defaced figures. There was a greatness, unique and precious, which he who does not feel will never duly appreciate the majesty of nature on this American continent” (153). In order to have a truly transcendental experience of nature, one has to look past the actual material (thus socioeconomic and political)
conditions of Native lives and gain intuitive knowledge of the intangible spirit of the Indian past.

Also requisite is maintaining a particular level of narcissism: even though Fuller admits to enjoying a “canoe excursion” with her companion, the two of them are paddled by two well-dressed, respected, young Anishinaabe men who “thought it, apparently, fine amusement to be attending two white women” (153). The excursion and its material effects are exhilarating and fun for Fuller, but these sensations are situated within a framework of racial difference predicated on white superiority. And it is important to keep in mind that by the 1840s, Anishinaabe people knew how to make white tourists feel good. In any case, while readers may experience some relief in seeing Fuller cut loose and laugh at being jostled by Lake Huron’s waves, she reminds us that this fun is about her status as aesthetic subject, not the chilly water bursting into the canoe and its effect on her corporeal self.

In his examination of pantheism’s pervasiveness in American Renaissance thought and its unsettling consequences for male identity, particularly in the writings of Emerson, Melville, and Hawthorne, Richard Hardack explains that pantheists seek “transcendence … of all separations between subject and object, perceiver and perceived, and self and world,” adding, “[P]antheism allows men to merge with other men in and through nature, but at the expense of their individuality…. The transcendentalist sought to transcend the constraints of nation and history and the borders of the individual male self; the pantheist believed he could actually merge into divine Nature to do so” (4-5). Perhaps Fuller recognized the danger of the self’s dissolution that pantheism required and the existential crises it prompted in her male counterparts, and was thus content to
practice her transcendentalism in a way that recognized a vital energy that united all, even as it allowed for claiming intellectual superiority by privileging elusive but attainable transcendental consciousness. And Fuller’s womanhood would have compelled her to find ways to emphasize the uniqueness of feminine intellectual capacity; subscribing to pantheism could only suggest the homogeneity of femininity through the dissolution of distinctions between material and mental, physical and spiritual. Mackinac Island, with its natural and human ruins, turns out to be the perfect place for Fuller to access the spirit of nature without losing herself in it. In other words, this island allows Fuller to make an island of herself, a center point of consciousness surrounded by but distinct from materiality.

Sault Ste. Marie

Jameson’s trip from Mackinac Island to Sault Ste. Marie is a serene interlude bridging two places characterized by social engagement and jocularity. Jameson travels to the Soo with Jane Johnston Schoolcraft and her children in a bateau manned by five voyageurs, and along the way she is overwhelmed by the sense of solitude she experiences in what are now known as the Les Cheneaux Islands. Jameson reports that she and her party do not encounter a single other human being for two days and nights, and she admits the difficulty of conveying “the strange sensation one has, thus thrown for a time beyond the bounds of civilised humanity, or indeed any humanity; nor the wild yet solemn reveries which come over one in the midst of this wilderness of woods and water. All was so solitary, so grand in its solitude, as if nature unviolated sufficed to herself,” which causes her to revel in the fancy of herself and Schoolcraft “alone in a new-born world” (478-9).
Her experience of nonhuman wilderness is profound enough for her to make the biocentric gesture of imagining a world without humans, a nature that demonstrates indifference regarding human absence, as “grand.” The irony of course is that she feels this way while traveling with several other people; then again, never in her life has nonhuman nature soothed her senses so completely.

Once in the Soo, Jameson discovers that Lake Superior whitefish is really, really good (486), but the rapids of the St. Mary’s in which those fish are caught are distracting and intoxicating: from her room in the Schoolcraft house, she claims, “if I look out any longer on those surging rapids, I shall certainly turn giddy” and forget to report on the history and topography of the area to her readers (482). She is enraptured by the “expanse of white foam” that is “not so terrific, not on so large a scale, as the rapids of Niagara, but quite as beautiful – quite as animated” (483). Again, Jameson’s nerves are excited by turbulent waters, but now she has to look away not because of a headache, but because it is her duty to inform her readers. And as Jameson was compiling “Summer Rambles,” she would have looked back on the Soo rapids as a force of nature symbiotically connected with a cultural practice that produces a dramatic shift in how she views and represents herself.

For Jameson, shooting the rapids is a cultural baptism that leads to her being “a Chippewa born” (499). In the days preceding the event, she spends a considerable amount of time with the Ojibwe members of the Johnston family. She finally gathers the gumption to experience the rapids intimately, and with an Anishinaabe piloting her canoe, dodging rocks during the descent on the turbulent, splashing water fills her with “giddy, breathless, delicious excitement” (498). Afterwards, when she is told by the
Johnston women – including Jane, her sister Charlotte Johnston MacMurray, and their mother, Ozhaguscodaywayquay – that she is the first white woman to descend the rapids, Jameson gushes, “Two glasses of champagne could not have made me more tipsy and more self-complacent!” and they give her a new Ojibwe name: formerly named “O,daw,yaun,gee the fair changing moon,” she is now “Wah,sàh,ge,wah,nó,quà”: “the woman of the bright foam” (499). It is highly doubtful that Jameson was the first white woman to ever descend the rapids, given the fact that white traders had been passing through the Sault for two hundred years. In any case, Jameson reports that the experience of the wild but accessible rapids is cause for her to be “declared duly initiated, and adopted into the family” (499), and at various points throughout much of the remaining narrative, refers to the Johnstons and the Ojibwe relatives of Ozhaguscodaywayquay in the possessive, as in “my mother,” “my cousin,” “my family,” etc. (501, 511, 524, 526, 542).

Wendy Roy has shown that Jameson’s “adoption” was much more contrived than Jameson’s representation of it, arguing that she actively sought adoption that was finally, patronizingly given by the Johnstons, though she also states Jameson believed “that in order to be a North American traveller and not a tourist, one must become part of what one travels through” (35-7). Even if the Johnstons did not view the adoption as legitimate, Jameson sees herself as forming an intimate relationship with the landscape commensurate with the type she perceives as constitutive of Ojibwe culture. Although Jameson seems to be the dupe of Native people playing Indian so that she can play Indian, the way in which she views culture as predicated on the materiality of nature and the visceral human experience of it is what makes her travelogue so progressive. It is in
the Soo that Jameson implicitly realizes that culture, any culture, depends on where you are and what you’re doing in that place, and she realizes that is exciting; the key is letting nature culture the body. Her “Ojibwe name”—the Woman of the Bright Foam—is, at least for her, symbolic of these realizations.

Ojibwe adoption aside, there is no question that Jameson’s engagement with nonhuman nature becomes much more pronounced after her time in the Soo. Her descent of the rapids is a turning point; from then on, she is more deliberately in pursuit of the excitements available through a visceral immersion in nature’s material phenomena. I elaborate on this pursuit of the visceral in the discussion of Jameson’s journey through the Manitoulin Islands below, but for now, I turn toward Fuller’s experience in the Soo.

Fuller too experiences the pleasures of quietude en route to the Soo, but is not the absence of humanity that undergirds these pleasures. In fact, at Point St. Joseph’s, traces of human presence increase the quality of these feelings. On a foggy morning, the captain of the steamer takes Fuller to the remnants of an English fort on the point: “All around was so wholly unmarked by anything but stress of wind and weather, the shores of these islands and their woods so like one another, wild and lonely, but nowhere rich and majestic, that there was some charm in the remains of the garden, the remains even of chimneys and a pier. They gave feature to the scene” (146-7). The wilderness and the effects of the elements are not remarkable in themselves, but with fog and manmade ruins, Fuller flirts with the Gothic. Fuller’s aesthetic sensibilities demand the melancholy indications of the human past in order for the scene to have “feature” and meet the requirements of the picturesque. The ruins and the spirit of humanity they embody give meaning to a scene that is meaningless otherwise.
Fuller is less than impressed in her descent of the rapids in the Soo. Like Jameson, she descends them in a canoe manned by Anishinaabeg, but the “gasp of terror and delight, some sensation entirely new to” her never materializes (150). Fuller attributes this disappointment in part to the adroitness of her pilots in navigating the rapids, so that only “the silliest person could not feel afraid” (150). Fuller theorizes that if she could have “come down twenty times” she “might have had leisure to realize the pleasure,” but the incoming fog forces her to opt for having “time to walk about” the town (150). Like at Niagara, what she has read and heard raises her expectations to the point that repeated exposure is necessary in order to achieve the appropriate sensations. In her decision not to re-experience the physical sensations of the rapids, Fuller seems to be confident that merely walking around will be more beneficial. It is clear to Fuller that the Soo is not the place to chase transcendence. At the very least, however, the rapids look nice: O! they are beautiful indeed, these rapids! The grace is so much more obvious than the power” (150). Fuller has beauty at her disposal, as the disinterested aesthetic subject, when nature’s physicality and cultural conditioning disappoint.

While Fuller is describing Native people catching whitefish in the rapids, she is “reminded that [she has] omitted that indispensible part of a travelling journal, the account of what we found to eat,” and goes on to explain, in one brief paragraph, that around the Soo, fruit and vegetable cultivation is subpar, but the fish and prairie chickens are quite good (151). Fuller acknowledges the brevity of her report: “I cannot hope to make up, by one bold stroke, all my omissions of daily record; but that I may show myself not destitute of the common feelings of humanity,” she will tell her reader about the food (151). The conventions of the travelogue and the desire to be perceived as “one
of us” are her motivations; otherwise, she is committed to eschewing particulars in favor of conveying an overarching spirit of the scene.

Fuller and Jameson both illustrate for their readers that the Soo is what you make it. If one is travelling in order to turn the senses loose, have fun, and develop a sense of human community, Jameson suggests the Soo is a perfect place, a place where beauty, visceral excitement, and cultural exchange are delightfully entangled. If one is in search of that higher law, Fuller demonstrates, stay away from the Soo; one will only find good game to eat and rather superficial beauty.

Jameson in the Manitoulin Islands

As Jameson proceeds east from the Soo across northern Lake Huron to begin her eventual return to Toronto, she continues to be more viscerally engaged with the nature around her, particularly by actively participating in the ways of those who call the Great Lakes home. As she becomes more accustomed to camping with the MacMurrays and their voyageurs, her account begins to reflect her desire to explore the ways in which she can present herself as a feature of a picturesque landscape. On the first night, Jameson finds it hard to get comfortable on an island inhabited by rattlesnakes, sleeping in a tent on rocky ground during a thunderstorm, but the next day opens with a beautiful summer dawn, and not only has the storm dispersed the mosquitoes, but camping shows idyllic potential: “Keeping clear of the covert to avoid these fearful snakes, I strayed down by the edge of the lake, and found a tiny creek, which answered all purposes, both of bath and mirror, and there I arranged my toilette in peace and security” (528). Perhaps Jameson was mischievously amused by the reaction readers would have to imagining the wife of the
attorney general of Upper Canada bathing in a creek on a tiny island in northern Lake Huron. In addition to understanding subversive nuance, Jameson was an astute critic of art, and here she plays the part of pastoral exhibitionist, inviting a voyeuristic gaze upon the picturesque scene she has composed. Her own body has become the focal point in a scene of natural beauty. Recalling Wendy Roy, Jameson has here become part of what she is travelling through, more so than at any previous point in her journey.

Jameson takes this exhibitionism one step further by describing herself as the object of the gaze of actual viewers, although her sense of propriety delineates a vast difference between idyllic solitude while bathing and the trouble of actual people looking through actual windows. At the Great Manitoulin Island, Jameson becomes the guest of, and is henceforth escorted in her travels by Samuel Jarvis, the newly appointed Chief Superintendent of Indian Affairs of Upper Canada, and Jameson arrives in the midst of a council between Anishinaabe groups and the British government. To be sure, Jameson is rather condescending when she states, “We are twenty white people, with 3,700 of these wild creatures around us, and I never in my life felt more security” (550), but she is also making an attempt at a progressive view and challenging the stereotype of bloodthirsty savages. Ever attuned to the comedic, however, Jameson relates, “I find it necessary, indeed, to suspend a blanket before each of the windows when I am dressing in the morning, for they have no idea of the possibility of being intrusive; they think ‘men’s eyes were made to look,’ and windows to be looked through; but, with this exception, I never met with people more genuinely polite” (550). Although there is no doubt a paternalist view of Indians as simplistic and innocent here, the mood here is flirtatious. Whereas at Mackinac Jameson was taken aback by Anishinaabe men looking through her
windows while she read, she now has a more coquettish attitude, as if to say, “Boys will be boys, so I guess I should put some blankets up while I get dressed.” Jameson’s readers may have found this rather racy, the body of a British woman of notable social status one piece of fabric away from the peering eyes of Indian men. Again, one wonders about the possible psychoanalytic significance of Jameson’s relationship with her husband in this scene, but the gesture increases Jameson’s credibility as a travel writer: readers see the great extent to which Jameson has become accommodated to the customs and nature of the Great Lakes that she engages and is engaged by; she isn’t just “passing through.”

The Anishinaabe gaze is not always comfortable for Jameson, though. During “an exhibition of [an Anishinaabe] war-dance,” one warrior in particular boasts of having “struck down seven Long-knives [Americans]” (552). Jameson relates, “This last vaunt he repeated several times with exultation, thinking, perhaps, it must be particularly agreeable to a daughter of the Red-coats; - nothing was ever less so! and the human being who was thus boasting stood within half a yard of me, his grim painted face and gleaming eyes looking into mine!” (552-3). This is a gaze infinitely more unsettling than the faces in the window on Mackinac Island, imbued as it is with violence. This is the rare occasion in which Jameson categorically dislikes being the focus of the gaze, challenging her moral stance as it does.

The violence of nonhuman nature’s forces, on the other hand, offer beauty and sublimity Jameson is only too eager to become acquainted with. While still with the MacMurrays and camping on La Cloche, the trees near the campsite catch on fire, and Jameson is mesmerized by how “wildly magnificent,” “beautiful,” and “awful” the whole scene is, particularly how the
waves, the trees and bushes and fantastic rocks, and the figures and faces of the men, caught the brilliant light as it flashed upon them with a fitful glare – the rest being lost in deepest shadow…. the night, the solitude, the dark weltering waters, the blaze which put out the mild stars which just before had looked down upon us in their tender radiance! – I never beheld such a scene. By the light of this gigantic torch we supped and prepared our beds (533).

Jameson is so exhausted by such a sensory overload that she actually manages to fall asleep—while a small forest fire rages nearby. Not only is this scene sublime—an impressive display of nature’s beautiful fury—but it is also a fine example of bathos in the way the fire becomes essentially a chandelier over their open-air dining room and helps make bedtime a bit more convenient with its light. But far from being merely a literary device, this bathos also suggests the extent to which the materiality of nature, even its dangerous materiality, has become familiar for Jameson. Daily routines need not be altered in the face of sublimity; aesthetic grandeur does not diminish the crucial corporeal needs of food and sleep.

It may be no accident that Jameson is eating when she is again struck by the profound beauty of northern Lake Huron. She is eating breakfast on the shore of a small island off the coast of Manitoulin Island with Jarvis, an interpreter, the governor’s teenage son, and some voyageurs while gazing upon a striking scene of blue sky and waters, scattered islands, and the eastern shore of Manitoulin Island: she notes, “The feeling of remoteness, of the profound solitude, added to the sentiment of beauty: it was nature in her first freshness and innocence, as she came from the hand of her Maker, and
before she had been sighed upon by humanity – defiled at once, and sanctified by the contact” (568). This passage seems to demand a reconciliation between materiality and religious sentiment, but then again, it may not. In her analysis of materiality and enchantment in the writings of Thoreau, Rochelle Johnson observes, “he specifies that the experience of enchantment is the experience of spirit – a term that he largely understands in a secular sense that even today’s scholars are likely to find tolerable: spirit as a vital force permeating all matter (including human beings),” proceeding to argue, “an examination of Thoreau’s pursuit of trans-corporeality throughout his corpus reveals a … conception and experience of bodies, natures, and an elusive but significant spirit as themselves intertwined and comprising both self and the rest of matter” (607, 611).

Jameson identified as a Christian, so her Edenic metaphor is situated within her belief in a very religious, not secular God. Nonetheless, it is possible to read “a vital force permeating all matter” here, because the physical qualities Jameson documents produce sentiments that are just as historical as they are religious: Jameson imagines a pre-human world, and though the world was “sanctified” with the creation of Adam and Eve in God’s image, Jameson also recognizes the defilement of human presence, the ways humans have disrupted and effaced nature’s beauty. Just as materiality is neither all good nor all bad, Jameson’s enchantment calls to mind the positive religious and negative physical effects of human presence. This historical, religious association is “elusive but significant” for Jameson, but it is fundamentally rooted in the way the place affects Jameson. And again, that Jameson is eating while thus enchanted emphasizes the corporeality and physicality of the moment, religiously construed as it may be.
The needs of the body compel Jameson to consider the mutability and fragility of moral sentiments, though. Reporting events that occur later in the day following the aforementioned breakfast of beauty, Jameson states, “My only discomposure arose from the destructive propensities of the gentlemen, all keen and eager sportsmen,” and she asks that the fish they catch “gasp to death” out of her sight, and that the pigeons and ducks be killed quickly and humanely (569). But, “I will, however, acknowledge, that when the bass-fish and pigeons were produced, broiled and fried, they looked so appétissants, smelt so savoury, and I was so hungry, that I soon forgot all my sentimental pity for the victims” (569). Things like “sentimental pity” do not stand a chance when the body is in need and the senses are so acutely awakened.

Jameson’s journey through the islands of northern Lake Huron represents the pinnacle of her material entanglement with the Great Lakes. Not only are her daily, corporeal activities conducted more intimately in the sphere of nonhuman nature, but these activities are part and parcel of her realization that the beautiful and sublime need not be sacrificed for the quotidian. Furthermore, it is among these islands that she most fully explores the implications of herself as an object of curiosity and an element of a lived pastoral picturesque, suggesting that the aesthetic and visceral pleasures of travel begin and end with the traveller’s body in geographical space. In order to achieve the authentic experience as examined by Oerlemans, Jameson asserts that the body itself must be available for contact and gazes.
Fuller on the Illinois Prairie

Perhaps it is appropriate that Fuller realizes the transcendent ideal on the prairie west of Chicago. Jameson seeks the visceral and finds herself most entangled in the island-scape of northern Lake Huron, whereas Fuller seeks consciousness and finds it in the diametrically opposite geographical corner of the Great Lakes region. Fuller finds the ideal she has been looking for, and while this certainly occurs in an actual physical space—it can’t not—it is not the physicality of the place in and of itself that impresses her, but more so the fact that it conforms to the ideal she has imagined; the vast majority of the Great Lakes region does not. For this reason, I believe that the Rock River chapter is the only one in *Summer On the Lakes* that does not bear a geographical place name as its title; in fact, it has no title at all, and the point Fuller is making is that the transcendental ideal is just that—it transcends the “mere” material and allows access to intangible but intelligible spirit.6

In her analysis of Fuller’s experience on the prairie, Annette Kolodny observes that Fuller’s expectations of her journey were finally met there, but she psychoanalytically situates Fuller’s satisfaction in the context of recovering her mother’s garden. This home garden in Cambridgeport, Massachusetts was the only retreat of peace and solitude Fuller had access to in an early life dominated by the patriarchal constraints of her father’s strict education program, and the role of reluctant matriarch Fuller was later forced to take on as a result of her father’s decision to move the family to remote, socially isolated Groton, Massachusetts (112-20). Kolodny’s analysis is compelling because it draws connections between physical spaces and Fuller’s psyche, but I believe Fuller is in pursuit of something much larger. The prairie’s ostensible similarity to her
mother’s garden may have certainly been attractive and comforting for Fuller, but I see this comfort as a consequence of transcendence, not Fuller’s goal.

In response to Kolodny, Georgi-Findlay posits that for Fuller on the prairie, “The eye is important, yet not the sole provider of sensory experience, and it is embodied in a narrator who draws attention to her own physical presence” (46). Georgi-Findlay goes on to point out that in “pastoraliz[ing] the prairies,” Fuller avoids “’naturalizing’ a scene, as do many travel narratives, by erasing connotations of human habitation or blotting out the signs of human presence. Moreover, she draws attention to the way the experience of beauty and nature is culturally constructed” (46). Georgi-Findlay’s assertion regarding the “naturalizing” of travel writing seems reductive, for certainly travel writers are almost always concerned with observing human cultures, and human presence is, for Fuller, the way by which meaning is made of nature. Additionally, as I will illustrate below, Fuller’s “physical presence” is not what she wants her reader to be thinking about; quite to the contrary, she wants her reader to understand that the transcendental ideal she had imagined all along can be found at a place called Rock River. Admittedly, Fuller’s attention to physical particulars in nature reaches its zenith in the Rock River chapter, but these observations are situated within the overarching, envisioned ideal she had in mind. Once the right “spirit of the scene” is discovered, particulars become more worth noting.

Fuller’s journey across the prairie toward the Rock River country functions as a foreshadowing of the transcendental ideal she will find there. Significantly, this portion of the trip is contained in the second chapter, “The Lakes,” as though until she reaches Rock River, she has not adequately put the chaos and turbulence of the actual Great Lakes behind her. West of Chicago, Fuller finds the village of Geneva charming precisely
because it is familiar, because it presents a view she had hoped she would see. Geneva reminds her “of a New England village,” and conveniently, there “are many New Englanders of an excellent stamp, generous, intelligent, discreet, and seeking to win from life its true values. Such are much wanted, and seem like points of light among swarms of settlers, whose aims are sordid, whose habits thoughtless and slovenly” (23). In the vein of a Norman Rockwell painting, Geneva reflects an ideal, and Fuller appreciates its mimetic rendering of the New England—or the portions of New England—that she values most.

Farther on, Fuller is impressed with the house and intellect “of an English gentleman” who seems to have realized “Wordsworth’s description of the wise man, who ‘sees what he foresaw’” (24). In a pastoral picturesque view that reflects how judiciously the Englishman chose the site of his house and then aesthetically situated that house, Fuller sees “that mixture of culture and rudeness in the aspect of things as gives a feeling of freedom, not of confusion” (24). Again, the scene conforms to an ideal, and is therefore pleasing. Farther on still, other homes appeal to Fuller because the “Provence rose” near the door or planted locust trees make it “pleasant to see their old home loves, brought into connection with their new splendors,” so that it is “as if the ordering mind of man had some idea of home beyond a mere shelter, beneath which to eat and sleep” (25).

Compared to Rock River, the rest of the Great Lakes region through which Fuller travels is disappointing. The Rock River country, discussed in Fuller’s third, nameless chapter, is so ideal that Fuller blames Black Hawk and his tribe themselves for loosing it to American settlers and the army: “How fair the scene through which [the trail of Black Hawk’s retreat] led! How could they let themselves be conquered, with such a country to
fight for!” (31) As is the case elsewhere, Fuller is ignorant of or ignores the complex, reprehensible political causes underlying Native people’s loss of territory.

Significantly perhaps, Fuller asserts the universal appeal of this area while observing a Fourth of July celebration: “To a person of unspoiled tastes, the beauty alone would afford stimulus enough. But with it would be naturally associated all kinds of wild sports, experiments, and the studies of natural history. In these regards, the poet, the sportsman, the naturalist, would alike rejoice in this wide range of untouched loveliness” (37). Of course, as Fuller herself has already reported, the area is far from “untouched,” though it is likely she means that it has as yet only been touched by those of “unspoiled tastes.” Although she claims the area is fit for those “favored or cursed” with the ability to endure hardship as well as “for the delicate, the thoughtful, even the indolent or eccentric” (38), Fuller seems to attempt a retraction of this egalitarian, pseudo-promotional rhetoric when she admits that there is much of interest she has purposely left out. “What I got from the journey,” she relates, “was the poetic impression of the country at large; it is all I have aimed to communicate” (42). In one sense, this can be considered confirmation of Fuller’s intention to produce a travel narrative unique in form and content, an effort, as Susan Belasco Smith puts it, to explore “the undiscovered continent of her own life” (xiii). And yet, one cannot help noticing the elitism permeating her pursuit of the Rock River area’s “poetic impression.” She confesses that she has heard “many piquant anecdotes and tales drawn from private life” in the picturesque homes of Euro-American settlers: “But here courtesy restrains the pen, for I know those who received the stranger with such frank kindness would feel ill requited by its becoming the means of fixing many spy-glasses, even though the scrutiny might be one of admiring
interest, upon their private homes” (42). I am compelled to believe that this is a subtle allusion to the backlash that Caroline Kirkland received from her Michigan neighbors when she aired their dirty laundry in *A New Home, Who’ll Follow?* More concretely, Fuller here represents herself as a worthy guest, as someone who was always more than welcome in these picturesque homes filled with great stories.

Fuller’s protective elitism is understandable, though, in the context of the area’s personal importance for her. She does not want this western, transcendent Eden trampled by droves of people who will not understand its “poetic impression” and the way that Euro-Americans have learned to live in concert with nature’s beauty in order to produce a living pastoral.

In his discussion of American Renaissance literature, Robert E. Abrams examines the ubiquitous contingency produced when cultural conditioning about landscapes is confronted with viewing landscapes themselves, producing perceptual and conceptual instabilities that continually proliferate in an “obscure dimension” Abrams calls “negative geography or space which constitutes the dark, alien aspect of all positively conceived landscapes and spectacles, subtly altering everything encountered and known” (2). Regarding *Summer on the Lakes* specifically, Abrams states, “Fuller … yearns for pure, unadulterated contact with ‘living presence,’ but breakthrough into a radically immanent here and now eludes her, and her impressions are heavily compromised by printed, widely disseminated imagery and travelogue description” (89). That Fuller constantly seems to be measuring what she expects against what she actually experiences and thinks creates the negative geography Abrams describes, but it also seems that she is never really in pursuit of “a radically immanent here and now”: the “contact with ‘living
presence”” she seeks does seem to be achieved at Rock River, where negative geography gives way to discovering an ideal, if fragile, in a real place.

For Jameson in *Winter Studies and Summer Rambles in Canada*, agency is about freedom of movement first and foremost; secondary to movement as generative entanglement is what the imagination and memory can accomplish in light of that movement. The capacity to enjoy and celebrate the visceral, even in alien landscapes, is for Jameson the true measure of agency. In *Summer on the Lakes*, Fuller outlines agency as overwhelmingly intellectual, a manifestation of the power of consciousness. Agency is the capacity to recognize the transcendent laws of the cosmos that lay hidden in material forms; agency is transcendence. Any entanglement suggested by her writing must be seen primarily in terms of the vital force of spirit connecting all things.

Between these two representations of the Great Lakes, a delightfully complex portrait emerges. Stability and stasis in nature and culture are rare, and human agency is constituted in various ways, even for those who are “just visiting.” Whether one is already living in the Great Lakes, considering emigration, or just planning a trip, one cannot easily characterize the region in any simplistic, homogeneous way, except to say that there are all kinds of people with all kinds of values doing all kinds of things in all kinds of physical environments. Jameson seems to value these characteristics because they are conducive to her project of celebrating the visceral, whereas Fuller struggles to find a way of seeing it all as cohesive and connected. Ultimately, both projects are worthy undertakings—they both test the limits of what it means to be human in the Great Lakes—and both are invaluable cultural artifacts in their own rights.
From a New Materialist, ecocritical, or geocritical point of view, however, Jameson’s travel narrative is more usefully instructive because it explicitly illustrates the generative possibilities of material entanglements. While it is not quite accurate to say that Jameson writes from an ecological or preservationist frame of reference, her travelogue demonstrates the beauty and pathos of meeting nature on its own material terms. Despite all this, Fuller’s account warns readers, especially today, about the alienation that can result from viewing nature too abstractly; or as Rochelle Johnson frames it, the alienation stemming from the metaphor of reason (146-65). As she searches for transcendence and fixates on consciousness, we see Fuller primarily dissatisfied with the physical human and nonhuman world around her, and that satisfaction compels her to privilege landscapes that adhere to constructed aesthetic criteria rather than viewing all places as potential sites for meaning and value.
CONCLUSION

This dissertation was begun in Columbia, Missouri and completed in St. Johns, Michigan, a situation that proved beneficial. The geographical distance that Missouri offered also offered a measure of critical distance: it made it possible to more effectively focus on what other people had to say about the Great Lakes and keep my own associations as a native Michigander in the background. Finishing the dissertation in Michigan, however, only seemed appropriate: it is, after all, about the materiality of the Great Lakes, and as I’ve stressed throughout, where we geographically find our corporeal selves has a big impact on what we write.

The complexities of materiality that generated textual responses to the Great Lakes from 1790 to 1853 are different in 2016, but they are just as complex. Zebra mussels from the world’s oceans have found their way into the Great Lakes through transport in the ballast water of freighters, and because the Great Lakes watershed is adjacent to the Mississippi watershed, it is very possible that Asian carp and bull sharks will become invasive threats as well. The city of Flint, Michigan is still negotiating the effects of a water pollution crisis that has prompted discussion about the relationship among environmental quality, race, and social class, a tragically ironic situation given Michigan’s proximity to the largest concentration of fresh water in the world. The Kalamazoo River still bears the ecological effects of a massive oil spill in 2010. But wolf and mountain lion populations are on the rise in the Great Lakes, and seeing bald eagles is no longer rare, though no less exhilarating. The pictographs painted over five hundred years ago by Native Americans still decorate the Agawa Rock on the east shore of Lake Superior, and the stretch of nearby King’s Highway 17 bears countless inuksuit on the
Mackinac Island remains beautiful despite still being overrun by tourists every summer, but there are also still thousands of acres in the Upper Peninsula on which it is more likely to see the form of a black bear than the form of a human. And Niagara Falls is still sublime.

Materiality is, in many respects, the best concept by which to bridge, compare, and contrast historical separation. The chapters in this dissertation are a testament to the persistence and mutability of materiality. Jane Johnston Schoolcraft demonstrates the beauty and ugliness of living at a cultural, political, and geographical axis. In the writings of Red Jacket, Tanner, Copway, and Warren, it is possible to see the ways in which materiality is construed toward asserting very different forms of Native identity, which directly confronts essentialist, nineteenth century, European and American views. Scholars of literature should thus be attuned to the reductive character of essentialist views that persist today and recognize that, even two hundred years ago and certainly before, identities like “Ojibwe” and “Seneca” were comprised of disparate but interconnected individual self-conceptions and differences. Traill and Kirkland show us that our homes were never and still are not only ours, but rather are entities permeated by and permeating other entities. Schoolcraft, Agassiz, and Cabot illustrate the subjectivity of natural history as both discomfiting and inspiring, so they urge us to think about the vagaries and “facts” empirical investigation can yield, and what the political repercussions of empiricism are. Jameson and Fuller compel us to consider how visceral and cerebral we want our travel experiences to be, and why we want those levels of visceral or cerebral experience.
My hope is that this dissertation compels anyone who has read it to think about the material phenomena, circumstances, and entities that make anywhere a “place.” I also hope this dissertation reinforces the value of material ecocriticism and the environmental humanities by showing that we should always be thinking about nature, race, gender, science, culture, and politics together. And while we are thinking about these things, we should be aware that these thoughts are only possible because there are millions of physicochemical reactions occurring in our brains.
Notes

INTRODUCTION

1. For the sake of continuity, I use the spelling “Ojibwe” throughout the dissertation unless “Ojibway” is necessary because of particular authors’ usages.

2. My decision to include Tanner in a chapter on Native American literature is based on the fact that, while born a white American, Tanner identified as Ojibwe or Odawa for much of his life, in large measure because he was considered as such by the Native families he was adopted into. Another issue the narrative raises is that it was translated and transcribed by Edwin James, an American ethnographer and natural historian. However, there is much reason to believe that James’ transcription is relatively faithful to Tanner’s telling: James’ footnotes display a notably different voice and tone—one that is often condescending toward Native people—and the narrative itself is devoid of obvious stereotypes that white authors typically crafted for “Indian writing and speeches” in the early nineteenth century. In all, there are many reasons to believe that Tanner’s narrative is an accurate representation of Anishinaabe culture and politics in the period, including Anishinaabe attitudes toward the nonhuman world.

3. Many, but not all, of the poems and stories discussed in this chapter appeared in The Literary Voyager, or Muzzeniegun. This manuscript magazine was edited by Henry Rowe Schoolcraft and circulated among family and friends, but it was only produced in 1826 and 1827. Maureen Konkle notes that the magazine was Henry’s “effort to amuse himself,” but he also “disapproved of the drinking and card playing” of other whites in the Soo area, so he “began a reading society in December [of 1826] for local people and some of the officers from [Fort Brady] and their wives”: the magazine consisted of contributions from reading society members (Konkle 169). Jane and Henry’s marriage is
often discussed in considerations of *The Literary Voyager*: see Robert Dale Parker’s “Introduction: The World and Writings of Jane Johnston Schoolcraft” in *The Sound the Stars Make Rushing Through the Sky* 1-84, Mielke 136-50, and Konkle 178-81. From these sources, the composite picture that emerges reveals a happy marriage at first, but one that became strained following the death of their first son in 1827. Henry’s professional ambitions kept the couple geographically separated for long periods, and he became a more and more demanding and condescending husband over time, partially due to a rigid Christian sensibility he developed after 1830.

4. For a rather comprehensive account of Schoolcraft’s cultural and personal realms, see Parker’s “Introduction.” Parker observes that Schoolcraft’s literary conventions were the result of a complex mixture of “‘poetess’ modesty; Christian piety; eighteenth-century sensibility; Ojibwe and Romantic apprehension of emotion through the natural world; Romantic melancholy; Ojibwe, British, métis, and American family loyalties and rivalries; the patterns and ethos of the English and Ojibwe languages, both individually and bilingually; and familially based political assertiveness” (46).

5. My postcolonial thinking on “Lines written at Castle Island, Lake Superior” has developed out of conversations with Maureen Konkle, and from attending her conference presentation “Jane Johnston Schoolcraft’s ‘Castle Island’: A Brief History of Colonialism in Michigan, c. 1838,” given at the Association for the Study of Literature and Environment conference in Lawrence, KS, May 30th, 2013.

7. Another story by Schoolcraft emphasizing the contingency of human and animal forms is “The Forsaken Brother: A Chippewa Tale.” In this story, a father’s dying wish—that his older children take good care of their youngest brother—is not honored. The boy is, however, taken care of by wolves, and much to the siblings’ dismay, he eventually becomes a wolf (Schoolcraft 177-80). Much like “The Origin of the Robin,” the story suggests that the nonhuman animal form is preferable because humankind is so selfish. Versions of “Mishōsha,” “The Forsaken Brother,” and “The Origin of the Robin” appear in Anna Jameson’s *Winter Studies and Summer Rambles in Canada*, discussed in Chapter 4. Jameson stayed with Jane and Henry on Mackinac Island in the summer of 1837, and then travelled with Jane to the Soo.

8. Compare Moowis’s personhood as reliant on possession of the bow and arrow with Tanner’s agency dependent on hunting in Chapter 1. “Moowis” is a reminder that, in very comedic and serious ways, manhood was socially construed in large measure through hunting for the Anishinaabeg.

CHAPTER 1. POLITICS, HUNTING, CHRISTIANITY, AND HISTORY: NATIVE AMERICAN LITERATURE IN THE GREAT LAKES

1. For a revisionist treatment of Brant’s actions and legacy, see Rick Monture’s chapter “‘Sovereigns of the Soil’: Joseph Brant and the Grand River Settlement” in *We Share Our Matters*, 29-61.

2. I am indebted to Kurt Barrett, D.O., for this diagnosis. Dr. Barrett adds, “The disease could easily progress into complications of the brain, lung, throat, sinus, and middle ear, and infection of the mastoid bone. Unchecked mastoiditis could cause permanent hearing loss and chronic drainage from the ears as described” (personal communication).
3. There is a striking parallel between Copway’s disparagement of hunting and Thoreau’s conception, in “Higher Laws” in Walden, of hunting as a rather juvenile, coming-of-age phase for men (that many do not grow out of).

4. For a discussion of the hunting tale’s popularity in the nineteenth century, see Herman’s chapter “A Pantheon of Hunter-Heroes” in Hunting and the American Imagination, 114-121.

CHAPTER 2. MOONLIGHT AND THE AGUE: THE PROJECT OF DOMESTICITY IN TRAILL’S THE BACKWOODS OF CANADA AND KIRKLAND’S A NEW HOME, WHO’LL FOLLOW?

1. For an excellent and provocative examination of the cultural conditions that compel Traill to (erroneously) view Canada in this way, see Daniel Coleman, “Grappling with Respect: Copway and Traill in a Conversation that Never Took Place.” ESC. 39.2-3 (2013): 63-88. Coleman’s speculation that Traill and Copway (discussed in Chapter 1) could have actually met is intriguing: Copway grew up in the area Traill settled in, and during the same time.

2. See en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blue_mass

3. Traill identifies talking too much as a “womanly propensity” (145).

4. See fs.fed.us and plants.usda.gov.

5. The literary subversion occasioned by morally corrupt characters exhibiting refined aesthetic taste in American literature goes back at least as far as the villain Carwin in Charles Brockden Brown’s Wieland; or the Transformation (1798).

6. For an informed analysis of Kirkland’s view on the necessity of various kinds of labor in US westward expansion, particularly as it relates to the discourses of settlement promotion and land speculation, see Rachel Azima, “Promotion, Borrowing, and Caroline Kirkland’s Literary Labors.” ESQ. 57.4 (2011): 390-426.
CHAPTER 3. GEOLOGY, WATER, FEAR, AND WONDER: THE GREAT LAKES NATURAL HISTORY OF SCHOOLCRAFT, CABOT, AND AGASSIZ

1. Andrew J. Lewis devotes a chapter of *A Democracy of Facts* to a discussion of state geological surveys’ perceived utilitarian value for American economic interests in the early nineteenth century. Of special interest is his account of the Michigan survey conducted by Douglass Houghton from 1837 to 1839 (147). Houghton served as physician on Schoolcraft’s 1832 Itasca Lake expedition.

2. Elizabeth A. Bohls’s chapter “Landscape aesthetics and the paradox of the female picturesque” in *Women Travel Writers and the Language of Aesthetics, 1716-1818* is a substantive but succinct discussion of Enlightenment and Romantic aesthetic theories in Britain, many of which appear in Schoolcraft’s *Narrative Journal of Travels*. Although Bohls is primarily concerned with demonstrating the ways in which British women travel writers appropriate and challenge patriarchal and elitist aesthetic theories, her chapter, when read alongside Schoolcraft—not to mention countless other American authors throughout the antebellum period—shows the transatlantic pervasiveness of British aesthetics in writing by American men and women alike. Bohls’s scholarship influences my reading of travel writers Anna Jameson and Margaret Fuller in Chapter 4.

3. It is tempting to wonder if a term like “American picturesque” should even be used to denote such a drastic American reinvention of a British aesthetic theory, diametrically altering attitudes toward human presence as it does. However, I think the term adequately captures the anxiety many American writers and artists felt in their simultaneous reliance on and desired separation from British aesthetic principles during the period. Robert Weisbuch has discussed this anxiety at length (see n. 4).

5. See in particular pp. 13-23.

6. An alternative holist approach to the scientific study of nature identified by Walls, and the approach she primarily associates with Thoreau and Alexander von Humboldt, is “empirical holism,” the “emergent alternative [to rational holism] which stressed that the whole could be understood only by studying the interconnections of its constituent and individual parts” (4). As for rational holism, and in addition to Agassiz, Walls associates it with “the Anglo-American tradition of natural theology, as well as Goethe and the German Naturphilosophen, Coleridge and British transcendental morphology, and finally Emerson” (4).

7. Again, Bohls’s arguments regarding British landscape aesthetics inform my reading of Schoolcraft.

8. For a comprehensive discussion of nature’s otherness in British Romanticism, see Onno Oerlemans, Romanticism and the Materiality of Nature. For a special focus on the otherness of nature relating to geology in British Romantic poetry and natural history, see Noah Heringman, Romantic Rocks, Aesthetic Geology, especially Chapter 2, “Geological Otherness; or, Rude Rocks and the Aesthetics of Formlessness.” Continuities are evident in Oerlemans’s conception of nature’s otherness in Britain and
Johnson’s conception of alienation in the United States; Johnson cites Oerlemans in her “Introduction” (11-2).

9. Just as Bohls’s work has transatlantic applicability in my view, so do Heringman’s observations regarding British aesthetic geology in my reading of Schoolcraft.


   “Their rocky summits split and rent,
   Form’d turret, dome, or battlement,
   Or seemed fantastically set,
   With cupola or minaret,
   Wild crests as pagod ever decked,
   Or mosque of eastern architect.”

British influence continues to permeate Schoolcraft’s aesthetic geological views.


   “It seem’d the mountain, rent and riven,
   A channel for the stream had given;
   So high the cliff of sandstone gray,
   Hung beetling o’er the torrents way,
   Where he who winds ‘twixt rock and wave,
   May hear the headlong torrent rave;
   May view her chafe her waves to spray,
   O’er every rock that bars her way,"
Till foam globes o’er her eddies glide,
Thick as the schemes of human pride
That down life’s current drive amain,
As frail, as frothy, and as vain.”

12. Interestingly, seven days later, Schoolcraft notes the following upon meeting Bonzo, a black freedman (139 n. 15) who is married to and has children with an Ojibwe woman:

It does not appear that climate has had any more influence here, than it has along the borders of the Atlantic, in ameliorating the colour of this race. But this evidence is certainly not wanted in the present state of physical and philosophical science, to establish the fact that the radical colours of the different species of the human family, are independent of the influence of climate (139).

For an additional account of Bonzo, or Stephen Bonga, see William Johnston (Schoolcraft’s future brother-in-law), Letters on the Fur Trade 1833, Michigan Pioneer and Historical Collections, 159. My thanks to Maureen Konkle for familiarizing me with Johnston and his writings.

13. The extensive OED Online entry on “mocking” suggests that the verb more often denoted imitation rather than “making fun of” in the nineteenth century and prior.

14. In Chapter 4, I more thoroughly explore this perceived connection between “Indian nature” and wildness in the landscape.
15. For a discussion of the conservative nature of Neptunist theory in the United States, see Lewis, 121-7. For a discussion on Neptunist conservatism in Britain, see Heringman, 104-7.

CHAPTER 4. THE ENTANGLEMENT OR TRANSCENDENCE OF TRAVEL: JAMESON’S WINTER STUDIES AND SUMMER RAMBLES IN CANADA AND FULLER’S SUMMER ON THE LAKES, IN 1843

1. My argument in this chapter shares some affinities with Regina Schober’s observations in her article about the idea of networks in the US in the nineteenth century, particularly in the writings of Emerson and Whitman. She argues, “For Emerson, the network is predominantly an intellectual construct, an idealist model reconciling seemingly oppositional notions of self and environment, of individual and community” (516). Whitman, on the other hand, “in his embracive poetics, relies on a more material and physical notion of the network, redefining most overtly the dissolution of the dualism between nature and culture” (516).


3. See Bohls, 89-91.

4. See Parker, The Sound the Stars Make Rushing Through the Sky, 36-45.

5. A month prior, atop Bear Hill near part of the Talbot Settlement (in present-day southern Ontario), Jameson has a vision of the future in which she sees towns and cities, fields of waving grain, green lawns and villas, and churches and temples turret-crowned; and meadows tracked by the frequent footpath; and railroads, with trains of rich merchandise steaming along: - for all this will be! Will be? It is already in the sight of Him who
hath ordained it, and for whom there is no past nor future: though I cannot
behold it with my bodily vision, even now it is (286).

Jameson continues in a rather anxious tone:

But is that now better than this present now? When these forests, with
all their solemn depth of shade and multitudinous life, have fallen beneath
the axe – when the wolf, and bear, and deer are driven from their native
coverts, and all this infinitude of animal and vegetable being has made
way for restless, erring, suffering humanity, - will it then be better? Better
– I know not; but surely it will be well and right in His eyes who has
ordained that thus the course of things shall run. Those who see nothing
in civilised life but its complicated cares, mistakes, vanities, and miseries,
may doubt this – or despair. For myself and you too, my friend, we are
those who believe and hope; who behold in progressive civilisation
progressive happiness, progressive approximation to nature and to nature’s
God; for are we not in his hand? – and all that He does is good (286).

6. The first chapter of Summer on the Lakes does not have a title either, though it
does begin with a subheading that stands in for a title, “Niagara, June 10, 1843.”
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