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A River of Voices: Confluences and Cross-Currents in the Discourse of the Colorado River

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**A RIVER OF VOICES: CONFLUENCES AND CROSS-
CURRENTS IN THE DISCOURSE OF THE
COLORADO RIVER**

by

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DISSERTATION

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation argues that the Colorado River and its watershed face a crisis of representation as privileged nineteenth-century myths portraying the American West as a frontier, garden, and wilderness have limited an understanding of what and whom the river is for. It examines the contribution of “tributary voices” or the lesser known perspectives from the region to reveal new lines of thinking about this river and its surroundings as they engage the traditional views of the river shaped by these myths. The voices examined at length in this study include contemporary nature writer Craig Childs, recent female boating narratives by Patricia McCairen, Laurie Buyer, and Louise Teal, and AEURHYC, a Mexican water-users association from the Colorado Delta region. Through an interdisciplinary “watershed” approach that draws on ecocritical, bioregional,

and rhetorical frameworks, this project considers how these tributary voices appropriate, complicate, and often reject the discourses and genres that have traditionally represented the river and watershed. Negotiating these conventional viewpoints, the tributary voices offer new lines of thinking that reveal the river's importance to a broader range of stakeholders. As impending water shortages threaten the region, this dissertation initiates a much needed conversation about the role literary and rhetorical production has in shaping attitudes and behaviors toward the Colorado and its finite resources.

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Riding the Waves of Myth: Tributary Voices and the “Lords of Yesterday”

“A people unaware of its myths is likely to continue living by them, though the world around that people may change and demand changes in their psychology, their world view, their ethics, and their institutions.”

—Richard Slotkin, *Regeneration Through Violence*, 4-5

Deep within the heart of the American Southwest, two rivers converge to form one of the most famous rivers in the world. From this secluded confluence surrounded by the multi-colored sandstone spires and towering cliffs of Utah’s Canyonlands National Park, the Green and the Colorado rivers emerge from deep canyons stretching north and east as far as the eye can see. The Green flows from the north, laden with the particles of distant mountains and surrounding deserts that mark its roughly 750 mile journey from its headwaters in the Wind River Range in west-central Wyoming through eastern Utah. Entering from the northeast, the Colorado rushes down from the western flank of Long’s Peak in Colorado’s Rocky Mountain National Park only 450 miles away to join the Green at the foot of the Island in the Sky District, a region rising thousands of feet above their union. As the rivers converge, a clear color line divides the rivers, reflective of their different origins and the landscapes they drain. Yet, as they continue further downriver, flowing together through the ochre walls of Cataract Canyon, the colors merge and a unified Colorado tumbles onward through Glen, Marble, and Grand Canyons to the gentler but more arid topography of the lower basin where the river makes its gradual descent toward Mexico, the Colorado Delta, and its historic exit into the Gulf of

California. Covering 242,000 acres in the United States and 2,000 more in Mexico, the Colorado River watershed is a land of extreme diversity and beauty.

While two rivers have made their confluence in this location for millions of years, a more recent debate about which river represents the true headwaters highlights a region long influenced by powerful political and economic interests. Since the arrival of Anglo-Americans to the region, the Colorado referred to the river below the confluence in southeastern Utah, whereas the upper tributaries were known as the Green and Grand rivers (*Water and the West* 141). As Russell Martin explains in his history of Glen Canyon Dam, the section of river that flows through the state of Colorado today has widely been accepted as the river's headwaters, despite being a few hundred miles shorter than the Green River flowing out of Wyoming and through north-central Utah (34). A quick perusal of government publications, news services, and web sites about the river corroborates this opinion.¹ Another Colorado River historian, Philip Fradkin, takes up this controversy and cites E.C. La Rue, the head of the U.S. Geological Survey who, in his 1916 report *The Colorado and its Utilization*, noted that the "Green River drains a larger area than the Grand and is considered the upper continuation of the Colorado" (qtd. in Fradkin 35). Thus, because the "longer stem of a river, termed the master stem, is usually considered its main branch," the Green should accordingly be the master or main stem while what is known as the Colorado today is its primary tributary (36). However, five years following La Rue's report, some rhetorical manipulation magically shifted the

¹ See Wikipedia's "Colorado River" entry, Utah Division of Water Resources' "Utah's Perspective: The Colorado River," and *Smithsonian Magazine*'s October 2010 article "The Colorado River Runs Dry," as just a few examples of this common misconception. Jonathan Waterman's *Running Dry* p. 17 also provides a good discussion of this naming issue.

Colorado River's headwaters hundreds of miles to the southeast and into the state of Colorado.

In the early 1920s, Colorado Basin states postured to get what they saw as their fair share of the river's water. As each state developed a plan for how best to divide up the water between the river's seven basin states, Colorado, Utah, and Wyoming considered renaming the stretch of river that flowed through their state. Martin observes that "it seemed logical to members of the Utah legislature that a political as well as a rhetorical advantage could be pocketed if the Green were renamed the Colorado, the true river then officially bisecting their beloved state" (34). As Wyoming worked with Utah to effect this change, Colorado was quick to act. Beating the previous two states to the punch, the Colorado legislature renamed the Grand the Colorado, an act which was then ratified by Congress, and signed into law by Warren G. Harding on July 25, 1921 (Hundley, *Water* 34; Fradkin 35). Thus, through political jockeying, the shorter of the two stretches received the nation's blessing as the true headwaters of the Colorado while the Green became the principle tributary.

This little known event is illustrative of larger processes that have operated throughout the watershed for hundreds of years. Key to the river's ongoing interaction with humans is the variety of often competing discourses that have dictated how the river would be named, imagined, and used by the American public in literature, journalism, public policy, and science. Like the river itself whose many small creeks and streams mix and mingle to produce the main stem, these different perspectives combine to carve out a unique body of discourse about the river and its surrounding landscapes. However, just as some tributaries (the Grand/Colorado) have historically taken precedence over others (the

Green), so too have certain strands of these discourses—at the expense of others—dominated which uses and representations of the river are most “appropriate” for the nation. Thus, a distinct hierarchy of voices has developed as a result of controversies over human engagement with the river, pitting different understandings of what and whom the river is for.

The dominance some discourses have had over others draws interesting parallels with Western water law which dictates the actual uses of the river. Originating in the mining camps of California, the policy of prior appropriation is the fundamental principle which has manipulated the Colorado since the late nineteenth century. Unlike riparian doctrine that governs water law and use in most of the eastern states, prior appropriation operates on a “first in time, first in right” principle which states that “the first to use water from a specific source held a prior right that would be protected against the claims of others” (Getches 83). Whereas riparian doctrine relies on “reasonable use of the water on the same land if the use does not interfere with the reasonable use of other riparians” (12), prior appropriation places the individual ahead of community, allowing for the individual right holder, regardless of his or her proximity to or location along the watercourse, to divert the full share of the right in spite of its impact on junior claims. This doctrine made the development of the arid West possible because no longer did water users have to ensure that a share of the limited water return to benefit downriver needs. Rather, the senior holders could appropriate their entire share of rightfully claimed water even if that meant that those who filed afterwards to divert water—either above or below the senior holder—either watched the water rush by them or saw it dry up all together.

The “first in time, first in right” legal principle along with the discussion about the synthesis of tributary waters bears significant weight on our understanding of the river. Because powerful agricultural and governmental groups have historically acquired and controlled the lion’s share of this limited resource they have also significantly influenced how the public sphere has thought and ultimately acted toward the river and watershed. Through discourses rooted in the nineteenth century, their perspectives have reflected an imbalance of representation that has privileged certain interests while ignoring others. It is within this historical backdrop that this dissertation addresses such disparity in public perception through the contributions of what I call “tributary” voices, or the neglected and lesser known perspectives of the river that have been traditionally relegated to a figurative backwater. By considering their confluences and cross-currents, or the ways in which they negotiate, critique, and at times reject the more dominant, conventional discourses and genres that typically forward the myths of the Frontier, Garden, and Wilderness, I attempt to demonstrate how these tributary voices reimagine the river and watershed as a more complex discursive space. Such a reconstruction invites broader stakeholder participation as it opens up a broader range of perspectives through which we can contemplate options, reconsider behaviors, and work toward a more egalitarian use of the river.

American Literary Rivers and Representation

This question of a river’s value and significance has played a central role in some of the most prominent texts of American literature. In fact, the development of American literature has often occurred alongside the banks of our nation’s rivers. The Concord and Merrimac, the Mississippi, and the Passaic have each served the genius of some of the

country's most heralded writers including Henry David Thoreau, Mark Twain, and William Carlos Williams. For literary scholars and environmental critics such representations reflect not just how one articulates and describes these natural entities, but more importantly, the values society associates with these water courses. In *The Meaning of Rivers: Flow and Reflection in American Literature* (2010), T.S. McMillin addresses these issues with a particular interest in examining what literary representations of rivers suggest about how we make sense of the world around us (xii). To attend to these questions related to "meaning," McMillin reflects on a question once posed to him: "What do rivers and literature have to do with one another?" (xiii). Through a rather lengthy response the author examines the reasons why so many see rivers and literature as two totally unrelated items.

His conclusion, however, is that rivers and literature have very much to do with one another. For McMillin, literary representations provide a means of examining how our culture has viewed, continues to view, and how it may view in the future these natural entities. He explains: "As a culture, because of the diversity of groups that constitute that culture and because of the knottiness of the subject, we have not collectively made up our minds about what rivers mean—which implies that the possibility exists of changing the way we think about rivers" (xviii). Our inability to reconcile the apparent disparities in how our culture views rivers has led to what McMillin sees as a "crisis in meaning to go along with serious environmental crises" (xviii). Herein lies the definitive connection between rivers and literature and the answer to which he seeks. Unable to settle upon what rivers mean to our culture—are they conveyors of spirituality, sites of recreation, entities for exploitation?—we find ourselves in a world wherein what we say about rivers

shapes how we treat them. Or as McMillin suggests, “those crises [of meaning and the environment] are related to one another” (xviii). Although such crises are apparent through the nation’s countless water courses, nowhere is such a “crisis of meaning,” or as I argue throughout this project, a crisis of representation, more apparent than along the Colorado River.

Ironically, while such crises exist throughout the Colorado River watershed, they don’t exist entirely because of a lack of cohesive meaning about the river as McMillin generally suggests. While it is true that this particular river has been and continues to be represented for numerous means often at odds with one another, a rather unified understanding and approach to the river’s significance has persisted over the last few centuries. In fact, as I argue in this dissertation, the environmental crises affecting the Colorado appear less from a lack of shared understanding than a lack of vision regarding the broad spectrum of meaning that this river embodies. Ultimately, it is the relatively static representations of the river that dominate the literary and discursive constructions of the river in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that continue to restrict a more inclusive awareness of the river’s many meanings.

To illustrate this point consider how two of the nation’s most well known Western authors, Zane Grey and John Steinbeck, depict the river. Grey, the master of the Western, was fascinated by the Colorado’s march across some of the continent’s most inhospitable places. In *Wanderer of the Wasteland*, his protagonist, Adam Leary, stares downriver, wondering what the river has in store for him. Grey writes:

The Rio Colorado was no river to trust. It chafed at its banks as if to engulf them; muddy and thick it swirled and glided along in flood,

sweeping in curves back and forth from Arizona to California shore.

Majestic and gleaming under the hot sky, it swung southward toward a stark and naked upflung wilderness of mountain peaks, the red ramparts of the unknown and trackless desert. (1)

Published in 1923, the novel's opening scene and Grey's description of the river masterfully capture the spirit of the age when America viewed the Colorado as a renegade, something as wild and strong as the characters that fill Grey's pages. In his masterpiece *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939), Steinbeck looks to the Colorado River as the boundary between the forsaken lands of the Dust Bowl and the promised Eden of California. In a powerful moment in the text's progress Tom Joad urges his brother, Noah, who is taken by the river's refreshing presence, to continue on with the family. Despite Tom's insistence Noah explains, "I ain't a-gonna leave this here water. I'm a-gonna walk on down this here river . . . I was in that there water. An' I ain't a-gonna leave her. I'm a-gonna go now, Tom—down the river. I'll catch fish an' stuff, but I can't leave her. I can't." (208-09). Turning his back on Tom, Noah begins his journey downriver, never to be seen by his family again.

One wonders what Steinbeck intended by this scene. Is this the author's way of lampooning Californians obsessed with getting as much of the Colorado's water for the state's burgeoning agricultural and municipal uses as possible? Are Tom's last words to his mentally-challenged brother whom he calls a "fool" (209) a direct attack on those sinking their hopes in a river surrounded by an unrelenting desert? Regardless of Steinbeck's intent, the scene speaks volumes about the function of the Colorado River in the larger American imagination. It has acted as a powerful symbol for those seeking to

slake the region's endless thirst and make the desert "blossom like a rose" while for others it has represented the nation's longing for the frontier and the rejuvenation that comes with confronting nature in its most raw form.

Grey's and Steinbeck's portrayals endow the Colorado with immense appeal both for its ability to reclaim parched deserts and sooth dry throats and its wilderness qualities that beckon the solitary male to disappear into its unknown recesses. These Romantic descriptions of a river that is untrustworthy and unpredictable yet equally awesome and worth harnessing for its precious resource have had a monumental impact upon later representations of the river in American literature and discourse. For authors like Grey, Steinbeck, and countless other writers who looked to the Colorado River as an entity through which America's longings to redeem the arid West would be realized, the river has performed nobly as a powerful carrier of myth, which service the nation's hopes and dreams for the region.

The West as Myth

As this introduction's epigraph suggests, myth is an intensely powerful force in shaping one's perceptions of and attitudes toward reality. Richard Slotkin defines myth as "stories drawn from a society's history that have acquired through persistent usage the power of symbolizing that society's ideology and of dramatizing its moral consciousness" (*Gunfighter* 5). The effect that this transmission of narratives and their associated values has on an individual or an entire culture makes myth "a basic constituent of linguistic meaning and of the processes of both personal and social 'remembering'" (5). Thus, the perpetuation of myth becomes a means of reinforcing a group's identity as shared stories remind members of those ideas, beliefs, and values that

are of utmost importance. As such, myths can become highly politicized narratives as they dictate the behavior between communities. Slotkin notes, “the actual work of making and transmitting myths is done by particular classes of persons; myth-making processes are therefore responsive to the politics of class-difference” (8). While this dissertation is not specifically an argument about class-conflict along the Colorado River, this observation about how people transmit myths and the way in which they reflect the values of different groups carries significant weight in understanding how we have imagined the river and watershed over time. Central to this understanding are the myths of the West as Frontier, Garden, and Wilderness and the particular groups and genres that promote them. By examining their origins, we gain a clearer sense of the pervasive and powerful ideologies that have shaped the river and that continue to influence how we regard it today.

Coalescing during the nineteenth century, the Frontier, Garden, and Wilderness myths have played a key role in influencing how writers such as Grey and Steinbeck have portrayed the river and its surrounding geography and how their texts have further entrenched these myths. Paramount among these myths is the West-as-frontier, a limitless place of adventure and opportunity. Most famously articulated by Frederick Jackson Turner, the frontier has come to best identify with the American West. Of course, Turner is not the first one to praise the nation’s land and its role in developing the American character and leading to the country’s progress. In his landmark text *Virgin Land* (1950), Henry Nash Smith points out that others like Crèvecoeur, Franklin, Emerson, Lincoln, Whitman, and “a hundred others” have considered this relationship (3). Yet Smith argues that it is Turner “who gave it its classic statement,” which has since influenced “a whole

generation of historians [who] took over his hypothesis and rewrote American history in terms of it” (3). Accordingly, Smith believes that Turner’s ideas are “still by far the most familiar interpretation of the American past” (4). As such, the frontier has moved from an academic explanation to a pervasive myth that continues to shape attitudes about the West and its natural resources.

Addressing the American Historical Association in 1893, Turner describes the frontier as the realm wherein “American social development has been continually beginning over again,” and where “This perennial rebirth, this fluidity of American life, this expansion westward with its new opportunities, its continuous touch with the simplicity of primitive society, furnish the forces dominating American character” (3). Less a physical space than an ideological one, the frontier was a “meeting point between savagery and civilization,” a location that continually moved West with the advancement of American “progress” across the continent (3). Regardless, however, of whether the frontier existed on the western side of the Alleghenies or in the Rocky Mountains, according to Turner it represented the limitless possibilities available through the development of open, untamed land. Ultimately, the frontier “in spite of environment . . . did indeed furnish a new field of opportunity, a gate of escape from the bondage of the past; and freshness, and confidence” (38). These concluding remarks to Turner’s frontier thesis helped reinforce the region as a mythic space as they suggest that no matter the environmental challenges the climate and topography may present, the spirit of freedom, ingenuity, and opportunity will overcome these obstacles. As Anglo-American settlers entered the arid West they found the lack of water to be one of the most obvious challenges to their desires to cultivate the area. But believing that they could conquer this

frontier as they had conquered previous ones, they set their minds to transforming the region.

Turner described a number of different frontiers in his thesis with the “farmer’s frontier” and its preoccupation with “Good soils” as a primary force in westward migration (18). Developing in light of this agricultural frontier is the myth of the Garden. Rejecting beliefs that the West was a “Great American Desert,” the moniker nineteenth-century explorer Zebulon Pike gave to the land west of the Mississippi River, this particular myth “took the form of a proliferation of notions about an increase of rainfall on the plains” (Smith 175, 179). A common mantra for nineteenth-century boosters and settlers in the arid West was that “rain would follow the plow”—a belief suggesting that providence would further the nation’s destiny of civilizing the continent by bringing increased rainfall to the region. A closely related hope was that found in the promise of reclamation and what irrigation could bring to the region’s parched lands. Many advocates looked to the arid West with the words of the Old Testament prophet foremost in their imaginations of what the region could be: they wanted to make the “desert blossom like the rose.”

This biblical prophecy aptly describes William E. Smythe’s *The Conquest of Arid America* (1899). As one of the great proponents of reclamation, Smythe dedicates his work to “those who have the courage of their optimism—for the homeseekers who . . . are to grapple with the desert, translate its gray barrenness into green fields and gardens, banish its silence with the laughter of children” (x-xi). Tapping into the optimism that undoubtedly infuses Turner’s frontier thesis penned only a few years prior to *Conquest*, Smythe views the West’s reclamation as the fulfillment of a divine partnership between

God and man to further civilization's and nature's progress. He writes, "The man who works intelligently in creating his irrigated farm with the raw materials of land and water, knows that in this smaller sphere he is engaged in finishing the world" (329). By bringing the life giving waters to the West's parched lands, Smythe believed that America helped complete the creation of the world that was left unfinished by God. This opportunity to work as a co-creator allowed humankind the opportunity to establish a new society, one which emphasized collaboration with one's neighbor to make this change occur. As he further notes of the grand designs for the West, "It was the destiny of the [West] to lie fallow until humanity should feel a nobler impulse; then to nurse, in the shadow of its everlasting mountains and the warmth of its unfailing sunshine, new dreams of liberty and equality for men" (19-20). Thus, while Pike's Great American Desert once rebuffed settlers, the "Miracle of Irrigation" (41-47) made it possible for man to facilitate the region's transformation into what Mark Fiege dubs an "Irrigated Eden" in his eponymous book. For Fiege, "the garden myth became an epic of personal and national regeneration. . . . Triumphant over chaotic wildness, re-creating the lost Eden, the pioneers redeemed themselves and the land, restored the agricultural base of the Republic, and realized God's plan for the earth" (171). Striving to return to the Garden once lost through the fall of humankind, nineteenth-century beliefs about the arid West dictated man's divine right to drastically alter the region for the onward march of progress and civilization.

Like the myth of the Garden, the Wilderness myth in American culture also has connections with the Frontier. In many ways, the Wilderness myth can be considered as an extreme outgrowth of the Frontier's emphasis on individualism and the renewal that comes from entering uncivilized land. Similarly, it can also be considered as a critical

response to the development and “progress” that the Frontier myth brought to the nation’s lands. In *Wilderness and the American Mind* Roderick Frazier Nash explains that where wilderness once was something that Americans sought to conquer as it “constituted a formidable threat to . . . survival” and tempted one to “[revert] to savagery” (24), rapid settlement and cultivation of the nation’s lands would change these attitudes. While Nash grounds a wilderness ethic in Romanticism, it is within the nineteenth century and the coalescing of factors like pervasive industrialization and Turner’s call for the closing of the frontier in 1890 that wilderness gains mythic status.² Of the period Nash suggests that “Too much civilization, not too little, seemed at the root of the nation’s difficulties” (143). Citing a “sense of discontent with civilization,” Nash explains that “America was ripe for the widespread appeal of the uncivilized” (145). Where wilderness once embodied all that was antithetical to culture, it now became an integral part of American identity. Thoreau once wrote that in “Wildness is the preservation of the world” (“Walking” 192). As with the frontier, wilderness became a symbol for hope, a place in which to distance oneself from society’s ills. Defining the wilderness belief during this time, Nash notes its connection to the frontier, its role as a “source of virility, toughness, and savagery,” and its place as a site endowed with “aesthetic and ethical values” which provided “opportunity . . . for contemplation and worship” (145). As the nation moved into the twentieth century and embraced a growing environmental ethos, the Wilderness myth became ever more entrenched in the American imagination as it positioned wild nature as the untainted embodiment of what is true and real, a place to escape the façade of the modern life. Thus, the Wilderness myth has taken on different guises in its relation

² Nash looks to the European Romantics like Burke and Kant and their musings on the sublime as the foundation for an appreciation of wilderness. For a more specific discussion of this topic see chapter 3: “The Romantic Wilderness.”

to the West. It first depicted the region's open lands in need of cultivation and civilization as its wild recesses were something to fear. Once the Garden myth and other factors helped tame some of these lands, wilderness then became something to celebrate and preserve. It is this more recent viewpoint of wilderness that is most applicable to this dissertation.

Since the nineteenth century, these three myths have enjoyed a unique relationship with the textual production that has emerged during this time. They have influenced the work of a privileged cadre of explorers, scientists, engineers, boosters, politicians, and writers, while at the same time their texts have further perpetuated these myths. A similar process defines how we understand the Colorado River as texts reinforce ideas and the way we talk about the river influences the texts' representations of the river. As a result, myth has long influenced representations about the river and dictated actual manipulation of the river and its surrounding lands by the Colorado's many stakeholders. Understanding these representations as expressed through what Charles Wilkinson calls the "Lords of Yesterday," those relics of nineteenth-century beliefs like the prior appropriation doctrine that continue to govern our approach to western resources, we come to better understand why the river has been manipulated as it has (*Crossing the Next Meridian* xiii).

To gain perspective on the significance of these changes, it is worth considering the modern river. While it continues to flow from snow capped peaks, through majestic canyons, and vast deserts, the Colorado is no longer what the early explorers and settlers found. One perspective is that it is "a river no more" as Fradkin suggests in his book of the same name. Today, thousands of ditches, dams, and headgates mark the river,

diverting much of its flow toward exploding urban centers and expansive agricultural areas. Hardly a tributary is undammed, the Yampa in northwestern Colorado being one of the last remaining survivors. Throughout the basin, countless creeks, streams, and rivers are interrupted by such obstacles with the largest projects like Blue Mesa, Flaming Gorge, Glen Canyon, Hoover, and Navajo dams pooling the waters behind their concrete facades for hundreds of miles. Depending on one's point of view these dams have brought countless benefits or disasters to the arid West. They have controlled massive floods that once decimated the lower basin, brought water to places like California's Imperial Valley, one of the most fertile regions on earth, and have made places like Los Angeles, Las Vegas, Phoenix, Salt Lake City, Denver, and Albuquerque possible.

Yet their impact on the environment has been equally dramatic. They have flooded places like Glen Canyon—noted by Powell and other adventures as one of the most remarkable places of earth; caused irreparable loss of native fishes and wildlife habitat; increased harmful levels of bacteria, chemicals, and hard metals in many of the reservoirs; and led to the widespread damage to the delta region and its human and non-human communities alike. Once a region of nearly two million acres that supported millions of birds like the Yuma clapper rail and other species like jaguars, the vaquita, and the clam *Mulinia coloradoensis*, which have either disappeared from the region or are listed as endangered, the delta is only a shadow of its former splendor (Luecke et al. iv). In Charles Bergman's words, "only the Nile and the Indus Rivers were comparable for spectacle and scale" (57). The countless demands on the river by agriculture, industry, and municipalities have stretched the river to the limit. In fact, such increasing demands and persistent drought throughout the region have prevented the river from reaching the

Gulf. In typical years, the river all but dries up at the Mexican border as the remaining water is diverted west into the green fields of the Imperial and Mexicali valleys. Only in extra wet years when surplus water is released from reservoirs throughout the upper and lower basins does the river reach its historic outlet in the Gulf of California, 120 miles south of the U.S.-Mexico border.

The challenge that exists for us today is to determine how best to manage the countless demands on the river. Add to the difficulties of meeting the needs of 30 million people who depend on the river the ever unpredictable precipitation patterns in the arid west. Reports from a variety of academic and federal institutions—the Bureau of Reclamation included—point to a significant water crisis in those areas dependent on the Colorado in the near future. In May 2003 the U.S. Department of the Interior and the Bureau of Reclamation unveiled their Water 2025 program, a plan to significantly improve water conservation and avoid the projected water conflicts throughout the region that would occur by this date. Areas that rely on Colorado River water where such crises are “highly likely” include Colorado’s Front Range, Utah’s Wasatch Front, Southern Nevada, and the Santa Fe-Albuquerque region (Bureau of Reclamation, “Water 2025”). Another recent study released in July 2009 and sponsored by the University of Colorado-Boulder and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration speculated that the region’s water supply could be entirely drained in the next forty years if we continue on our present course of river allocation (“Future of Western Water”). Sources from within and outside the watershed like the *The Durango Herald*, *The Salt Lake Tribune*, and *The New York Times* have run recent articles concerning present and impending controversies

about the river, noting that significant changes in management and policy are necessary in order to avert major water crises.³

One response to these particular challenges is to initiate a broader conversation about the contributions that tributary voices make to our understanding of the river and watershed than what has previously existed. The “Law of the River,” that body of legal regulations and requirements that dictate river use and rely on prior appropriation, has created a have and have-not scenario embroiling the region in conflict as many within the watershed grapple to assert their rights with each state, municipality, and individual out to secure its “fair share” of the river. In light of such pending controversies, the consideration of tributary voices brings greater awareness of the range of possibilities through which we can imagine and use this resource and a fuller understanding of the many needs that must be balanced. With clear indications that significant shortages are just around the corner, policy makers must be more aware of the range of demands and the possible options that exist to mitigate the challenges. Acknowledging the watershed’s tributary voices is but the first step in this direction.

Charting New Directions for Colorado River Scholarship

In order to address these imminent issues, we need to rethink how we have approached the River in the past. We must question the current attitudes that dictate policy and management, and certainly, we must examine the fundamental myths and ideologies that are at the root of such decisions about how we regulate the river and its

³ Daniel McCool’s “Colorado River Water Policy Faces An Age of Limits” in *The Salt Lake Tribune*; Paul Quinlan’s “Lake Mead’s Water Level Plunges as 11-Year Drought Lingers” in *The New York Times*; The AP’s “Mexico, U.S. Discuss Colorado River Water” in *The Durango Herald*; Sarah Zielinski’s “The Colorado River Runs Dry” in *Smithsonian.com*; Henry Brean’s “Low Snowpack Signals Water Crisis at Lake Mead” in the *Las Vegas Review-Journal*; and William deBuys’s “Adding Up the Water Deficit” in *The LA Times* are just a few of the countless articles about the challenges facing the river today.

surrounding geography. But where do we begin? With such a complex and contentious history reconsidering how to think about and act toward the river is a formidable task. Yet, our future success in the region is predicated on this re-envisioning of the river and watershed. Fortunately, a number of journalists, writers, and scholars have initiated this effort from which we can chart new avenues for consideration.

According to Philip Fradkin and Marc Reisner whose respective works, *A River No More* (1968) and *Cadillac Desert* (1986), are essential primers on the history of conflict surrounding the Colorado and western water issues, the Colorado boasts a reputation few other rivers share. As Fradkin argues, “the Colorado is the most used, the most dramatic, and the most highly litigated and politicized river in this country, if not the world” (15). Reisner draws on Fradkin’s earlier observation to note that “The Colorado’s modern notoriety . . . stems not from its wild rapids and plunging canyons but from the fact that it is the most legislated, most debated, and most litigated river in the entire world” (120). As if these accolades aren’t enough, he goes on to point out that “[the Colorado] also has more people, more industry, and a more significant economy dependent on it than any comparable river in the world” (120). For these reasons, one could assume that the Colorado River has also produced more literature in terms of both scholarly (historic, legal, scientific studies) and creative (fiction, poetry, memoir) works than any other river in the world. For as Bergman points out, “you could create a second river out of all the ink that has been used to write about every aspect, every nook and cranny, of this once-great river” (39). Thus, any attempt to analyze the textual representations of the river faces a monumental task that spans numerous disciplines, genres, and time periods.

Yet for all that has been said about the river by historians, lawyers, scientists, politicians, and others with a penchant for critique, less attention has been given to understanding the implications of our discourse about the river, the words and images we use to describe this entity in both written and oral communication. And with western water issues capturing so much regional and national attention, it is surprising to note the general lack of scholarship given to Western rivers, and the Colorado River in particular, and the literature and rhetoric which represent them.

However, some notable exceptions exist. McMillin's study is the most recent contribution although it has a more national focus on rivers. Kevin Wehr's *America's Fight over Water: The Environmental and Political Effects of Large Scale Water Systems* (2004) brings a sociologist's perspective to the river and the discourse of "high modernism" which he argues promoted the construction of Boulder, Gran Coulee, and Glen Canyon dams (3). Within literary studies, a number of recent works take up this topic. Some of these earliest analyses include Joan Elizabeth Thompson's 1995 dissertation, "The Control of Water and the Land: Dams and Irrigation in the Novel by Mary Hallock Foote, Mary Hunter Austin, Frank Waters, and D'Arcy McNickle" and David Cassuto's *Dripping Dry: Literature, Politics, and Water in the Desert Southwest* (2001), which includes a chapter on Edward Abbey's musings on Glen Canyon Dam in *The Monkey Wrench Gang*. Other notable works like Tom Lynch's "Toward a Symbiosis of Environmental Justice: Water and Land Conflicts in Frank Waters, John Nichols, and Jimmy Santiago Baca" (2003), Dan Philippon's "Edward Abbey's Remarks at the Cracking of Glen Canyon Dam" (2003), and Michaelann Nelson's dissertation "Voices of Glen Canyon: The Influence of Place on Imagination and Activism" (2009) focus on the

Southwest's water history as represented in Western/Southwestern American literature. These works continue to lay a foundation for a nascent body of literary and rhetorical criticism, studies which underscore the need for greater awareness about how such imaginative texts can shape the political and physical face of the western landscape.

Yet, as evident in many of their titles, those works which do consider the Colorado often focus their comments on that stretch of the river known as Glen Canyon and the literature that arose from its damming in 1963. A result of the 1956 Colorado River Storage Project Act which aimed at developing a number of massive, federally sponsored water projects throughout the upper basin, and the emergence of a rapidly developing national environmental ethos—a result of the Act's proposed construction of the Echo Park Dam in Dinosaur National Monument—Glen Canyon Dam became a lightning rod for controversy. With writers like Edward Abbey, Katie Lee, and Wallace Stegner, to name just a few, who condemned the dam for its desecration of a truly sacred, incomparable place of beauty in texts like “Down the River,” *The Monkey Wrench Gang*, *All My Rivers are Gone*, and “Glen Canyon Submerses,” literary critics have enjoyed a treasure trove of material from this one particular stretch and historical event.

Because of the significant attention that the damming of Glen Canyon has received by critics in a host of fields, my interest in addressing the Colorado charts a different course. Implementing a broader watershed approach in its consideration of river voices, my dissertation follows the precedent established by Robert Fleck's *A Colorado River Reader* (2000) and the Arizona Humanities Council's exhibition: “Moving Waters: The Colorado River and the West” (2002).⁴ Both projects extend their view beyond any

⁴*A Colorado River Reader* is just one in a number of anthologies focused on the watershed and the Colorado specifically. Since 2000, *The Glen Canyon Reader* (2003) and *The Grand Canyon Reader* (2011)

one particular region and voice within the larger Colorado River watershed to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how different people have represented the river over time. Thus, as Fleck explains in his collection's preface, this "is the first to encompass a span of time from Native American creation myths to contemporary nonfiction prose" (viii). Similarly, the "Moving Waters" exhibit emphasizes river voices from throughout the basin, with a significant contribution of present-day interviews with river stakeholders to "generate regional consciousness of the river" (Moving Waters).

Like these two projects, my analysis spans cultural, geographical, and temporal boundaries to provide a more holistic understanding of what the river has come to mean within our national imagination. However, their purpose is chiefly to present primary source material rather than interpret its value in light of prevailing discourses. Herein lies the contribution the present study makes to Colorado River scholarship. Along with gathering a variety of voices from throughout the watershed that have been overlooked or otherwise neglected in terms of the more pervasive discourses, I examine the impact these marginalized perspectives have in shaping past, current, and future attitudes about the watershed.

As Chapter One explains, I rely on a number of theoretical perspectives from Western American history, ecocriticism, and rhetoric to consider the value of these voices. More specifically, bioregionalism and the watershed model become organizing metaphors for analyzing these selected tributary voices and how they engage traditional, mainstream views of the river and posit new directions. I address this negotiation between dominant and subordinate perspectives through Walter Beale's *Pragmatic*

have joined Fleck's collection as further tributes to these impressive areas and the writers and writing which depict them.

Theory of Rhetoric (1987) to further consider how these voices communicate their unique perspectives of what the river and surrounding watershed “means.” Beale’s work is useful particularly as he conveys a semiotic grammar of motives through which he attempts to categorize written discourse. Looking to understand the various motives of discourse he constructs a model with four realms in which all written discourse occurs: scientific, poetic, rhetorical, and instrumental. It is within this quadrad that I organize my discussion of tributary voices, examining both the discourse motives and the genres—nature writing, memoir, fiction, and governance documents—which articulate these motives.

In Chapter Two, “The Paradox of Desert Writing: Science Meets Story in Craig Childs’s *The Secret Knowledge of Water*,” I consider the tradition of science writing and the trope of paradox which has shaped the writings about the watershed’s deserts. Framed initially within Beale’s ratio of scientifically motivated discourse, I locate this discussion beginning with early exploration narratives of the Spanish conquistadores and missionaries Kino, Dominguez, and Escalante who first articulate the deserts’ paradoxical nature through their observations of a worthless yet stunningly dramatic landscape. Moving into the nineteenth century this topos becomes a mainstay of the natural history writing tradition that reflects the observations of many of the period’s greatest scientists and explorers including Pike, Ives, and Powell. These men, like those nature writers in the century to follow, will employ paradox and more poetically motivated discourse to describe the desert’s unique geography and biology. It is within this negotiation between scientifically and poetically motivated discourse that Craig Childs’s text examines desert water. As I demonstrate, however, his journeys throughout the American Southwest

reveal a more complicated approach. Relying on paradox to negotiate disparate epistemologies to understand the natural phenomena he encounters, Childs enters a dialogue with the desert through which its voice teaches the author that his technical training is insufficient to truly understand the mystery of desert water.

Moving from Childs's interactions with the watershed's deserts, Chapter Three, "New Currents in Colorado River Boating Narratives: Westerns and the Female Experience of Wilderness," relocates the analysis to the Grand Canyon and the role of the boating narrative which has become a staple of the Colorado River literary tradition. I begin the chapter with a consideration of the river narrative genre as an off-shoot of the Western and its emphasis on heroic protagonists, sublime and forlorn landscapes, and death-defying adventure evident in texts by some of the most famous river explorers like John Wesley Powell, Frederick Dellenbaugh, the Kolb brothers, and more recently, Edward Abbey. Having outlined the primary topoi of these narratives, I consider how women have manipulated the Western genre both on and off the river. I ground this discussion in Mary Hallock Foote's late nineteenth-century short story "Maverick" and the author's critique of the male-dominated Western to comment on Western water politics. As both an originator of the formula Western and critique of this genre, Foote establishes a foundation upon which twentieth-century Colorado River women boaters will build. Employing and negotiating traditional women's themes like domesticity, community, and storytelling through memoir, fiction, and interviews, selected works by Patricia McCairen, Laurie Buyer, and Louise Teal embrace a range of discourse. Motivated by poetic and rhetorical discourse, their works celebrate the Colorado as they

also create a space for a woman's rightful place on the river and within a highly male-dominated literary tradition.

Finally, Chapter Four, "Green Lagoons and Delta Blues: Changing Tides in the Mexican Delta," foregrounds the oft-neglected Mexican perspective and its role in the river's management within Beale's instrumental, poetic, and rhetorical aims of discourse. Central to this chapter are two founding documents of AEURHYC, a local water-user's association that operates within the Colorado Delta and works to protect and restore the delta's fragile ecosystem. To set up the unique rhetorical strategies this group makes in its *Plan Estratégico* of 2001 and 2004, I consider the contentious history that has marked the United States' paternalistic and hegemonic relationship with Mexico evident in a host of binational treaties that reflect the United States' dominance over the Colorado and subsequently over its neighbor to the south. Through AEURHYC's appeals to story, collaboration, and the *querencia*, a concept that pervades the Mexican/Hispano/Latino culture throughout the American Southwest and Mexico's *El Norte*, this group demonstrates the value of cooperation and a diversity of voices in watershed management and conservation initiatives.

Toward a New Western Rhetoric: Watershed Aesthetics and the Aims of Discourse

“To know the spirit of a place is to realize that you are a part of a part and that the whole is made of parts, each of which is whole.

—Gary Snyder, *The Practice of the Wild*, 38

This chapter introduces the theoretical basis for the larger study about the utility of examining a set of tributary voices which reveal unique perspectives about human understanding of the Colorado River watershed historically and today. In “Rhetoric, Environmentalism, and Environmental Ethics” Michael Bruner and Max Oelschlaeger argue that rhetoric is “critical, persuasive, and architectonic,” and draw upon these elements to better understand the field of environmental ethics. These three categories of rhetoric help articulate the developments of this field and enhance our understanding of the watershed’s discursive construction and the unique perspectives that the selected tributary voices bring to this discussion.

Drawing on a number of critics to round out their observations, Bruner and Oelschlaeger suggest that rhetoric-as-critical “reveals the *discourse of power* that overdetermines discussion of the environmental agenda, that is, contextualizes the issues in ways which lead to narrowly defined debates over policy that inevitably lead to pre-established ends that are themselves never discussed” (216). Such a stance questions hegemonic, taken-for-granted discourses, scrutinizing them on the grounds by which they make their arguments. The authors argue that rhetoric is also architectonic, a term Richard McKeon coined, suggesting that it is “transformative” and ultimately

“productive of a new cultural order” (218). They reference examples by writers like Aldo Leopold whose “land ethic envisions a new living space in which humankind is bound up with the land community, not as its conqueror, but as plain citizen” (218). The following discussion about bioregionalism and watersheds functions with this goal in mind of providing an alternative and useful heuristic by which to reconnect nature and culture while toning down an “egocentric” world view. As I consider their work in light of Walter H. Beale’s quadrad, we find a workable model by which to examine the variety of discourse and genres that represent and articulate the river and the watershed’s significance. Finally, Bruner and Oelschlaeger view persuasive rhetoric as another tool in the eco-ethicists tool bag. By implementing various discourses including “credible images and spokespeople,” persuasive rhetoric initiates a rethinking of options by the public, which reexamination of possible approaches and scenarios to environmental challenges can ultimately lead to action (220).

Because rhetoric reveals the power differential in environmental debate, provides alternative methods and models by which to imagine possible solutions, and suggests means to persuade the public to consider such alternative options, rhetorical analysis becomes a powerful tool in examining the contribution that tributary voices make to the discourse about the Colorado River and its watershed. These three principles are particularly relevant to this dissertation as it analyzes and challenges some of the most pervasive and dominant historical myths, discourses, and genres that have dictated how the river has been imagined in and out of the watershed for centuries. Likewise, this work seeks to bring to light alternative metaphors and methods of envisioning the watershed, and ultimately, to shed light on lesser known discourses from those individuals and

groups who offer alternative means of imagining and consequently interacting with the river and its surrounding landscapes. Through the theoretical contributions of a variety of fields I aim to both justify my selection of texts and to establish their value in the broader scholarship and understanding of the Colorado River watershed.

To create a more comprehensive approach to understanding our relationship with the river that invites a broader consideration of cultures and genres, I turn to recent theoretical developments in Western American history, ecocriticism, and rhetoric and their articulations of a more heteroglossic consideration of voices. As a result, I establish a useful framework through which to examine a variety of tributary voices and their representative discourses and genres. This structure, which draws heavily on a watershed model and Walter Beale's semiotic grammar of motives, provides the inroads through which to consider the impact of myth, the discourses and genres that promote them, and the alternative positions regarding living with the Colorado River and its surrounding lands that are so necessary today.

New Western History, Bioregions, and the Watershed

Skeptical of the prevailing myths that construct a very unified and reductive view of Western progress evident in works like Turner's frontier thesis, recent scholarship has offered a much more critical portrayal of the region's development. The result of this renegotiation of place and culture has given birth to New Western History, and more recently, Critical Regionalism. Beginning in the post-World War II years with historians like Henry Nash Smith whose *Virgin Land* charts America's preoccupation with the agrarian myth and its relation to Turner's thesis, the West as a topic of study has, in the words of Donald Worster, "emerged out of the old clouds of myth and romance, and now

seems for the first time honestly revealed” (*Under Western Skies* 5). This monumental shift in perception, dubbed the “New Western History” by individuals like Worster and his fellow historians Patricia Limerick and Frederick Turner, positions the West in an entirely new light, one typically far from the optimistic vision Turner’s thesis had suggested. Worster outlines three key themes of this revisionist approach to the West, arguing that, 1) “the West has not at all been a place to retreat from the human community and all its conflicts;” 2) “The drive for the economic development of the West was often a ruthless assault on nature, and it has left behind it much death, depletion, and ruin;” and 3) “the West has been ruled by concentrated power” (13-15). In essence, the West was never the site where the hopes of nation could idyllically play out. Rather, it has long been a place of imperial conquest and struggle between peoples and land, a place where democracy has always been under negotiation.

Such has been the case of the arid West and the nation’s views of the Colorado River. As Limerick explains in *Legacy of Conquest* (1987), one of the foundational texts to New Western History, “people moved to arid and semiarid regions, secure in the faith that water would somehow be made available, then found the prospect of water scarcity both surprising and unfair” (43). Ironically, however, the reality of the situation didn’t prevent the myth of the Garden to flourish. As Mark Reisner suggests, “. . . even as the myth of the welcoming, bountiful West was shattered, the myth of the independent yeoman farmer remained intact” (51). With this hope still in play, the arid West has seen over a century of efforts to reclaim the desert and transform it into a well-watered oasis. While many areas of the region have done just this, the increased demand for a limited

quantity of water suggests that ongoing efforts to service this belief in its current understanding are misguided, if not downright foolish.

A significant problem related to this inability to give up on the myth is the effect that perpetuating the myth has on those throughout the watershed. Since Turner's thesis envisioned a place of renewed opportunity and progress, the supposed savage cultures and landscapes of the region did not stand a change in the face of Anglo progress that moved steadily westward armed with enlightenment and civilization. Ultimately, Turner's thesis reveals his lack of awareness about the realities of the region and his bias for an agrarian frontier.⁵ Thus, for so many who have based their understanding of the West on Turner's observations, they have accepted a very restricted view of what the region is generally about and whom it is for. As a result, the land, its resources, and its native cultures have suffered mightily as the nation has often looked to the West as the land of endless possibilities. Worster observes that "Quite simply, the domination of nature in the water empire must lead to the domination of some people by others" (*Under Western Skies* 31). Such has often been the case with such groups as women, Native Americans, Mexican-Americans, and Mexicans, throughout the Colorado's development over the last century or so. Yet while their voices seem absent from the broader discourse about the river, a closer look reveals an ongoing presence, some more subtle than others, which should inform our understanding of the river. The contemporaneous emergence of bioregional, watershed, and New Western historical criticism invites a new reading of the river and the contribution that these and other marginalized viewpoints provide to its understanding as a physical object and cultural construct.

⁵ Limerick suggests that Turner's belief that the frontier had closed has merit only if viewed through the effects of agricultural on the region. On the other hand, she notes how the notion of the frontier continued to live well beyond 1890 in industries like mining and ranching. See *The Legacy of Conquest* pp. 23-24.

This willingness to acknowledge the value of lesser known river perspectives draws strength from Limerick's second major addition to *New Western History*, *Something in the Soil* (2000), which reflects on the contribution this field has made to the cultural landscape of the region. Recognizing that much of the early scholarship in this field was very poorly received by the Western public because it supposedly "cast white men as wicked and demonic and envisioned the history of the American West as an unrelieved tragedy" (17), Limerick clarifies her position through four key terms: continuity, convergence, conquest, and complexity, each idea bearing significant weight on the current project. Limerick explains that the West is a place of continuity where the same practices at play before the closing in 1890 continue today evident such processes as ongoing boom and bust cycles in mining and other extractive industries (19). It is also a place of convergence, "one of the great meeting zones of the planet" where peoples of countless races, ethnicities, and religions interacted and which challenge the idea that the West was just a place for white Americans to occupy (19). Conquest and complexity round out Limerick's description, suggesting that a simplistic, ahistorical notion of the frontier fails to acknowledge both the reality of widespread oppression of minority groups and the West's highly intricate past that is far from the naïve escape to innocence suggested in Turner's work (20-21). Together these ideas aptly describe the Colorado River's past and present evident in the continuity of frontier optimism that influences water use and the region's development, the interaction of diverse cultures and beliefs about the river's value, and the oppression of peoples and resources within the watershed.

This emphasis on conquest and complexity are equally significant and closely related to the advent of critical regionalism and its reenvisioning of the American West.

Scholars Krista Comer and Neil Campbell have provided important commentary on the New West that they both approach through the post-modern shift. Comer contends in *Landscapes of the New West* that “landscape is not an empty field of vision . . . but rather a brimming-full *social* topography that creates and enacts the various cultural assumptions and power struggles of the age” (13). Like Limerick, Comer is critical of past beliefs that landscape, and the West in particular, have been viewed as blank slates ready for the dominant culture’s sole imprint. Rather she recognizes the multifaceted and competing histories, philosophies, and practices that have shaped the land and suggests that “we might approach western landscape studies, and all of the social relations that landscape represents and negotiates, from a more nuanced and proactive vantage point” (13). This dissertation responds to Comer’s call as it encompasses a more comprehensive approach to the myriad discourses emerging from the watershed’s diverse time periods and cultural groups.

Echoing a call to establish more productive perspectives by which to examine the West’s landscapes as a site of critical discourse, Campbell draws on Bakhtin’s notions of dialogism and polyphony to better understand how the American West as a complex social and physical space operates. Such perspectives lead him to view the “lived space of the West as a complex web of interconnections, competing discourses, and different ‘voices’ that together constitute the region” (10). He continues to explain that viewing the West through polyphony, this continual mingling of viewpoints, removes “boundaries constructed by narrow historiographical studies, dime novel stereotypes, and romantic visualizations of landscape and human action, by introducing new discourses in dialogue with the old” (11). Campbell’s application of Bakhtin’s ideas to the West provide a solid

grounding for the importance of my notion of the Colorado's tributary voices that are continually in conversation with discourses of the past. Like rocks protruding from a stream that both shape the watercourse and are in turn shaped by the water, the tributary voices work within and against these past positions as they strive to leave their own imprint on the full body of river discourse.

Similar to the New Western historians and those promoting a critical regionalism of the West, I am equally interested in establishing new vantage points by which to examine the Colorado River watershed as a more complex discursive space. A better way of expressing what I seek to do in this dissertation is more appropriately described as an attempt to articulate a New Western Rhetoric. Rather than just considering the historical contribution a particular tributary voice makes to the river's timeline, I am more concerned with analyzing these voices' discursive strategies and appeals which forward their respective visions of the river and how their rhetoric engages, challenges, and rejects mainstream perspectives to posit alternative ways of living with the river. This type of rhetoric embraces Limerick's West where continuity, convergence, conquest, and complexity become defining qualities in the representative texts by desert explorers, women boaters, and pro-delta perspectives. In each case, they reference the optimism and individuality indicative of the Frontier myth, demonstrate a greater diversity of viewpoints, and consider the hegemonic ideas and practices that challenge the portrayal of the watershed and particularly its wilderness areas as an idyllic retreat from civilization's woes. While history plays an integral part in the delineation of this New Western Rhetoric, the primary contribution of this new approach is its emphasis on and

critique of discursive activity rather than a celebration of a tributary voice's mere presence.

Useful in outlining what a New Western Rhetoric may look like are the contributions of bioregionalism which share Campbell's affinity for interconnectivity. The value of a bioregional approach is that it assumes a mutual dependence between the human and non-human world. As ecocritic Tom Lynch observes:

By foregrounding natural factors—primarily the biotic community and watersheds—as the basis of a place's definition, bioregionalism posits that our sense of identity may be constituted by the characteristics of our residency in a larger community of natural beings—our local bioregion—rather than (or perhaps, more realistically, supplementary to) national, state, ethnic, or other more common bases of identity. (18)

Unlike traditional political boundaries that are often arbitrary, witnessed throughout the American West in places like the rectilinear anomaly of the Four Corners, bioregionalism reenvisions the land through a lens of integrity and unity. Although cognizant of a region's diversity, a bioregional ethic embraces this difference as an enrichment of the geography to which it is a part. The end result of this practice, then, is what Gary Snyder, one of the great proponents of bioregional thought, suggests as “the entry of place into the dialectic of history” that is, “that there are ‘classes’ which have so far been overlooked—the animals, rivers, rocks, and grasses—now entering history” (41).

Another way of saying this is that *where* we live has an immediate impact on *how* we live since one who adopts a bioregional outlook is aware of his actions and their influence on

the natural world, and makes necessary changes to ensure the prosperity of all within that biotic community.

Besides the immediate value bioregionalism has in altering our relationship to place, it proves highly useful in rethinking the literature and other textual material that expresses our connection with a locale. As Lynch observes, “In addition to altering our sense of regionality, a bioregional approach is also especially valuable in the study of the literature of the American West for providing an alternative to the still pervasive trope of the frontier as a defining aspect of the region’s culture” (26). Because bioregionalism demands a recognition of and a humility toward the natural world, it challenges traditional notions of place which position it as exploitable.

Bringing a bioregional approach to our understanding of the Colorado River and related western water issues is nothing new. In fact, one could argue that our present understanding of bioregionalism originated in response to the Colorado River well over a century ago. Having recorded the first passage down the Colorado from Green River, Wyoming to the Grand Wash Cliffs that mark the end of the Grand Canyon in 1869, John Wesley Powell became an overnight hero as he brought the last “unknown” place in America to light. His subsequent journey down the river in 1871 and extensive travels throughout the American West from 1870-1879 as leader of a federal survey led Powell to promote a unique vision for the development of this region which aridity marked as its primary condition. Outlined in his *Report on the Lands of the Arid Region of the United States, with a More Detailed Account of the Lands of Utah* which he submitted to Congress in 1878, Powell describes the land west of the 100th meridian that he believed could “eventually be rescued from their present worthless state” (8). Noting the pervasive

lack of precipitation throughout the region, Powell envisioned new land systems which would better adapt land use practices to actual conditions rather than the current 160 acre plot granted to landowners under the 1862 Homestead Act. Drawing from his knowledge of New Mexican acequia culture and Mormon and Native irrigation practices (Lynch 45; Worster, *River Running West* 495; Stegner, *Where the Blue Bird Sings* 50), Powell believed in a reorganization of the West into “hydrographic basins rather than by arbitrary political lines drawn on a map. Such basins . . . would be virtually self-governing and hence able to negotiate with other similar basins, as well as to control their own watersheds clear to the drainage divides” (Stegner, *Beyond the Hundredth Meridian* 315, 322). Powell looked to these self-sustaining, community-oriented groups as the arid West’s best option for long term development.

In his recent biography of Powell, Donald Worster further elaborates on this revolutionary approach to establishing political entities based on topographical realities rather than more random survey lines. Of these geopolitical basins he writes:

The purpose now was to see the entire region as a mosaic of interconnected watersheds, as integrated units of water and land, not to deepen geological understanding so much as to guide settlement. Each of those carefully mapped and measured watersheds furnished the natural boundaries for a series of ‘irrigation districts’ into which settlers could come and work out their problems together. (*River Running West* 477)

One can only imagine how the West would look today had Congress and the delegations throughout the region to which Powell promoted this idea accepted his watershed model. Yet those to whom he addressed this argument could not divorce themselves from the

power of myths and the opportunities to make a dollar. Thus, despite Powell's telling observation that "the lands which might thus be reclaimed are of greater extent than the amount which the streams can serve" (*Arid Lands* 17), politicians and boosters would vehemently reject his vision, placing their hopes in the Garden myth and American hubris rather than in one who had gained such an intimate knowledge of the arid regions.

While Powell's contemporaries rejected his progressive thinking, his ideas would not be lost. As Worster observes, "In the years to come, practical men and women looking to create a new West . . . might reexamine the social and environmental ideals of John Wesley Powell, distilling out of them their democratic essence" (*Rivers of Empire* 332). It seems that such a day has come about as numerous scholars across various disciplines have invoked Powell's model as a needed corrective to past thinking and practice. In regards to addressing the Colorado River's current challenges and projected water shortages and escalating conflicts between cities, states, agriculture, industry, and environmentalists, a watershed model is particularly germane to how we think of and imagine the river along with our attempts to find workable solutions. Like bioregions, and as Powell well understood, watersheds do not conform to political boundaries. In their most basic, topographical sense, a watershed is "the total land area that contributes water to a river . . . delineated by a ridge or drainage divide that marks the boundary of the drainage basin and can be easily identified on topographic maps. All surface water runoff below a ridge line will flow downhill within the watershed" (Cech 59).

Watersheds can be relatively small, encompassing a particular drainage of a few square miles, or they may span large portions of continents, encompassing numerous states and other geopolitical spaces like the Mississippi watershed, the third largest in the world

(65). And like bioregions, they are ripe for metaphorical application to New Western Rhetoric and the role that tributary voices play in reshaping our understanding of the discursive constructions of the river through literary and non-literary texts.

In *Writing for an Endangered World*, ecocritic Lawrence Buell claims that “‘watershed’ [has] become the most popular defining gestalt in contemporary bioregionalism, at least in the United States” (246). As such, numerous environmental writers have looked to watersheds specifically as a means of exploring new possibilities in ameliorating environmental problems. For Buell’s own treatment of nature writing, he sees the value of what he dubs “watershed aesthetics” in its

respect for environmental health, equity, and self-restraint within particular bailiwicks, implying that cocoon-like fantasies of self-containment fail to grasp the complexity and extent of the imbrication of cultures and environments. For, in principle, ‘watershed’ ought to refer not only to a small, relatively finite unit but to a series of zones connecting local communities with larger stretches of continent. (263-64)

As in bioregionalism, a sense of community cohesion and restraint are integral to the watershed model. Similarly, watersheds bring together culture and environment, providing a means of working around the nature/culture dyad that has long vexed our thinking about human relationships with the natural world. Perhaps, more effectively than bioregionalism, at least in terms of thinking about the Colorado River, a watershed approach allows us to consider how water ties multiple bioregions and their related human components together. In essence, the watershed model becomes a “vision corrective” as it brings new perspectives to an understanding of place (*Writing* 246). As

the river flows from its headwaters in the Rockies toward the Gulf of California, it passes through a number of bioregions including the Colorado Plateau and the Mojave and Sonoran Deserts, not to say anything of the lesser tributaries and the regions outside the watershed that still rely on Colorado River water through transbasin diversions. These additional regions would include such places as Albuquerque near the convergence of the Arizona/New Mexico Plateau and northern Chihuahuan Desert, the Central Basin and Range abutting Utah's Wasatch Front, and the High Plains which spread east from Colorado's burgeoning Front Range (US EPA). While each bioregion is highly unique in the climate and the flora and fauna that it supports, they are all nonetheless tied together by the Colorado River.

Equally important to the watershed model are the connections that it makes between states and countries. Although Pinedale, Wyoming and Mexicali, Sonora, Mexico could not be more different from one another, they are united by the river that is the lifeblood for both communities. While most people in the upper basin think little of their downstream neighbors and vice versa (except, perhaps, to blame them for taking too much water), the decisions made within each basin regarding the management of the river can have significant impacts elsewhere. Reflecting on his own journeys throughout the watershed, Fradkin explains:

But listening to and seeing how people used the river the Colorado became a series of segments, each labeled "mine" . . . One neighbor's vision rarely penetrated into another's backyard with any great degree of compassion . . . To listen to the voices, one would never suspect they were connected to the same river, or that the Colorado led to Mexico and the expectations of

its multitudes, or, after being last used in that country, that it no longer emptied into the gulf. (316-17)

Most significant in this statement is the role that listening to voices plays in gaining a “watershed” vision of the river. Fradkin’s view of the river is radically different from those perspectives that are limited by their own small stretch of the river or its countless tributaries. Having traveled from the headwaters to the mouth and taken time to listen to the stories of those all along the river, he is able to patch these segments together to form a more comprehensive view, one less inhibited by the biases and ignorance of those who lack such vision. Fradkin’s awareness of the entire watershed evident as he brings together disparate perspectives, aligns with the previously discussed theoretical positions which call for a more complex, heteroglossic understanding of the American West. Through an application of the watershed model we open ourselves up to the multiplicity of articulations and discourses about the river which provide a richer understanding of countless claims upon the river and its resources.

Perhaps the most useful articulation of the watershed model for the present study comes from Robert Adler, a lawyer and professor at the University of Utah School of Law and an expert on Colorado River law and management.⁶ Building on the notion of connectivity inherent within watersheds which so many other writers have acknowledged, Adler pushes the description further, suggesting the deep connections that watersheds make between different communities and the role the overall health of the

⁶ Worster’s call to employ Powell’s model has gained significant traction in recent years as numerous environmental thinkers and waters managers have looked to the watershed as a useful structure to delineate water use. Jack Loeffler’s article “Thinking Like a Watershed” published on his website *Lore of the Land* borrows Aldo Leopold’s mantra of “thinking like a mountain” to posit new directions for living with rivers. Similarly, an April 2011 report of the University of Montana’s Center for Natural Resources and Environmental Policy titles the work “Thinking Like a River Basin.”

system plays in restoring a particular place like the Colorado Basin. In *Restoring Colorado River Ecosystems* (2007), Adler explains that

watersheds are not just bodies of water, but are connected intimately with the entire associated land mass . . . river systems are not just two-dimensional (linear and lateral) but four-dimensional in nature. They are longitudinal or linear (upstream-downstream); lateral (river floodplain to riparian zone and beyond); vertical (groundwater-surface water); and temporal (all three spatial dimensions change over time). Thus, for the Colorado as with all major rivers, the health of the river depends in part on what occurs on associate watershed lands. River restoration efforts cannot end at the water's edge, or even in the relatively limited riparian zone. We cannot view rivers as lines of water flowing downstream, disconnected from their sources of food and energy. In restoring the Colorado River and other water bodies around the country, we must consider connections in all dimensions. (77)

Adler's consideration of a watershed as a multi-dimensional entity of various temporal and spatial relationships coupled with his argument that we need to view watersheds in this light if we are to restore a river like the Colorado is of considerable significance in the present study's treatment of river discourses. Similar to the various dimensions through which one can examine a watershed, discursive representations of the river follow a similar multi-dimensional structure: they are linear as they often follow Western narrative structures; they are lateral as some are disseminated further than others throughout the public sphere; they are vertical through their hierarchical nature i.e. some

discourses take precedence over others as the “right” or “correct” representations of the river evident in the discussion about myths; and they are temporal in that they—like the river itself—change over time. Applying this four dimensional watershed schematic to the literary and rhetorical representations of the river, we come away with a clearer understanding of how the Colorado River watershed has been rhetorically constructed through literature and other textual productions, recognizing that through a greater awareness of the breadth of discourses present, our ability to address the watershed’s overall health becomes a hopeful reality.

Moving Metaphor into the Realm of Rhetoric

With the watershed model promoting connections between disparate communities and different dimensions as suggested by Buell and Adler, how does such a metaphor function in light of the textual production of a watershed? How do we begin to outline a New Western Rhetoric and delineate which voices to examine among the countless perspectives that continue to stake their claim on the river? As an entity that is both physical and imaginative in nature another heuristic is needed to make clearer sense of how we have defined and represented the Colorado River and its watershed over time. Since this project focuses on the imaginative creation of the watershed through the promulgation of various discourses which each have their own set of topoi, discursive features, and rhetorical strategies in promoting a particular image and understanding of the river, I turn to Beale’s *A Pragmatic Theory of Rhetoric* (1987) as an architectonic system of rhetorical thought and action to organize the contributions of the tributary voices and to examine how they construct their vision of the river’s significance to particular discourse communities.

Beale's pragmatic theory revisits and amends Aristotelian and Burkeian rhetorical models as well as principles from speech-act theory that provide greater insight to written rather than oral discourse which has traditionally been the primary mode of inquiry among rhetoricians (8-10). Beale explains that he hopes to "construct a theory of written rhetoric which will provide both a rationale and a foundation for the study of rhetorical literature, a field firmly established within the discipline of speech communication but much neglected by students of writing, literature, and the written word" (1). Since this dissertation focuses entirely on written representations of the river and the surrounding region, Beale's treatment of rhetorical literature illuminates this medium as it addresses the river. His theory rests on what he identifies as a "semiotic grammar of motives" or a "system" that "relates to human constructions of reality in general" (9). This system builds on Kenneth Burke's pentad as articulated in his *A Grammar of Motives* (1945) to create a quadrad, a four-pronged approach to understanding how discourse is motivated and how such discourse reflects a particular construction of reality. Beale points out that his semiotic grammar of motives "is not in itself a construction of reality but an objective model for talking about human constructions of reality" (10). Applied to the Colorado River and its watershed, this model helps initiate a discussion about how these tributary voices construct their reality of the river and region and where their approaches and attitudes may align with or challenge the pervasive "reality" of what the river has meant in the past and what it possibly means today.

A fundamental part of this new discourse model is the "Motivational Axes," which are "extrapolated from the principal tensions inherent in the concept of "meaning" (11). Positioned as a vertical and horizontal axis, the two axes together plot different

philosophical positions about how language constructs reality and meaning. On the vertical axis the two poles correspond to how discourse functions to promote action and participation or contemplation and non-participation. On the horizontal axis discourse is referential or non-referential (11). These two axes and the four poles that address how reality is constructed comprise Beale's quadrad, "a map to the entire range of linguistic and intellectual activity" (63). He further explains that "Although they may not anticipate absolutely everything of any interest to students of meaning, they certainly encompass enough to constitute the essential components of a 'system of placement' for dealing with the problems of motivation in discourse" (63-64). Such a comprehensive schema of meaning provides an ideal organizational structure for this project and allows room for an initial consideration about why writers operating in a range of different discourses depict their visions of the Colorado as they do. While other models exist for delineating how to approach the lesser known and under-represented perspectives about the river, Beale's framework provides a solid foundation upon which to examine a wide range of textual production that spans numerous discourse communities. Similar to a watershed which delineates all the water within a specific, geographical space, this discourse model provides a means of representing the range of written discourse about the river. By translating the watershed model onto this discourse map, we come away with a comprehensive framework for understanding the range of linguistic and intellectual activity about the river with particular attention to tributary voices.

As I begin to map the discursive activity of my selected tributary voices onto this "system of placement," it is important to note the fluidity between poles that exists within written discourse. For Beale "discourse [is] a complex human activity, to be understood

in terms not of primary determinants but of ratios” (11). This is because, as Beale further observes, “no utterance . . . can call into play one of these axes without simultaneously invoking the other” (64). Therefore, rather than a particular text constructing meaning solely within the realm of contemplation, it will also give utterance to nonreference or reference. These combinations or “ratios” of how meaning is constructed give rise to the classical aims of discourse: scientific, poetic, and rhetorical. To this list Beale adds instrumental to better account for the proliferation of written discourse which exists today and which was of lesser significance in Aristotle’s world (90). Thus, the four poles of the motivational axes give rise to these four aims of discourse which embody portions of these philosophical orientations. Scientifically motivated discourse is a ratio of contemplation and reference; poetic discourse combines contemplation and nonreference; rhetorical discourse mixes nonreference and action; and finally, instrumental discourse blends both action and reference (11, 64).

Considering how the Colorado River watershed has been and continues to be represented in light of pervasive myths, these aims help demonstrate the range of voices and their associated intentions inherent in the watershed, their interconnectivity with one another, and in some cases, the ease by which they challenge more mainstream discourses. To this end Beale reminds us that, “Any single work of discourse may contain or exhibit a range of motives, of course—some of them explicit in the discourse, others implicit in the situation, others transparent only to a subset of the audience, and others immediately accessible only to the author” (95). Because it is neither possible to recreate the exact situations which motivated my tributary voices’ discursive acts (although the intentions in the Mexican water-user documents are clearer than Childs’s and the women

boaters' works), nor to understand how an author and audience perceived such motives, my analyses focus on the motives that emerge from the texts themselves.

To negotiate and examine these various motives and their respective aims and their relevance to how my tributary voices discursively construct the river and watershed, I consider their primary objectives and the genres which most typically represent them. In the case of the scientific aim, its main objective is “the discovery, construction, and organization of knowledge, particularly in those areas or subareas in which facts, classifications, and general laws can be verified by rational and empirical procedures, as opposed to the values and loyalties of communities” (94). Beale cites such specific genres as reports and theoretical and philosophical treatises as emblematic of the scientific aim (94). The poetic focuses on “the construction of an object of enjoyment and reflection, using the materials and resources of language” and is found in such genres as “Poems, stories, and novels” (94). The rhetorical seeks “to influence the understanding and conduct of human affairs” and “operates typically in matters of action that involve the well-being and destiny of communities” and “in matters of value and understanding which involve the communal or competing values of communities” (94). Beale lists such texts as “public resolutions and declarations of competing groups within a community” as examples of this discourse aim (94). Finally, Beale defines the instrumental aim through its “governance, guidance, control, or execution of human activities. It includes such specific products as contracts, constitutions, laws, technical reports, and manuals of operation” (94). Again, it is worth reemphasizing that these descriptions are “not ideals; they are norms of activity” (94). As such, they may perform in unexpected ways evident, for example, in Childs’s nature writing embodying both scientifically and poetically

motivated discourse and the women's boating narratives which appropriate the Western genre to critique and challenge its themes, and ultimately, the expectations of this form of poetically motivated discourse. According to Beale, "An individual work of discourse succeeds partly by conforming to the norms of a given rhetorical genre, partly by transcending them, sometimes even by flouting them" (115). The success of these tributary voices' texts depends upon their ability to appropriate conventional genres and the typical discourses they embody to then forward their own agenda of what the river and watershed mean.

Applying Beale's model and his four aims specifically to a discussion of the Colorado River and watershed, we gain a more complex vision of how various individuals and groups imagine the river and region. Rather than just focusing on one particular genre like the report and the scientific discourse which typifies such a genre, for example, Beale's work enables us to compare critically and analytically a wide range of genres that influence the way we understand the watershed through different forms of writing from multiple perspectives and persuasions. Perhaps most importantly, though, Beale's quadrad encourages an examination of the various discourses a particular text may embody. Instead of limiting a text or people to a particular genre or set of discourses that represent the river, this model opens up a text's or a group's options in terms of how to convey its "reality." Thus, as Beale reminds us, "the aims of discourse . . . exist in relationships of continuum with each other, and their relations can be adequately comprehended in terms of departures from normal states of convergence in one or more respects" (94). Existing within relationships or ratios as noted above, each of the four aims of discourse is hardly a static category representative of only one kind of genre or

group. Rather, as the title of this dissertation suggests, this project centers on the value of “departures” or cross-currents that tributary voices embody in light of their “convergences” or confluences with the pervasive, mainstream discourses which have dictated how we have viewed the river over time. By examining representative texts from a number of tributary voices that align to varying degrees with Beale’s four discourse aims, the Colorado River watershed becomes a complex site where multiple discourses, genres, and attitudes intermingle. As they interact with prevailing beliefs about how to imagine and use the river, a broader understanding of what the Colorado River means physically, discursively, and ideologically to a larger set of constituencies emerges.

In light of the aforementioned theoretical positions, this call for a New Western Rhetoric and its emphasis on the contributions of tributary voices may seem an odd tact to take within the larger body of Colorado River scholarship. More often than not, the bulk of the conversations about the river and watershed exist in legislative sessions and public hearings, technical journals and state funded studies, and sound bites offered by policy makers throughout the region. But considering the widespread challenges that face the watershed and its resources that span countless disciplines, we need to involve more voices and perspectives if a more comprehensive, egalitarian solution is to exist. In effect, what we need is more of what Helen Ingram, a social ecologist, advocates. She argues that

When engineers, politicians, or economists have taken control of water-resources decision making, a singular, exclusivist perspective has dominated. Humanists, it seems to me, would be better gatekeepers because they are respectful of value pluralism . . . humanists would

emphasize the rights of ordinary people to participate in the public deliberations that should govern water choices. (166)

If we are serious about understanding how our written expressions about the river have shaped and can influence the watershed and bordering regions physically and ideologically, it is imperative that we consider a broader range of discourse beyond those that have historically dictated river management and allocation. We need the added perspectives of humanists to better consider how various discourses of dominant and marginalized voices influence the construction of how the public views (or fails to view) the river and its integral position in determining the success or failure of the western United States and northern Mexico. With a clearer understanding of the dominant ideologies that have shaped the river as we know it today, along with those counter-discourses emerging as part of the public sphere of the Colorado River Basin through the reconsideration of traditional genre boundaries, we find ourselves in a better position to sit down at the bargaining table as equal stakeholders, cognizant of the myriad possibilities and challenges that will dictate our future relationship with this most unique river and region.

The Paradox of Desert Writing:

Science Meets Story in Craig Childs's *The Secret Knowledge of Water*

“What *is* a desert and why is it what it is?”

—Joseph Wood Krutch, *The Voice of the Desert*, 17

In the opening pages of *The Secret Knowledge of Water* (2000), Craig Childs, a modern-day explorer of desert regions, describes a journey to a Southern Utah slot canyon in full flood stage. As the deluge subsides, Childs enters the canyon to examine the water, and it is within the depths of this chasm that he makes a highly significant observation that not only reveals water's unique and perplexing presence in the desert but also the author's connection to an entire literary tradition. With the “sour taste of dead animals and fresh mud” (xiv) on his lips, he explains, “There are two easy ways to die in the desert: thirst or drowning. This place is stained with such ironies, a tension set between the need to find water and the need to get away from it. The floods that come with the least warning arrive at the hottest time of the year, when the last thing on a person's mind is too much water” (xiv). This pointed statement about the consequences of too little or too much water invokes a central theme of the literature about the deserts of the American Southwest: paradox.

No stranger to this motif is Edward Abbey and his text *Desert Solitaire* (1968). Explaining his rationale for taking a job at Arches National Monument he states:

I am here not only to evade for a while the clamor and filth and confusion of the cultural apparatus but also to confront . . . the bare bones of

existence, the elemental and fundamental, the bedrock which sustains us . . .
 . I dream of a hard and brutal mysticism in which the naked self merges
 with the non-human world and yet somehow survives still intact,
 individual, separate. Bedrock and paradox. (7)

Retreating from the constricting confines of society, Abbey finds his paradise in a remote corner of a Southwestern desert where his imagination and zeal for freedom flourish. Grappling with notions about life and death, the real and the abstract, Abbey establishes his work within what David Pozza describes as “a philosophy of paradox” (14), one through which the author “gains a broader perspective on existence where inconsistencies and incongruities naturally abound” (9). His evocation of paradox places him in a tradition of desert writers who marvel at the desert regions where life and death stand in stark contrast, where the land itself seems to contradict and challenge Anglo American expectations of how the land should appear.

Of course, paradox as a literary device is not solely characteristic of these two authors and their respective works of desert literature. Cleanth Brooks argued more than half a century ago in “The Language of Paradox” that this motif plays a key role in the poet’s efforts to unify what may initially appear as contradictory emotions, ideas, and symbols (17). Of the contempt that many have given to paradox in relation to poetry Brooks notes that this motif has often been regarded as “the language of sophistry, hard, bright, witty” rather than the “language of the soul” (3). He further suggests that “Our prejudices force us to regard paradox as intellectual rather than emotional, clever rather than profound, rational rather than divinely irrational,” and that under such preconceived notions “It is the scientist whose truth requires a language purged of every trace of

paradox” (3). As the following discussion demonstrates, however, it is precisely the scientist, who, like the poet, eventually comes to rely on paradox to articulate a particular vision of the world—one that in terms of the deserts of the Colorado River watershed seems irrational as Childs’s initial observation about dying in the desert or Abbey’s fusion with the natural world suggests. Defining paradox as a means of communicating “that the common was really uncommon,” and bringing about an “awakening of the mind” to use Samuel Coleridge’s words (7), Brooks looks to the “twin concomitants of irony and wonder” (16) as one of the defining principles that enliven poetry and give it is transcendent power. For those writing about the desert with a penchant for scientific observation, paradox reveals the unique nature of these places and the means by which to know them.

For Childs, Abbey, and countless other writers, the desert is a place of contradictions that elicits a host of responses as desert travelers try to understand the landscape, its processes, and its inhabitants. If we look back over the last few centuries at the writing that has emerged from and about these landscapes by Spanish explorers and missionaries, Anglo scientists and adventurers, and more contemporary nature writers, the literary deserts these individuals have created in their writings are highly paradoxical. As poet Peter Wild observes, “over the last hundred years or so, we have embraced a huge set of contradictions. Our culture has turned the desert, as if it were a limitless, exotic putty, into just about anything people want it to be” (*Opal Desert* 3).

To bridge the gap between these various unconformities, scholars have looked for unifying themes and motifs to bring some consistency to the genre. In *Desert Passages*, historian Patricia Limerick traces reactions to the American deserts over two centuries

and provides a useful framework for understanding the varied representations constructed about these places of irony. She categorizes the outcomes of such encounters in three distinct but related views toward deserts that derive their power from pervasive myths about the fabled Great American Desert (3). These include “attitudes toward nature as a biological reality in human life—vulnerability to hunger, thirst, injury, disease, and death . . . as an economic resource—a container of treasures awaiting extraction or development; and as an aesthetic spectacle” (6). Such is the case with the trajectory of desert expression addressed above through the reactions given by the scientist-explorers, missionaries, and nature writers who all brought different perspectives to bear on the desert as some feared their surroundings and hoped to survive while others turned their focus to profiting from the land or merely celebrating its beauty. And although Limerick acknowledges that “the phrase *attitudes toward nature* throws a thin cloak of simplicity over a mass of complexity” (6), this unifying categorization of key themes and developments proves extremely useful in approaching a large body of work that represents significant leaps in time and space.

Yet with the continued development of the American Southwest and the looming water crises in the region it is worth taking a closer look at this “thin cloak of simplicity,” for as Limerick argues of such representations and those who create them, “there is room to acknowledge subtlety, contradiction, and paradox” (9). The purpose of this chapter is to consider paradox as a key rhetorical device employed by explorers, scientists, and literary artists to shape their responses—and coincidentally ours as well—to the deserts of the Colorado River watershed. Specifically, I want to consider how paradox engages Beale’s scientific aim of discourse which refers to “the kind of discourse whose primary

aim is the discovery, construction, and organization of knowledge, particularly in those areas or sub-areas in which facts, classifications, and general laws can be verified by rational and empirical procedures” (94). To chart this relationship, I expand my analysis of desert discourse beyond the typical genres of “reports of historical, statistical, field or laboratory investigations” (94) which typically define scientific inquiry to include the broader discourse of exploration that captures much of the watershed’s historical articulations and the more recent natural history and nature writing traditions that rely on scientific methods to observe the natural world. Thus, this chapter is an inquiry into the contributions and limitations of science and scientific writing which highlight paradox as evident in exploration narratives, natural history writing, and nature writing. By examining representative texts from these traditions, however, we begin to see how the paradox complicates purely scientifically motivated texts to suggest that other epistemological systems and discourse modes are necessary to make sense of the region’s geography.

Central to this discussion is *The Secret Knowledge of Water*, a text that places Childs in this unique tradition of desert exploration and science writing. Like his predecessors, he relies on scientific discourse to convey his learning about the watershed’s desert water, but ultimately he finds that this discourse is insufficient to capture the region’s mysteries. As Matthew Teorey has suggested in his study of this text, Childs’s work “is less about sharing scientific data and recounting exciting backpacking adventures than it is expressing an ecocentric outlook, whereby readers begin to comprehend and grapple with humanity’s eco-reality and biological selfhood” (3). To facilitate this new vision of nature and society’s relationship to it, Teorey argues that

Childs employs an “ecological discourse, an articulation of nature’s intrinsic value and humanity’s responsibilities as a member of the biotic community” (2). Although I agree with Teorey’s assessment of *The Secret Knowledge of Water* as a means of reorienting the reader’s mind to a more ecocentric perspective, I find that Childs’s scientific training, awareness, and the scientific discourse which speaks to his motivation to know the desert and its water, plays an integral role in defining his unique vision of these entities. It is precisely Childs’s scientifically motivated discourse that gives way to more aesthetic responses to the desert and the poetic discourse of reflection. Thus, paradox comes to define not just what Childs observes through his explorations, but the type of discourses he employs as he seeks knowledge. And it is exactly his use of paradox and various discourse aims that Childs creates a slightly alternative vision of the region shaped less by an attitude projected toward nature than through one *open* to nature wherein the desert exerts agency or “speaks back” to the writer. Ultimately, this vision enacts “nature’s voice,” the “non-personified authority as a speaking subject that communicates, in its own way, to all living beings, including humans” to create a more complex view of the desert and its water (2). For Utah writer Terry Tempest Williams, the desert’s authoritative voice as it emerges in relation to the watershed’s canyon country becomes a “teacher,” a tutor of sorts in how to live in a land of extremes (*Red 5*). *The Secret Knowledge of Water* is therefore Childs’s account of how the desert has instructed him and how, when confronted with paradox on an observational and experiential level, he has to rely on different discourses to make sense of this desert phenomenon. The treatment of the desert’s indifference to humankind and its pattern for coping with aridity ultimately mold Childs’s and other desert writers’ thinking to offer up new ways to

engage the deserts of the Southwest. Drawing on the development of the motif of “eco-dialogue” through writers like Abbey, Mary Austin, Joseph Wood Krutch, and Ann Zwinger, Childs turns his attention to what the desert can teach him by relying on his process of inquiry, observation, reflection, and restraint to create a space in which he downplays his own egocentric view of the watershed’s arid landscapes to invoke a more ecocentric understanding (Teorey 6).

The Watershed’s Deserts and the Early Explorers

To understand how Childs’s text affects this maneuver, one must have a sense of the 244,000 acre watershed the Colorado River drains through its infinite number of rivulets, brooks, and streams that carry runoff to the main channel. For it is the land, rather than the river itself, that has shaped the earliest records of the river as the Spanish explorers noted the river’s various shades of red, orange, and brown caused by its massive sediment load; this led them to name it *colorado*—red. So it is here, on the land, rather than the river, that this study of the watershed begins. While the Colorado’s headwaters begin in the Rocky Mountains’ snow-capped peaks, the vast majority of the land the river drains is marked by extreme aridity. The Colorado River watershed includes portions of the continent’s four major deserts: the Chihuahuan, the Great Basin, the Mojave, and the Sonoran that stretch across portions of all seven basin states in the United States and two in Mexico. While the headwaters regions may receive over seventy inches of precipitation a year these deserts often receive less than three inches per year (“Advanced Hydrologic Prediction Service”).

This stark discrepancy between regions of the same watershed and between those areas east of the hundredth meridian ensured that for centuries only the hardest of souls

who knew how to survive prolonged drought and temperature fluctuations would call the deserts home. Yet with the post-war's boom in technology and changing attitudes toward the desert, the American Southwest has been inundated with those seeking space, clean air, sun, and the promises of Western myths. In a highly ironic shift of affairs, what were once areas that most people tried to avoid at all costs now include desert-oases like Las Vegas and Phoenix whose home states have been the fastest growing states in the U.S. over the last three decades (U.S. Census Bureau). Of course, this steady flow of newcomers has put significant strain on the Colorado's water as this finite resource faces every increasing demands.

In order to address the watershed's present environmental challenges in regards to water management and desert conservation, significant rethinking in our relationship to nature and to science as a tool to foster a more sustainable future in region is necessary. According to Michael Bryson, solving our pressing environmental issues "requires not only technical know-how, economic resources, and political moxie, but also a keen and historically informed sense of how we conceptualize both nature and science" (xi). Like Ingram who recognizes the need for more perspectives to shed light on our water issues, Bryson acknowledges that how we imagine science and nature informs how we can possibly change unsustainable behaviors. Such imaginations may suggest new avenues through which science provides the answers; in others, and as Childs suggests to varying degrees, science may only be one part of the broader spectrum of knowledge that dictates more productive relationships with nature. To facilitate a more informed sense of the historical relationship between science and nature within the deserts of the Colorado River watershed, one must consider the scientific discourse of the region's first explorers

and how it then developed into the natural history and nature writing traditions which later desert observers adopt. From here, Childs's unique contribution to the desert exploration tradition and the thinking about living with the watershed and its threatened river becomes apparent.

To understand how the watershed's deserts have been depicted over time and the role that science has played in shaping these representations, one must begin with the earliest written accounts of these areas that locate scientific knowledge about the deserts within the exploration narratives and the disciplines of geography and cartography. The first written knowledge we have of the watershed's deserts come from the Spanish excursions to the region. Alvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca and his three traveling companions are credited with being the first non-indigenous people in the watershed following their storied journey from the coasts of western Florida to present day Texas and the American Southwest before heading south into Mexico City where they arrived in 1536 (Lavender 14). Drawn by the rumors of massive wealth to be found in the region, subsequent expeditions penetrated farther into the deserts of what was then Spain's most northern territories in the New World to find the fabled city of Cíbola. Under the leadership of Cortés and Coronado, the first accounts of the Colorado River surfaced as men like Francisco de Ulloa, Hernando de Alarcón, and García López de Cárdenas probed the coastline of the Gulf of California at the river's mouth and made their way to the Grand Canyon. As Lavender explains, despite the significant findings of these explorers, which included the realization that the Baja peninsula was not an island but part of a large gulf, and the location of the Continental Divide and the pueblos throughout present day Arizona and New Mexico, "because this dry knowledge was unprofitable . . .

it was forgotten” (20). It is this “dry knowledge”—this information that has historically seemed insignificant in light of greater desires to find wealth and arable land—that Childs and other desert writers seek to recover.

The geographic and cartographic details gleaned during these initial forays into the region were of such little importance or were so imprecise that Juan de Oñate’s report of his journey in the first years of the seventeenth-century from the San Juan River basin to the Gulf of California influenced mapmakers at the time to label the peninsula, previously noted as such by Alárcon, as an island once again (21). Not until the eighteenth century with the expeditions of Jesuit and Franciscan missionaries did the region’s geography become more standardized. Eusebio Francisco Kino, Francisco Atanasio Dominguez and Silvestre Vélez de Escalante loom large in the history of the watershed as their travels throughout the Sonoran Desert—in Kino’s case—and Dominguez and Escalante’s travels throughout the Colorado Plateau country brought greater knowledge to Spain of its lands.

Like the *conquistadores* who preceded them into the watershed’s deserts, these men of the cloth had other objectives than understanding the deserts’ ecological intricacies. Less preoccupied with wealth, however, the missionaries sought to spread Christianity to the indigenous people they encountered, hoping to establish missions and eventual settlements. Writing to Spain’s Viceroy in Mexico City in 1703 Kino explains his travels through present-day northern Mexico and Arizona to search for both converts and a land route from Lower California to the mainland.⁷ Discovering both, Kino

⁷ While proselytizing is Kino’s primary objective, he is nonetheless aware of the opportunity for the empire to gain wealth in the area. In his letter to the Viceroy he speculates on the facility of converting “countless inhabitants to our Catholic faith,” while at the same time he entertains the possibilities of adding to Spain’s coffers (*Plan 24*). He writes, “it would be no difficult task to acquire very rich valleys watered by

revamps the region's geographical knowledge once again, explaining that "I discovered the land-passage at 32 degrees of latitude, at the confluence of the Río Grande de Gila and the abundant waters of the Río Colorado. (The latter stream would give us access from the west to a region very close to the land of the Moquis.)" (28-29). With his geographic clarification and observations of the Colorado's substantial flow that could serviced to establish missions, Kino's mind turns to the Hopi villages in the north and his desire to bring them the Word.

Following Kino's excursions across these desert regions and the eventual expulsion of the Jesuits from New Spain, the Franciscans Dominguez and Escalante departed Santa Fe in 1776 searching for a route to the mission in Monterey, California. Similar to Kino's letters, Escalante's journal entries primarily focus on the course of travel by including latitude and longitude measurements of their whereabouts, references to the native peoples encountered, along with occasional digressions about the flora and fauna and general landscape that may make a suitable location for settlement. Of the area near the Animas and San Juan rivers of present-day southwestern Colorado Escalante writes, "the terrain is very moist, since it rains very frequently because of its proximity to the sierra; as a result, both in the mountain forest—which consists of very tall and straight pines, scruboak, and several kinds of fruit—and in its narrow valleys there are the prettiest of pastures" (Velez de Escalante 14). Writing to preserve the topographical and biological details of his surroundings for the benefit of opening up new territories to Spanish influence, Escalante's observations denote his scientifically motivated discourse. At the same time, however, this statement reveals Escalante's more personal reflections

bounteous and fertile rivers, and densely populated by well-disposed and docile natives, long inured to work. Nor to be overlooked are the mining possibilities. All this wealth could be a source of profit and renown to the royal Catholic dynasty and to our mighty monarch, Philip V" (24).

as he describes the valleys as beautiful. Although minor in the overall scope of his writing, these descriptions speak to the explorer's need to move beyond scientific discourse to provide a fuller picture of what he experienced.

Preoccupied with finding reliable water sources, the journal is replete with references to this end, particularly as the expedition leaves the lush mountain valleys for the more arid canyon country to the west. In this sea of sandstone canyons splintering off of the Colorado River, Escalante concludes that although the river passes through the region, it is "very deep inside a canyon, so that even if the land were good the river is of no help for farming near it" (111). Nearly two weeks after this entry, the party finally finds a place to cross the river whose canyon had prevented them for days from gaining easy access to the east bank. There the diarist concludes, "no settlement can be established . . . because, besides the terrain being bad, the river flows through a very deep gorge" (121). Within the canyon's walls flowed enough water to eventually support the megalopolises that dot the watershed today. Equally, paradoxical is Escalante's brief notation on October 26, 1776 which suggests that despite the inexplicable mass of rock he and the group must navigate there is beauty to be found in the desert. Heading north toward present day Lees Ferry but finding themselves walled off by the precipitous slopes Escalante observes that despite the difficulty that lay ahead in climbing these "very lofty bluffs and big hogbacks of red earth," this apparent wasteland displayed "for having various formations and the bed below being of the same color" a "pleasingly jumbled scene" (112). While Escalante's writings periodically note the aesthetically satisfying views of well-watered valleys and surrounding mountain peaks, this observation is unique for the time and place in which it is recorded. Penned during the

expedition's most arduous circumstances as the men floundered through a maze of canyons, the missionary's pause to find pleasure in the desert which he has almost always described in more negative terms establishes the role of paradox in some of the earliest articulations of the desert as it works to negotiate what often seem to be disparate and competing discourses about how one sees nature.

Despite this subtle reference to the desert's beauty that contrasts with so many previous references to its harsh, unforgiving nature, the desert yielded little value for the Dominguez-Escalante party; it was too dry and the river inaccessible. Only the hope of gaining proselytes encouraged thoughts of future excursions into this region. Like Kino, the true wealth of the region lay in spreading Christianity rather than in exploiting the region's resources. Losing much of the optimism that fills Kino's reports, the Dominguez-Escalante record casts a gloomier view of the deserts as their goal was thwarted by an unrelenting landscape. Nonetheless, their account leaves readers with broad observations about the land and its peoples, demonstrating the prevailing scientific paradigm of the period which emphasized a generalist's knowledge of one's whereabouts.

It was not until the nineteenth century that the first Anglo-American settlers made their entrance into the watershed's deserts and that the scientific knowledge of the region would extend beyond general observations of topography and biology. Capitalizing on Jefferson's purchase of the Louisiana territory that extended the nation's western border to the edge of the continent's deserts and what was at one time Spain's and then Mexico's sparsely populated northern borders, numerous mountain men and adventurers entered the deserts searching out their own dreams. Historian William Goetzman dubs this period

of American encroachment and entrance into this territory as the “Rediscovery of the Southwest” since those who made their way into this region did so without the accumulation of three centuries of knowledge by the Spanish explorers who had previously mapped much of the region (38). Without access to the historical records that previous explorers had produced—many of them housed in archives in Europe and Mexico—these newcomers would not have been privy to this knowledge. At the same time, one wonders whether many would have welcomed such information if it were more readily available. With tensions rising with Mexico and a general disdain for Native Americans, ignoring the knowledge from these groups, while lamentable, is hardly surprising. Thus, for the mountain men, traders, and ensuing soldiers, explorers, and scientists who would follow, “the essential task confronting them was one of rediscovery, of regaining the knowledge that had been lost” (39). This reoccurring pattern of discovery and loss and the subsequent desire to reconnect the lost knowledge becomes a key topos in the desert literature of writers like Childs that allows for science and scientific discourse to take the primary role in shedding light on what has proved to be an enigmatic landscape. But as works like the Dominguez-Escalante journal demonstrate, the desert becomes very difficult to pin down through scientific knowledge alone, and so other methods of understanding the region become necessary.

While knowledge about the watershed’s deserts had waxed and waned over centuries, this changed in the early 1800s as a result of Zebulon Pike’s expedition to explore the southern portions of the newly acquired Louisiana Territory. Although his travels never carried him into the Colorado’s basin, his observations of the plains and the Arkansas and Rio Grande river drainages had major impacts on how later generations

would view the Colorado watershed. Like the countless explorers and adventures before him, Pike took detailed notes about each day's activities, the distance traveled, and the privations his party suffered through lack of water, available food, and extreme temperatures. Yet his attention was not solely focused on the land and its effect on his party as he made lengthy entries about the region's unique creatures like prairie dogs, rattlesnakes, and horned frogs. Drawing on the nascent development of natural history writing, Pike's journal provides some of the earliest descriptions of the region that extend beyond geographical considerations. Despite these contributions to the knowledge of the area, Pike is better remembered for his February 5, 1807 entry which likened the American West to the Sahara:

These vast plains of the western hemisphere, may become in time equally celebrated with the sandy deserts of Africa, for I saw in my route in various places, tracts of many leagues where the wind had thrown up the sand, in all the fanciful forms of the ocean's rolling waves, and on which not a speck of vegetation existed. But from these immense prairies may arise one great advantage to the United States, viz. the restriction of our population to some certain limits, and thereby a continuation of the union. Our citizens being so prone to rambling, and extending themselves on the frontiers, will, through necessity, be constrained to limit their extent on the west to the borders of the Missouri and Mississippi, while they leave the prairies, incapable of cultivation, to the wandering and uncivilized Aborigines of the country. (248-49)

Viewing the region as ultimately worthless in terms of its overall agricultural potential as had the Spanish padres three decades before, he nonetheless finds the stark aridity something to praise as America now had its own exotic deserts to rival those of more famous climes. As Goetzman argues, Pike's description of the Purchase's southern territory facilitated the myth of the "Great American Desert," predating Stephen Long's views on the region to which most scholars have attributed the idea (51). Finding the region utterly alien to more familiar climes, his musings on the "fanciful forms" of sands rolling like the waves of the sea infuse his work with a poetic strain that only add to the mystique of the arid West. While charged to report on the "facts" gleaned from his expedition, Pike's response, like those before him, searches for alternative discourses beyond geography and chronicling the daily affairs of an expedition to report on his surroundings. In doing so, he underscores the complexity of the discursive constructions of the region as they move between actuality and hyperbole, verity and myth.

Although this myth rebuffed some, many Americans were not content to leave such vast tracks of land alone, including the United States government. While governments had long sponsored the exploration of their lands for military and expansionist purposes, such activities did not have scientific inquiry as their primary objective. It was not until 1819 that the United States organized the Yellowstone Expedition, the first exploratory group to include trained scientists to enter the American West (58). This party paved the way for subsequent expeditions beginning in the 1840s which would cast an increasingly focused scientific gaze on the nation's ever-expanding territory. The heightened interest to add a scientific objective to the nation's military operations in the West sparked what Goetzman calls the "Great Reconnaissance," a phase

in which the country, acting under Manifest Destiny, attempted to civilize and understand the West (305). During the 1850s, the Topographical Bureau charged the Corps of Topographical Engineers, the outfit primarily responsible for opening up the American West to development and settlement, with cataloging “the plants, animals, Indians, and geological formations of the country traversed” (303). Seeking to advance knowledge in a variety of fields including geology, botany, zoology, and ethnology, the Bureau hoped to eventually create “the broad outline, the comprehensive catalogue that was basic to any long-range scientific consideration of the region” (329).

Such a holistic approach is indicative of science and its relationship to exploration and literature during this period. This approach also sets the stage for the desert writing in the following centuries as this expansive understanding of science merges with more poetic responses to the desert and opens the door to paradox as a rhetorical device and thereby a broader range of discourse used to express one’s engagement with the region. Of science, exploration, and literature, Fulford, Lee, and Kitson acknowledge that these “were areas of activity that, while largely distinct from each other, were not always wholly separate or unitary fields” (2). Furthermore, they point out that science as we know it today “was a number of areas of enquiry [sic], which did not necessarily all share common goals and methods” (2). Thus, the scientific work that emerges during the early nineteenth century was a hodge-podge of disciplines which rely on such fields as botany and philosophy to explain natural phenomena. Perhaps the best example of this ‘scientific’ approach comes from the work conducted by famed German scientist Alexander von Humboldt in the Southern hemisphere. It is here, as Donald Worster explains, that Humboldt brought together a host of fields like botany, geography, and the

emerging science of climatology to understand the interconnections between plants and their respect habitats. At the same time, however, this desire to move toward a sense of ‘truth’ about the natural world was equally infused with an aesthetic of nature typical of the Romantic worldview (*Nature’s Economy* 135-36). This all-encompassing view of science and nature that looked to various philosophical traditions and discourses proved highly attractive for those following in his wake during this period. However, not yet willing to divorce objective scientific inquiry from their desire to see a broader harmony and order in nature, these writers’ “work was still philosophical and metaphysical rather than scientific in its emphasis” as they searched for “unity, totality, and oneness with the whole ‘Kosmos’” (Goetzman 329).

Lieutenant Joseph C. Ives’s expedition up the Colorado with the Topographical Engineers in 1857-58 is indicative of these various responses to nature and science at this time. Accompanied by a host of scientists including Mr. Mollhausen, a relative of Humboldt, Ives attempted to navigate the river by his steamboat, *The Explorer*, in hopes of establishing a workable trade route to the settlements in New Mexico and Utah (*Report* 5). Advancing up the Colorado from its mouth as Alarcón had done three centuries earlier, he reached only as far as Black Canyon on the western end of the Grand Canyon where he left his ship to proceed on land. Traveling through the Grand Canyon region and past the San Francisco Peaks outside present-day Flagstaff, Arizona, Ives’ report of the region is mixed in the discourse he uses to describe his journey. In his report’s introductory letter to A.A. Humphreys of the Office of Explorations and Surveys he explains that “The region explored after leaving the navigable portion of the Colorado—though, in a scientific point of view of the highest interest, and presenting natural features

whose strange sublimity is perhaps unparalleled in any part of the world –is not of much value” (5). Indeed, this portion of the Colorado Plateau is of great scientific value as the report includes, along with a narrative of the travels, sections on hydrography, geology, botany, zoology penned by Ives and a variety of experts. Likewise, four appendices treat astronomical, barometric, geographical, meteorological observations with information regarding map making.

At the same time, however, the general report is replete with Ives’s more aesthetic reactions to his surroundings shaped significantly by the influence of European Romanticism and its emphasis on the beauty and harmony that nature exudes. These influences are clearly evident in the previous reference to the region’s “strange sublimity.” On the 18th of April, 1858, Ives reflected on what he had seen in the Grand Canyon region and penned what has become an iconic and highly ironic statement about this place: “Ours has been the first, and will doubtless be the last, party of whites to visit this profitless locality. It seems intended by nature that the Colorado river [sic], along the greater portion of its lonely and majestic way, shall be forever unvisited and undisturbed” (110). Just as references to a Great American Desert and its uncivilized, empty recesses could not keep people from moving into the region, Ives’s descriptions of such a “lonely and majestic” place would only encourage others to come and see for themselves. Coupled with such subjective musings on the area, the report includes a host of sketches and other works of art that capture the “sublimity” of the Colorado Plateau as they dwarf the explorers by the dark, imposing walls of the canyons. When presented with a spectacular view of the “Big Cañon,” Ives notes how his topographer, F.W. Egloffstein, turns to his sketch pad to create a depiction that “does better justice than any descriptions

can do to the marvelous scene” (110). Steeped in the Romantic notions of the sublime which dominated nineteenth-century American thought about nature, Ives and his fellow scientists represented their surroundings in a unique blend of detached scientific inquiry with representations of nature that emphasized its divinity, its wonder, and often its terror. For this expedition and those to follow, science and aesthetics continue to work together to produce a paradoxical vision of the watershed’s deserts.

It isn’t until the expeditions of the 1860s that a gradual shift begins to take place wherein the Romantic vision of the earth and its processes gives way to a more specialized, complex understanding of the region (Goetzman 356). Yet, as is clear in the following example, old ideas do not easily disappear. Chief among these new explorer-scientists, and certainly the most well-known and celebrated within the watershed is John Wesley Powell. A self-appointed naturalist (Worster, *River Running West* 60), Powell follows in the rich tradition of British and American naturalists/scientists who turned away from Christian theology to explain the earth’s origins. According to Worster, these men envisioned a world which “followed its own laws without any need for immediate or direct supernatural interference,” believing that “Science alone could explain those laws” (63). Having completed two journeys down the Colorado in 1869 and 1871-72 along with more extensive surveys throughout the Intermountain West and especially Utah, Powell tested his hypotheses about how the land was formed and how people could reasonably develop a region that seemed to all but resist widespread manipulation. Eschewing indigenous and Mormon beliefs about how the land and the people came to be in the region, Powell relied on his growing scientific expertise to make sense of the watershed’s breathtaking landscapes and peculiar peoples (264).

The results of these activities resulted in a number of publications including his famous river account captured in *The Exploration of the Colorado River and its Canyons* and the *Report on the Lands of the Arid Region*. These texts reflect Powell's reliance on a number of scientific advances in a variety of fields to understand his surroundings as they are replete with his hypotheses and conclusions about the region's geology, hydrology, biology, and human presence. For example, in the *Report*, a work dubbed as "a model of ecological realism in an unsympathetic age of unbounded expectations" (*Rivers of Empire* 133), one of his primary objectives is to outline how much land can realistically be cultivated based on the region's limited water resources. Upon finding areas where enough water was sufficient to irrigate the surrounding arable land, he explains the method by which to precisely measure these quantities: "Angular measurements were made with gradientors to a slight extent, but chiefly with the orograph, an instrument by which a great multiplicity of angles are observed and recorded by mechanical methods" (Powell, *Arid Lands* 100).

Not surprisingly, however, Powell's work—particularly his river narrative—also reflects a clear Romantic strain as he speaks of the canyons' sublime precipices as Ives and others had done. As Worster explains of Powell, "Sometimes he seemed to be almost completely rooted in the earth—rooted in facts of soil and water, in the problems of getting a living from the land. At other times, however, his head was way up in the clouds, looking for the unseen—the laws that governed the evolution of life" (*River Running West* 549). Caught between empirical observation and philosophical musings deriving from Darwin's nascent theories about nature's origins and the earlier, more established Humboldtian science, Powell's observations and those of his fellow explorer-

scientists give voice to the tensions within scientifically motivated discourse of the period. As their observations and representations of nature shift between a more objective even pessimistic realism and Romantic idealism, these men ensured that the natural world would long be viewed through a similarly complex lens. In the case of the watershed's deserts, three centuries of reports have depicted these places through a wide range of reactions, ensuring that they cannot be pinned down into a nicely packaged and easily quantifiable whole. Vilified on one hand for their inability to provide food, water, and wealth while celebrated on the other for their sublime landscapes and potential for colonization and development, the deserts have proven highly contradictory for those searching to make sense of these foreign landscapes.

From Natural History to Nature Writing

With the deserts mapped and its species catalogued, the days of the traditional explorer-scientist have faded into history, or so it seems. While the Corps of Topographical Engineers no longer leads the charge in unveiling the region's secrets, a new type of desert-explorer has emerged to continue to shed light on our connection with the nation's most arid regions: the nature writer. Drawing on the natural history tradition which influenced the United States' earliest explorers and scientists, these writers entered the watershed's deserts in search of recovering the "dry knowledge" of centuries past and expanding our understanding of these regions. In doing so, they cast the deserts and the literature which represents them in a new light.

Emerging during the Romantic period through the work of Gilbert White, the English parson whose *Natural History of Selbourne* (1789) is the foundational text in this field, natural history writing has had a profound impact on how we view both nature and

science. In his study of the development of ecological ideas in Western thought, Worster looks to White and the particular cultural conditions which shaped his study of Selbourne's flora and fauna. Influenced by the Industrial Revolution and increased specialization in the sciences (*Nature's Economy* 18), White and those who would follow embraced what Worster defines as an arcadian model, one in which "ecological study is the means by which the naturalist establishes communion with nature: it becomes an innocent pursuit of knowledge about one's neighbors, an integral part of the curate's devotional life, excluding in no way a sense of piety, beauty, or humility" (11).

As an offspring of the Romantic period, natural history sought to reconnect man and nature through a unique fusion of science and emotion, an approach embraced by Humboldt and popularized by countless other naturalists. This particular vision of man's relationship to nature would only strengthen after Darwin's publication of the *Origin of the Species* which challenged the orderly, holistic science the naturalists working in the White tradition espoused. "One of the central burdens of the natural history essay," Worster explains, was to "find an alternative to this cold science [of Darwin]—not by retreat into unexamined dogmatism, but by restoring to scientific inquiry some of the warmth, breadth, and piety which had been infused into it by [White]" (17). The purpose of this particular approach is, as Worster further claims, "twofold: first, to endow each creature with a freedom of will and action that would defy analysis by chemistry and physics; and second, to study all nature as a single integrated unity, held together by a rather mysterious organizing force" (18). By today's standards, such an approach to understanding nature seems both archaic and naïve, especially as the naturalists working in the arcadian tradition viewed the natural world through a highly moralistic lens. Yet a

closer look at this genre's development over time reveals that such ideas are not easy to discard. According to Thomas Lyon, the nature essay is "one of the most stable genres in literature" ("Introduction" 1). Uniquely motivated by scientific and poetic discourses that blend inquiry and ethics, we see a tradition beginning with Romantics like Wordsworth and continuing through contributions by the Transcendentalists Emerson and Thoreau, the early wilderness advocates John Burroughs and John Muir in the late nineteenth century, and more recent writers like Aldo Leopold, Rachel Carson, Annie Dillard, and Barry Lopez. While all of these authors' works embody their own unique ways of approaching nature and the human relationship to it, they nonetheless have stabilized a genre that relies on first-person interaction and observation to draw larger conclusions about how society thinks and acts toward the natural world.

In *This Incomparable Land*, Lyon provides a particularly useful schematic for understanding the many valences of this genre. Creating a "taxonomy of nature writing"—a method quite apropos to this discussion as he draws on science's penchant for classification—Lyon outlines a range of nature writing which extends from technical field guides and natural history essays on one end of the spectrum to the other where nature's emphasis gives way to the author's own experience (22). Regardless of where one chooses to classify a text within this taxonomy, there is a shared sense of what the broader genre seeks to do. For Lyon, "the fundamental goal of the genre is to turn our attention outward to the activity of nature" (25). The result of this action is that there arises "a clarifying of perception inherent in this refocusing, which opens up something like a new world," a world that "may eventually be seen as a more important discovery than the finding of new lands" (25). This explanation of what may be the genre's largest

contribution is central to Childs's work and a consideration of his reliance on the explorer-scientist's tradition of understanding and representing the desert. While he does not discover new territory per se, he nonetheless introduces the reader to relatively uncharted imaginative terrain through his unique approach to "harmonize fact knowledge with emotional knowledge" ("Introduction" 3). This mingling of disparate forms of knowing, coupled with the casting of old knowledge—that established by earlier explorers and inhabitants of the region—within the new knowledge of his own observations and scientific pursuits, brings paradox once again to the forefront of desert writing as a powerful means of reconciling the region's complex physical and imaginative realities.

The purpose of this unique epistemological approach of bridging fact with emotion through scientific and poetic discourse is to create what Lyon has called "an entire psychic reorientation" (4). By incorporating scientific 'fact' alongside an author's aesthetic responses to his surroundings, Lyon argues that nature writing seeks to challenge the human/nature duality that has persisted since the Enlightenment and which gained much momentum during the period in which White first turned his attention to the nature of his village. Ironically—or perhaps more appropriately here—paradoxically, this shift toward a more ecocentric view often comes through an author's foregrounding of personal experience and the emphasis of the self. Ecocritic Scott Slovic, one of the first scholars to examine the implications of this trend in nature writing, comments on its proliferation among numerous contemporary nature writers like Annie Dillard, Edward Abbey, Wendell Berry, and Barry Lopez. Of them he suggests that they "are not merely,

or even primarily, analysts of nature or appreciators of nature—rather, they are students of the human mind, literary psychologists” (*Seeking Awareness* 3).

If the intent of nature writing is to encourage what Lyon describes as reorientation, then it seems, perhaps surprisingly, that a strong human presence in the form of the narrator is necessary. It is through the narrator’s experience that the audience is able to vicariously experience the natural world created within the text and think through the ethical questions posed as the author engages with nature. As Slovic suggests “By confronting face-to-face the separate realm of nature, by becoming aware of its otherness, the writer implicitly becomes more deeply aware of his or her own dimensions, limitations of form and understanding, and processes of grappling with the unknown” (4). Therefore, what emerges from these texts is an invitation to the audience to consider its own relationship to nature and to humbly acknowledge the limits of human comprehension about the natural world—a move that certainly carries the possibility of moving one toward a more ecocentric perspective.

This confrontation with nature and the heightening awareness that emerges defines much of the early nature writing about the desert. Take, for example, Mary Austin’s *The Land of Little Rain* (1903), one of the most famous examples of desert writing, which chronicles her years on the eastern flanks of the Sierra Nevada.⁸ Attuning her senses to the unique characteristics of this portion of the Great Basin, Austin discovers the misaligned perspectives that she and others possess when considering

⁸ Two years prior to Austin’s publication of *The Land of Little Rain*, the Eastern art critic John C. Van Dyke published *The Desert*, an account of his travels through the Mojave and Colorado deserts of southern Nevada and California. While his text is one of the most famous desert texts it has also received much scrutiny in recent years for his inaccuracy and fabrication. Peter Wild’s introduction to the 1999 American Land Classics edition of this text provides a thorough overview of Van Dyke’s impetus for writing and reveals the truth-stretching of the author’s “authentic” observations. Concerned primarily with representing the desert within the aesthetic traditions of the picturesque and the sublime, I have chosen Austin’s account as a more indicative model of the characteristics of nature writing that Slovic addresses.

nature. In her chapter “Water Trails of the Ceriso,” Austin describes the faint paths that small animals have made across the land in search of water. She notes, however, that such trails are hardly evident to the casual observer and that only by “Getting down to the eye level of rat and squirrel kind, one perceives what might easily be wide and winding roads to us if they occurred in thick plantations of trees three times the height of a man” (11). By reorienting her view to see the land from an animal’s perspective, Austin finds a new world opening to her. At the same time, she realizes the limitations of our own viewpoints as she laments, “It seems that man-height is the least fortunate of all heights from which to study trails” (11). This revelation invites a thoughtful reconsideration of the human relationship to nature, and, more specifically, to these water trails through arid country, as it expresses the belief that our current understanding of the desert may be flawed. In the decades following Austin’s work, numerous writers will follow her lead as they attempt to reorient the audience’s consideration of the Colorado River watershed’s deserts by championing their virtues while also creating room for their respective voices to emerge.

Dialoguing with the Desert: Contemporary Desert Literature

Up to this point in my discussion about natural history and the nature writing traditions, I have assumed a broad understanding of what the word “nature” refers to. However, from the advent of the tradition a much narrower vision of the natural world ensued. Because the genealogy of this genre goes back to the well-watered and cultivated lands of England and America’s eastern coast, nature writers promoted the pastoral landscape, one characterized by “the quiet peace of hay barns, orchards, and mountain valleys” (Worster, *Nature’s Economy* 16). Not until the late nineteenth and early

twentieth century did deserts take on an equally celebratory role as perceptions about the American West and the Great American Desert began to change through the Frontier, Garden, and Wilderness Myths. And it is primarily within the deserts of the Colorado River watershed where the American desert literary tradition emerges. Like the vanguard natural history/nature writers who turned to the villages, farms, and forests around them, writers today have turned their attention to the region's sandstone canyons, alkaline basins, and saguaro-studded hills to come to a greater understanding of their processes and of the writers' own reactions to these landscapes. What emerges from their observations is a reckoning with a place equally puzzling as those which the explorer-scientists of previous centuries encountered and which necessitates a broader range of discourse by which to account to such unconformities.

Perhaps no desertscape within the watershed has caused more confusion, bewilderment, and awe than the Grand Canyon. Stretching nearly 300 miles through northern Arizona, it comprises portions of the Great Basin, Mojave and Sonoran deserts. For newcomers to the canyon's inner depths, the abundance and variety of life, the exquisite geological features, and the river's ever-changing form can quickly leave one lacking for words, most likely as Cárdenas did when he first peered into its depths. For a seasoned Grand Canyon traveler like Ann Zwinger, the effect is consistently similar.

Remembering a remarkable two-week long Colorado River trip through the Grand Canyon, Zwinger writes in *Downcanyon* (1995) of her long hike to the rim and the reentrance into the busy, civilized world. Exhausted and disheveled from weeks of hiking and backcountry living, she encounters a tourist in a parking lot who asks Zwinger, "Is there anything down there?" (237). Caught off guard by this woman's question, Zwinger

provides a brief, unmemorable response which supposedly seems to have satisfied the inquisitor. However, this innocent yet inane question to anyone who has ventured inside the Grand Canyon “haunted” Zwinger for some time (237). Only when flying high over the river and canyon at a later date did Zwinger happen upon a satisfactory answer. She explains, “there *is* something down there, and it cannot be explained in a listing of its parts. It has to do with truth and beauty and love of this earth, the artifacts of a lifetime, and the descent of a canyon wren at dawn” (237). Zwinger further clarifies this response suggesting that what one finds in the canyon is a nearly indescribable blend of large and small, life and death, intimate and distant (238). Thus, a great many things exist “down there,” yet they defy easy summarization. Ultimately, Zwinger settles upon this simple idea: “the terrible life-dependent clarity of one atom of oxygen hooked to two of hydrogen that ties us as humans to the only world we know” (238).

Zwinger’s initial bewilderment at defining this particular portion of the watershed and her ongoing difficulty at adequately defining what is really down there has the author grappling for a number of different images and ways of knowing that describe her observations. From such subjective and abstract concepts as ‘truth’ and ‘beauty’ she reduces her personal response and the emotions embedded in it to the very tangible and measurable reality of water’s elemental composition. This vacillation between the subjective and the objective, the conceptual and the concrete, the poetic and scientific is a pervasive topos of desert writing evoked time and again as explorers, scientists, and artists have struggled to articulate the desert that met their eyes. So often, the writers return to paradox and the desert’s uncanny ability to resist easy classification and categorization.

Catrin Gersdorf argues in *The Poetics and Politics of the Desert* (2010) that “the desert is “an entity that *does* something rather than *being* or *meaning* something” (author’s italics; 1). Reading the desert as an agent casts the desert in a significantly different light than the medium upon which humans project their emotions and desires as Limerick and Wild suggest in this chapter’s introduction. While the early twentieth-century writings continue to view deserts in this manner, they also witness the authors’ efforts to recognize the desert’s agency. This emergence of the topos of the “desert voice” coincides with Van Dyke’s journeys into the deserts of the Lower Colorado River watershed and continues through the works of Austin, Krutch, and Abbey. Situated squarely with the natural history tradition of close observation of nature’s flora and fauna and appropriating themes established by Thoreau and other nature writers who strived to give agency to more well-watered environments, these writers turn to the deserts to cast a focused gaze on its biologic and non-biologic processes out of which they realize that the desert does indeed do something rather than just operate as a template on which human longings and desires are projected or as a medium to be easily quantified and analyzed. Indeed, what emerges from their engagement with the desert is an attempt to counter traditional attitudes toward nature represented in so many of the explorer’s narratives that all too often have reduced the desert to a resource for exploitation or a place to avoid.

Take Krutch’s close observations in the Sonoran Desert, for example, which lead to his lessons in desert living that emphasize the need for space and a new type of economy. In his chapter “What the Desert Is Good For” from *The Desert Year* (1951) as well as in his later book, *The Voice of the Desert* (1954), Krutch addresses those attitudes toward the desert which consider its value and shows how current views have led to

nuclear testing. While the desert for many is valuable only because, ironically, it is worthless—one can detonate bombs there which will lead to national security—Krutch's careful observations of the desert suggest a different value. His awareness of his surroundings teaches him about the importance of sparseness. Reacting to the "Malthusian dilemma" he sees plaguing the earth both in human and non-human communities, he looks to the desert for answers. While he acknowledges that over-speciation probably exists in the desert, he writes, "I cannot help seeing as an advantage the simple fact that the land here is dry enough to prevent uncomfortable crowding, and I cannot help wondering if one of the worst features of most of the world in which we live is not the simple fact that, to an ever increasing degree, mere living space is the thing which gives out first" (88-89). Fearing the loss of room for humans to inhabit, Krutch draws from the sparseness of desert flora and fauna imposed by aridity to demonstrate how each species has enough room to not only survive but flourish.

Later in the text Krutch becomes more enthusiastic about the desert's ability to point the direction toward better living. Having returned from a trip which took him out of the Sonoran desert and into the Mojave and Colorado deserts of Southern California, Krutch reflects on what he observed on this journey and concludes that the desert is one powerful teacher:

Call it, if you must, only another aspect of the pathetic fallacy, but the desert seems to approve and to encourage an attitude with which I have found scant sympathy among men, and of which I have never before been quite so sure that even nature approved. However fanciful this may seem or, for all I care, however fanciful it may actually be, all the deserts seem

to suggest and confirm a system of values for which much ought to be, but very seldom is, said. (180)

Since little has been said about how the desert suggests a system of values, Krutch's books attest to the desert's power in communicating these systems. Admitting how he has learned from watching the desert, he moves into a discussion regarding man's insatiable desire for material possessions and contrasts our behavior with that of the desert's. Of human society he contends, "the all but universal ambition of the individual and the all but invariable aim of every proposed social or political movement is to get, for oneself or for others, more *things*" (80-81). He then juxtaposes our insatiable wants with the "economy of scarcity" (*Voice* 99) that desert life embodies. Observing his surroundings he writes, "the very fauna and flora proclaim that one can have a great deal of certain things while having very little of others; that one kind of scarcity is compatible with, perhaps even a necessary condition of another kind of plenty—for instance . . . that plenty of light and plenty of space may go with a scarcity of water" (*Year* 181-182). His observations of the kangaroo rat—"the mouse that never drinks"—stand as a powerful reminder of how one animal has adapted to the scarcity of water and thrived.

So it is with many of the other organisms Krutch examines in his time in the Sonoran Desert. From the spadefoot toad that lies dormant during much of the hottest and driest parts of the year, he suggests it "represents, in a very extreme form, one of the ways of living in the desert—namely by lying low most of the time" (*Voice* 30). The roadrunner on the other hand stands as a symbol for those newcomers to the desert that have adapted to its conditions rather than impose their own. He notes how the bird's "peculiarities represent things learned, and learned rather recently as a biologist

understands ‘recent’” (38). Despite its adaptability, Krutch acknowledges how current attitudes seem to disparage the bird. He writes, “it seems that a creature who so triumphantly demonstrates how to live in the desert ought to be regarded with sympathetic interest by those who are trying to do the same thing” (38-39). The problem exists, however, that many people don’t take time to learn from this animal and what it could teach about adapting to a new environment. Krutch believes that although the road runner and the quail are enemies, they still continue to co-exist as “neither seems likely to eliminate the other” (39). But as he points out, “man, on the other hand, may very easily eliminate both. It is the kind of thing he is best at” (39).

Recognizing man’s inability to sufficiently adapt to the Southwest’s climate and geography, and his eagerness to control what he does not understand, Krutch concludes both texts with a charge to humankind to rethink its impact on the desert. He reminds the audience that a balance between abundance and scarcity is necessary to desert living and that “to have experienced [the desert] is to be prepared to see other landscapes with new eyes and to participate with a fresh understanding in the life of other natural communities (*Voice* 223). Along with this call to see the desert in a new light, Krutch argues that people need to ultimately love the desert in order to save it. Looking to Aldo Leopold’s famous essay “The Land Ethic” as a model for approaching the desert with a fresh perspective, Krutch concludes vis-à-vis Leopold that what lacks in current interaction with the desert “is love, some feeling for, as well as some understanding of, the inclusive community of rocks and soils, plants and animals, of which we are a part” (193). Throughout Krutch’s texts, the author works toward understanding the unique desert community of which he sees himself a part and urges his readers to learn from the desert

and to love it so as to save this unique ecosystem. He seeks to overcome the “sentiment and science” divide that marks much of the nature writing of the early twentieth century (Lutts 3) and the nature/culture binary that has dictated much of the literature about the natural world. What emerges from this synthesis of discourses is a refashioning of the arcadian model of natural history along with all of its idealism. Krutch adapts the formula to create a desert pastoral, one which later writers like Abbey in *Desert Solitaire* adopt as they structure their texts on seasonal cycles, inspect their “gardens,” tend to the species, and bask in the space and relaxation such locales afford.⁹ Through his close, quasi-scientific observations which then give way to reflections that celebrate the flora and fauna and advocate sympathy and love by humans for the natural world, Krutch directly calls for a more sustainable and harmonious community between humans and nature.

As Krutch admonishes his readers to embrace a new desert sensibility at the texts’ conclusions, he entrenches his works in paradox. Because he represents his encounters in the desert through the pastoral, he brings an entirely new vision to bear upon land that was altogether dismissed as barren and worthless by previous desert travelers. The pastoral motif relies on a fecund, cultivated landscape typical of wetter climes, and yet Krutch’s texts argue that similar abundance can be found in one of the great deserts of North America. And not only do they suggest, as Greg McNamee does, that such an “embarrassment of riches” (xvii) exists in this unlikely place, which is surprising enough, but that such fertility is grounded in an “economy of scarcity” (*Voice* 99). Thus, the implication that more-is-less is quite unsettling and leads the reader to further ponder the

⁹ Abbey’s chapter “Cliffrose and Bayonets” from *Desert Solitaire* aptly describes his own reliance on this motif. Leaving his trailer one early winter morning, he announces, “Time to inspect the garden” (27). Describing the expanse of land that denotes his little piece of heaven, he goes on to “Inventory” (27) the rich variety of flowers, shrubs, and cacti that add to the beauty of his surroundings.

implications of this juxtaposition of the disparate traditions of the pastoral and desert writing.

Far from the rolling, green hills of Western Europe's fertile valleys, Krutch suggests that peace and repose denote his home country. Like the traditional pastoral which positions itself as a return to simple living much like the Wilderness myth does, Krutch's desert pastoral also advocates this view. However, while the traditional pastoral represents a flight from reality, Krutch's version embraces reality rather than rejecting it for a more ideal setting. Recognizing actual environmental conditions and limitations, Krutch's pastoral vision suggests that the panacea to modern living is not found in the literary imagination of the pastoral but in adapting to one's surroundings, taking note of the lessons nature can teach those willing to listen. As Krutch employs the pastoral to describe the desert, the reader initially expects his presentation of the ecosystem to follow a similar trajectory. Yet by foregrounding the knowledge he gleans through his astute observations and the paradox which complicates this motif, his texts become far more insightful and relevant as they posit more sensible ways of living in the Sonoran Desert.

The Desert on Its Own Terms

While the desert pastoral becomes a staple in the desert writing of the mid-twentieth century, writers like Craig Childs move away from this motif and the outright celebratory tone that Krutch and Abbey bring to the genre. Similarly, Childs brings a more trained eye for objectivity that dissuades him from making more overt, didactic statements about what the desert should teach humankind. Make no mistake, however; Childs certainly has a soft spot in his heart for the deserts of the Colorado River watershed and particularly those areas of the Sonoran and Great Basin that lead him

through the mountains and canyons of Arizona and Southern Utah. But his admiration and interest derives from a different background than most of the modern desert writers. While many of the great chroniclers of the desert and the larger American West, for that matter, like Charles Fletcher Lummis, Austin, Krutch, and Abbey are all eastern transplants to the Southwest, Childs is a native, one born and raised within the West's arid regions. As he opens *The Secret Knowledge of Water*, he is very much aware of his well-established desert roots.

He begins the book by emphasizing his long connection and experience with desert water, mentioning the spring by his mother's birthplace that nourished her and eventually him as her offspring, and early childhood memories of southern Arizona that include a cottonwood tree, tadpoles in a dwindling puddle, and a small desert stream coursing over rock (xii). The purpose of beginning the text this way is to establish his authority as a keen observer and a native to the desert, one whose observations are supposedly more trustworthy than those outsiders who have retreated to the desert with a nostalgic longing for a bygone era of pristine wilderness. Reflecting on an experience within one of the desert's countless canyons, Childs admits that "I realized that part of my life was here, something I would have to seek with full attention, dictated by the water from my mother's spring sent from her body into mine" (xvi). As he further emphasizes his connection to the desert-as-home not desert-as-destination, Childs attempts to create a more authentic and credible depiction of these landscapes and their relationship to water so that the audience more readily accepts his observations as 'truthful' rather than as just mere creations of a Romantically charged imagination. With this consideration in mind it only seems natural that Childs's text is primarily motivated

by scientific discourse as this type of discourse provides a more objective and possibly accurate vision of what the desert is like as opposed to poetic discourse.

The quote above operates on another level as well. It suggests that this quest is just as much a journey into the self as it is one in pursuit of desert water. He is seeking that part of his life connected to the desert's water and exploring the genealogy of that water which courses through his veins. Therefore, for Childs to understand the desert and its water, he must understand himself. For him, truth is at the heart of his quest into the desert and into his soul. Unlike a quest for scientific truth apparent in the passages above, this desire to know the truth of his life is more poetically motivated as it emphasizes reflection. Thus, from the text's outset different discourses arise in the author's quest for truth. Ironically, as Childs's introductory comments strive to establish his connection to the desert as an insider, he nonetheless adopts the clichéd motif of entering the deserts to find truth, a theme stretching back thousands of years as people retreated to the desert for enlightenment and which flourishes today through the Wilderness myth that promises its followers that a more real, truthful existence can be found in nature's wild areas. It is the attentiveness to one's own pursuit of knowledge that Wild observes that "the focus becomes so concentrated that the desert—the supposed subject—begins disappearing, replaced by the viewer's own reflected image. It is a journey from expansiveness into self-absorption" (*Desert Literature* 11).

Resisting a full-blown paean to the self and attempting to more thoroughly emphasize his authority as one with the experience and credentials to accurately report on the desert, Childs relies on years of experience growing up in the desert and his professional training in scientific inquiry acquired through graduate studies in desert

ecology at Arizona's Prescott College. Raised between homes in Arizona and Colorado, Childs spent much of his youth exploring the deserts of the American Southwest on foot and by boat where he became intimately acquainted with the unique characteristics of these regions. Underlying much of Childs's writing and what is clearly visible in *The Secret Knowledge of Water* is his attention to and reliance on the scientific method as an organizing principle. Chasing a burning question about these regions, Childs enters them to test hypotheses, record observations, and work toward conclusions. Consider his remarks in the closing chapter of this text which speak to his methodology. He explains that, "I had spent two years tracing the bloodlines, meticulously studying the documents, then walking to see if it was true, if the desert was, indeed, bound by water as I had believed" (266). While this reveals the overall rationale for this travels, this explanation suggests more importantly his reliance on history and tradition to inform his excursion. Rather than create an ahistorical desert where he will make first tracks, Childs is keenly aware of the long human presence within the desert. Thus, as he embarks on his various treks, he often follows the paths others have blazed before him, willing to acknowledge their contributions to the region and his own gaps in understanding.

Pursuing a question and a hypothesis, Childs finds himself in some of the most remote locales of the continental U.S. where his preparation in desert ecology helps him reconcile the anomaly of hidden water in the desert. In the text's first section "Ephemeral Water," Childs travels to places like Thousand Wells along the Arizona-Utah border to search for waterpockets in a land of pure rock, and the Cabeza Prieta National Wildlife Refuge, in Southern Arizona's Sonoran Desert, to map water holes, or *tinajas*, as part of the refuge's commitment to preserving and protecting desert bighorns. In the case of the

Thousand Wells region, which Powell described as an area of “innumerable basins” (*Exploration* 333), Childs seeks out possible waterpockets after coming across one man’s graduate fieldwork about a tadpole shrimp. This small desert crustacean, referred to by Childs as *Triops*, happens to be “the oldest living animal on the planet” (*Secret* 47) and requires a reliable pool in which to propagate.¹⁰

It is through Childs’s consideration of *Triops*’s relationship to the Colorado Plateau’s ephemeral waterpockets that the author comes to a greater understanding of the desert, its processes, and the human relationship to this area. Akin to Krutch’s attentiveness to desert life, Childs considers the survival mechanisms of this species, which must endure extreme drought, and informs the reader of the process of *anhydrobiosis* or more simply “*Life without water*” (61). As the author explains, this is a condition in which the shrimp “shrivel up until they are dry as cotton balls, releasing all of their water” (61). From this basic description, Childs goes into a multi-page explanation about science’s understanding of these organisms. He refers to their ability to produce trehalose, a special compound to enter this particular state, and their ability to withstand x-rays and radiation without harm, go decades without water, and endure constant temperature fluctuations. He also describes how this species, along with numerous other organisms, live through *phenotypic plasticity* or “the ability to alter the body’s shape in step with its environment” (67). Thus, as the pool shrinks, *Triops* slows its biologic processes down, as the pocket grows with additional runoff, *Triops* grows. Through this point in the narrative Childs’s text is motivated scientifically as he seeks to understand the phenomenal behavior these organisms exhibit.

¹⁰ Childs published a more detailed version of this chapter in the Spring 2009 issue of *Wings*, the official publication of the Xerxes Society for Invertebrate Conservation. It is titled “The Memory of Water: Life in Ephemeral Water Holes.”

At the same time, however, the adaptations that Childs describes become a larger metaphor for the chapter “Water That Waits,” and thereby seems to be poetically motivated as he sets up the metaphor to help the reader draw connections between *Triops* and humans. Beginning the chapter by recognizing his own limitations in the desert and the amount of water he has to carry in order to survive just a few days, he turns his attention to what he calls the “prophetic knowledge” of *Triops* and other similar organisms as they easily adapt to their surroundings. From his observations of this and other desert creatures, Childs concludes that “my own life had to be measured by completely different standards” (69). The juxtaposition he creates between his own existence and that of *Triops* through his scientific inquiry and research allows him to marvel at the resiliency and permanence of this creature and also recognize his and our culture’s limitations in attempting to adapt to the harsh conditions of desert life. As the author seeks to understand his relationship to desert water, his narrative fluctuates between scientific and poetic discourse as he seeks to process his observations.

Childs’s attention to this unique organism and its ability to thrive in conditions that would quickly kill a human being seems to bring us back to a Krutch-like didacticism that comes out of his observations about creatures like the kangaroo rat and spadefoot toad which help him formulate his “economy of scarcity” theory. True, there are lessons to learn from Childs’s consideration of *Triops*. We can certainly read his interest and dedication in understanding this species’ survival as an admonishment to try to be adaptive in our own way, to not become habituated to more water than is necessary but to work with what is available and make the most of the circumstances. We could even extend this vignette to suggest that if humans could just learn to adapt to the

unpredictable nature of water that perhaps, in the course of time, humans could evolve to pattern their own biological processes to better align with desert water's ephemerality. Yet Childs never comes to these conclusions, at least not explicitly. He never turns away from the dominant scientific narrative as Krutch does to address the reader directly to say: "and this is why this organism is important for us to know about." Rather, he lets the science speak for itself and give voice to *Triops*'s qualities. The most we get from Childs is his recognition that he and *Triops* are worlds apart in their ability to live in these harsh conditions. "Tom and I were lithe, short-lived creatures who would never know how to sleep for an entire hundred years," Childs reflects (69). "This was a different strand of life from my own" (69).

Resisting the urge to preach to his audience about how this example can be a model for more sustainable living, Childs firmly roots his text in the nature writing tradition which seeks a more subtle, apoliticized consideration of the nature-culture duality that has long dictated Western civilization's relationship with the natural world. Although Childs is well-informed about the highly contentious political debates raging about the Colorado River, he resists moving his writing into the realm of environmental writing, which, according to Bill McKibben carries a confrontational edge to it, "sometimes sounding an alarm" about our current environmental challenges (xxii). However, he explains that this is not his objective and consciously chooses to take a different tack in his course to understand water in the desert. He explains, "In a part of the world inundated in water politics, I chose to look elsewhere than the dams and compromised rivers and skeletal canals leading to Phoenix, Los Angeles, and Las Vegas. It was desert water I was looking for, the water that is actually out there, that has been out

there for thousands of years” (xv-xvi). Simply put, Childs is not interested in looking at Colorado River basin water and the obvious issues associated with our manipulation of the resource. His text does not share the rhetorical purpose that texts considered in chapter three and four will. For Childs these issues are too contentious, too skewed by competing interests and desires that only complicate his purpose of establishing a more solid understanding of desert water. Instead, he opts for a more seemingly objective approach that resides in the safety and surety of scientific fact. Yet, by deferring to science to describe *Triops* and its incredible adaptations, Childs paradoxically grants nature a voice through the persistent metaphor that lurks beneath the surface of objectivity he hopes to establish.

The impacts of this choice are manifold. By emphasizing *Triops*'s physiological properties rather than digressing into his connection to the species, Childs allows the audience to come to its own conclusions about this creature and its relationship to the desert. Likewise, by invoking the organism's otherness—its existence in a world far different from his own—Childs prevents himself from purposefully using *Triops* as a metaphor in the service for human society. Ironically, while Krutch attempts to give voice to the desert by closely observing the remarkable features of so many desert organisms, he compromises to a slight degree the ecocentric project he envisions as he uses nature for the benefit of human kind—even if it is just a model for better living. In Krutch's defense Gersdorf argues that by “Relying on basic scientific knowledge, but sidestepping too much detail or jargon,” he “not only prepares the ground for the philosophical interpretation of the desert existence as ingenious, creative, economical (as opposed to wasteful), and yes, thoughtful” (279). Childs on the other hand does not

sidestep the jargon and details in favor of “the moral lessons manifest on the phenomenological surface of the desert” (279). Instead, he foregrounds scientific discourse and thereby exercises, surprisingly, a sense of restraint and distance that derives from the role that objective and accurate scientific inquiry can provide. Establishing the known facts about *Triops* and then resisting the desire to further an agenda that comes from these observations, even if a benign one, Childs creates a nuanced vision of the desert. While reliant on an epistemological system that seeks to explain all the ins and outs of natural phenomena he nonetheless creates an alternative portrayal of nature that enables it to exert its own voice—a true ecocentric gesture that grants him an even greater ethos as an expert explorer and observer of the desert. Talk about paradox indeed!

Although Childs builds his narrative on the scientific method by formulating hypotheses, developing methodologies, and then testing results, he recognizes its inability to capture the full mystery of the region and looks instead to other ways of knowing to aid his growing comprehension. In his 2004 book *The Way Out*, Childs and his hiking companion find themselves in an unnamed region of the Colorado Plateau, struggling to negotiate a path through an expanse of cryptobiotic soil. Their hesitancy derives from their understanding of this crucial component to healthy desert ecosystems, this living soil composed of cyanobacteria, lichens, and mosses which provides nutrients and stability for other organisms (Belnap). Trudging ahead with no alternative route across, Childs considers the implications of his actions. He realizes that

Science is easy for me, with all of its neatly turning gears and ratios. I can put my weight against it in discussions with learners of obscure disciplines: fluvial geomorphology, osteology, microbiology. But I have

also known that I should not put my weight there. With this limited human spectrum of sensations, our blithely unquestioned bias of self-superiority, how can I possibly confide in the imagined purity of science? Devastated beneath my boots are colonies of rare desert mosses and these brittle, creeping colonies of blue lichen. Spore heads no larger than drops of mist bind and crush. Hard science barely allows for mystery, for true sacrifice and loss. It robs this soil of what I see right now. (*Way Out* 87)

This brief reflection amidst Childs's larger purpose of relating how he and his friend attempt to navigate their way through a maze of sandstone speaks to Childs's ongoing negotiation of the role of science and other forms of knowledge in his work as he seeks to understand the deserts of the American Southwest. It also speaks to his awareness of the larger human ecological footprint upon the earth. Yet again, he avoids didacticism and opts instead to have the science and the image he creates speak for themselves to offer possible correctives to how humans interact with the natural world. While his technical expertise leads him to understand the role of this living soil and see its connections to the larger ecosystem, it nonetheless fails to adequately convey the effects of destroying one of the oldest organisms on the planet. Placing limits on scientific knowledge, Childs opts for other epistemologies to engage his surroundings. But such limitations do not exactly suggest a return to Gersdorf's philosophical interpretation that describes Krutch's work and that of many other nature writers. Instead, he recognizes that scientific knowledge is inadequate and incomplete in his quest to understand the desert. As a result, Childs argues for an alternative approach to the desert that evades the promises of his

professional training in favor of a more poetically motivated discourse that further allows the desert's voice to emerge.

Childs begins to question science's inadequacy years earlier as discussed in the first chapter, "Maps of Water Holes," and in much of the remainder of the text. Throughout, Childs finds himself teetering between the utility of empirical fact and science's limitations to provide a complete picture of the desert. "When I began hunting for water in small, isolated holes," Childs explains, "I had wished for a tangible knowledge, a line of information I could personally own" (*Secret* 75). He continues in great detail as he includes a typical entry of his measurements:

I had taken notes carefully and made my own maps, quantifying whatever I could measure. *On the top of the Navajo sandstone at the end of the summer rains. In steep, narrow canyons of granite, not in the arroyos below.* To prove my knowledge, I wrote academic papers on the positioning of waterholes, spatial distribution, ways of determining longevity, submitting these to scholarly reviewers for a master's degree program I had applied to. My measurements of water holes in Cabeza Prieta came out in stunning, colored charts. Weeks of fieldwork from the wildlife refuge appeared in fifteen pages of:

Pool #33 104 1 (28 gallons)

Coordinates: N 32° 20' 15.1" W 113°48' 36.4"

Elevation: 1,650 ft

Depth (h) = .18m

Average width (2r) = 1.5m

Protection: Protected

Local Catchment Area: Large

Sediment: Low

Turbid

Invertebrates: Mosquito larvae/pupae, chironomid larvae. (75-76)

As in his commentary on *Triops*, this broader explanation of his research about waterholes clearly demonstrates Childs's reliance on his scientific training to make sense of his observations and experiences. But his time in the Cabeza Prieta National Wildlife Preserve in southern Arizona quickly teaches him that scientific knowledge alone cannot reveal the secret knowledge of desert water. As Childs's text progresses he becomes more and more aware that the knowledge he believes to possess about water is insufficient and unsatisfactory. Where water holes are, in his words, "effortless to study [because] they have discrete boundaries that take easily to tape measure, a global positioning device, or a Brunton compass," moving water, the subject of the next section is, in the author's words, "different" (76). Because moving water "furrows itself into shapes as it runs, immediately telling stories out loud," he suggests that "An alphabetic string of symbols is left in sand and on rock faces after it passes" (77). While trying to decipher these symbols, Childs concludes that the knowledge he had accumulated about the water holes "turned suddenly arcane and restrictive. The knowledge was no longer so simple to possess. It was not as innocent as *where* and *how much*. It was now asking questions of me" (77). At this point in the narrative, Childs confides that this training is insufficient to grasp the phenomena of desert water that defy his understanding, a recognition which suggests that the desert is far more than a blank slate on which to project one's own agenda. Despite Childs's

efforts to this end, he discovers that desert water resists these attempts as it behaves outside of his ability to control and order it according to his liking. In this case, the desert exerts its own agency and speaks to Childs, teaching him that its water is far more complex than his training would suggest.

To make better sense of his observations, Childs changes course to pursue another means of understanding not typically a part of the objective scientist's program: the role of stories told by those that have come before him to this parched land and who have an intimate knowledge of its unique features. He writes that "Familiarity with scattered water holes has become obsolete, left only for the bighorn sheep. Words are now missing from the story of ephemeral waters, severing critical pieces of information. Many people have died while crossing this desert, . . . They died because the story was forgotten" (10). Childs implies a powerful lesson here for desert dwellers, suggesting that our present society has forgotten the stories and instead tries to engineer its way out of reality with its "cement aqueducts to siphon distant rivers, and holes . . . drilled into ten-thousand-year old groundwater" (10). Yet he does not come out and say this as in previous cases where such didacticism would be so easy and neither does he point to any particular group who today has forgotten what kind of relationship it takes to live sustainably in the desert. Instead, Childs makes his observation very matter-of-factly, leaving the audience to consider where it stands in relationship to water, the desert, and living in an arid land.

In order "to put a story back together and recover parts that had been lost" (9) as Childs suggests, he embarks on a quest to consult the documents of previous explorers and to read the land more closely to see what information it can yield. As a latter-day desert explorer, Childs continues the tradition of his predecessors to the watershed who

sought time and again to restore the knowledge that had been lost or forgotten by previous expeditions. Turning to the travels of Father Kino, Childs defers his own knowledge to an earlier voice, relying on centuries-old knowledge to move from one water hole to the next. Yet Childs doesn't rely solely on Kino's experiences to find the water. He relies on much older knowledge that is inscribed on the land itself.

Traveling back and forth between a number of known tinajas that allow him to extend his search deeper into the refuge's mountains and valleys, Childs notices faint lines or trails that criss-cross the desert floor in logical patterns. This chapter clearly echoes back to Austin's chapter which goes beyond the animal-worn pathways to consider the Shoshone inscriptions on the land that marked reliable drinking water. Calling these trails "waterlines," he explains that they are the ancient paths of the indigenous people who knew where to find reliable water as they migrated through the area. What is most significant about these waterlines is that they are, as Childs insists, "the opposite of canals, moving people to water rather than water to people" (31). This new realization about how previous generations survived in a challenging environment reinforces the author's previous observation about how our culture has forgotten the stories. In each case, Childs's comments imply alternative means by which to engage the desert: "know the land and its maps, you might live," he argues (31). Likewise, he suggests that our current process of bringing water to cities, often hundreds of miles from their source, is out of step with a deeper, more sustainable knowledge that earlier generations possessed. The paradox here exists in our reluctance to see the old knowledge inscribed on the land that speaks to the environment's limitations. Despite our sense of

progress and achievement, Childs's comments suggest that in order to survive, a new paradigm of "success" is necessary if our civilization is to endure.

Again, what surfaces out of this chapter is Childs's recognition of the limitations his own scientific knowledge plays in shaping his understanding of the desert. Retracing Kino's footsteps, following the waterlines as they moved from one hidden waterhole to the next, and locating an 1882 survey completed by the U.S. and Mexico International Boundary Commission, Childs finally comes to the conclusion that, "I had been wrong. The story of water that I had been trying to repair had not been lost. It had never even been interrupted" (38-39). Believing that such knowledge had disappeared, he feels that he must reconnect the pieces—and in a sense he does as he puts the various stories in a historical trajectory that shows their continuity and perseverance over time. But this is much more subtle than the more overt recognition of his error. Demonstrating a sense of humility as he defers his knowledge to previous generations, Childs finds his understanding of the desert and these waterholes enmeshed in and reliant on the story of others. Herein lies much of the appeal of Childs's writing. Whereas writers like Ed Abbey, Zane Grey, and even Joseph Wood Krutch to a lesser extent are famous for portraying the deserts as uninhabited wilderness, Childs goes to great lengths to demonstrate the enduring human presence and knowledge that exists. While there is no doubt that Childs loves wild, sparsely populated places, his writing demonstrates a careful balance of his own need for wilderness and the accretion of meaning ascribed to such locations by those who have written their own presence into the land.

The further one proceeds through the text it becomes clear that Childs cannot achieve a complete knowledge of desert water through science alone. Whereas the

discussion about *Triops* and water holes ground the text in view of reality motivated by scientific discourse, it becomes abundantly clear in the third and final section that Childs recognizes that knowledge comes in various forms, including from nature itself. As “Fierce Water” describes the floods that leave death and destruction in their wake and pushes Childs to make his own life and death decisions, his text further reveals his negotiation between scientific and poetically attuned discourses as he searches for answers to events he struggles to understand. Where he could once analyze and measure water in numbers and figures, the floods come so unpredictably to the desert to leave him longing for a means of quantifying their behavior. In the end, he concludes that “It was no longer my own longing or my own body, not some piece of knowledge I could possess. Water now had the knowledge” (167-68). While science punctuates this last section to shed light on the apparent mystery of such inexplicable behavior of a tapped aquifer to explain a Tohono O’odham myth or through terms like “hydrologic jump” and the reference to a university researcher’s work on canyon erosion, Childs foregrounds story throughout this third section and its relationship to scientific knowledge to explain the paradoxical nature of these floods. In the case of the Tohono O’odham account, Childs teeters back and forth between the knowledge that science and indigenous storytelling reveals. According to the narrative, a hunter once pursued a badger into a hole which, after poking his stick into its dark recesses, spewed forth a huge amount of water that swept away a number of villages and threatened to drown all the people. Having exhausted all other options of stopping this sudden burst of water onto the desert’s sands, the people decided to sacrifice four children to the flood, throwing them into the hole with hopes of stopping the flow and saving the community. To their relief,

the sacrifice proved sufficient, and as the water receded, a large rock fell into place capping the hole (176-77). At this site, a shrine to the children emerged and it is this gathering of rocks and other paraphernalia for which Childs searches. Of this quest he explains, "I was scientific about it," as his keen eyes recognize "an embankment of compacted, water-driven sand left far from any drainage, just out in the desert" (177).

At the same time that he is trying to be "scientific" in his search, he also turns away from a scientific explanation of such phenomenal events as massive amounts of water suddenly gushing from parched ground. "Purposely," he admits, "I did not mull over records of local geohydrology to isolate this story of water bursting out of the ground" (182). Instead, Childs chooses to emphasize the native account. While he juxtaposes the narration of these events with information about general groundwater levels throughout the Southwest, Childs opts for this version of the sudden appearance of water in the desert as it teaches him an important lesson about water's relationship to the desert. He writes, "Our offerings to water, our requests of it in the desert, must be balanced carefully. Not too much and not too little" (183). While this statement argues for a tempered desire for water, it also mirrors Childs's balanced approach in his consideration of the offerings made to water. They cannot be too firmly entrenched in scientific discourse, but should also involve story and poetic discourse to provide a broader spectrum of what the reality of desert water entails. Such an approach to understanding water differentiates Childs's work from explorers like the Spanish Padres or the U.S. surveyors who placed the desert's worth in the realm of science's ability to dictate value. This negotiation also separates his writing from more contemporary nature writers who draw on the natural history tradition and who often make more didactic

observations about human relationships to the natural world as Krutch does. Rather, Childs acknowledges that science has clear limitations, and its ability to procure and endow understanding only goes so far. Similarly, he refrains from making extended commentary about how we should live with the desert and its water, choosing instead to let the desert's voice as captured through paradox, and allows the contested space between scientific and poetic discourse to do the talking, as it were. In the case of "The Sacrifice of Children," Childs defers his technical training to give space to another perspective on desert water, thereby placing indigenous (and we can read this as a metaphor for all non-scientific forms of knowledge) ways of knowing on equal footing.

As the rest of the section unfolds, Childs's understanding of water comes less and less from his academic knowledge and more and more from other sources that include the stories to which he is willing to listen. In this way, his writing becomes, as Teorey suggests, "a two-way conversation that requires humans to interact with Nature on its terrain" (11). Childs tells, for example, of the three hikers traveling up Phantom Creek in the Grand Canyon, where a husband and wife are pulled under and drowned while the brother-in-law is somehow able to ride on top of the flood and survive (216). Likewise, he considers the fate of twelve hikers caught in a flash flood in Antelope Canyon, a narrow slot in the Arizona Strip. Only the guide survives, having been entirely stripped of his clothing and left naked on a ledge by the raging waters (217). And when he recalls finding himself caught in a canyon with a massive flood bearing down on him, he admits, "I had been studying water. I had read hundreds of scientific journal articles, taken innumerable pages of notes, produced papers, articles, treatises on the performance of water in the desert. It was all washed blank here" (272). Childs will echo these exact

sentiments in his larger work on flash floods: *The Desert Cries* (2002). Herein he admits, “Even all of my studies appear foolish as I try to frame the flood, to break it down into math” (138). Like many of the early explorers who ventured into the desert unknowns armed with the knowledge of cartography and other developing fields, Childs initially expects that scientific inquiry will provide the most reliable means of quantifying the desert’s unique characteristics. Yet despite his extensive technical training in the complex and paradoxical phenomena of desert water, he eventually finds this knowledge insufficient and even foolish to fully explain the how’s and why’s of this mysterious entity. Paradox thus becomes the prominent theme in his writing as he recognizes, as have the explorers and numerous desert writers before him, that this rhetorical device is the best way to articulate the irony and wonder these individuals attribute to the desert.

The Voice of the Desert

The question still at hand is what effect does Childs’s ongoing negotiation with scientific and other forms of knowledge that come through native myth and anecdotal evidence have on the larger understanding of the Colorado River and its watershed? As a twenty-first century explorer with roots sunk deep into the explorer-scientist tradition of the nineteenth century, Childs’s work provides one approach to examining the spectrum of knowledge possible when engaging the watershed’s deserts. By employing the well-used trope of paradox in writing about the desert Southwest, Childs brings a number of seemingly contradictory discourses into play. With his academic training in tow, Childs aligns himself with those like Powell and other nineteenth-century explorers who relied on objective observation, precise methods, and thorough experimentation to break down nature’s complex phenomena. At the same time, however, Childs allows for vestiges of

the Romantic-Humboldtian-nature writing traditions to infiltrate his work as he creates room for a more mysterious, potentially unknowable desert that resists empirical science's reach.

Closely related to these branches of nineteenth-century science is the paradox the author invokes between the discipline of science and non-related forms of knowledge like story and myth. In both cases, Childs creates a space, a place of entrance for nature's own knowledge and voice to emerge. While critics have scorned the pathetic fallacy as a literary liability, it nonetheless performs a very powerful function in nature writing as numerous scholars have argued. Lawrence Buell dubs this motif "nature's personhood," and argues that to prohibit its use "would be worse than to permit its unavoidable excesses. For without it, environmental care might not find its voice. For some, it might not even come into being" (*Environmental Imagination* 218). It is through this tool that an author weds "ecology to ethics," thereby creating a useful technique by which to influence an audience's perspective on the natural world (201). This approach then becomes what Bryan L. Moore calls "ecocentric personification," a further development of the pathetic fallacy or nature's personhood, to "*persuade* an audience that all living things are *connected*" (author's italics 10). This iteration of the pathetic fallacy aligns closely with the "psychological phenomenon of 'awareness'" which likewise functions to provoke a reader to consider the natural world, and the desert in Childs's case, on a more profound and personal level. At the same time, they allow nature to have a voice of its own—not literally, of course, as the words we read are the author's—but by a humble gesture of acquiescence and deferral to nature's own processes and decisions. Thus, while *The Secret Knowledge of Water* primarily employs scientific and poetic discourse, this

attention to evoking nature's voice, which then surfaces as an instructor and a behavioral corrective, motivates the text within Beale's rhetorical realm as a way to influence action and values. With Childs's text motivated by these three discourses that continuously mingle in light of the various circumstances in which he finds himself, it becomes emblematic of what Teorey sees as "The respectful collaboration of nature's voice and human language [that] can reestablish a story of health and prosperity" within the watershed (7). This story becomes a new reality, one based on the existence of the desert's autonomy and own knowledge that Childs reveals through his close engagement, patience, and willingness to recognize and accept his otherness from the desert. But rather than use this otherness as a way to exploit and profit from the desert, it invites a reverence for a closer engagement with an entity that exceeds human's inability to fully comprehend its mysteries. As Childs recognizes this divide between his own life and the natural world he discovers that only through a continual negotiation of synthesis with and divergence from the desert can he begin to understand its complexity.

Childs's deferral to the desert's voice through his use of paradox relies on harmonizing divergent epistemologies into a greater whole. As he does this, Childs resurrects nineteenth-century scientific discourse and its various branches to create a new take on how we can envision the watershed's arid regions today. His work embodies the fusion of ideas that Laura Dassow Walls examines in her article "Seeking Common Ground: Integrating the Sciences and the Humanities." Concerned with the disciplinary disconnect between science and the humanities, Walls contends that "Insofar as each discipline is founded on a single mode of vision, then no one discipline can cash out the entire universe: not literature for all its scope and beauty; not science, for all its range and

power” (200). Childs’s text embraces this perspective as he comes to explain that science is not the definitive source of knowledge while story, or literature, is not entirely adequate on its own as they are too easily forgotten over time.

Viewing Childs’s text in this light positions it as a contemporary embodiment of a more integrated and interdisciplinary approach to knowledge that Walls observes in the work of nineteenth-century luminaries like Humboldt, the British polymath William Whewell who first used the word ‘scientist’ in 1840, and Henry David Thoreau (*Nature’s Economy* 130). Thus, by bridging science and story and their respective discourses grounded in constructions of objective or subjective reality, Childs creates what Walls describes as “‘relational knowledge,’ not of subject against object but of the new whole that subject and object make together” (204). Such is the epistemological and discursive vision Childs embraces in *The Secret Knowledge of Water* as he spans disciplinary boundaries and recognizes the relationality of the knowledge that he acquires to construct a text motivated by various discourse ratios to underscore paradox and the desert’s uniqueness. Accordingly, Childs’s experience reflects what Walls discovers in Whewell’s *Theory of Scientific Method*: the coming together of various perspectives “to form a new, coherent truth” (qtd. in Walls 205). Walls’s consideration of this “truth” or enlarged vision, as I see it, provides an excellent model for us to think about Childs’s work and its contribution to representations about the desert and the larger Colorado basin. Adopting the model of a river to explain the convergence of divergent knowledge, Whewell explains that “the stream of knowledge from various classes of facts will constantly run together into a smaller and smaller number of channels; like the confluent rivulets of a great river, coming together from many sources, uniting their ramifications so as to form

larger branches, these gain uniting in a single truth” (qtd. in Walls 205). Although Childs’s work does not pursue a unified “truth” as Whewell and other scientist-philosophers have, his work nonetheless attempts to synthesize various forms of knowledge to create a more comprehensive and holistic understanding of the watershed’s deserts.

Clearly germane to the present study, this model of a river’s confluence provides an excellent heuristic by which to understand Childs’s perspectives on desert knowledge. From biologic data about *Triops* and cryptobiotic soil to the geographical surveys of a land commission and the stories gleaned from the Tohono O’odham and national park rangers, boaters, flash flood survivors, and what the desert itself reveals, Childs creates a mosaic of ‘truth’ about what the desert is and what it does. Unlike the unified reality Whewall imagines, Childs brings together his own set of tributary voices without compromising their unique contributions. Although codified within an understanding of the desert and its water, he navigates his way through past and present information, never positioning one approach as the definitive way to access this secret knowledge. And as I have suggested above, by drawing on these apparently paradoxical approaches to knowing Childs allows the desert and the water that has shaped it to have a voice of their own. By bringing all these voices into conversation within the text, Childs demonstrates that the desert does not just *mean* something but that it *does* something as well: it exerts its own knowledge that only those willing enough and patient enough—and perhaps even lucky enough—can only begin to understand.

To conclude, I turn to Frank Stewart’s observation about nature writers. He states, “Whether scientists or poets, nature writers make us aware that neither biology nor

imagination by itself can illuminate the call of the last American timber wolf, [or] the tossing meadow grasses in a mountain rainstorm, . . . But both disciplines, working together, may give us a new, more powerful lens of perception” (xix). In the case of the deserts of the Colorado River watershed, Childs’s text provides a unique perspective by which to approach this region, an approach that brings Teorey’s “story of health and prosperity” and Buell’s “vision corrective” into play (7, *Writing* 246). By negotiating various discourses and their genre traditions, Childs resists trying to reduce our understanding of these deserts to one epistemological model. In doing so, he demonstrates a willingness to accept the gaps in his learning, thereby granting the desert a sense of autonomy and agency that extends beyond human comprehension. By deferring to the desert’s and its water’s own systems of knowledge, systems which continually prove enigmatic, Childs allows these entities to become an instructor of sorts, one which inspires, challenges, and refutes his previous assumptions and hypotheses about these unique entities. In a region where human and non-human communities are under significant pressures, *The Secret Knowledge of Water* demonstrates that no one approach to understanding and ultimately addressing these issues is adequate. Through his implementation of paradox as a way to highlight desert water’s unique properties, Childs speaks to the variety of knowledge, which at times appears contradictory, but which can and should inform our understanding of the region.

**New Currents in Colorado River Boating Narratives:
Westerns and the Female Experience of Wilderness**

“Coming to the Canyon and immersing myself in its beauty have brought a self-confidence and appreciation I never knew I was capable of, liberating me from the ‘baggage’ of life.”

—Denise Traver, *Writing Down the River*, 94.

Lava Falls is perhaps the most storied rapid on the Colorado River and the pinnacle of any river runner’s experience through the Grand Canyon. Formed by a cycle of prehistoric lava flows that have repeatedly dammed the river’s progress and the Colorado’s constant erosive power, this rapid has captured the imagination of countless river runners who have attempted to navigate this notorious stretch of water. For those river runners who look to capture their experience in writing, Lava provides the perfect climax for a river yarn. Situated near the end of most river trips through the Grand Canyon, Lava functions as an apt high point in any river trip as the foreboding, excitement, and anticipation of this hallowed place culminate in a rush of pure adrenaline. Mirroring the river’s progress downstream, a typical river narrative follows this linearity using Lava and one’s passage through it as the culmination and resolution of a text.

Such is the case with Elizabeth Hyde’s *In the Heart of the Canyon* (2009), a fictitious account of twelve people who convene on the Grand Canyon for a two-week river trip with their trusty guides: JT, Abo, and Dixie. As in nearly all narratives about the

Grand Canyon's Colorado River stretch, there is a great preoccupation with the rapids. At the beginning of Day Seven, JT explains to the group that "It's not about the rapids" (170), and yet, he knows full well that the beauty of the surrounding cliffs, the intimacy of the canyon's endless side canyons, and the surprising abundance of flora and fauna can hardly compete with the thrill of the whitewater to come. As Hyde writes, "But try convincing twelve people not to get too excited about running the biggest white water on the continent. . . . There's no getting around it: ninety-three miles downriver from Lee's Ferry [sic], it's about the Big Ones" (170). Amid names like Granite, Hermit, and Crystal rapids, Lava reigns supreme.

Yet, unlike so many tales that climax with the rise and fall of one's passage through Lava, *In the Heart of the Canyon* takes a very unique departure from this formula. Anticipation peaks when the party awakes on Day Eleven to JT's announcement: "It's Judgment Day" (225). In preparing for Lava, everything goes as expected: the guides scout the rapid, everyone cinches their life vests extra tight, and they all hold on for dear life. And even when Amy, the obese, angst-filled teenager, falls overboard during her tumultuous passage through the rapid, the narrative seems on par with others. But when she's rescued and brought to dry ground in Lava's tail waters, the real excitement begins. The unexplainable health issues Amy has experienced throughout the voyage come to a head at the foot of Lava as it is clear to all that the seventeen year old is in labor.

Shifting the climax of a Colorado River boating narrative from the excitement and adrenaline rush of pounding through rapids to the female experience of giving birth, Hyde places her text in line with a growing body of boating literature that looks beyond

this traditionally male genre that places adventure, wilderness, and individuality—elements of Western myth and the genre of the Western—at a premium. While *In the Heart of the Canyon* draws upon these topoi it nonetheless creates a space for a historically neglected woman’s perspective of Colorado River boating, a perspective that deserves serious attention for its contribution to our understanding of how the river shapes and is shaped by those who encounter it. This manipulation of the genre by positing alternative topoi falls in line with what Kristine McAndrews observes in *Wrangling Women: Humor and Gender in the American West* (2006), her study of the horsewomen in rural eastern Washington State. Examining how the stories these women tell negotiate their own marginalized position in a traditionally male line of work, McAndrews explains that “When telling their stories, women in this community employ traditional male narrative techniques but stretch or undermine these strategies by introducing nontraditional images and themes” (xiii). Hyde’s use of childbirth rather than the rapid to shape the climactic moment of the text upsets the status quo and becomes a unique trope which challenges the male-dominated topoi that typify such narratives.

To account for and understand the way women writers engage and transform these typical topoi and narrative structures, this chapter considers the contribution that a number of women boaters—whether guides or passengers—have made to the body of writing about river rafting and how they have consequently enlarged our understanding of river running. It shares a conviction with numerous scholars that traditional even mainstream considerations of the West-as-frontier have positioned the region as a specifically male space that has typically neglected a woman’s experience, for as Susan Lee Johnson argues in her consideration of gender in the region, “no place has been so

consistently identified with maleness—particularly white maleness—as the region imagined as the American West” (495). Writing in “Women’s Literature and the American Frontier: A New Perspective on the Frontier Myth,” Susan H. Armitage encourages critics to take up the recovery process, noting that “when the [recovery and analysis] process is complete, female voices will change our present understandings of American history and American literature” (10-11). As this chapter considers the experiences of a number of women boaters as expressed through a variety of genres, I argue that these oft neglected tributary voices indeed alter how we think about the Colorado River running experience and the narratives that capture it.

Over the last few decades, a number of women have published texts about boating the Colorado River and its tributaries. Examples include Ellen Meloy’s *Raven’s Exile* (1994), Louise Teal’s *Breaking into the Current* (1994), Patricia McCairen’s *Canyon Solitude* (1996), Kathleen Jo Ryan’s *Writing Down the River* (1998), Laurie Wagner Buyer’s *Side Canyons* (2004), and, of course, Hyde’s *In the Heart of the Canyon*. Like McAndrews’s horsewomen, the fictive and non-fictive stories these women tell appropriate the genre and narrative structures, yet complicate the perspectives of their male counterparts. However, unlike McAndrews’s observation that “while [these women’s stories] do disrupt regional gender and narrative expectations the stories often return to a community status quo” (xiii), I would argue that the women boaters’ accounts ultimately compromise the norm in favor of a new vision of female presence on the river. Such a transformation occurs through a reading of Colorado River narratives as a form of the Western genre where horses are exchanged for boats and characters and plots are highly formulaic, and where ultimately, women have been left out of the equation.¹¹

¹¹ Patricia McCairen also draws this connection in *Canyon Solitude* in which she refers to her male friend

This appropriation and mingling with the Western by women boating narratives allow these writers to contemplate their marginalization within an activity and literary tradition dominated by men. This contemplation enacted through these women's words positions their discourse in Beale's poetic realm "whose primary aim is the construction of an object of enjoyment and reflection, using the materials and resources of language" (94). He goes on to point out that "Poems, stories, and novels" are the typical genres that depict this aim. While poetic discourse aptly describes this particular purpose of these narratives as they celebrate the river and canyon and the boating experience, it becomes quickly apparent that their works are also equally motivated by the rhetorical aim of discourse, which, in this case, seeks to both place women on the river and firmly establish their voice within the literary tradition that sings the Colorado's praise. Similar to Childs's work, these women's narratives are motivated by various aims. By appropriating the Western genre and its associated topoi, the women are able to enter a well-recognized literary body through which to recount the adventure, learning, and amazement that they experience on the river. Yet it is exactly this appropriation of the genre and their manipulation of it in terms of what McAndrews suggests that these narratives become clearly rhetorically motivated as they seek to justify the women's presence on the river and within this literary tradition that captures a traditionally male-dominated activity.

To examine how the women's Colorado boating narratives are both poetically and rhetorically motivated, I begin by outlining the key conventions of the Western genre that define the boating tales and consider representative examples of male-authored narratives that exemplify this genre. From this point, I turn to Mary Hallock Foote's short story "Maverick" which represents a formative woman's voice within the Western genre that is

who, rather than working with "bucking broncs . . . wrestles bucking rafts" (10).

equally preoccupied with Western water. It is through Foote's work that we see an emerging tradition of counter-narrativity that manipulates the genre to explore women's marginalization in the West—a tradition to which the women boaters will contribute. With Foote's condemnation of women's oppression in mind, the chapter examines McCairen's *Canyon Solitude*,¹² Teal's *Breaking into the Current*, and Buyer's *Side Canyons* which demonstrate how these women's rhetorically motivated discourses create a space for their own voice and experience within a male dominated tradition. Specifically, through their engagement with and negotiation of themes like domesticity, community, storytelling, and empowerment that work within and against her male counterparts' views on the river experience we come away with alternative ways of envisioning life with the river that can prove useful in negotiating current water conflict.

Colorado River Narratives as Westerns

As a genre the Western has its roots in the European literary tradition. In his seminal work *Love and Death in the American Novel*, Leslie Fiedler examines James Fenimore Cooper's *Leatherstocking Tales* for its role in putting an American spin on the historical romance, and thereby projecting the themes of the romance onto the American landscape. Fiedler identifies common topoi within Cooper's work which will, in their own right, lay the foundation for the Western, its subgenre, the dime novel, and subsequently, the Colorado River boating narrative. These include "male protagonists, . . . adventure and isolation plus an escape at one point or another, or a flight from society, . . . [and] a male companion" (181). As central themes within the Western genre they draw heavily upon and reinforce the Frontier myth and its influence on shaping understandings

¹² McCairen's work has appeared in two recent anthologies about river literature: Lance Newman's *Grand Canyon Reader* (2011) and Verne Huser's *River Reflections* (2005).

of the West. As Armitage explains, such topoi are “probably most familiar to us in literature: the encounter with wilderness, the excitement of danger and challenge, the violent act of confrontation and commitment, the final slow surrender of freedom to advancing civilization” (“Through Women’s Eyes” 16). These commonplaces as described by Fiedler and Armitage motivate the women boater’s poetic and rhetorical discourse as they engage these topoi to reflect on their unique experiences on their river and to carve out a place for their voice within this male-dominated canon and their place within the canyon. To consider how this negotiation of discourses appears within the texts, one must first understand the male boating tradition and the discourses it employs.

In 1867 John Wesley Powell spent a summer in the Long’s Peak region of Colorado Territory, exploring the headwaters of the Grand River (later the Colorado) and speculating about its journey through the canyons of the West. These early imaginings eventually gave way to his famed expedition two years later which aimed at “penetrating still farther in that canyon country” of the Grand, Green, and Colorado Rivers (*Exploration* 117). On May 24, 1869 Powell and company pushed the *Emma Dean* and three other boats from the shore of what would be later named “Expedition Island” and turned his back on the small outpost of Green River, Wyoming. Over the course of the next three months, Powell and his fellow explorers would drift south through the canyons of the Green and Colorado rivers, charting new territory and opening up the marvels of the Grand Canyon to the masses.

For Powell and his men, this expedition was a journey into the unknown, an opportunity to put their names alongside the great explorers of the continent who had gone before them, returning triumphant in their descriptions of sublime landscapes,

perilous rivers, and primitive peoples. Yet, the realities of their journey down the Colorado would challenge any visions of grandeur that they may have imagined. While Powell's journal chronicles the marvelous places they encounter as they race downriver, his account is also filled with uncertainty, reservation, and even despair as his crew faced countless hardships navigating a dangerous, unpredictable river. Perhaps Powell's most famous entry is that which captures the scene as the expedition enters what would later be dubbed the Inner Gorge of the Grand Canyon. Having already spent months fighting perilous rapids and intense heat, the Major confides:

We are now ready to start on our way down the Great Unknown. . . . We are three quarters of a mile in the depths of the earth, and the great river shrinks into insignificance as it dashes its entry waves against the walls and cliffs that rise to the world above; the waves are but puny ripples, and we but pigmies, running up and down the sands or lost among the boulders.

We have an unknown distance yet to run, and unknown river to explore. What falls there are, we know not; what rocks beset the channel, we know not; what walls rise over the river, we know not. Ah, well! We may conjecture many things. The men talk as cheerfully as ever; jests are bandied about freely this morning; but to me the cheer is somber and the jests are ghastly. (247)

Whereas the group had traveled through previously explored country, their journey into the Grand Canyon was a step into the void—a blank spot on the nation's maps. Concerned about food rations, the distance they still had to travel to reach the Mormon

settlements along the Virgin River, and the unknown dangers ahead, Powell's outlook is far from the confident, optimistic mood that initiated this fateful voyage. In fact, his view is so soured by short food supplies, continual portages and lining of rapids, and discord among his fellow travelers that Powell describes his predicament as "prison" (275) as he longs to exit the seemingly never ending canyon walls that had loomed over the party for hundreds of miles.

Powell's descriptions of beauty, hardship, and eventual triumph which fill the pages of his narrative seemed to have all the elements for a good sell. Yet, as Donald Worster has suggested, the public reaction to the account first serialized in *Scribner's Monthly* in 1875 was mixed. He notes that "Although he had a dramatic streak, he was not up to mass-market standards" (*River Running West* 331). What the public clamored for during this period were the "adventure stories, set on a frontier, about personal character striving to overcome perilous circumstances" that the Western and the dime novel embodied (Wallmann 9). While Powell's narrative clearly addresses each of these themes, the literary market demanded greater exaggeration in the danger and challenges Powell faced during the journey down the Colorado. Despite a lukewarm reception by publishers initially, a government issue of the expedition's report, also in 1875, met larger success, with requests coming in from as far away as South America, Western Europe, and Australia (Worster, *River Running West* 332). Surprisingly, when Powell revised these earlier versions for commercial publication in 1895, the text once again met mixed reviews and further setbacks as the press, Flood and Vincent, went bankrupt five years after its first run of Powell's work (Brandt xii).

Despite the varying success that Powell's account had during his lifetime, today the 1895 *The Exploration of the Colorado River and its Canyons* has become a classic of Western American literature and has played a paramount role in the way that the river has since been imagined. Worster explains that Powell's record "became the most popular literary product of all the western surveys. Over the next century no one among his contemporary explorers and surveyors . . . was a widely read as Powell" (332). One of the reasons for the staying power of the 1895 account is its emergence during a unique historical moment when the American frontier captured the nation's attention and Western romance and the dime novel ruled the literary marketplace. Two years prior to *The Exploration's* publication, Frederick Jackson Turner addressed the American Historical Association at the Columbian Exposition in Chicago and boldly declared that the frontier had officially closed. This pronouncement suggested that a crucial phase to American development had ended, and with it, much of the early spark that had urged settlers to press westward in search of opportunity. Ironically, while one frontier supposedly closed, another one opened as the nation took a nostalgic view at what was assumed gone to the annals of American history. While nostalgia typified America's understanding of and engagement with the West long before Turner's proclamation evident through the scholarship of Annette Kolodny and Henry Nash Smith, it would thrive as a pervasive cultural force within the nation's literature as the country tried in earnest to recuperate that which it had supposedly lost.

The longing for a bygone West is a foundational tenet of the Western and the dime novel which flourished during the latter half of the nineteenth century and into the first years of the twentieth. Enjoying decades of success, numerous publishing houses

jumped on the dime novel bandwagon looking for a piece of a very lucrative pie. Tracing the dime novel's emergence to the 1860s, critic Bill Brown argues that this "subgenre" relies on the heart of Turner's thesis for its success (6). He contends that "The commercial value of the West . . . resides in the movement between proclaimed absence and textual presence, in the nostalgic portrayal of an image and era marked as passing if not passed" (3). And the reason that these genres enjoyed such success during this period is in fact their ability to easily replicate the "image" and "era" of nostalgia. In Brown's words the dime novel "is recognizable by its narrative structure (a set of plot formulas); it is recognizable by its lexicon and subject matter (ranging from the threatened innocence of the beautiful maiden to the ineptitude of the local and federal governments); and it is most recognizable by the standardized packaging" (6).

While not all of these conventions exactly describe Powell's account, his work has much in common with this popular medium that influenced how generations would view the West. Adopting a similar narrative structure which focuses on a male hero against a set of natural forces that continually try and test him until he eventually comes out victorious, Powell situates his text within a time worn convention stretching back to the ancient Greeks. Likewise, the discourse used to communicate this adventure narrative stems from and draws upon Aristotle's notion of poetic discourse which, as Beale suggests, is aimed to reflect and entertain (94). Yet *The Exploration* adds a twist to these ancient and modern narratives as it is set on a river, thereby initiating what can be envisioned as another subgenre of the Western: the boating narrative. Like the western dime novel whose "Success depended on the fundamental reproducibility of scene, character, and action (6), Powell's boating narrative embodies a particular set of narrative

structures and topoi that subsequent Colorado River accounts will reproduce again and again. As a result, Powell's record stands at the head of a highly conventionalized albeit minor genre of Western literature that continues to shape public engagement with the river nearly 150 years after his first voyage.

Recognizing the potential market for river narratives that capitalized on the widespread interest in the American West embodied by popular literature, others who had accompanied Powell down the Colorado looked to provide their own side of the story. In the same year that Owen Wister published *The Virginian* (1902), the quintessential Western, Frederick Dellenbaugh, a member of Powell's second expedition in 1871-72, would publish his *Romance of the Colorado River* which chronicles the river's "discovery" in 1540 by Spanish explorers through his own journey with Major Powell. Emphasizing the distinction of Powell's two voyages as the first to travel through "the whole line of canyons" (vii), Dellenbaugh writes, "If danger, difficulty, and disaster mean romance, then assuredly the Colorado of the West is entitled to first rank, for seldom has any human being touched its borderland even, without some bitter or fatal experience" (vii). By charting the exciting history of encounters with the river over hundreds of years by conquistadors and mountain men, and by referring to Powell as "the One-armed Knight" who made "A Bold Attack on the Canyon" (184), Dellenbaugh extends Powell's narrative framework and themes of challenge, struggle, and eventual survival into a far more melodramatic realm depicted by a long trajectory of male heroism and conquest of this mythic landscape. His penchant for the sensational is clearly evident from the opening pages in which he depicts the river as

a veritable dragon, loud in its dangerous lair, defiant, fierce, opposing utility everywhere, refusing absolutely to be bridled by Commerce, perpetuating a wilderness, prohibiting mankind's encroachments, and in its immediate tide presenting a formidable host of snarling waters whose angry roar, reverberating wildly league after league between giant rock-walls carved through the bowels of the earth, heralds the impossibility of human conquest and smothers hope. (*Romance 2*)

Far from the more emotionally distant account by Powell, Dellenbaugh's retelling of the voyage takes advantage of the common literary topoi of adventure, peril, and conquest to promote his tale. Likewise, by referencing those significant places noted by Powell such as Echo Park, the Dirty Devil, Labyrinth Canyon, Music Temple, the Crossing of the Fathers, and Sockdolager Rapid, we begin to see the discursive construction of the river become rather stylized and conventional through the repetition of these topoi and the poetic discourse which underlies them, and exclusive as both a physical and imaginative place: the river is a place only for those courageous enough to face these perilous waters and the men who are able to then write and publish their experiences.

Captivated by Powell's and Dellenbaugh's accounts and armed with knowledge of three other voyages down the Colorado, two brothers, Ellsworth and Emory Kolb, arrived in Green River City, Wyoming in early September, 1911 intent on making history of their own. Armed with two flat-bottomed boats, a twenty-two year old travel companion, and an assortment of cameras from their studio at the Grand Canyon's South Rim where, for a decade, they had operated a photo studio, the Kolb's would attempt to record the first moving pictures of the Green and Colorado rivers. Prepared for what they

called the “Big Trip”—a journey that would take them from Green River City to Needles, California—they hoped “that we could bring out a record of the Colorado as it is, a live thing, armed as it were with teeth, ready to crush and devour” (4). Drawing upon Dellenbaugh’s portrayal of the river as dragon, the Kolb’s own voyage became a direct outgrowth of the nascent genre of Colorado River boating literature.

When the Kolb’s landed in Needles on January 18th, 1912 they had achieved their dream. The following year, Ellsworth would spend eight days floating from Needles to the Gulf of California. Thus, their combined expedition from Wyoming to Mexico over the course of 101 days culminated in the first recorded journey from Green River City to the Gulf while also providing the first film images of this remote region of the American West. Desiring to publish an account of their own in order to add their voices to those of the revered explorers who preceded them downriver, Ellsworth produced *Through the Grand Canyon from Wyoming to Mexico* (1914). This text continued to build upon the tradition established by Powell and further dramatized by Dellenbaugh, and like Dellenbaugh’s text, Kolb’s narrative relied on many of the structural and thematic elements of the Western to promote their experience. At the same time, the Kolb’s had the good fortune of securing an endorsement for the narrative from the master of the Western himself, Owen Wister.

Providing the text’s foreword, Wister evokes quintessential Western themes as he introduces the Kolb’s journey through the canyons of the Southwest. He writes: “Every youth who has in him a spark of adventure will kindle with desire to battle his way also from Green River to the foot of Bright Angel Trail; while every man whose bones have been stiffened and his breath made short by the years, will remember wistfully such wild

tastes of risk and conquest that he, too, rejoiced in when he was young” (ix). Setting up Kolb’s narrative as a classic Western where dramatic landscapes try and test men, Wister underscores the heroic nature of the Kolb’s journey and the wonder of the Grand Canyon through language replete with myth and hyperbole. Speaking of the river’s run through the Grand Canyon Wister explains, “This place exerts a magnetic spell. . . . Bend after bend this trance of beauty and awe goes on, terrible as the Day of Judgment, sublime as the Psalms of David” (xi). He continues, “No siren song could have lured travelers more than the siren song of the Grand Canyon: but these young men did not leave their bones to whiten upon its shores. The courage that brought them out whole is plain through this narrative, in spite of its modesty” (xii). Wister’s lofty and rather melodramatic description of the Grand Canyon noted by its references to its mystic qualities, unsurpassed beauty, and the Kolb’s journey through this region, speak to the era’s praise of explorers and heroic deeds that pit man and nature against one another. His words also firmly entrench the river running narrative as a sub-genre of the Western, making subsequent river narratives heavily steeped in mythic landscapes, nostalgia, and perilous adventure for the male subject—a motif which extends through more recent river narratives by writers like Wallace Stegner and Edward Abbey.

The appearance of these foundational Colorado River narratives and their preoccupation with poetic discourse and the Western themes of adventure and conquest and literary forms noted above was by no means coincidence. Recognizing the nation’s fascination with the American West as expressed through this popular medium, these authors relied heavily on the formulaic nature of the Western to celebrate this wild region, construct their own heroic tales, and garner widespread popularity. Beginning

with Powell's pioneering descent down the Green and Colorado rivers and developing through accounts by Dellenbaugh and others, the Colorado River narrative depends on this reproducibility of topoi such as battling the river's unpredictability, facing perilous rapids, overcoming fear, and interacting with larger-than-life guides, along with the obligatory references to places like Cataract and Glen Canyons and Lava Rapid to captivate audiences and establish authorial ethos as the writers demonstrate their first hand knowledge of and experience in this region. Yet their ubiquitous presence functions beyond their ability to establish a consistency and predictability between texts over time. What these topoi have ultimately done is construct the river and its surrounding landscapes as a highly exclusionary, primarily male place, one in which men test themselves against a harsh and trying environment. Thus, not only are these narratives emblematic of poetic discourse which celebrates the watershed's wild regions and entertains through the dramatic repetition of predictable topoi, they become highly rhetorically motivated—even if not intended as such by the authors—as they celebrate man's triumphs in this wild region. In doing so, these narratives both ignore and repress a female presence on the river and within the literary tradition of the Colorado River boating narrative, an exclusion that women will begin to challenge in the mid-twentieth-century.

The construction of the Colorado River as a male space is also evident in more recent Colorado River narratives as witnessed in Edward Abbey's chapter "Down the River" from his classic text *Desert Solitaire* (1968). Chronicling a ten-day journey floating lazily down the condemned waters of Glen Canyon that would soon be inundated by the pooling behind Glen Canyon Dam, Abbey's chapter pays homage to this

magnificent region, a place he describes as “a portion of the earth’s original paradise” (189). With his friend Ralph Newcomb in tow, the two travelers embark on a journey full of anticipatory nostalgia as they long to see Glen Canyon before it disappears under the waters of Lake Powell. Just as Westerns nostalgically commemorate the passing of a region and way of life, so too does Abbey’s river narrative reflect back to better, simpler times.

Abbey’s construction of Glen Canyon as the ideal place in this opening scene is loaded with numerous ideological positions that speak to the nation’s preoccupation with the West, its wilderness, and whom those spaces are for. In *West of Everything* (1992) Jane Tompkins considers the Westerns’ influence on our perceptions of the West and thereby adds significant light to what Abbey expresses through his chapter. Tompkins argues that the West

functions as a symbol of freedom, and of the opportunity for conquest. It seems to offer escape from the conditions of life in modern industrial society: from the mechanized existence, economic dead ends, social entanglements, unhappy personal relations, political injustice. The desire to change places also signals a powerful need for self-transformation, . . . a translation of the self into something purer and more authentic, more intense, more real. (4)

Tompkins’s view of the West echoes what Turner, Fiedler, and Armitage have previously noted. It is a place of renewal, escape, and redemption as one conquers the challenges imposed by the land (and the people there). Much of what she expresses here hearkens back to the Frontier myth as well as the Wilderness myth. The opportunities that the West

offers in terms of isolation and renewal are more specifically embraced within what Roderick Nash identifies as the Wilderness Cult, an American phenomenon which embodies “the widespread appeal of the uncivilized” (145). Emerging in the latter years of the nineteenth century with the nation’s ever increasing industrialization, many Americans looked to previously desolate, forsaken lands as the locus for freedom and renewal.

Such is the inspiration for Abbey’s venture into Glen Canyon. Reeling at the Bureau of Reclamation’s decision to dam the river, Abbey and Newcomb retreat from the trappings of civilization to be reborn “backward in time and into primeval liberty, into freedom in the most simple, literal, primitive meaning of the word,” to “[leave] behind for a while all that we most heartily and joyfully detest. That’s what the first taste of the wild does to a man, after having been too long penned up by the city” (193). Key to Abbey’s rejection of civilization in this passage is his reference to its negative influence on men who suffer by its confining effects, which speaks again to the wilderness ideology in America. As Nash further explains of this time period, “wilderness also acquired importance as a source of virility, toughness, and savagery” (145). William Cronon also comments on this androcentric vision of wilderness suggesting that “a man could be a real man, the rugged individual he was meant to be before civilization sapped his energy and threatened his masculinity” (78). Abbey employs this male-dominant view of the river as a way to both celebrate the river and attack civilization’s effeminizing effect on men. As he looks to the Frontier and Wilderness myths and their emphasis on masculine independence, flight from the city, and conquest over nature, Abbey’s

narrative leaves no question that the river—both as physical and imaginative realm—is a male space.

However, Abbey's choice of setting and incorporation of his male sidekick, Newcomb, are not the only reasons why his text closely aligns with the Western. As the men pack their two rafts, Abbey notes that he's a bit apprehensive to begin the journey since he had left the life vests at home and was about to board mediocre-quality crafts with a partner who had a bum leg. Yet, despite his anxiety, he assumes the code of the West, the bravery in the face of danger that made so many voyages into the region's wild places all the more heroic. He writes, "I keep my cowardly doubts to myself, waiting for Ralph to speak of them first. But he doesn't. Imperturbable as the river itself, tranquil as the sky over-head, he puffs on his corncob pipe, limping back and forth between the truck and the launching point with canned goods and bedrolls" (190).

As Jane Tompkins contends, language and the Western hero are at great odds with one another as the expression of language represents everything the hero hopes to resist. She explains: "Westerns distrust language. Time and again they set up situations whose message is that words are weak and misleading, only actions count; words are immaterial, only objects are real. . . . Doing, not talking, is what it values" (49-50). Thus, in Abbey's opening scene where the two men load their boats, Newcomb is silent, alone with his own unarticulated thoughts, while his actions, the smoking of his pipe and the work he performs, do the speaking in this scene. Not surprisingly, Newcomb has very little to say throughout the ten day voyage. What little we do learn about Abbey's companion is from the brief one-liners or one-word questions that define his speech. During one leisurely afternoon Abbey turns to Newcomb and asks, "where do we come

from?” (203). Such a question that considers the origins of humankind and reaches to the heart of one’s quest for meaning begs a lengthy, perhaps even profound response. Yet in typical Newcomb-Western hero fashion, we’re left with little to grab hold of. The conversation continues as follows:

Newcomb: Who knows?

Abbey: Where are we going?

Newcomb: Who cares.

Abbey: Who?

Newcomb: Who. (202)

This nonsensical exchange resists all attempts to explore such a weighty question. Newcomb shrugs off Abbey’s attempts to philosophize, drawing the author instead into a vacuum of language that leaves Abbey writing at the end of this dialogue, “Words fail” (202). Indeed, words do fail here as the men float onward down the river, and yet, the meaning of this and the opening scene is clear. Language isn’t needed to describe what is happening since its absence suggests all we need to know about the point behind this voyage. As Tompkins reminds us of the Western’s purpose, “Because the genre is in revolt against a Victorian culture where the ability to manipulate language confers power, the Western equates power with ‘not-language.’ And not-language it equates with being male” (55). Therefore, the absence of meaningful communication—the pithy, nihilistic quips by Newcomb—places him squarely within a tradition that views language as a dangerous challenge to his masculinity. “For the really strong man,” Tompkins writes, “language is a snare; it blunts his purpose and diminishes his strength” (51).

While being a man in a Western means shunning language, it also means viewing the landscape as something to possess or control. Such a perspective has dominated Western culture's approach to the land as thoughtfully expressed by numerous scholars like Annette Kolodny whose influential text, *Lay of the Land*, takes up this particular issue. Here she argues in favor of what she identifies as "America's oldest and most cherished fantasy: a daily reality of harmony between man and nature based on an experience of the land as essentially feminine" (4). Noting this pervasive way of viewing the American landscape, Kolodny clarifies that this feminization of the land has led to its exploitation. She writes that we have not only looked at the land "as mother, but the land as woman, the total female principle of gratification—enclosing the individual in an environment of receptivity, repose, and painless and integral satisfaction" (4). This two-sided perspective of the land as both lover and nurturer typifies Abbey's experience as he embarks on his voyage downriver. Stepping away from shore, Abbey paddles his way into the main current and "onto the brown silt-rich bosom of the Colorado" (191). Effortlessly gliding downriver, Abbey's earlier hesitation turns into bliss: "My anxieties have vanished and I feel instead a sense of cradlelike security, of achievement and joy, a pleasure almost equivalent to that first entrance—from the outside—into the neck of the womb" (191). As if Abbey's reverie in this fantasy weren't enough, he goes on to more explicitly note that they were "indeed enjoying a very intimate relation with the river" (191). He continues: "I am fulfilling at last a dream of childhood and one as powerful as the erotic dreams of adolescence—*floating down the river*" (191). He concludes this reverie appealing to a male audience he believes would perfectly understand this

experience. “Every man,” he writes, “that has ever put forth on flowing water knows what I mean” (192).

While Kolodny does not mention Abbey’s text in her study, his work nonetheless stands as an exemplary case of the fantasy and longing that defines much of America’s interaction with nature. This conflation between women and nature has led to the rise of ecofeminism and its proponents, which “assume,” as Connie Bullis states, “that the oppressions of women, races, classes, and nonhuman nature are interconnected parts of the same dynamic” (124). Thus, as Abbey describes the Colorado as an exotic female whose “silt-brown bosom” awaits him and who eagerly succumbs to his sexual desires, there is no consideration of how this female presence responds to such entreaties. The entire description emanates from Abbey’s perspective which suggests that his “lover,” while highly prized, is not an agent unto herself. With no voice, the river is only something to possess to satisfy the explorers’ most immediate needs.

Embodying the typical narrative structure employed by other river narratives, Abbey’s “climax” coincides with his preoccupation with upcoming rapids and the life jackets left at home. Interestingly, however, this high point coalesces in the early pages of the story as Abbey lays out the justification for the trip: “we wish to see [Glen Canyon] as Powell and his party had seen it, not knowing what to expect, making anew discoveries of others” (Abbey 195). As they round a corner, the rapids appear and Abbey writes,

there’s no turning back now. After the entrance, the inescapable spasm.
Between narrowing walls the river rushes at increasing speed. Our little
boats bounce over choppy waves toward the whitecaps that now are

visible, churning to foam around glistening wet boulders strewn across our course, boulders which seem to rise and fall as we race toward them on the bounding current. (195)

Navigating the rocks and waves, the two men exit the rapid in one piece and Abbey notes that “we are still alive” (195). One can’t ignore the sexual imagery or the drama that fills this description. Ironically, many others who floated Glen Canyon in its pre-dam days noted the placid waters; it happened to be quite popular with groups of Boy Scouts and other river novices (Farmer x). Regardless of the severity of the rapids, Abbey borrows this now common topos and casts it in an eroticized light to further underscore the masculine prerogative of exploration and conquest that has long dominated the river.

From Powell’s earliest account through Abbey’s highly nostalgic celebration of a doomed place, Colorado River narratives have adopted the Western’s and dime novel’s formulaic pattern and replication of plot, scene, and character to create its own unique genre. These river Westerns position men at the center of the text, chart their exploits navigating unpredictable and often unknown waters and territories, describe the allure of remote, sublime lands on the protagonists’ psyche, and marginalize community and communicative experiences in favor for isolation and quiet. These characteristics, coupled with specific references to key geologic and cultural sites along the river, demonstrate the writers’ attention to poetic discourse to convey engaging tales of their river experiences. However, like the dime western which is principally concerned with “men writing about men” (Brown 32), the Colorado River boating narrative is equally concerned (whether consciously or not) with delineating the river running experience as a male pursuit. Thus, the pervasive poetic discourse that harnesses these common topoi

gives way to the rhetorical which delineate boundaries and sections of this genre as the offspring of an exclusive discourse community. As I will now begin to show, however, as a closer look at the historic record reveals, men are not the sole arbiters on who can speak about and for the river, and while the women who write about the river may adopt some of the conventions from their male counterparts, they add nuance, recontextualize, and even transform some of these to create a new literary version of the river and its culture.

Female River Westerns: Navigating the Rough Waters of Convention

At first glance a reading of women's Colorado River narratives through the lens of the Western and its constituent features may seem incompatible as the Western has demonstrated ambivalence and often antagonism toward a woman's presence in the West. Yet, if we consider the genesis of the Western, such a reading is not so far outside the pale. As Brown notes, the first dime Western was written by a woman (vi). Moreover, as Norris Yates suggests in his analysis of women in Westerns, Owen Wister looked to Mary Hallock Foote's *The Led-Horse Claim: A Romance of a Mining Camp* (1883) as one of the primary inspirations for *The Virginian*, which "could be labeled the first formula Western" (11).

Foote's role in the development of the Western cannot be overlooked as her own experiences living in the West motivated her writing to employ poetic and rhetorical discourse as a means of refashioning the conventions of the already well-established dime Western and thereby provide critical views on the dramatic landscapes and heroic deeds this formula promotes. As Krista Comer acknowledges, the product of her time in the West "enfranchised and authorized [her] 'local' and 'female' knowledges, transforming them, in the process, into legitimate public knowledges which then were more

strategically situated to contest the reigning masculinism of the ‘official’ national sphere” (“Talking Feminism” 115). Juxtaposing traditional male representations of the West based on the Frontier, Garden, and Wilderness myths, Foote relies on her acquired “knowledges” to present alternative versions of the region in her writing which reflect her uncertainty of the West’s promises. As Shelly Armitage reminds us, “Mrs. Foote’s fiction and reminiscences tell a story of constant tension between dreams and reality—a tension which is most often resolved in disappointment” (163). In the case of her short story “Maverick,” first published in 1894 in *Century Magazine*, Foote exploits this struggle between viewing the West as a receptacle for the nation’s longings with the cold, hard facts of living in an arid region to challenge the potent male-dominated world that dictated Western water use. Recent Colorado River boating texts by women will adopt a similar approach of appropriation and critique of the Western genre to comment on their presence on the river.

While written during the twelve years she and her family resided in Idaho, “Maverick” is a classic tale of love and tragedy set within the foreboding landscapes Debra Shein identifies today as Craters of the Moon National Monument (250). Appropriating poetic discourse through the topoi characteristic of regionalist writing and Western fiction, Foote endows her work with a beautiful maiden, western justice, and raw nature to create an exciting tale of love and death. At the same time, however, her use of this genre allows Foote to comment on the plight of the nineteenth-century woman and to consider her options that challenge the status quo for how a woman should live her life—a move that many of the women boaters will adopt a century later to justify their presence on the Colorado. But Foote is concerned with more than just playing to the audience’s

sympathies for the protagonist's precarious situation. Through Foote's characterization of Rose Gilroy and her relationships with the text's male characters and the landscape, "Maverick" becomes Foote's vehicle through which she reveals her insecurity of Western life and expresses her skepticism toward western reclamation doctrine and the patriarchal ideologies that promote it.

Cast as the classic "story of Beauty and the Beast" (546), "Maverick" is the tragic tale of the Lemhi County sheriff and the woman he loves. Narrated through the voice of a young man traveling through Southern Idaho on a hunting trip, this tale relates the story of Maverick, whom the Gilroy family raised after an Indian attack left him orphaned and his face brutally scarred. Hardened by western justice and his own repulsiveness, Maverick keeps a close watch on the Gilroy home and on the family's one daughter, Rose. When she flees the stage-stop with a Swede, Maverick and the narrator pursue the two fugitives across the forsaken landscape of the lava flats where the sheriff eventually guns down Rose's lover. There in Deadman's Gulch, she is taken captive by her two pursuers and led back toward Traveling Buttes. Yet rather than live with the oppressive confines of western life and Maverick's constant and hideous gaze, Rose escapes into the lava flats and to her supposed death.

Rose's plight, Maverick's unbending will, the ignorance of a tenderfoot fresh from the East, and the alien landscape provide "Maverick" with the perfect combination for writing the potboiler that would alleviate the Foote family's financial stress. And although Foote demonstrates her skillful treatment of the genre, she is far from a hack just out to make a buck. Like so many dime novels, "Maverick" reveals much more than a fanciful and romanticized tale of love and loss as it speaks to the social conditions of its

day by embedding more subversive, challenging critiques within pervasive stereotypes about gender and land use. Surrounded by a landscape responsible for the family's continual financial insecurity and the fleeting hopes of western reclamation which seemed to perpetuate their tenuous situation, Foote looks to her fiction to express her bleak outlook. Through the classic stereotypes of the dime novel and specifically its treatment of the "woman in peril" motif—another topos of the Western—"Maverick" becomes a powerful rebuttal to western reclamation.¹³

When the narrator first introduces the reader to Traveling Buttes, he remarks on how "the country is destitute of water. To say that it is 'thirsty' is to mock with vain imagery that dead and mummied land on the borders of the Black Lava" (544). While the near-lifeless landscape informs the reader of the tale's setting, it equally foreshadows Rose's pathetic situation. When the narrator finally learns of Gilroy's daughter, he relates Rose's oppressed upbringing as she lives at the mercy of a senile father, his "crookedness" (544) and that of her brothers, and Maverick's constant surveillance. Under such conditions Rose possesses few options for mobility and independence. Foote reemphasizes the girl's pitiable situation after the death of the Swede and her capture by Maverick and the tenderfoot. Riding the lonely trail back toward Buttes, the narrator asks Rose what she will do with her life. In previous outbursts of fear and sadness she hopes to die so not to return to the life she hates. But collecting herself she confides in the narrator and woefully expresses how "nobody can help me. There ain't nowhere for me to go" (549). She recognizes that her one chance at freedom is gone and that the future holds

¹³ In her article, "Through Women's Eyes," Armitage points to how Western history has represented women, identifying them through stereotypes of "the refined lady, the helpmate, and the bad woman" (12). Rose most closely aligns with the lady who is "either uncomfortable, unhappy, or is driven literally crazy by the frontier" (12).

little for a single woman who refuses to follow the marriage conventions of her day. And although she loathes Maverick because he represents much of what is oppressive to her, she explains, “but it ain’t him I’m running away from. It’s myself—my own life” (549). Recognizing that life in Traveling Buttes is nothing more than prison for a girl such like herself, she opts in the end for the only chance of freedom available to her by fleeing into the barren wilderness. Such flight from the restrictive and often oppressive forces that dictate women’s lives emerges as a key factor for why Buyer’s protagonist in *Side Canyons* chooses to leave her home for a rafting trip down the Colorado.

While Rose sees a future of entrapment, her captors see her life in an entirely different light. The narrator views Rose as “all woman, and helpless” and Maverick echoes this sentiment when he tells Rose “you can’t get along [in town] without me” (548). Maverick would hope to marry the girl despite his repulsiveness and so continues to hold her against her will wishing that she’ll succumb to his entreaties. Depicted as an oppressed subject, Rose becomes a powerful symbol through which Foote comments on the plight of both western women and the land they share. As I previously suggested the conquering of the American landscape since the arrival of Europeans has resulted from the equation of land as female by those making the New World home (Kolodny 5). According to Kolodny this notion has shaped both the physical and imaginary landscape of the region and has led to such ideologies as the “pastoral impulse” which represents “a yearning to know and to respond to the landscape as feminine” (8). Nowhere is this theory better illustrated than in the Westward expansion that dominated the nineteenth century and looked to alter the arid landscapes into a well-watered Eden.

Such are the themes Foote takes up in “Maverick”’s opening scenes. Marveling at the stark aridity of the region, the narrator extends his musings beyond the local geography to include views of the economic factors involved with procuring water in the West. Riding through Traveling Buttes with his guide, he describes how the people operating the stage-house tapped a spring, piped the water to them, and “sold it to travelers on that Jericho road at so much per horse. The man was thrown in, but the man usually drank whiskey” (544). Although such an observation seems harmless, it speaks volumes about the role of water in the region. Not only does the narrator share this crucial detail about the value of water in the west, he relates his guide’s opinion of water exchange. As the guide “commented unfavorably on this species of husbandry,” he also suggests that “any man that will jump God’s water in a place like this, and sell it the same as drinks—he’d sell water to his own father in hell!” (544). While these comments introduce Maverick to the reader, they also provide insight about Foote’s perspective on water use. So that the reader doesn’t forget this initial affront to a burgeoning practice, she returns in the closing pages to reassert her position.

When Rose and her two captors stop at Belgian Flat to refresh themselves at the spring that Rose and the Swede dug the day before, Foote once again lashes out against the region’s obsession with exploiting the resource for gain. The narrator explains how Maverick dismounts and then takes up some water and mixes it in his whiskey flask which he offers to Rose. Despite her initial refusal to drink, she acquiesces and drains the flask. Instead of reviving her, however, the beverage’s effect “made her deathly sick” (549). With the Western mantra “whiskey is for drinking, water is for fighting” underlying these references, Foote underscores the significance of water in the region and

the desire to control its power. As Rose refuses to drink at the behest of Maverick, the narrator instead tries to get her imbibe. With the cup held to her lips, Rose finally succumbs. Such events not only speak to Rose's physical subjection by her captors, but the ideological oppression she faces. Following Kolodny's land-as-female argument and the fact that the lead female's name represents a type of flower, we can read Rose as an obvious metaphor for the land. As she finally drinks, she becomes the Western lands over which reclamation doctrine flows with its luring promises of life and prosperity.

In this scene where the men try to force Rose to drink from the spring's life-saving waters, Foote ironically comments on the widely held belief that by harnessing the West's rivers through reclamation, the otherwise arid and useless land would "bloom like a rose." Having spent many years in the arid West and seeing first-hand the complicated and intricate process of appropriating water for mining and agricultural purposes, Foote aptly names her leading lady. Rose's life seems to wither from the oppression she faces while she symbolizes those lands prized not for what they are without manipulation and intervention, but what they could become. Representative of the land, Rose and her fate become a sort of cautionary tale to those believing they too can manipulate and control the region's waters for gain. No matter how much one tries to exert control and coax the land to comply, the conditions of the arid west ultimately refuse to bend to humanity's whims. Lamenting the ruin of independent subjects by the whim of outside force, Foote leaves the reader to ponder those things as precious as "God's water" to ensure that no more are lost to the pipe dreams of western myth (548).

While the conclusion suggests the protagonist's demise, Foote gives her protagonist a chance at freedom—regardless of the cost—and thereby writes a strong

female character into the narrative. However, it seems that the only hope for Rose's independence is through her death rather than an escape from civilization and its oppressive forces—in this case the expectations for marriage and the life with a man she does not love. Notwithstanding her inability to achieve the type of freedom her male counterparts enjoy, Rose's resoluteness and willingness to sacrifice convention for her own sense of liberty foreshadows the characterization of women boaters that will come in the following century. As Foote appropriates the dime Western's topoi to explore the effect of Western myths on women, she lays a foundation for other female authors to challenge stereotypes and position women within a historical trajectory of Western experience that is more indicative of what really occurred in this particular place. Evident in their narratives, these women rely on the Western genre for various effects. At times, they rely heavily on the genre to forward their stories while in others they reject and adapt the topoi to meet their specific needs. Thus, poetic and rhetorical discourse motivates these women's boating narratives as they praise the river's beauty, reflect on their experience on the river, and challenge the exclusive and oppressive ideas and practices that have marginalized their presence on the river and within this unique literary tradition.

A closer examination of the Colorado River's boating history reveals a longstanding presence that challenges the notion that running the river is purely the physical and discursive domain for men. In *River Runners of the Grand Canyon* (1985) David Lavender traces the history of the intrepid voyagers who made the river's first recorded passages through this region. Although the vast majority of these individuals were men, Lavender acknowledges some of the first women who left their mark on the

river and canyon. These include Edith Kolb who is believed to be the first woman to have run a major rapid on the Colorado when she joined her brothers for a brief stint during their run to Mexico and Elzada Clover and Lois Jotter who floated from Green River, Utah to Lake Mead in 1937 with Norm Nevills as part of a University of Michigan sponsored botanical survey to become the first women to navigate this stretch of the river (62, 96-97). Speaking of Clover, Lavender explains that this was “an historically important expedition, for she and other women, too, if possible would be the first of their sex to traverse the last American wilderness” (96). This precedent would pave the way for Doris Nevills, Norm’s wife, and Mildred Baker, who in 1940, would join Norm on an expedition to retrace Powell’s journey, and thereby make these women the first to float from Green River, Wyoming to Lake Mead (100).

Interestingly, Lavender fails to note the voyage of Mary Remsen North, a ten-year-old Girl Scout, who traveled with her parents down the Colorado from the Boulder Canyon dam site to Yuma, AZ nearly a decade before Clover and Jotter. While her journey did not cover much of the “wilder” stretches of river that these other women traversed, North’s experience is valuable for a number of reasons. First, with the help of her father, North turned her recorded experiences into her 1930 publication *Down the Colorado By a Lone Girl Scout, Mary Remsen North*, which represents the first known account from a child who was out to both recreate and learn about the Colorado. Second, it captures brief responses from governors of each of the seven basin states who shared their often optimistic views about the promises of Boulder Dam and reclamation. Third, and perhaps most significant to this discussion of female river narratives and their relationship to a traditionally male dominated genre, are the introductory words provided

by none other than Frederick Dellenbaugh. His opening remarks of praise for North, her adventurous spirit, and her book initiate a slight opening in an otherwise exclusive fraternity of river runners whose voices dominated the public's understanding of the Colorado. But because North traveled under the supervision of her mother and father, it would take many more decades for a single woman's presence to find acceptance on the river.

It was not until the 1950s and 1960s that the pioneering spirit of these first female river travelers gain significant traction. This period saw women like Georgie Clark make the river and its stretch through the canyon lands of the Four Corner's region her home. Today, Clark can be seen as the female equivalent to Powell: a river pioneer whose experience and knowledge would change forever how those who followed would experience the Colorado and its canyons. Instead of employing boats, Clark's first experiences on the river relied only on a lifejacket and her traveling companion, Harry Aleson. Together they twice swam sections of the Grand Canyon in 1945 and 1946, experiences which introduced Clark to the beauty and power of the river that would transform her forever. Following these trips, Clark began to raft the canyon alone, often going solo for weeks on end where she would see no one. While she reveled in this time alone, she desired to share her love of the river with others. As Clark explains in her autobiography, *Georgie Clark: Thirty Years of River Running*, "I wanted to make the river accessible to everyone regardless of age, sex or physical condition" (90). Such efforts led to drastic innovation in the types of watercraft used to navigate the river and its rapids. A shameless self-promoter, Clark notes how her inspiration to tie three inflatable rafts together—what she would dub the G-rig—allowed her to be the "first

river adventurer to run all rapids consistently” and the “first person to take large groups down the river” (12). These hallmarks along with her ongoing devotion to the river and boating appropriately led to Clark’s self-appointed title as “Woman of the River” (9).

Sharing Powell’s intrepid spirit to explore the river as no one had done previously, Clark is a pioneer within the boating community. Her reputation alone has become legendary along the river. And in many ways, her narrative seems to fall right in line with the male genre as her early excursions emphasize her love of the freedom of being on the river when so few people knew it and sharing these precious experiences with a trusted companion, Aleson. Yet, as her work also demonstrates, Clark does not share the typical male longing for wilderness evident in the narratives of those before and after hers. Although she revels in her solo trips she also desires to make the boating experience more egalitarian and does so as she challenges the boundaries of conventional wisdom regarding the type of craft with which one should navigate the river and its rapids. Thus, despite numerous references throughout her text that stress her “first” at achieving this and that—references which sound more typical of the men’s accounts down the river—she balances these achievements through her appeals to make the river accessible to more people. Rather than conquering the river and then leaving it with a number of “firsts” to her name, she returns again and again to ensure that anyone with a desire to run the river has an opportunity.

As Clark played an integral role in making the river more accessible to people from all walks of life, countless women have ventured to the Colorado in search of the adventure and freedom afforded to previous explorers. Many of these women have captured their experiences on the river in writing as a means of communicating the

dramatic impact this natural entity has on shaping character and perspective. Such accounts demonstrate an ongoing conversation with mainstream discourses about the West evident in their engagement with tenets of the Western and the wilderness idea. However, we can trace their reactions to a more archetypal process of experiencing nature. In *The Wilderness Within* Kristine Groover identifies what she describes as “the spiritual quest,” and argues that it is “the quintessential American experience [that] is central to both American mythology and literature” (1). Defined by “heroic protagonists [who] undertake physical journeys whose destination is a greater understanding of or connection to the spiritual world,” Groover’s text considers how this pursuit for personal enlightenment has been primarily a male enterprise as demonstrated by much of American canonical literature, and as the previous discussion suggests, by what can be considered as canonical Western and Colorado River narratives (1). She explains, “a spiritual quest tradition which mandates solitary flight from family and community is a tradition which pointedly excludes women” (3). In *The Environmental Imagination* (1995), Lawrence Buell calls this male-dominated quest an “androcentric pastoral escape” that he sees as “the great tradition within American literary naturism” (25). With such a powerful and pervasive trend in American literature dictating for whom such excursions into the wild exist, it is not surprising that women are absent from much of the literature of the Colorado River which often foregrounds the pursuit of truth and knowledge as one engages with the region’s dramatic landscapes.

Yet Groover argues that, while this search for enlightenment is predominantly a male activity, women also enact their own form of the spiritual quest. “Because the life experiences of women and men are so often different,” she writes, “different activities

enact the spiritual in women's and men's texts" (11). While she identifies the flight into nature as the male search for meaning, she posits "three areas of female experience which serve in American women's writing as realms of the spiritual: domesticity, community, and storytelling" (11). Groover argues that it is through these realms that women "*create* sacredness by effecting positive transformation" (11). While this perspective traces a particular entry of female discourse into a predominantly male pursuit—one which proves useful to the following discussion regarding female boating narratives—it nonetheless fails to fully capture the complexity of how these women river runners negotiate their experiences on the Colorado. Although many of the women who travel to the river enact a very similar quest as they seek out one of the nation's most rugged and iconic landscapes for personal enlightenment, they nonetheless do so by complicating both the typical male approaches and the essentialized triad of female discourses Groover prescribes for women writers entering the wilderness. Groover envisions the domestic and communal realms as quintessential female spheres that are diametrically opposed to the male world of the public sphere and the solitary figure in the wilderness. Likewise, she suggests that the stories women tell reinforce these fixed boundaries (11-16).

However, as the proliferation of female Colorado River narratives over the last two decades demonstrates, their stories which construct these traditional female topoi as both liberating and oppressive to the protagonists problematize representations of home and community. Although the protagonists of these texts approach the river for different reasons and often challenge the essentialist perspectives inherent in discussions of the home and community, they all share a common bond in joining those of previous eras who loved the river and who were willing to set aside in varying degrees society's

expectations for women in search of their own fulfillment. Like the negotiation that takes place on the river as one charts a course through turbulent waters, these recent women's texts move between what have been traditional male and female modes of representing wilderness and gender expectations to chart their own paths which are equally valuable in a broader assessment of Colorado River discourse. Significant contributions within this growing corpus include those texts by McCairen, Buyer, and Teal which center their narratives on rafting within the Colorado's approximately 280 mile stretch through the Grand Canyon which has produced the vast majority of Colorado River narratives.¹⁴ Certainly, this emphasis on breadth somewhat compromises my attempt at a more thorough analysis of a singular text. Since my purpose here is to underscore how the female presence is not resigned to an isolated case which can be easily considered an anomaly, addressing numerous texts reveals that there exists a figurative "gathering of waters" as more and more female voices enter the literary discourse of the Colorado. Through these three women's texts we begin to see how poetic and rhetorical discourse makes the Colorado River corridor a more complicated imaginative place that encourages the presence and participation of tributary voices.

Patricia McCairen

In *Canyon Solitude*, McCairen appropriates and refashions the Colorado River Western to explore her own insecurities and joys as a single, middle-aged woman and to ultimately argue for the legitimacy of a woman's experience on the river. This memoir chronicles her journey rafting the Grand Canyon solo and the experiences that led up to this momentous decision in her life. She begins her tale *in media res*, perched on a ledge

¹⁴ There are a number of other narratives that focus on tributaries of the Colorado like the Escalante, Green, and San Juan Rivers. Examples include Meloy's *Raven's Exile*, Ann Weiler Walka's *Walking the Unknown River* and *Waterlines*, and Ann Zwinger's *Run, River, Run*.

in the heart of the Grand Canyon, unable to move for fear of falling. Revealing her fear of heights, she draws a connection to the same inaction in her life that has stalled her progress toward becoming what she envisions. She confides:

The same fear that has kept me stuck in life so many times before, afraid to move forward, to take a step that would free me from the ordinary, the mundane, the insufferable. A crippling fear that deadens my potential and limits my relationship with the world. It's so easy to cling to the familiar, even when it's deplorable. (5)

Yet in the midst of such paralysis, she finds the will to move and slowly inches her way to safety, knowing that "I've taken more difficult steps in life, chosen pathways that required more of me than this single step" (5). She concludes the opening chapter stating that "The canyon has spared me once again" (6).

These three passages establish the direction of McCairen's text and reveal her motivation for being on the river. Within them we find the traditional Western boating topos of being challenged by nature, facing fear, and ultimate triumph. At the same time, however, McCairen's sentiments embody a sense of humility not often seen in many Westerns. Unlike the undaunted hero who is prepared to face any challenge, she recognizes her fears which have long plagued her both in and out of the canyon. Much more debilitating than Abbey's hesitancy to go down the river without a life jacket, McCairen's fear is a deeply felt sense of failure and inadequacy resulting from her inability to live up to other's expectations and her own dreams. It is this kind of fear that leads her to stay in the same rut day in and day out, choosing safety and sadness rather than risk and possible freedom. Far from the uncertainty and trepidation that Powell and

his acolytes face as they venture through a rapid, McCairen's fear reveals a vulnerability unlike anything the male narrators seem to suggest. Out of these opening pages surfaces a text that is at once ready to invoke a traditional male genre and reassert its topoi while also using those same elements to comment on the woman's place in society and on the river. This continual negotiation between perpetuating a well-established formula and repeatedly critiquing it establishes McCairen's text as one of the foundational Colorado River boating narratives that places a woman at the center of the text rather than a man. Even more than White, McCairen is ever cognizant of her marginalized position as a woman and uses her trip down the Colorado with its trials and triumphs as a larger metaphor for how to challenge the status quo to create a new vision for women's opportunities on and off the river.

To effect this change, *Canyon Solitude* perpetuates a number of male river Western conventions. Along with the numerous discussions about adventure, sublime geography, and facing challenges, McCairen feminizes the river in a complicated way that both aligns with Abbey's sexualized portrayal and Kolodny's earth-as-mother topos. McCairen describes the Colorado as "A sleek, beautiful goddess, alluringly seductive, forgiving to those who love her," a river that "entices" and is "beguiling" (51, 52). But earlier passages reveal that the river is less a lover than a nurturer. She refers to the Colorado as "Mother River" and endows it with strength rather than the passivity that defines Abbey's river (22). McCairen explains that "She is a power that teaches those who open themselves to her. Her lessons may be subtle, or frightening. She cares not if we learn: It is up to us to seek her out" (51). While these passages reproduce what has traditionally been a male-dominated cliché of Mother Earth, McCairen's use endows the

river with agency along with lines of what Childs does with the desert in the previous chapter. Thus, a continual struggle emerges throughout this narrative between McCairen's need to enter a male-dominated genre to tell her story and her appropriation of the topoi to make her unique voice heard.

The reliance that McCairen has on this genre and its topoi continue as she recounts her voyage down the Colorado. Traveling downriver, McCairen finds that her ability to see the canyon and reflect on her experience is highly mediated by men. As she comes to Red Wall Cavern, she references Powell's and Abbey's perspectives on this famous alcove and notes an arch near Thirty-six Mile Rapid named by the Kolb's as "The Bridge of Sighs" (87, 104). Likewise, when she reaches the ancient granaries in Nankoweap Canyon, another typical stop for Grand Canyon river trips, she references Fletcher's account of the area captured in another of his texts. Attempting to recreate the scene of those who lived in the canyon hundreds of years earlier, she admits, "All I see is Colin Fletcher doing it" (115). These references to those sites made famous by previous river runners speak to McCairen's ongoing negotiation of her own experience on the river. Struggling to find her own voice and tell her own story, she often finds her journey mediated by men whose writings continually remind the author that she is a trespasser in this male domain.

Notwithstanding the pervasive physical and imaginative reminders that men have shaped how to see and experience the river, McCairen's text works within the genre's poetic discourse to posit alternative ways of knowing the river and thereby create a complex rhetorically motivated narrative. Her writing demonstrates a continual give and take between the male genre and her manipulation of it as she argues for a woman's

rightful place on the river and desire to pursue her dreams even if contrary to societal norms and expectations that have traditionally assigned a woman's place within a domestic, communal sphere. A powerful example of this appropriation and critique emerges in her discussion of her first visit to the Grand Canyon and river, which initially locates her experience squarely within the predictable retreat-to-wilderness-for-rejuvenation topos. Toward the beginning of the narrative she notes that "I was born on the Colorado River at the bottom of the Grand Canyon, thirty-five years after my initial birth in New York City" (12). An avid vacationer to various parts of the world, McCairen decides to follow the suggestion of a friend to spend her next trip on a guided raft tour down the Colorado through the Grand Canyon. With few expectations, McCairen soon finds her descent into the canyon enchanting, leaving her "totally overwhelmed the farther I descended" (16). Once on the river, the rafting party soon encounters its first of many rapids that mark the first day's journey downriver. Plummeting through Horn Rapid McCairen explains that

. . . we dove into the trough of the wave. Before the raft rose again, everything in it was covered with water. *Wet!* I did not expect to be so wet. The raft dipped and rose, dipped and rose. Something in me snapped. With each motion I screamed—not a cry of fear or pain but of utter joy, released enthusiastically, naturally. I was vulnerable and open and totally happy. I was a child again, uninhibited, wild and free, riding a roller coaster with the excitement and anticipation of hanging on the brink before plunging down the near vertical slope. (20)

McCairen's reaction to her experience descending into the canyon and crashing through rapids is predictable in terms of the poetic discourse she uses to praise the area's wilderness condition that presently defines the nation's fascination with remote, wild places. And to some degree, the outcome of this experience is similarly expected; she, like so many others who have flocked to the West in search of fulfillment, decides to abandon her "civilized" life in New York for "the rivers of the West and a tipi on Colorado's high plateau" (23).

McCairen's use of the topos of rebirth and renewal clearly aligns these revelations with the Frontier and Wilderness myths that define so many other Westerns. Despite the apparent conventionality of this flight to the West in order to find herself anew, McCairen's rebirth signals a complicated engagement with the Western genre's treatment of identity and the reassertion of masculinity that derives from journeying downriver. For Powell, Dellenbaugh, Kolb, and Abbey, a river adventure meant heading into the unknown, testing oneself against nature, and retreating from civilization's ailments. For McCairen the case is more or less similar. Yet, unlike these men who often journeyed for the sake of adventure, she seeks the river to deal with an inner crisis, one that is perhaps best understood in light of Colin Fletcher's rationale for heading down the river on his own solo trip a few years previous to McCairen's. He explains in *River* (1997), his own account of the journey, that he went because "I . . . realized that I'd grown soft. Things had been going too well lately. Too easily. I needed something to pare the fat off my soul . . . to make me grateful, again, for being alive (7). Echoing Abbey's critique of civilization, Fletcher looks to wilderness to restore his vitality. McCairen similarly looks to the river to facilitate this transformation, but again, the rationale is different. Rather

than enjoying a cushy life where a trip to the wild can possibly remind Fletcher of his manliness, McCairen's life is anything but easy. Granted, she enjoys a job that allows her to spend weekends in Europe and vacation throughout the world. But what she realizes on her first trip through the canyon is that she's been living a life not wholly her own.

As a result of experiencing the "wildness and freedom" of the canyon and river which "continued to haunt" the author, McCairen begins to take control of her life, something that she had not done previously as she lived according to other's expectations of her (22). Only when she finds herself crashing through Horn Rapid does this new sense of being emerge. Naming this newly born version of herself, Babe, McCairen reflects on this raft trip:

Something deeper had happened, something I didn't understand. A stranger had emerged in the canyon, and she fought to remain present. I tried to stuff her back wherever she had come from but she wouldn't have it. Babe had been born on the river and she demanded attention, she insisted on recognition. . . . Babe didn't want to be a sexy girl with bleached blond hair, makeup and short skirts to show off legs that turned men's heads. . . . She didn't care about being acceptable to others or pleasing men at her own expense. (22-23)

Reminiscent of Charlotte Perkins Gilman's woman trying to escape the confines of the yellow wallpaper, McCairen's Babe emerges from the rapid's froth to challenge the traditional topos of rebirth. Rather than purposefully seeking wilderness's solitude to rejuvenate one's self as Fletcher, Abbey, and so many others do, McCairen's description of this "rebirth" suggests that her experience was entirely unexpected. She explains that

she had no experience on rivers or camping out in the wild—her narrative suggests that at this point she was entirely ignorant of the so-called promises of the wilderness myth; she had no expectations for what would happen on the trip. And unlike Fletcher's desire to regain a sense of purpose and his identity as a man, McCairen's experience suggests more of a first birth rather than a rebirth. Having tried to conform her life according to certain gendered identities dictated by society's standards for beauty and how a woman should supposedly act toward men, the appearance of Babe not only gives McCairen the first real sense of who she is, but also challenges the traditional woman-as-temptress character that defines many Westerns. This reformulation of the topos of rebirth-in-wilderness takes on a new meaning as McCairen advocates for her new beginning. Although McCairen replicates a journey down the Colorado similar to so many men who have come before her, she reorients the voyage to speak to the freedom that comes not from fleeing civilization because of its effeminizing effects, but from casting off societal expectations regarding her gendered identity that have prevented her from seeing a more complex and honest version of herself.

The emphasis McCairen places on her rebirth as Babe, a woman whose identity transcends limiting and oppressive views of women, is further reinforced through her passage through the rapid. While her descent into the Inner Gorge, the Grand Canyon's deepest and narrowest stretch, is a clear metaphor for her entrance into the womb, her journey through the rapid is depicted not through exploitive, sexualized terms between an adventurer conquering the river as in Abbey's account, but through the maternal experience of giving birth. Similar to Hyde's shift in perspective discussed in this chapter's introduction, McCairen attempts in this scene to construct the river and canyon

as a woman's place, distancing it from the typical feminization and sexualization of the river by various male authors.

While this scene initiates McCairen's journey to establish her own rightful position on the river, it is her actual solo voyage down the river and her reflections on her past that she further challenges the exclusivity of the Colorado boating experience and reveals the ongoing process of her rebirth. Central to achieving her new life is a reconciliation with the feelings of inadequacy she feels as a woman and the fear of being alone. In planning her Grand Canyon solo trip she confides that while motivated to rekindle the sense of freedom of empowerment experienced when Babe was born and while working as a guide on smaller rivers throughout the West, she was gripped by the fear of solitude. Her chapter "Going Solo" charts her wavering and apprehension, recognizing that her real fear was less of what could happen but "the aloneness of it. Facing whatever there was to face alone" (39). While a solo voyage down the Colorado is no small undertaking and certainly worthy of such concerns, McCairen's worries are all the more exacerbated by the ongoing lack of confidence she recounts from her experiences as a woman. She recalls attempts to secure employment as a Colorado River guide and the subsequent rejection because "Though I looked and felt ten years younger, I suspected that at forty they thought I was too old, though men my age had no problem being hired" (70). This rejection carries a sting that she explores throughout the text, questioning it later on when she meets another rafting party at one of the river's many sand bars. Seeing that most of those in the group are men, she explains that she desires to show "how brave and independent I am" in an attempt to prove to herself and them that she belongs on the river (132). McCairen's preoccupation to justify who she is and to

give Babe full expression leads her to look to the river for answers and guidance. As it first gave voice to Babe, it now becomes her mentor, leading her out of the depths of insecurity to see a bright future where she takes charge of her own life. By studying the river and learning the techniques to successfully and safely negotiate the river's obstacles she discovers that "using the river's strength, direction, and flow helped me more than absolute control or total passivity" (170). This ongoing interaction with the river over a number of years facilitates this ongoing awakening that McCairen experiences and establishes a close connection with the river that one should not attempt to completely control or give way to. She speaks to an intimate balance of give and take that allows her to move safely downriver and which provides a useful metaphor for our own considerations of the how we interact with the river.

McCairen continues to rely on this river-as-life metaphor as a way to chart her rebirth. In her conclusion, she reflects back on the lessons learned while on the river and acknowledges that "Some days I'll have perfect runs, and other days I'll eddy out and flounder around in murky water before continuing on downstream. But unlike in the past, now *I'm* the one at the oars" (246). Until her solo voyage, McCairen lived her life according to the dictates of others. But faced with challenges that only she can overcome, the journey down the Colorado allows her to discover the strength of character that had lain dormant until given a chance to grow. Far different from Fletcher's or Abbey's narratives which seek a revitalization of what they see as their true selves once the façade of civilization is removed, McCairen's account of her rejuvenation is a discovery of, not a return to, her true identity. As she heads off into the wilds of the canyon, she overturns the wilderness myth's flight-from-the-city topos to suggest that it is just as much the

oppression of a male-dominated society that one needs to escape from as the effeminizing effects many male writers attempt to relinquish in their own quests for the wild.

Associated with the topos of rebirth is McCairen's negotiation of the domestic sphere through her reflections on the relationship she has with her mother. Described as a hyper-critical woman, McCairen's mother represents the conventionality that the author seeks to escape. As she reflects on her journey that led her to a solo voyage through the Grand Canyon, McCairen notes the oppressive influences she felt dictated her life and looks to her mother as the full expression of that oppression. She writes of a "society that favored boys over girls" and the many male teachers throughout her adolescent years who "discouraged girls from contemplating college or pursuing a career" (93, 94). Yet, McCairen explains that in respect to this latter group, "My mother was worse" (94). McCairen elaborates: "Whether I expressed interest in acceptable female professions such as teaching or library science, or traditional male occupations such as zoology or law, her response was the same: 'College will be a waste. You're just going to get married and have children'" (94). Continually reminded of her mother's expectations but seeing the reality of her mother's unhappiness in marriage McCairen believes that "getting married and having children was a fate worse than death" (188). With these new realizations McCairen pursues a life that on the surface rejects this domestic future as she seeks out solitude and self-discovery in the West's mountains and canyons.

However, while McCairen brusquely turns her back on the life her mother anticipated for her, she nonetheless embraces the elements of the home as she rethinks her place within the canyon. When she is reborn in the rapid during her first visit to the canyon, she speaks of "My Mother River, My Father Canyon" (20) and her alter-ego

Babe, who “Like a newborn screaming in her crib . . . demanded nourishment and attention (21). By evoking the nuclear family McCairen’s text reveals a latent desire to have the security and support represented within the ideal of the traditional home and family. Yet, she constructs this home on her own terms, setting up as parental figures the river and canyon to which she now attaches herself. When she passes safely through Crystal Rapid, one of the most feared sections of whitewater on the Colorado, McCairen remarks, “This river is my mother and she loves me” (171). Recognizing the failings of her own family life which was marked by an absent father and a bitter, depressed mother, McCairen reconstructs her lineage within the canyon to formulate her ideal version of the family based on love, openness, and freedom.

Just as McCairen recasts the domestic sphere to better align her own desires, she questions what she feels are unequal and unfair expectations that define men’s and women’s behavior and which prevent women from seeking adventures like her own. “Men, for the most part, have not been labeled peculiar when they go adventuring alone,” she writes. “Rather, they are considered brave and daring. Of course, by keeping women tied to the kitchen and bedroom, a man has someone to come home to, someone to swoon over his heroic deeds” (199). Recognizing the confining nature of such relationships, McCairen posits an alternative option for those like herself who are often more comfortable alone than with others: “There are some of us who simply can’t be tied down. It’s a positive response to our nature rather than a negative reaction to our past. My restlessness and need for change, my curiosity to see the world, may make me an unsuitable mate” (200). McCairen’s acknowledgment that her life is probably better off by being alone certainly hints at the male writers’ desire for solitude in far off places. But

her consideration of a life of solitude in and out of wilderness carries this desire beyond what the men's narratives suggest. Rather than a periodic escape from society to clear one's mind, McCairen's work suggests a much more comprehensive withdrawal from society, domesticity, and the traditional woman's life. She must rely on the topos of solitary adventure typically associated with men in these narratives in order to distance herself from the conventional role of women, but as she extends it further than most male river narratives do, McCairen draws up a far more complex and conflicted perspective of what it means to live between these competing narratives that position adventure and freedom within a man's world and confinement and disappointment within a woman's.

McCairen does not clearly resolve this conflict within the text. In the final pages of the narrative her quest for freedom through solitude turns on its head. As she moves slowly through the impounded waters of Lake Mead at her journey's end, she realizes that her "search for freedom has led me into a trap. It is only through commitment—first to myself then perhaps to another—that I can ever know complete freedom" (245). For McCairen, this solo journey through the depths of the Grand Canyon has allowed her time and space to probe the recesses of her soul to better understand her responsibility to herself and others and the liberty that can come by attending to both. Recognizing that she does not have to choose a life of complete isolation or of compromise, she reaches the trip's terminus enlightened by the emotional and physical strength honed on the river. Realizations such as these place *Canyon Solitude* in line with countless other texts in American literature where Groover's articulation of the spiritual quest is at the heart of the work. Yet, McCairen's ability to work within and against typical conventions of the androcentric river narrative embodies the complexity that McCairen and other female

adventurers must face as they describe their presence on the river. Torn between expectations of whom and where they should be, they negotiate conventionality to create a space for their own distinct voice.

Laurie Buyer

In ways that are similar to *Canyon Solitude*, Buyer's *Side Canyons* also engages the Western genre and its poetic discourse to reenvision the spiritual quest narrative and a woman's relationship to those around her and the land. Although it is a novel based on a true story, it departs from the strictly non-fictional account evident in McCairen's and the men's narratives above to blend fiction and poetry in unpredictable ways. Buyer intersperses these throughout the prose, disrupting the narrative form as it is not always clear where a chapter ends. This unpredictability is evident in the opening pages in the chapter "On the Ranch" which Buyer punctuates with poems "At Wellington Lake," "Disfigured," "Live Analysis," "Weeping," "Portrait of a Woman in a Box," and "Interlocking Limbs." This experimentation with form functions in a number of ways to reimagine the typical river Western. In a formal sense, through the blending of these genres that represent poetic discourse, they depart from the linearity and predictability that typify river narratives. While Buyer's text does proceed chronologically, the poems move in different directions temporally and spatially as they shift between the narrator's interior and exterior experiences. That is, the poems inject a greater awareness of the narrator's feelings that are less developed in the prose. Thus, as Buyer modifies the genre's conventions, she performs a rhetorical act that acknowledges her departure from the status quo and her attempt to make a work uniquely hers.

Depressed over a failing marriage with a man who is emotionally withdrawn except when drunk, Buyer's protagonist, Laurie, agrees to join Angie and her group of female friends for a vacation down the river—a journey which becomes Laurie's own spiritual quest. Like so many other river Westerns, both male and female, *Side Canyons* emphasizes the wild force of the river, the sublimity of the canyon, and the peace found in solitude. Yet rather than reject civilization as this genre and so many American texts do, Buyer's work acknowledges the role that community and the presence of other people play in mending a broken heart and soul. Worn out by years of arguing and falling out of love, Laurie moves between needing her own space and time to her own thoughts and the support and reassurance of her fellow rafters. Although she is accused of “pick[ing] the oddest places to camp” (92) as she chooses secluded areas where she can commune with her surroundings, she also welcomes the company of others and has no problem joining a friend for a walk along one of the canyon's many beaches (92). Laurie's openness to her fellow travelers in a place where so many Colorado River narratives emphasize isolation adds nuance to Groover's conventional notions of community. As Laurie welcomes a community of like-minded river travelers, she turns her back on the domestic community from which she and McCairen alike escape, even if only temporarily. This more egalitarian community is evident later in the text when Laurie finds herself reflecting on the unique relationships she's established during the trip after a late night hike up a side canyon with friends. She explains:

I pulled my flannel bag out into the moonlight and lay there thinking about all the hands I'd held in the Canyon, how we helped one another get up from our soft seats in the sand or assisted each other in and out of the

boats. While hiking, outstretched hands reached to pull me up a difficult place or guide me down a tough spot and a chain of hands guided me across hard-current creeks. . . . I never reached out my hand that someone, man or woman, didn't take it, hold it, give it a quick squeeze, or pull into an embrace. In this unknown environment, holding someone's hand meant a moment of sheltered harbor where I felt safe. (185)

Contrasting with the emotional and physical distance evident in her marriage, the repeated contact of another's hand sustains Laurie throughout her voyage. When faced with a "difficult place" or a "tough spot" she finds reliable support as her fellow travelers cooperate to lead her safely onward. Linked with this unique community that is bound together by a shared interest in the place, Laurie's reflections on these relationships offer a unique way of thinking about the river and canyon outside of the typical "isolation brings healing" topos. Just as McCairen is unable to entirely disregard community, Laurie sees a necessity for communal relations even in a relatively isolated locale.

This willingness to establish close ties is also emphasized by Laurie's traveling companions. As they load up on dinner, Laurie explains how "Angie, Helen, and Gina squeezed in next to me" (144). To these close quarters Angie remarks: "Talk about companionship" wherein Helen responds, "That's the perfect word. . . . Isn't it amazing that people who were strangers just days ago seem like family" (144). While these relationships will be tried and tested throughout the text, Buyer nonetheless emphasizes the special connections made in the canyon. The beauty of the surroundings, the unique mode of traveling, and the change in expectations from one's 'real' life all reinforce the significance of community in Laurie's journey downriver.

Community is also evident through the role that communication plays in the text as Buyer's challenges how the typical Western disparages language in favor of isolation. Laurie, a writer, is passionate about her craft having taken trips throughout the country to attend various workshops. It is her desire to express herself so much that she feels herself growing apart from her husband, John. Buyer constructs John as the traditional Western male: he's a tough Wyoming rancher and man of few words. When Laurie first broaches the subject of going on a raft trip through the Grand Canyon, John is concerned because she'll be gone when the calves need to be shipped. When Laurie asks whether he could wait to ship them until she returns, John retorts, "Forget it. I can do it alone" (18). And when she suggests that he should ask the neighbors for help, Buyer writes, "he just stared at me with unspoken reproach" (18). When he does speak, he questions why she has been away so much recently, adding the raft trip to her attendance at a writing workshop and enrollment in a Vermont school that have taken her from the ranch for extended periods of time (18). Interestingly, Buyer writes that as John says all of this, he's looking out the window at their dog, Blue. He's not looking at Laurie in an attempt to read her expressions and understand why she wants to leave; he's looking at man's best friend. While a small detail, it underscores what Buyer attempts to communicate through her depiction of John. With his attention centered on his dog and his hesitance to respond to Laurie, John isolates himself from his wife's attempts to engage him and thereby rejects this moment where an emotional connection could be made. Unwilling to face the reality of their situation that Laurie is trying to communicate, John finally asks "Well, I wish I knew what the hell it is you're searching for" and then leaves the room (18). Buyer closes the scene with Laurie responding but to no avail. "Not knowing if his nonresponse meant

that he had not heard me or that he chose to ignore me,” she writes, “I did not follow” (18). John flees the situation perhaps going to consult with his dog, which stands in for the protagonist’s male companion typical of Western.

Contrast Buyer’s characterization of John and his complete aversion to communicate and nurture relationships with Robb, the raft trip’s lead guide who in many cases preserves the image of the classic Western hero. Yet, surprisingly, Buyer looks to this figure as a way to reinvent the male river guide, casting him as a more sensitive man, one who welcomes community and is willing to listen and express feelings while still retaining his charisma, his knowledge, and his masculinity. Instead of creating a guide like Powell whose indomitable, larger-than-life ambitions often created tension within the expedition, Buyer transforms the convention to depict her leading man with a greater sense of compassion and acknowledgement of others’ needs—things John does not seem able to give Laurie. Throughout the journey, Laurie gravitates to Robb, admiring his humility, his kindness, and his reverence for his surroundings. On their third day on the river, just below Spector Rapid, Laurie considers her interest in Robb. She describes him as “a keen observer, not only of the Canyon and the river, but also of all of us in his care. Calm and quiet, he appeared everywhere at once” (107). She continues: “he pitched in with every facet of camp life: he cooked and washed dishes, moved the groover [toilet], loaded and unloaded the gear, built fires, helped set up the kitchen and take it down again. . . . he remained patient and kind, spending time with each person in camp. Attentive to everyone’s needs, he seemed to know before anyone asked what was wanted” (107). He is both omniscient and omnipresent, fully in control of his environs, never bothered by any situation no matter how big or small it may be, never afraid to

work. And these qualities cause Laurie and Lana to express their deep admiration for the man, suggesting that they too could possess “his connection to the Canyon, his affinity for wildness, this love affair he has with the river. He’s smart, . . . Look at everything he tells us about astronomy, geology, and biology, the environment” (109). Through such comments, one can easily read Robb as the object of these women’s desire, not so much in romantic terms, although there are repeated hints of this throughout the text, but as a symbol for who they wish the other men in their lives could be: free, calm, at perfect ease with oneself and the world. Robb is fully aware of those around him and goes to great lengths to meet their needs. Of course, this is his job and he’s paid to assist what amounts to paying customers. Nonetheless Robb seems genuinely interested in his party, evident by the later descriptions Buyer’s gives him.

While Robb embodies many of the qualities of the typical male hero, Laurie’s depiction sheds another light on his character. Buyer writes, “Sharing an easy camaraderie with the men, he offered his knowledge of the river and the Canyon openly. Sensitive and conciliatory with the women, he offered a sympathetic ear and a tender touch. Never playing favorites, he found ways to be magnanimous to each of us” (108). Robb does seem to be larger than life. He is both strong yet sensitive—he is for the women what a ‘real man’ should be, their ideal. As such, Robb is able to communicate with the women on their terms. When Laurie and company near the end of the trip, she is gripped with melancholy, sad to see the journey come to an end when she has seen and experienced so much new physical and emotional territory. After some misunderstandings between the women come to a head, Laurie shrinks off to find Robb in whom she can confide. She explains, “There’s so much I want to say,” and yet she

struggles to put to words all the feelings inside her, feelings of hurt, sadness, love, and liberation (240). When Robb replies that he understands, Laurie wonders “if he could know that the river changed me in significant ways, that I felt like I finally knew who I was, that some long-ago wound had healed” (240). The river experience proves in many ways to be the balm Laurie so desperately needs to heal her soul, and such a transformational experience for this woman would initially seem difficult for a man of John’s type to understand. But not for Robb. “Yes,” he answers, “I do. I understand the words you don’t know how to say” (241). Because these two have spent so much time together over the course of the trip, sharing feelings, listening to one another’s stories, Robb is in tune with Laurie and where she’s coming from. Their non-articulation of these feelings is more powerfully communicated as they lie on their backs staring up out of the canyon at the moon overhead. They choose not to exchange words, not because they desire emotional isolation as Abbey does or Foote’s Maverick who “fed [the fire], savagely, in silence” and ignored the narrator “as if I had been a strange dog,” but because they already understand each other perfectly through the expression of silence (Foote 540, *Side Canyons* 202). Where words once failed, now silence communicates.

After this intimate moment shared with Robb, Laurie returns to the final campfire of the journey. Enjoying drink and stories she notes that “I hated to give up those last minutes of companionship, so I stayed a little longer” (242). On a night when so many emotions are near the surface, an understandable reaction would be to seek out solitude in order to process and make sense of the myriad thoughts and feelings that flooded Laurie’s heart and mind. However, she chooses to spend those last few moments of firelight with her fellow sojourners. Opting for community over solitude, Laurie demonstrates her

reliance on others for support and her willingness to communicate both verbally and non-verbally in order to work through her personal challenges, share joys, and draw strength from those around her.

Interestingly, despite the numerous instances where Laurie emphasizes the need for companionship in the canyon, she explains that she probably would not want to return with the same group on another trip. She explains to Angie, “There are just too many people. It’s too hectic and unsettled for me. If I come again I’d like to find a way to go to a remote place and be alone with the Canyon” (252). While this statement seems to undermine all that she has said about her need for others, in light of the transformation that has taken place in her character, she is now able to face challenges more on her own two feet. Such a statement would not have been possible before this trip as she was too vulnerable, too insecure. But having drawn strength and experience from this small boating community, she is now confident to navigate her own path in the canyon on a more intimate level. Asked whether the river trip changed her life she replies, “Yes. I’m not the same. I don’t know what that means, but there it is” (251). Empowered by the community experience, Laurie must now decide her future. While much self-discovery awaits her, she is now endowed with greater confidence and buoyed up by the healing effects of the raft trip to face, like McCairen, whatever challenges lie ahead.

The initial pain and suffering that brought Laurie to the river in the first place has given way to a new independence and resolve. But this independence does not come from fleeing society or imposing one’s will on nature as the traditional Western and Colorado boating narrative often suggest. Rather, it evolves from working with others and listening to what the canyon has to teach. On her voyage Laurie articulates the lessons she has

learned from observing her experiences: “Go slowly. Step softly. Take time to look and listen and feel. Be considerate. Help out. Hold hands. Allow yourself to be immersed in awe. Make reverence a daily ritual” (150). Although a Romantic strain runs through this passage with its attention to the aesthetic and spiritual sublime, Buyer places the transformative experience alongside the companionship of others. With this revelation, Laurie can return to John and her Wyoming ranch equipped with the tools not only to survive, but to thrive. With a new sense of self born on the river and forged through the relationships she made with her traveling companions, Laurie may embrace her future with determination and a contentment that the memories of being on the river will always be there to remind her of the progress she made in the company of others. This subtle reorientation of the wilderness experience embraces a different set of values that reimagines the genre as something much more than a tribute to the Colorado boating experience. Emphasizing the role of community throughout the text and the role it plays in empowering a woman to face with confidence future trials, *Side Canyons* is also rhetorically motivated as it advocates for a reconsideration of the river experience and what benefits can come through community to those lacking a voice or the power to effect positive change.

Louise Teal

In both McCairen’s and Buyer’s texts poetic discourse is a vehicle through which the authors explore traditional women’s themes in light of the Western and suggest new ways of thinking about the female sphere, the river experience, and the genres that express these elements. A similar process describes Louise Teal’s *Breaking into the Current*. But more explicitly than the previous texts, Teal’s work departs significantly

from the River Western's narrative approach in its commentary on stereotypical constructions of the river as a repository for masculinity. Such an approach is typical of much women's writing as numerous scholars have argued. Susanne Bounds and Patti Capel Swartz explain in their consideration of women's desert writing that, "The Western desert woman writer is developing a genre of her own, one often not solely definable in terms of genre categorizations of poetry, prose, fiction, nonfiction or drama" (77). In *The Desert is No Lady* (1987) Vera Norwood and Janice Monk extend this observation of how women writers challenge traditional genre conventions suggesting that "To understand women's responses often we must seek out lesser-known works of literature and art, folk forms such as weaving, pottery, embroidery, and quilting, and women's diaries, journals, reminiscences, and oral histories" (4). Neither a novel nor a memoir and perhaps more like an oral history, *Breaking* is a collection of interviews with twelve female Grand Canyon river guides who address community, domesticity, and empowerment through the stories they tell. Even though these narratives draw on the River Western's topoi, this is a more obviously rhetorically motivated text as these women's voices directly tackle the issue of sexism on the Colorado and the means by which they addressed this discrimination while guiding.

Teal, a river guide and writer, captures the voices of women who have made their way into a traditionally exclusive club of male river runners in the Grand Canyon. Dedicating the book "To all women navigating the changing currents of our time" (front matter), she acknowledges Georgie Clark's influence in opening the Canyon's recreational opportunities to other women and then turns to the experiences of those women who followed Clark in subsequent decades through 1990 when only sixteen

percent of the Canyon's numerous commercial rafting companies employed women as full-time guides (xii). While such a percentage may seem initially meager considering how far women have advanced in other professions, this is a significant leap from the 1970s when Teal first began guiding. Then, she says, "you could count the number of women guides . . . on one hand" (xii). It is within this context that Teal works to capture the unique contribution that women have made within the canyon.

Challenging the perceptions about the Grand Canyon which is, in Teal's words, "the last bastion of the male river god" (51), she emphasizes stories and experiences by female boaters which speak to the unique position that women have on the river, and which align with and challenge Western themes that aptly define this traditionally male dominated profession. For Teal, gathering stories is an integral part of the river experience. She explains, "When you stick your oars in the water, you're feeling the whole story. There's no words, but it's the language of the formation of the earth" (59). Like the exchange between Laurie and Robb in *Side Canyons*, Teal's engagement with the river is one where words don't need to be expressed for the story of a place to surface. Or as in McCairen's view of the river-as-teacher, if one is observant and willing to listen to the lessons the river can share, then the mysteries of the canyon will reveal themselves. In a similar vein, as one rows down the river the stories of those who have passed before emerge. Through her text Teal seeks to bring to the surface the "whole story" of these pioneering boatwomen whose river experiences have largely gone unnoticed, but which add necessary depth to understanding how the river has shaped those who make their living by it.

The type of work performed along the river is, in fact, one of the significant stories that Teal shares in the text and which she uses to delineate how women's river work differs from that typified by men as embodied in the Western. Tompkins identifies work and action in the Western as another theme that reasserts the androcentric West. While she suggests that Westerns have functioned as an escape from everyday life to which work would belong, she argues that "hard work is transformed here from the necessity one wants to escape into the most desirable of human endeavors: action that totally saturates the present moment, totally absorbs body and mind, and directs one's life to the service of an unquestioned goal" (12). Such work takes on this crucial aspect in the Western because it is this struggle against one's surroundings whether human or non-human that gives purpose to one's life. As Tompkins explains, "the trouble with ordinary work isn't, as people generally assume, that it demands too much of you but that it doesn't demand enough" (15). The Western on the other hand provides action that requires one's utmost attention and focus. Life in the Western depends on the ability to toil and sacrifice, which thereby "satisf[ies] . . . a hunger not for adventure but for meaning" (15).

Similar to the centrality of action in Abbey's depiction of Newcomb who goes about his labor with singleness of purpose, Teal emphasizes the role of work in the lives of her female colleagues in order to show how women are just as capable of doing this male-dominated job. "Working long hours," Teal explains that the female guide "doesn't punch out at five o'clock each day during the 225-mile trips that last eight to eighteen days" (1). In fact, she explains that "Sometimes we row against seemingly endless upstream winds. Our skin is dried out by too much sun, and our brains are fried by

hundred-degree heat. We face other assaults on our bodies, the largest being some incurable form of foot rot” (1). But for the women who routinely endure these particular hardships, this is a small price to pay for being in the canyon. Similar to the Western hero who finds true purpose for living through his labor, these women find meaning to their lives and come away with a great sense of self as they take on challenges traditionally saved for men. By mimicking this topos, Teal contests the traditional image of a river guide to show that women can and do function just the same under these demanding conditions as do their male colleagues.

Teal’s description of work also attempts to challenge the exclusivity of the guiding profession in a way that establishes a collective identity among the disproportionately few women in this field. Marilyn Sayre, a predecessor to Teal in the canyon, recalls her experiences with some of her male coworkers:

I felt, although they never said anything overtly, that some of them did not want me there, that they would rather have another guy. It was the first time in my whole life that I ever really experienced what I’d call male chauvinism . . . Maybe I was a threat to them, and they couldn’t warm up to me. It made it hard for me to work down there. (31)

This reaction is not an isolated case. Buzz Holmstrom, one of the pioneering boaters in the Grand Canyon, once said, “Women have their place in the world, but they do not belong in the Canyon of the Colorado” (Lavender 94). With a shared sentiment among various men that women were inferior, working in the canyon exacted an emotional toll as well as a physical one on the female guides. Yet, these conditions helped solidify the spirit of sisterhood that Teal and others invoke throughout the text and lead her to claim,

“these women speak for us all” (*Breaking* xiii). Thus, this text is far from just a collection of adventure narratives, the usual poetic discourse so readily available in a quick perusal of the Grand Canyon’s South Rim bookstore. Instead, it is powerful rhetorical act, one which strives to carve out a special place for women’s experiences both on and off the river, further evident by her admission that this book is not only for those intrepid women of the river who “only follow[ed] their hearts amidst the pressures and possibilities facing all women in our particular era,” but an homage “that honors all women” (xiv).

At the same time, her description of the working conditions also functions to establish her credibility as an insider—to show that she and the other women in the text know what it takes to be successful as a river guide. Only those who have woken up at 4:30 in the morning to brew coffee, cooked over a stove in 110 degree heat, continually loaded and unloaded thousand pound rafts, attended to the group’s toilet needs, led hiking expeditions, and dealt with irritable tourists all while being the ever-gracious host knows the unique challenges of this line of work. But Teal also knows that there is nothing worse than a complainer on such a trip. Since, as her fellow guide Liz Hymans acknowledges, “Boatmen seemed to thrive on an atmosphere of competition, . . . so you had to look like you were made of steel the whole time,” Teal is quick to move beyond this litany of negatives to provide the reader with a more favorable depiction—one that captures the real reason why she, and others like her, continue to return to the river year after year (43). “But for the six-month river season,” she writes, “these minor irritations are more than offset by watching that massive pile of rock, the Grand Canyon, work its particular magic on folks” (1). From the accounts that follow, the canyon and the river’s “magic” work not only on those paying customers, but on the subjects of Teal’s book,

who, with her, “were all in the same romance” (xiii). For these women the river and the work performed in leading commercial trips is not a chore, but a delight, a unique occupation whose benefits are paid in uncompromising beauty rather than consistent employment and retirement plans.

By entering into the discourse of work and noting its challenges and rewards, Teal engages a key Western theme while also emphasizing the unique perspective of a female river guide. This confluence with and divergence from the Western formula continues throughout the text as Teal emphasizes other stories that speak to the unique experiences of women rafting the Colorado through the Grand Canyon. Drawing upon the Western’s celebration of the heroic figure, Teal includes stories that position the female guide as hero (or heroine for that matter) in the eyes of other guides and passengers as she goes about her duties to ensure that all under her care have safe passage through the canyon. Such a move places these women on equal level with men to debunk the “myth . . . that lingers still, that it takes a large, powerful man to row a boat through whitewater” (McCairen 152). A representative example of this attempt at equalization comes from Teal’s retelling of Suzanne Jordan’s memorable run at 24 ½ mile rapid in the historic high water of 1983. After flipping her boat and being tossed through another rapid a short ways downstream, “it looked like she had jumped on someone’s upright boat, tied the two flipped rafts to it, and was rowing all three boats to shore” (85). Suzanne’s fellow guide, David, watched this whole event and marveled at the strength of this petite woman to recover the rafts. As Teal writes of David’s reaction, “I had a hard time rowing one boat to shore at 62,000 [cubic feet per second], and here she was pulling two upside-down boats to shore” (85). Such a statement not only demonstrates that women are equal

to the challenges of river work, but that they, as is the case here, can exceed men's abilities.

But strength alone doesn't fully describe the heroic qualities that Teal emphasizes in her subjects. When a flash flood in Havasu Canyon overwhelms a passenger and a guide who goes to rescue her, it is Suzanne who is in the right place at the right time with the rope to throw out to the two people being swept out of the canyon and into the Colorado. David, the guide she rescued, praises Suzanne stating, "She's always spot-on and one of the bravest people I've ever worked with down here" (89). This courage and foresight demonstrated in this example are indicative of the rest of the women throughout Teal's text. As every Western has its hero, so too do these rafting accounts emphasize the heroic feats accomplished along the river. Of course, Teal is concerned with creating new types of heroes through the stories she tells. Speaking of her fellow female guides one boatwoman remarks, "They were neat to aspire to be like, that maybe you didn't have to be macho and look like a guy and act like a guy to be competent" (170). Very much a text about women for women, *Breaking into the Current* provides a valuable alternative narrative to the typical male version even as it reproduces some of its principle features. While the women in this text tap into similar topoi of the Western like adventure, a love of grand landscapes, and hard work, they do so from their own experiences, emphasizing how they have had to struggle against pervasive stereotypes and prejudices to create their own space on the river. As she concludes her text Teal explains, "It is wonderful to watch another generation of women—young women who have grown up hearing river stories in which the storytellers are women and the heroes are heroines" (172). The stories this text

tells promote a new version of the Western hero, one that is every bit as courageous and capable as her male coworkers.

In “Wild Women: Literary Explorations of American Landscapes” Sarah McFarland considers the absence of women from the American nature writing tradition that “has been burdened by a discriminatory history, influenced by wilderness exploration and scientific study that excluded women” (41). Like Groover, who challenges this forced absence in the spiritual quest, McFarland argues that “The exclusion of women from nature writing is not a problem only because it disguises the fact that the very concept of wilderness is a male construct, but also because it leaves careful readers with the impression that nature is no place for women” (41). What writers like McCairen, Buyer, and Teal demonstrate, however, is that nature, and particularly, the Colorado River and Grand Canyon, can be very much a place for women. As they travel through the canyon, learning to navigate the river’s many challenges while drawing on their surroundings to make powerful connections to their own lives, these women are empowered as they shed prejudices and find a new sense of individual worth.

The lessons that emerge in their texts as they are read in light of the Western demonstrate why such a reading is particularly valuable to understanding how the Colorado has shaped both the imagination and the actual lives of those fortunate enough to have traveled its renowned waters. While Westerns have often been denigrated for their perpetuation of stereotypes and escapism, they, like “Maverick” and Foote’s critique of Western water policy and women, prove useful as they reveal much about what a culture values and what it denigrates. In the case of the traditional Colorado River Westerns from Powell’s account to Fletcher’s we find that the river is a place for men to

find adventure, beauty, fame, and a panacea from the ills of urban living. By examining these female narratives as versions of the river Western that appropriate its principle themes for their own purposes, we come away with a very different picture of the river and for whom it flows. More pointedly, as we consider the poetic discourse within these texts which celebrate the beauty and wonder of the river and this canyon, we see how they appropriate a genre and its many topoi to create what then become powerful rhetorical tools that create room for marginalized women's voices. Jane Tompkins reminds us in *West of Everything* that the Western has "influenced people's beliefs about the way that things are" (6). If, as Tompkins further suggests, "what the hero experiences is what the audience experiences; what he does, they do too" (6), then it stands that alternative models for Western heroes could have equal sway in shaping the public's perception and actions about this region. By reading the female boating narrative into the traditional/historical discourse of river accounts, we open ourselves to new stories about the Colorado, stories like those evident in these women's texts that emphasize a more cooperative role in facing challenges and healing old wounds. With a watershed under such distress by the endless competing demands of federal, state, and private interests, such a shift in perception from "the way things are" is needed now more than ever.

From Green Lagoons to Delta Blues: The Changing Tides in the Mexican Delta

“Agua no si vende, si defiende”

(“You don’t sell water, you defend it”)

—Albuquerque bumper sticker

“Of what avail are forty freedoms without a blank spot on the map?”

—Aldo Leopold, “Green Lagoons,” *A Sand County Almanac*, 158

Ask the average westerner about the Colorado River’s course and more often than not images of crashing rapids and bottomless canyons of the Colorado Plateau or verdant Rocky Mountain peaks come to mind. For so many people, these iconic landscapes represent the whole of the watershed while the realities of the river’s lower reaches and eventual terminus are lost to the sands of ignorance. Not surprisingly, the majority of the textual and visual representations about the river and watershed tend to focus on the celebrated landscapes now part of our nation’s federal preserves: Canyonlands, Dinosaur, Grand Canyon, Rocky Mountain, and Zion national parks to name a few. But what of the other stretches of river and portions of the watershed that don’t quite have the sublime beauty or wilderness appeal that these areas do? Likewise, when it comes to talking about the prominent voices that have shaped and continue to play a role in deciding the destiny of the watershed the usual names continue to mind. The ubiquitous Powell is probably first and foremost among these river celebrities, while a host of politicians, water managers, and activists like Herbert Hoover, Stewart Udall, Wayne Aspinall, Floyd

Dominy, Patricia Mulroy, David Brower, and Katie Lee also have left their mark. While such lists of the river's "greatest hits" provide a baseline for considering the Colorado's history and topography, they also reveal a very limited perspective in the wide spectrum of voices, participants, and land forms that have and continue to define the watershed.

Nowhere is the clearer than in the river's delta. Charles Bergman, one of the most engaged authors with the region today, explains that "The delta has always challenged westerners. . . . It's the hottest place in North America. . . . It gets only a couple of inches of rain per year. The delta was, ironically, one of the first places in North America that Spaniards explored. But it has remained one of the least known" (17). Mexican scholar Jose Trava considers this irony noting that river deltas are typically magnets for development and some of the first places settled. In the case of the Colorado, however, the delta has largely remained an enigma to the millions of people who rely on Colorado River water every day (172). Spanning an area one hundred miles long and eighty miles wide, the delta stretches southeast from California's San Geronimo Pass just northwest of Palm Springs down to the river's terminus in the Sea of Cortez (Fradkin 333). It covers some of the most extreme landscapes in North America. However, in a great twist of irony created by the massive irrigation projects that have made the desert bloom, the region is the ultimate realization of the Garden myth as it boasts some of the most fertile and productive agricultural areas in the U.S. and Mexico including the Imperial, Coachella, Palo Verde, Mexicali, and Wellton-Mohawk valleys throughout southeastern California, northern Baja California and Sonora, and southwestern Arizona. While these efforts to reclaim the desert have made many areas in the upper delta very profitable, they have also substantially altered the river and its impact on the lower delta. With decades of

dam building cutting off the river's annual flooding and even its exit to the sea, what once was a lush and vibrant ecosystem is now in many areas a desiccated expanse of sand flats and stunted vegetation.

In the last two decades numerous efforts have been made to inform the public about these drastic changes. Books, magazine articles, and short movies have all documented the region, providing a glimpse of what was, and pointing fingers at who's to blame for the river's demise in this area.¹⁵ No one culprit exists, although the United States government and its seven basin states share the lion's share of the responsibility. As Bergman points out, in terms of who will ensure that adequate amounts of water once again appear in the delta, "The inevitable answer, the controversial answer, the incendiary answer is obvious: the United States" (19). However, the environmental challenges that the river faces today in the delta extend far beyond current management practices. The Colorado's inability to reach the sea over the last decade or so is a product of decades of policies and prevailing attitudes about the river and who it is for. A general attitude of ownership has prevailed north of the border which has drastically compromised the river's integrity and the livelihoods of those in Mexico who depend on the river's health to survive. As I will discuss later, this outdated and hegemonic position also stands in stark contrast to present local perspectives on managing the region's natural resources. Yet, as this dissertation continually suggests, the problems that we face

¹⁵ A variety of media has publicized life in the delta region, focusing on the environmental degradation that has greatly altered the area as a result of the expansive agricultural, urban, and infrastructural developments through the U.S. and Mexico. Some of the more notable works include Bergman's *Red Delta* (2002), Jonathan Waterman's *Running Dry* (2010), and Blue Legacy's film: *Death of a River: The Colorado River Delta* (2010). Of course, there is a substantial body of scientific reports produced by U.S. and Mexican scientists and organizations that have contributed knowledge about the delta's threatened ecosystems. For a more detailed list of sources see the University of Arizona's Colorado River Delta/Delta Del Rio Colorado Research Coordination Network website at: http://www.geo.arizona.edu/rcncrd/online_bibliography.html. It includes links to online bibliographies, websites, books, and other academic publications about the delta.

within the watershed extend far beyond what may be viewed as xenophobic laws and short-sighted regulations. Bergman astutely observes that the challenges hampering the river, particularly within the delta, are issues of imagination and language. In his conclusion to *Red Delta* (2002), one of the most comprehensive of the recent examinations of the region, he confides:

I have come to believe that this question of language—of what words we use for the delta, what metaphors we apply—is fundamental. . . .

We have made the delta into an ‘other,’ an alien place, not seeing all the while that it was already home to people and creatures. Through our metaphors, we may have imposed ourselves upon the physical landscape, but we have not yet learned to live there. (279-80)

As Bergman correctly observes, a crisis of representation mires the Colorado River delta region as numerous texts represent the region as a wasteland and a place of little value, a place where, according to the title of Philip Fradkin’s study of the river, the Colorado becomes “A River No More.” Bergman’s repetition of “we” suggests that the trouble about representation derives from a U.S.-centric perspective toward the delta wherein it has been viewed as a blank slate upon which to project any number of denigrating or idealized representations. But as Bergman’s statement implies, other ways of understanding the delta must exist, for the delta has supported human communities for thousands of years. In order to learn to live in this particular region and the river that formed it, we must broaden our vision about what this place has meant to those who have inhabited the delta for generations. As they invoke alternative metaphors one finds the region cast in an alternative light that moves beyond the debilitating perspectives that

have “othered” the delta to offer more productive means of addressing this ecosystem’s many challenges.

To find these alternative metaphors and ideas about how to represent the delta this chapter turns to a variety of pro-delta voices articulated through a range of genres and discourses that challenge the long-standing perspectives—primarily emanating from the United States—that have marginalized this place and its inhabitants. Primary among these is the Asociación Ecológica de Usuarios del Río Hardy y Colorado (AEURHYC), also known as the Hardy and Colorado Rivers Ecological Water User’s Association. This organization represents a growing movement to restore the delta to a vestige of its former splendor. Committed to the physical reconstruction and rehabilitation of significant portions of the delta, AEURHYC’s founding documents demonstrate an equal preoccupation with reimagining the delta as a living, productive, inhabited place worthy of our greatest attention. Supported by other delta-based perspectives emanating from government, academic, and non-profit representatives from the U.S. and Mexico, AEURHYC’s *Plan Estratégico* (Plan) from 2001 and 2004 employs discourse of collaboration and the home-place with its associated principle of *querencia* to galvanize support and justify its role as a necessary and valued player in the broader dynamics of Colorado River politics.

Since AEURHYC’s strategic plans outline the operational details by which to govern this organization, these documents are primarily motivated by Beale’s instrumental aim which seeks to outline “the governance, guidance, control, or execution of human activities” (94). However, as the previous chapters suggest and as Beale explains, these aims represent only “norms of activity” so that each aim can and does

engage other aims within his semiotic grammar of motives (94). Therefore, similar to a few pro-delta texts by American authors Aldo Leopold and Frank Waters who celebrate the region for its aesthetic qualities, the 2004 version of the plan in particular embraces poetic discourse to represent the delta and celebrate the region many call home. At the same time, however, these two discourses ultimately give way to powerful rhetorically motivated discourse that seeks to persuade readers to view the region as a place worth preserving. For as Beale reminds us, the purpose of rhetorical discourse is “to influence the understanding and conduct of human affairs” as it “operates typically in matters of action that involve the well-being and destiny of communities” and “in matters of value and understanding which involve the communal or competing values of communities” (94). It is within the rhetorical, instrumental, and poetic aims that we discover the range of approaches and mediums used to advocate for the delta, its people, and biotic communities. This breadth of rhetorical activity casts the long and often antagonistic relationship between the United States and Mexico over water use as a powerful environmental justice issue that is shifting the tides of how future binational water issues may find redress.

United States-Mexico Water Relations: 1848-1973

In his examination of the political ecology of the delta region from 1940-1975 Evan Ward observes that “a theme that unifies the history of the Colorado River Delta” is “the conquest and control of land and water” (4). Beginning with the Spanish arrival in the region in the 1500s as described in chapter two, the delta has experienced wave after wave of newcomers seeking to harness these resources. Following the United States’ victory in the Mexican-American War, Mexico ceded millions of acres of its northern

lands to the U.S. through the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo in 1848 and the Gadsden Purchase in 1853. Over a century and a half after these events, John O'Sullivan's rallying cry of Manifest Destiny, uttered on the eve of the United States' war with Mexico, continues to play out again and again as these two nations struggle to equitably apportion the Colorado.

Ironically, to understand the history of water conflict between Mexico and the United States one must leave the watershed and travel east across the Continental Divide and into the Rio Grande watershed whose past, present, and future are inextricably linked to the Colorado's. Most importantly, as I will contend later in this chapter, it is by returning to the Rio Grande watershed and its significant Hispano presence that we find new ways of reenvisioning the Colorado and its delta. Beginning on the eastern flanks of Colorado's San Juan Mountains in the southern portion of the state, the Rio Grande flows southward through New Mexico to then form the U.S.-Mexico border as it separates Texas on the east from Mexico on the west. It is along the Rio Grande's fertile areas like Colorado's San Luis Valley, the Mesilla Valley in southern New Mexico, and the El Paso-Juárez Valley along the Texas-Mexico border that these two nations negotiated the first international water issues (Hundley, *Dividing the Waters* 19-21). While an extended history of the water development and subsequent treaties regarding the Rio Grande are not the focus of this chapter, it is worth noting a few key developments in this watershed that have significantly influenced how the two nations have approached the Colorado.

One of the central tenets that defined the relationship between the two countries derived from what became known as the Harmon Doctrine. In his definitive work on the

water conflicts between the two nations, Norris Hundley Jr. explains that this principle arose out of conflict along the Rio Grande in 1894 as increased up-stream use and drought conditions threatened the agricultural production in Mexico. Complaints from south of the border eventually reached Washington where Attorney General Judson Harmon took a most unsympathetic position toward Mexico's water claims. In a number of legal decisions he concluded that the United States, in Hundley's words, "was unaccountable to the lower riparian nation," and he further supported the notion of "absolute territorial sovereignty" (22-23, 24). Obviously, such a conclusion did not sit well with the Mexican delegates who had petitioned Washington for redress. Fortunately for Mexico, many high ranking Americans felt sympathetic to their cause, looking more toward a relationship of "comity" or a "mutually satisfactory solution" than what Harmon had advocated (23). As a result, the negotiations moved toward a deal with Mexico to pay for damages and help finance dam construction in the El Paso area (25). While these efforts seemed a step in the right direction to nurse the wounds already inflicted, American interests up-river continued to hamper progress toward an amicable solution (25).

Not until 1906 did the two nations sign a treaty that ensured Mexico "its maximum uses prior to negotiations" (Hundley, *Water and the West* 81). Because of this decision many U.S. representatives feared that a similar situation would play out on the Colorado as the nation forfeited more water to Mexico than they believed their southern neighbors were entitled to (81). But as Hundley astutely notes, "the treaty represented merely a friendly gesture on the part of the United States. Theoretically, at least, the Harmon opinion was still supreme" (*Dividing the Waters* 30). Though this treaty marked

the first official water deal between the two nations, it would not be the last. As these subsequent negotiations ensued, the attitude of supremacy and exceptionalism inherent in the Harmon position continued to characterize the relationship between the two nations. Since the United States felt that it had gone to great lengths to meet Mexico's demands on the Rio Grande, Mexico felt that it could exercise more of its rights on the Colorado especially since the vast majority of this river, unlike the Rio Grande, flowed within the United States.

During the same time that the United States and Mexico worked toward a solution on the Rio Grande, development of the Colorado in southern California boomed, thereby causing conditions that would soon overshadow the negotiations happening in the east. California's role in harnessing the Colorado's water cannot be overstated. Simply put, California more than any other state or group has transformed the watershed into a well-engineered network of dams, reservoirs, and canals that provide water for tens of millions of people on both sides of the border. With the discovery of gold in 1849 and the subsequent hoards that flocked to the state in search of wealth and opportunity, California quickly became the nation's Promised Land and the embodiment of the West's most pervasive myths. For those exploring the southeastern portion of the state, such dreams helped transform seas of sand and inhospitable desert into an agricultural paradise.

As Donald Worster explains, many of those entering California looked to the delta and its fertile soils created by millions of years of erosion and deposition (*Rivers* 194-95). A portion of this region was initially known to the newcomers as the Salton Sink, the remnant of ancient inland seas formed by the Colorado's periodic breaching of its banks and flooding of this area that lies hundreds of feet below sea level (195). Only

the Salton Sea remained as a testament to the massive lakes that once filled the basin. But this recognition of the region's salinity did not fit into the grand designs and desires of those who came. Thus, in 1901 the local inhabitants christened the Sink the Imperial Valley to better reflect the optimism and promise of the Garden myth (196). The challenge in making the land live up to its new name lay in getting water from the Colorado, which ran some thirty miles to the east, over a band of sand dunes running north and south that separated the valley from the only source of reliable fresh water for miles around. But not even these difficult conditions could thwart the change to redeem the desert and turn it into an oasis.

Up to this point, the Mexican government looked at the American efforts as a boon to local development. In fact, it was in previous decades that the government encouraged foreigners to move into the Mexicali Valley just south of the Imperial Valley to bolster a nascent economy (Ward 5). As a result, groups like the Colorado River Land Company—led by the owners of the *Los Angeles Times*—purchased huge tracts of land upwards of 800,000 acres (5). At the center of all of the development was Charles Rockwood, an engineer who had moved to the Southwest with a grand vision for what the Imperial Valley could become. Rockwood faced a major challenge though in turning the Sink into a paradise as the distance of the river to the valley and the imposing sand dunes seemed insurmountable. Faced with the realities of an uncompromising geography, Rockwood and his associates made a number of decisions that would become the stuff of legend—as much for their insight as for their blunders.

According to Hundley, Rockwood realized that the best way to get water from the Colorado to the Imperial Valley was to use one of the Colorado's myriad abandoned river

channels that once led to the Salton Sink which swept south from the river into Mexico and then back north, across the border, and into the valley. To gain access to Mexican lands, however, Rockwell had to petition Mexico's government, which now forbade foreigners from owning Mexican territory. Through some legal maneuvering, Rockwood created a Mexican land holding company, La Sociedad de Irrigación y Terrenos de la Baja California, Sociedad Anónima, appointed a Mexican citizen to run it, and thereby created the right-of-way he needed (*Dividing the Waters* 32-33). It seemed that all he now had to do was open the headgates and watch the Imperial Valley bloom before his eyes.

Yet Rockwell's optimism quickly got the best of him. The same forces that made the valley such a promising region also made it a highly unstable place. With the annual spring runoff caused by the melting of the Rockies' snowcapped peaks, the river in its lower stretches became a torrent that continually broke its banks, flooding everything in its path as it fanned out across miles of sand and mud flats on its way to the sea. Such events caused many to look upon the river as a renegade, a force to be tamed. When Rockwell began irrigating on June 21, 1901 he found that the yearly flooding and the huge silt loads continued to frustrate his efforts to provide reliable water to the fields now beginning to dot the landscape (33; Worster, *Rivers of Empire* 196). As a result, he cut new openings to the canal where the silt hadn't already plugged them up. Then the massive floods of 1905 came rushing down the river and began eating away at the canal's opening. In what historian and writer William deBuys dubs the "most spectacularly bungled development scheme of the century, perhaps all time," the Colorado eventually shifted its entire course from its present channel and into the canal (8). At one point,

90,000 cubic feet¹⁶ per second of water poured through the breach (Worster, *Rivers of Empire* 197). For nearly a year and a half the river continued to follow the canal's path into the Imperial Valley rather than its traditional route to the sea, inundating countless acres of crops and desert and making a lake fifty miles long and fifteen wide to rise once more in the Salton Sink (197). Not until February 1907 through the Herculean efforts of the Southern Pacific Railroad did the river return to its channel.

By this time, American agricultural interests realized a few things about the river and their desire to irrigate the desert. First, the river needed to be controlled as yearly flooding continued to hamper efforts to build effective irrigation works. Second, Mexico needed to be bypassed—there had to be a way of getting water from the river to the valley without dipping below the border. Of course, Mexico discovered a few things as well from this fiasco. When Rockwell built his canal through Mexico and into the Imperial Valley, Mexico feared that the Colorado's waters would be diminished to such a degree that the river's navigability—a provision established in the treaties of 1848 and 1853—would suffer (Hundley, *Dividing the Waters* 18-19). Likewise it saw increasing American interests in the region as a threat to its own prosperity. Again, Mexico petitioned Washington. But like initial attempts to establish a compromise on the Rio Grande, movement toward a treaty on the Colorado equally failed (37). As these tensions played out in both watersheds it was clear that water would be the primary issue to unite and divide these countries in lively debate in the years to come.

The primary force in shaping the eventual treaty the nations signed over the allocation and management of the Colorado in 1944 resulted from California's relentless push toward developing its agricultural base in the areas bordering the Salton Sea.

¹⁶ One cubic foot is equal to 7.48 gallons.

Following Rockwood's flooding debacle, water users in the region argued for increased infrastructure along the river to jumpstart the economic development of the area. As Hundley explains, these measures would minimize annual flooding, Mexican agricultural development, and ultimately help the U.S. to be less dependent on Mexico through which the water flowed (*Water in the West* 45). Indicative of the fear of Mexico's own efforts to promote agriculture in the Mexicali Valley, Thomas Yager, a farmer in California's Coachella Valley remarked, "The waters of the Colorado River are inherently ours, . . . Wherein . . . does equity and comity compel American citizens to concede rights to Mexico depriving American farmers and American lands of the water of the Colorado River?" (qtd. in *Water in the West* 49). Sure enough, the same feelings that had manifested in Harmon's position on the Rio Grande surfaced in debates about the Colorado as the prevailing attitude in the United States viewed the river as its rightful property.

Mexico was not the only political entity nervous about California's voracious appetite for water. The other basin states feared that California's rapidly increasing urbanization and agricultural base would quickly jeopardize their own ability to use the water. Well aware of the impacts of prior appropriation they soon realized that because of California's seniority claims on the river all others would be junior right holders and eventually squeezed out if shortages occurred. To rebuff California, the six states looked to establish an interstate water agreement that would ensure a more equitable division of the waters. Establishing the League of the Southwest in 1917, the seven basin states opened negotiations about how to apportion the waters. Not surprisingly, however, there were a number of stakeholders with limited or no representation. Hundley explains that

although the League allowed Mexican officials to attend the proceedings, it did not grant them membership and it did not invite any of the numerous native tribes throughout the watershed to participate (*Water and the West* 56). With little regard for the needs of native groups and those in Mexico, only U.S. representation dictated how to “fairly” divide the Colorado.

When the states finally settled upon an agreement in 1922 at Bishop’s Lodge just outside Santa Fe, New Mexico and within the Rio Grande watershed, Mexico’s water needs seemed to merit little more than an afterthought. According to this document which became known as the Colorado Compact,

If, as a matter of international comity, the United States of America shall hereafter recognize in the United States of Mexico any right to the use of any waters of the Colorado River System, such waters shall be supplied first from the waters which are surplus over and above the aggregate of the quantities specified in paragraphs (a) and (b); and if such surplus shall prove insufficient for this purpose, then, the burden of such deficiency shall be equally borne by the Upper Basin and the Lower Basin, and whenever necessary the States of the Upper Division shall deliver at Lee Ferry water to supply one-half of the deficiency so recognized in addition to that provided in paragraph. (Art. III, Sec. C)

The important term throughout this entire section is the conditional “if” that precedes statements about sharing the water. The document’s drafters left little question as to their position on Mexico’s rights to the Colorado. The attitude expressed by the United States is very paternalistic in this opening as the language suggests that *if* the U.S. feels it in

their hearts to take compassion on Mexico, then it will provide water according to the following stipulations. The compact suggests that Mexico will only get surplus waters, meaning that the Mexican demand can only be fulfilled after the U.S. gets its share. The conditional language also implies through its connection to the word “any” that Mexico has no right to the water unless the U.S. decides to grant its supposed neighbor such rights.

Clearly evident in the Compact’s language is that this and other governing documents were hardly just bureaucratic or operational texts that dictated how nations should approach water allocation. While these documents certainly function in this manner, they also represent the rhetorical positioning of the United States as proprietary arbiter over the river and of Mexico as its subordinate. Thus, these texts are equally motivated, if not more so, by a desire to articulate its privileged stature in regards to Mexico. This strategy of using what initially appear as benign, potentially dry instrumental documents to employ persuasive techniques to advocate for a group’s exceptional rights to water use will characterize discussions about the Colorado in following decades. However, as we will soon see with the rise of AEURHYC, Mexican voices will equally adopt the use of these supposed instrumental texts to rhetorically carve out a space for its rightful claims and entitlement to the river.

While the ratification of the Compact was a monumental achievement, it did not quell the distrust fomenting throughout the basin. This same year, Mexican President Alvaro Obregón established the Board of International Waters to facilitate negotiations between the U.S. and Mexico on the Colorado, Rio Grande, and Tijuana Rivers. Despite this maneuver, the United States continued to exert a stranglehold on the Colorado’s uses.

In statements indicative of the general attitude toward Mexico's claims to the Colorado, Arizona Congressman Carl Hayden argued that Mexicans had "no right, legal or moral" to the river (qtd. in *Dividing the Waters* 63). Such attitudes would prevail in subsequent years with the passage of the Boulder Canyon Act in 1928 which paved the way for a host of projects that would forever alter the Colorado and the livelihoods of those along the lower stretches of the river. This act aimed "to provide for the construction of works for the protection and development of the Colorado River Basin, for the approval of the Colorado River compact, and for other purposes" ("Boulder Canyon"). With Rockwood's bungle and subsequent flooding throughout the lower basin still fresh in many legislators' minds, this act opened the door for numerous flood controls, irrigation works, and dams, the most notable of which would become Hoover Dam.

With protection and development at the heart of the Boulder Canyon Act and the states' desires, Mexico once again took a back seat in these discussions. While Section 4 apportions the water between Arizona, California, and Nevada, it binds Mexico's claim on the river (assuming as few did during this time that it had any rightful claim on the Colorado) within a number of stipulations about when and how such water deliveries shall be made. In terms of the Gila River, the Colorado's last main tributary in the United States (and which used to be the border between the U.S. and Mexico before the 1853 Gadsden Purchase), the act states that "the Gila River and its tributaries . . . shall never be subject to any diminution whatever by any allowance of water which may be made by treaty or otherwise to the United States of Mexico" (Sec. 4.a). Similar disregard is present in the Act's penultimate section: "Nothing in this Act shall be construed as a denial or recognition of any rights, if any, in Mexico to the use of the waters of the Colorado River

system” (Sec. 20). What appears to be very much an afterthought, this reference to Mexico functions to allay initial fears about what this new infrastructure along the river would mean for downstream users in Mexico. At the same time, however, this provision emphasizes once again that Mexico may not even have any rights to the use of the river. Thus, in a politically shrewd maneuver to take a highly ambiguous position in regards to Mexico’s water needs, the United States attempted to prolong its control on the river for the indefinite future.

Not surprisingly, the Boulder Canyon Act and the impending construction of Hoover Dam caused much anxiety among Mexican officials. Slated to store “not less than 20 million acre-feet” of water, the dam would drastically reduce the river’s flow as it filled and would more or less make the devastating yet rejuvenating spring floods a thing of the past (Sec 1). Reflecting the Mexican perspective during these years, a relative of President Manuel Ávila Camacho lamented, “The cotton will be lost if our ‘good neighbor’ don’t loosen water from the Colorado River. These gentlemen are our ‘good neighbors’ since 1847 and they either make war on us or drag us into it according to their desires” (qtd. in Ward 25). Such distrust and displeasure among Mexicans caused then President Lázaro Cárdenas to seize all foreign owned lands in the Mexicali Valley in 1937 (5). Heightened tensions continued to characterize the U.S.-Mexico relationship over water throughout the first half of the twentieth century as each nation refused to acquiesce to the other’s demands regarding the Colorado, in Mexico’s case, and the Rio Grande, in the United States’ (*Dividing the Waters* 73-74).

In 1944, the United States and Mexico finally made a significant step toward reconciliation when they signed a treaty regarding the Colorado, Rio Grande, and Tijuana

rivers. Facilitated through the newly formed International Boundary and Water Commission¹⁷ this treaty granted Mexico a 1.5 million acre feet guarantee to be augmented by another 200,000 acre feet in surplus years (Article 10). While appeased by this guaranteed amount, Mexico soon discovered that water quantity was not the only issue of concern. Because of the high salt content present throughout the watershed's alkaline soils, the Colorado has always carried a significant salt load on its way to the sea. But with increased agricultural operations primarily in the lower basin and the constant need to flush salts from the soil so as to not poison the crops, the river's salinity rapidly increased. One of the primary culprits during mid-century which added to Mexico's water woes was Arizona's Wellton-Mohawk Irrigation District just east of Yuma. Comprising two fertile valleys along the Gila's southern border, these irrigation districts channeled huge amounts of agricultural waste water back into the Colorado with salt levels almost three times the Colorado's average level (*Dividing the Waters* 173). What seemed like an easy way for the U.S. to meet its 1944 treaty obligations with Mexico proved disastrous for those farming downriver. Again, heated discussions between the nations emerged. Fortunately for Mexico, there were those basin states in the U.S. sympathetic to this developing issue and who were instrumental in working toward a solution (177). Finally, in 1973, the International Boundary and Water Commission amended the 1944 treaty with Minute 242 that forged, as the title of the document suggests, a "permanent and definitive solution to the international problem of salinity in the Colorado River" ("Minute 242").

¹⁷ This was previously known as the International Boundary Commission formed in 1889 to resolve border disputes and address the ever shifting border formed by the unpredictability of the Colorado and Rio Grande's flows. See the 1944 Treaty, Article 2 for more information.

As this contentious history and its associated treaties, addendums, and clarifications suggest, the U.S.-Mexico relationship over Colorado River water has clearly favored the U.S. and its policies and actions to use the river as though it was its sole user. From questionable land grabs in the Mexicali Valley to more recent debates about the controversial lining of the suitably named All-American Canal, domination and control all too frequently define the interactions between these two countries.¹⁸ With a growing environmental ethic this troubled relationship has become more apparent in recent decades as more and more people north and south of the border turn their attention to a struggling delta and the river which made it.

The Tides Begin to Shift

While paternalistic and imperialistic perspectives have often typified the United States' Colorado River policies toward Mexico, other perspectives from a number of Americans during the first half of the twentieth century have portrayed the Mexican delta in a more sympathetic, if not more objective light. Chief among these is Godfrey Sykes's *The Colorado Delta* (1937) which examines the biological and geological aspects of the region. Based on a number of trips to the region beginning in 1890, Sykes's text provides one of the most thorough accounts of these features along with commentary on the early exploration history of the delta. Following in the tradition of writers referenced in chapter two, *The Colorado Delta* begins by acknowledging the scientific value of the delta. However, Sykes points out that its value has been overlooked as others have turned their

¹⁸ As part of California's requirement to bring its water usage back into harmony with the 4.4 million acre-foot granted under the Boulder Canyon Act, it has lined a portion of the earthen canal with cement to prevent significant bank seepage. Unfortunately, for Mexican growers, this seepage has provided a substantial and reliable water source that has now been cut off. See the Bureau of Reclamation's "Boulder Canyon Project-All-American Canal System webpage for history about the canal and current operations and Sandra Dibble's "Calderón stands firm against lining of All-American Canal," *Union-Tribune*, May 5, 2007 for more information about Mexico's reaction.

attention to the river's more magnificent landscapes. The introduction's opening paragraph reads:

The great canyons carved through many hundreds of miles of an elevated plateau region by the waters of the Colorado River have, because of their magnitude and impressive grandeur, captured the popular imagination, rank as one of the best known scenic features of the continent, and brought the name of the river into prominence throughout the world. Although not so spectacular as the visible result of the long-continued subtractive process by which the canyons have been excavated, the opposite phenomena, attendant on the disposal of the enormous volume of material removed from the vast voids themselves, are perhaps equally impressive and interesting to the geologist and physiographer. (1)

Aware of the disparate values associated with different landscapes throughout the watershed, Sykes's observation identifies the root problem in how we have viewed the delta. Years before Bergman set foot in the region, he recognized that this was a forgotten place, overlooked because it does not fit the model of the more sublime geography upriver. Of course, only to an outsider is this land a *terra incognita*. Nonetheless, writing in the tradition of those explorers referenced in chapter two, Sykes finds the delta infinitely valuable in its "scientific significance and importance" (1). However, his text extends his observations beyond his geologic and biologic analyses to comment briefly on the transformation that has come to the region during the forty plus years he has studied there.

Sykes outlines three distinct periods that define his observations in the region and the delta's changes over time. He marks the first period by the delta's "condition of an unexplored wilderness, practically unchanged by any form of human enterprise" (1). Not so aware of the indigenous presence in the region, he characterizes the area as a void. However, in the second period Sykes addresses the United States' policies with Mexico over the Colorado. Although not condemnatory, his statements clearly note the role the U.S. has played in altering the delta's traditional flow regime and sediment loads. He describes this as the "great westerly diversion of the river waters" to feed the needs of California's Imperial Valley (1). Sykes also notes, however, in the third period Mexico's role in also developing the region through flood control measures and reclamation efforts (1).

Because his study is primarily concerned with understanding the river's phenomenal sediment deposition rates and how these have shaped the region, his work, not surprisingly, is motivated by a need to shed new knowledge on this subject. At the same time, however, these observations suggest that the U.S. is primarily responsible for the decrease of flooding and loss of the high sediment rates that have always characterized the river. He frequently points out that the sediment has been cut off because of Boulder (Hoover) Dam but does so in a matter-of-fact way to suggest that this is just the natural state of affairs and not some grand ecological tragedy. As the text concludes after a number of chapters detailing the history of development in the area and the technical aspects of monitoring the river's sediment loads in the delta, Sykes considers the region's past and hypothesizes about its future. He notes that as one looks back on the region's earliest recorded history by the Spaniards, it "afford[s] us fleeting

glimpses of an unattractive land, traversed by a great river which was difficult of access, surrounded by inhospitable deserts of unknown extent, and guarded from a sea approach by great and violent tides” (171). These rather pessimistic depictions ensured that the region would most often be viewed as a wasteland holding little value. And because Sykes’s work is concerned with observing changes rather than taking sides, he notes the effects of the dams that have “practically end[ed] the movement of fresh detrital matter of the coarser type down the main stem” without condemning the U.S. (173). Perhaps because his studies concluded just as Boulder Dam was completed he could not see the long-term effects this and other structures would have. Nonetheless, he had seen enough to correctly foretell the delta’s future. In the last sentence of the study he writes, “Curtailment of the surface water supply and its restriction to the cultivated areas and a narrow channel zone will eventually result in the reversion to the condition of the surrounding deserts of much of the region which is at present occupied by luxuriant vegetation” (175). As a scientist supported by the American Geographical Society of New York and the Carnegie Institution, Sykes’s closing statement reflects his disciplinary training as he makes a conclusion based upon his years of work in the region. He offers no remorse in this final observation and prophecy, but rather suggests that this transformation is just a natural bi-product of development and the efforts to cultivate the desert.

In my consideration of Sykes’s work I do not mean to condemn the man; he was a product of his time and true to his scientific training that favors distant, objective analysis. What he does provide to this discussion is his awareness of the impacts of the dam on the river and the fact that while still a wasteland in many ways, the delta does

hold great scientific value. In this way, Sykes's text becomes a transitional work between the discourse in the treaties and compacts that hardly give the delta—at least the Mexican portion of it—a nod. By turning his attention to understanding this remarkable place he suggests that it is worth attention.

In the decades following Sykes's publication of *The Colorado River Delta* other American writers looked to the delta with a more aesthetic rather than scientific appreciation. And like Sykes, they too would skirt the issue of water rights and the United States' impact on the region. Perhaps the most well-known of these accounts is Aldo Leopold's, captured in his 1949 environmental classic *A Sand County Almanac*. Chronicling his 1922 trip to the delta with his brother to hunt birds, "Green Lagoons" is a paean to bygone era, one which speaks to the "luxuriant vegetation" Sykes noted in his study. Leopold describes the incredible wealth of wildlife that he sees along his journey listing the egrets, cormorants, avocets, willets, mallards, widgeons, teal, bobcat, raccoons, coyotes, deer, and tracks of "el tigre," the jaguar whose "personality pervaded the wilderness" (151). Of course, such fecundity and abundance could only be possible in a well-watered place before the drastic effects of the dams upriver would significantly curtail the river's flows. Leopold explains that the free-flowing river had transformed one of the most inhospitable places on the continent into a verdant oasis. "On the map the delta was bisected by the river," he explains, "but in fact the river was nowhere and everywhere, for he could not decide which of a hundred green lagoons offered the most pleasant and least speedy path to the Gulf" (150). Upon these waters Leopold and his brother floated through what he calls a "milk-and-honey wilderness" (155).

Although Leopold's chapter overflows with nostalgic delight so typical in wilderness narratives, his work—like Abbey's account of Glen Canyon in the previous chapter—becomes an elegy for a lost place living only in faint memories. Leopold's paradise quickly gives way to the reality of the passage of time and changing conditions as he realizes that "All this was far away and long ago. I am told the green lagoons now raise cantaloupes" (157). The author concludes his chapter with a lament: "Man always kills the thing he loves, and so we the pioneers have killed our wilderness" (157). Evident in these closing lines, Leopold creates a text whose discursive purpose moves between poetic and rhetorical aims as he both celebrates and mourns the delta's beauty and its demise. As he casts his praise of the region through the golden glass of nostalgia, the text sits comfortably in that aim of discourse meant to evoke "enjoyment and reflection" (Beale 94). Yet as he shifts the temporality of his writing from past to present and implicates the reader in the delta's ruin through his use of "we," Leopold moves his writing into the rhetorical aim as it asks the audience to go beyond mere reflection on the drastic changes to this area to "influence the understanding and conduct of human affairs" (94). "Green Lagoons" becomes an indictment of our culture's inability to preserve beauty and a latent invitation to rethink one's relationship to the natural world.

Despite the power of Leopold's account captured in the stark contrasts between an unparalleled landscape brimming with life and the pointed critique in its final pages, his words did little in the intervening years to cause any alarm about the region for this was the boom-era of United States' reclamation when massive water projects popped up throughout the region. In fact, things in the delta would get much worse before they ever got any better, as the 1956 Colorado River Storage Project Act facilitated the construction

of numerous dams throughout the upper basin including Glen Canyon, Flaming Gorge, and those along the Gunnison River in Colorado. These further exacerbated the river's tenuous presence in the delta and the overall health of its ecosystem.

A few years before Leopold published his account, Frank Waters traveled the river from source to mouth depicting his journey in *The Colorado* (1946). Less romantic than Leopold's, Waters's descriptions of the delta from a trip in 1926 on an old Mexican steamship equally speak to the uniqueness of the region. Like Leopold, he too notices the "boundless flocks of waterfowl" and speaks of the rich diversity of animal life that inhabits the region (103). He also adds to his many observations more information about the river's characteristics and its effects on the surrounding land. Like so many explorers to the region before him, Waters notes the extreme tidal fluctuations that are so characteristic of river deltas, and he captures more mundane details about this area: "At low water dry stinking bottom-lands, salt-encrusted sinks, alkali flats, tidal flats and geysers of hot mud. At high water a vast bayou" (103). Drawn to the paradoxical natural phenomena of this desert reminiscent of the desert literature considered in chapter two, Waters underscores the mystery and uniqueness of this "strange, wild terra incognita" (101).

Despite Waters's emphasis on the region's natural features, he also considers the Mexican dependence on the river. This attention to the national, political aspect of the region sets his account of the delta apart from Leopold's and foreshadows subsequent works that demonstrate greater concern for the delta's human presence. The rest of his chapter details his journey downriver on the *Rio Colorado*, the steamship loaded with animal hides for markets downriver and the "peons and their families who were returning

to their homeland villages in Mexico” (106). This meager enterprise of moving goods and people down the Colorado, into the Gulf of California, and to cities beyond is far from impressive and leads Waters to conclude four decades after this voyage that “The Colorado has never been a river of commerce and utility, but an emotional, religious, psychological influence in the lives of all who have known it” (Waters, “A Personal View” 12). Recognizing that the Colorado River never developed along the lines of such rivers as the Columbia or Mississippi in terms of its ability to improve trade within the region, Waters chooses to characterize the river years after his journey for its more mysterious spiritual and aesthetic influences.

However, the fact remains that his passage on the *Rio Colorado* as part of Señor Arnulfo Liera’s business, the Compañía de Navegacion del Golfo de California, S.A, played a role, albeit a minor one, in the region’s economic affairs. Through Waters’s later descriptions of the steamship’s captain, a “full-blooded Cocopah” whom he praises for his “voice, slow and authoritative” and references to other passengers like Jimenez and Feliz, Waters constructs the delta as a populated place that is far from the isolated, pristine wilderness oasis Leopold celebrates (109). And while Waters’s account often includes disparaging remarks about Mexico and some of his fellow travelers—“Like all things Mexican, the steamer ran by God rather than by schedule” and Jimenez is described as “a bore”—his text demonstrates a shift from portraying the delta as purely wilderness to an inhabited land home to many (106, 112). This development within the poetically motivated discourse about the delta will define how more contemporary writers and texts depict the region as they become more rhetorically minded as they

consider the changes that need to occur to preserve the area's human and non-human communities.

Influenced by these mid-twentieth-century voices and an emerging national environmental ethos, a growing number of writers over the last few decades have turned their attention to the delta. Many of these follow in the tradition of writers like the Kolb's and Waters, which trace a journey from the headwaters to the river's mouth. Examples include Philip Fradkin's *A River No More* (1968), Colin Fletcher's *River* (1997), and most recently, Jonathan Waterman's *River Running Dry* (2010). The delta figures prominently in all of these texts, although in Fradkin's the region is more or less a no-man's land, a place where the river is truly "no more" while in Fletcher's it is the backdrop for the termination of his solo float trip downriver. To be fair, Fradkin's perspective is certainly justified considering that he visited the region during a period when the upper basin's major dams filled and when significant drought years restricted the river's flows. Likewise, he was there in the years just before major flooding and other events would cause the region to take on a vestige of its former self. And yet his observations fulfill Sykes's prophetic vision for the region once the U.S. turned the water off. Waterman's text, while also interested in the sheer exhilaration of making the journey from the Wind Rivers to the Gulf, goes to great lengths to paint a picture of the river's compromised state once it crosses the U.S.-Mexico border. Yet, unlike Fradkin, his encounters with the delta leave him with a more hopeful tone, recognizing the vibrant life that continues to fight for existence amid a highly unpredictable flow regime.

In the post-Leopold days, the most significant contribution to the literature of the delta from north of the border comes from Bergman's *Red Delta* (2002). This beautifully

formatted text combines scores of vivid photographs that depict the region and its human and non-human communities with narrative that chronicles the author's experiences in the region and encounters with the people who are fighting to preserve and restore it. Written during a period when the delta has become a symbol of environmental degradation and hope, Bergman's text is far more sympathetic to the challenges those living in the area face as the river has been reduced to a shade of its former self. His text takes on a rather different view of the delta than previous writers who have solely lamented what once was. Having witnessed the fierce dedication of the delta's inhabitants to the land and the resilient wetlands and wildlife that thrive under quixotic circumstances, Bergman suggests that "Now we find ourselves in another wave of rediscovery in the delta—and this time what we have discovered is a whole new set of social and cultural values connected to desert climates and desert rivers. For this new discovery of the delta to take hold, a new image for the place will have to prevail" (276).¹⁹ Among the American writers just discussed, a range of discourse has considered the delta's scientific value, the loss of wilderness, and within the Bergman's case, the need to restore the region. Motivated by scientific, poetic, and rhetorical aims, these works reflect the various discursive options these American writers use to reflect their vision of the delta's reality. Despite such contributions, Bergman's observation begs the questions: what will this image be and where it will come from? As the following discussion argues, AEURHYC provides significant traction in providing an alternative vision as it too embraces a wide range of discourse to state its claim on the delta.

¹⁹ Wetlands like those at La Ciénega de Santa Clara were created by agricultural wastewater from Arizona's Wellton-Mohawk Irrigation District. The result of decades of dumping this water into the Mexican desert has created the delta's largest wetlands, homes for many endangered and threatened bird species, and an ecotourism business for those who live in nearby Ejido Johnson. *Red Delta* provides a thorough discussion of this history.

The “Voz Local”: A Mexican Perspective

While the delta’s plight has become a more widespread issue of concern throughout the watershed and beyond since the Colorado’s high water years in the 1980s and 1990s, the people living in the Mexican delta have long known the problems associated with this severely taxed river. Unlike many of their northern counterparts, however, their writings and representations of the region depict the delta in a much different light to provide the images Bergman stresses. Rather than perpetuate the paternalistic discourse evident in the United States’ historical interactions with Mexico over the Colorado, or depict the delta through isolationism and appeals to uninhabited wilderness as Leopold does, the Mexican voices initiate a variety of discourses that challenge these particular perspectives and approaches.²⁰ In doing so, they represent the delta in ways that are both new and necessary to those rooted in so many Anglo-American portrayals of this region. Surprisingly, the metaphors and images Bergman demands do not come from a Mexican version of Edward Abbey or any other environmental/nature writer who decries the delta’s demise. While such new ways of thinking seem expected coming from an author and genre dedicated to using more poetic language to rethink humanity’s place in the natural world, the Mexican voices locate their solutions within discourses and genres focused on action and tangible results.²¹

²⁰ Priscilla Solis Ybarra notes in her assessment of Ruiz de Burton’s works that America’s obsession with wilderness as a defining characteristic of national identity relies on the erasure of Native and Mexican American cultural land practices. Although Leopold’s tribute to the delta’s wilderness is highly valuable in recording what the region once looked like, it too neglects the reality of this as an inhabited landscape. See “Erasure by U.S. Legislation: Ruiz de Burton’s Nineteenth Century Novels and the Lost Archive of Mexican American Environmental Knowledge” in *Environmental Criticism for the Twenty-First Century* (2012), pp.135-147.

²¹ The question regarding whether a Mexican equivalent to Abbey exists is a provoking one as the literature from the region does not reveal such an author as far as I have been able to discern. What I find most significant in this question is not so much whether one exists but why one should ask the question in the first place. Such a query reveals a conditioned view on the types of voices that can and should address

Therefore, as the rest of this chapter demonstrates, a pro-delta Mexican perspective is solidly located within documents that operate primarily within Beale's instrumental realm. Considered in light of the aforementioned legal documents governing U.S.-Mexico Colorado River allocation, these texts demonstrate a shift away from individualistic views of property rights and resource ownership, opting instead for appeals to collaborative efforts between various stakeholders to preserve what amounts to their home. However, as Beale observes, "Any single work of discourse may contain or exhibit a range of motives, . . . some of them explicit in the discourse, others implicit in the situation, others transparent only to a subset of the audience, and others immediately accessible only to the author" (95). In the case of AEURHYC's strategic plans, a range of motives surfaces beyond its instrumental purpose which outlines how this particular group wishes to conduct its affairs. While this particular discourse is most obvious in a first reading of the text, by considering the exigence for its creation it becomes apparent that poetic and rhetorical discourse motivates these documents as well. Together, these three discourse motives function to establish an organization whose environmental ethos focuses on the vitality of an inhabited, civilized place, and which draws upon a community-based approach to address the environmental challenges that directly impact the livelihoods of those dependent on the delta's natural resources. As such, they challenge representations of the delta steeped in the Wilderness myth evident in Leopold and the ethno and anthropocentric perspectives inherent in the binational treaties. At the

environmental issues. In the case of Leopold and other prominent American writers of the Colorado River watershed (as evident in chapter three), a pro-wilderness rhetoric typically emerges as authors praise a place for its wildness, isolation, and human absence. Such perspectives clearly reveal a bias for particular locales and the privileged background of those able to retreat to such places. Thus, by asking this question we assume that the delta is a wilderness, a place that inspires writers to reflect on the loss of such places. While such work is necessary and useful, it does not seem entirely appropriate for the delta which has long been inhabited and which, to those living there, has never been a wilderness.

heart of these plans and AEURHYC's efforts in the region is to advocate a greater awareness of community and home that tie people to the land and bring different groups in conversation with one another. Through repeated emphasis on collaboration, cooperation, and implicit references to *querencia*, the documents containing these voices function primarily to advocate for the survival and proliferation of the region's natural and human communities.

In response to the need to protect the rivers and wetlands throughout the delta, concerned citizens of the region began to organize. Formed in 1999 after seven years of collaboration with Pronatura, Mexico's foremost environmental organization, AEURHYC represents a diverse body of citizens who advocate for the delta's preservation and lead initiatives to involve others in the region's fight for existence (Hinojosa-Huerta, "Restoring" 20). Though small, this group has developed its "Plan Estratégico" or strategic plan for 2001 and 2004-2006 which outlines how to work toward restoring the Colorado River, the Hardy River, a small tributary to the Colorado in this region, and the surrounding delta ecosystem. While these two documents only span fifteen and sixteen pages respectively, they articulate this objective through a range of instrumental, poetic, and rhetorical discourse and thereby provide a means through which we can re-imagine the delta as a living, productive, inhabited place worthy of our greatest attention. At the same time, these documents also assist the Association in outlining its objectives while also justifying its role as a necessary and valued player in the broader dynamics of Colorado River politics.

The 2001 Plan Estratégico represents the first formalized efforts of a group of concerned citizens to articulate their goals for addressing the numerous challenges the

Colorado Delta region in northern Mexico. While modest in its presentation (a very basic word processed document lacking photos or other visual representations of the area), this plan does provide an initial glimpse into the group's discursive activity. As the one-page introduction explains, AEURHYC formed through the involvement of representatives of various constituencies living and operating in the delta that include those from the tourist, fishing, and agriculture industries as well as members from the Cucapá tribe.²² According to the Plan's opening statement, these are groups which "dependen íntimamente de la salud de estos humedales" ("intimately depend on the health of these wetlands") (1). From the Plan's initial remarks, AEURHYC makes clear the close connection that the people here have with their environment. As such, the Plan further explains that AEURHYC's participating members are dedicated to sustainable development through which social and economic activities develop without harming the environment or, as the document states, "deteriorar el medio ambiente" (1). For AEURHYC, working to restore the delta's wetlands and rivers is a matter of survival. In a statement clearly aware of the marginalized position the delta and its inhabitants have occupied for generations, the Plan declares, "Este plan guiará las acciones de AEURHYC como voz local en la restauración del delta del Río Colorado" ("This plan will guide AEURHYC's actions as a local voice in the restoration of the Colorado River Delta") (1). This declaration argues on behalf of the inhabitants of the region who want to assert their rights of playing a role in the region's future where such rights had previously been more or less ignored.

²² The Cucapá tribe is one of the primary indigenous groups to the region. Their homeland stretches throughout the delta and across the U.S-Mexico border where, in the U.S., they are known as the Cocopah people. With the construction of dams and other large scale water projects along the river this tribe has faced significant challenges.

Analysis of AEURHYC's current position further reinforces this sentiment.

Within its consideration of the organization's strengths ("Fortalezas de AEURHYC"), the document notes its grassroots existence as it formed out of the concerns of the local inhabitants and has been a "pilar para la union de la comunidad" or a point of strength for the community (2). As AEURHYC outlines its opportunities, it looks to the delta's natural resources as a way to inspire and unite community members to participate in their restoration and protection. The plan reads: "los miembros de la asociación sienten a los recursos como propios y cada uno tiene el compromiso e interés de esforzarse y unirse para lograr que la asociación siga adelante y cumpla con los objectives que se ha propuesto" ("The association's members feel that the resources are theirs and that each person has a commitment and interest in striving and uniting to ensure that the association moves forward and accomplishes its proposed objectives" (2-3). With these brief references in the opening pages to the organization's home-grown origins and its desire to assert its rights to the region's resources and act in manner so as to preserve them, the 2001 plan grounds its discourse within Beale's rhetorical realm as it works to forward the group's sense of identity. Through their claim to the region and their call to action the plan gives AEURHYC a voice through which to assert its values and goals.

At the same time, these words lay a foundation for the operational aspects of how restoration of the delta should proceed and thereby position the Plan as a clearly instrumentally motivated document. Sections that evaluate AEURHYC's strengths and weaknesses, outline its organizational structure and mission plan, identify its fundamental principles, and chart its strategic goals and objectives speak to how the group should run its affairs so that it can be an active and valuable player in the conversations about delta

restoration. Within these sections and the explanations of how AEURHYC should organize its efforts, a recurring theme of collaboration and dialogue emerges. While indicative of how procedural efforts should ensue, they equally function to challenge the hierarchical and hegemonic water management styles discussed earlier in the chapter that have significantly altered the delta. Seen in this light, the 2001 Plan embraces a rhetoric of cooperation which provides a very useful method for how to approach highly divisive subjects like environmental restoration and water allocation.

As the result of a workshop to outline AEURHYC's operational approach, the 2001 Plan repeatedly stresses the importance of collaboration between the group's members and other organizations. Because AEURHYC lacked any real financial support and actual administrative offices during this time, it quickly realized that to promote and achieve its numerous goals it needed to draw on the resources of other entities. With this recognition of its limitations and the nascent and potentially vulnerable organizational structure, the Plan reinforces collaboration, cooperation, and respect. In the "Debilidades de AEURHYC" section which outlines the organization's current weaknesses, the document explains that "es necesario tener mayor comunicación y voluntad entre los miembros" (2). For AEURHYC, maintaining open communication and good will between members of a diverse range of backgrounds is essential to ensuring their success. The group ensures that regular participation and feedback continues as the Plan requires yearly workshops for five years to evaluate how well AEURHYC is meeting its goals (15).

However, the clearest means of reinforcing open communication appears in the document's third section: "Fundamentos y principios de AEURHYC." Breaking down

the group's guiding principles into smaller subsections the organization continually emphasizes the value of other perspectives. One of these sections explains how AEURHYC will include society at large as part of the organization as it makes and implements decisions. It reads, "Es importante tener más apoyo y reforzar a la asociación con opiniones y sugerencias provenientes de diversos puntos de vista" ("It is important to support and reinforce the association with opinions and suggestions that come from different perspectives") (5). Likewise, as it explains how members will treat one another within the organization, it calls for "una conducta respetuosa y fraternal dentro de la asociación," or respectful and kind behavior within the association (6). The attention to civil discourse and the value AEURHYC sees in different points of view places this document in a much different realm than most documents that make up the Law of the River. Certainly such clear mandates for respect in terms of how members interact and how the organization deals with outside entities distances this from the 1922 and 1944 laws that seemed to consider Mexico and its particular needs as an afterthought. By integrating calls for collaboration and respect into the framework of the text, the 2001 Plan occupies a unique place in the U.S.-Mexico relationship over water and lays the foundation for the more developed 2004-2006 Plan which further emphasizes these themes and their role in promoting the health and viability of local communities.

As the document emphasizes collaboration and cooperation within these sections, it distances itself from the appeals to isolation and solitude inherent in the more wilderness minded texts about the delta. These two texts create a spectrum of discursive engagement with the delta, suggesting on one hand the need to work together to make it a more livable and productive habitat for humans and non-humans alike, while on the other

the desire to retreat to wild places that have since vanished. This negotiation between wilderness and *comunidad*, nostalgia for a bygone era and optimism for the future is at the heart of AEURHYC's efforts to establish its voice as a significant participant in the decision-making process that dictates the river and delta's future. However, these references throughout the 2001 Plan are but a precursor to the more elaborate and developed plan produced in 2004. It is within this newer document that a clearer image of AEURHYC's vision of the delta emerges as it more fully illustrates the collaborative and communal process necessary to improving the region's future outlook.

With yearly workshops mandated by the 2001 Plan to evaluate each year's activities and plan the coming year's work, the 2004-2006 revision showcases the significant development the organization and its voice for local restoration efforts have made over three years. As AEURHYC's most recent governing document, it best represents how this Mexican voice engages various discourses to construct alternative realities to the wilderness-solitude topos that so often dominates discussion about the Colorado River and watershed. Similar to the 2001 Plan, this version operates within Beale's rhetorically and instrumentally motivated quadrants. At the same time, however, it also exhibits strains of a poetically motivated discourse. As a result, the 2004-2006 Plan becomes a more powerful and rhetorically complex document that relies on a number of discursive approaches to carve out its unique place as one of the principle advocates for the delta and those that live there.

Unlike the 2001 Plan, this newer version represents a more professionally developed product that builds the organization's ethos and rhetorical force. The Plan's cover page depicts the name of the organization above a photograph of the Río Hardy at



Río Hardy en Campo Ramona, Mayo 2004

© Joaquín Murrieta

Campo Ramona, an ecocamp that often hosts American hunting and fishing enthusiasts, as it looked in May 2004. This photo depicts a wide stretch of the river surrounded by thick foliage on both sides, with mountains disappearing in the distance, and a dock emerging from the photo's left. Superimposed on the photo are the words: "Trabajando para la Conservación del Delta del Río Colorado" ("working for the conservation of the Colorado River Delta") (1). Unlike Leopold's vision of the delta, this photograph blends the beauty of a well-watered locale with the actual human presence of those who live in region, evident by the dock at the water's edge and the portion of someone's arm that appears in the lower left-hand corner. The presence of a human being and development along the river reinforce the idea of work that the caption on the photo suggests. At the same time, however, their presence balances with the view of the river and mountains that recede into the distance. Humans neither overshadow nature indicative of a pro-development ethos situation nor do they shrink before it as so many Romantics do. Cropped to foreground the river while also allowing the elements of civilization to appear, the photo embodies AEURHYC's vision for what the delta can become: a place where a reliable presence of water can bring back Sykes's "luxuriant vegetation" and promote sustainable economic and environmental practices.

Whereas recreational and aesthetic interests promote the preservation of wilderness ideals in many of the basin's federally protected areas, the delta is a place where needs beyond these ideals are put in conversation and where a diverse set of stakeholders come together to discuss how these needs will play out in the region. As articulated in the 2004-2006 Plan, AEURHYC's mission is to "conservar y restaurar los ecosistemas del Delta del Río Colorado y promover un buen uso de sus recursos para la realización y permanencia de actividades que permitan el desarrollo económico, social, y cultural de las comunidades locales" ("to conserve and restore the ecosystems of the Delta and the Colorado River and promote the wise use of its resources for the realization and continuation of activities that will allow for the economic, social, and cultural development of the local communities") (7). This notion of "work" becomes a key term throughout AEURHYC's 2004-2006 Plan as its members have their home in the delta; they are working primarily to preserve their home, and therefore, they are concerned about how environmental restoration can prove economically sustainable for local communities and business enterprises. Work is further reinforced by a photograph on page nine which depicts two individuals loading a wheelbarrow. The caption explains that these men are beginning the restoration efforts at Campo Muñoz, another one of the delta's tourist camps.

The 2004-2006 Plan also distinguishes itself from its predecessor as it begins with a preface by Germán Muñoz López, a founding member of the group, to underscore the organization's desire to advocate for the plight of the region and its people. Rather than launch into the organization's goals that are more characteristic of instrumental discourse, this introduction adopts a reflective narrative of the river and delta, and thereby relies on

pathos to underscore the devastation that has come to the area and the hope that can come through communal efforts. Thus, by relying on poetic discourse that emphasizes reflection and contemplation and its appeals to the reader's sympathies, López's introduction also develops the document's rhetorical aim in calling for changing and underscoring the association's values. López begins by writing:

Quedamos pocos de los que vimos al Río Colorado en su esplendor, antes de que su flujo cesara casi por completo. La mayoría de nosotros, ahora miembros de AEURHYC, tuvimos nuestro primer encuentro con el Río Colorado en la década de los 1950s, y algunos otros, como miembros de la tribu Cucupá, desde hace cientos de años ("There are few of us left who have seen the Colorado River in its splendor before its flow almost completely stopped. Most of us, now members of AEURHYC, had our first encounter with the Colorado River during the 1950s, while others like members of the Cucupá tribe have been here for hundreds of years"). (2)

This opening declaration establishes the human presence within the area and the relationship that the Mexican farmers and Cucupá Indians have had with the river for generations in many cases. It also respectfully acknowledges an indigenous presence here, a move that the early water treaties along the Colorado failed to do. As the Mexican delta has long been viewed as a wasteland in the post-dam days, López's opening remarks locate a strong human connection to this region. From this point he continues to describe the river before the dams and heightened demand greatly reduced its flow, highlighting the river's strong and turbid currents that it was so well known for by early visitors to the region (2).

With the river's historic characteristics in the forefront of the reader's mind, López again returns to those who call this region home, explaining that “Desde entonces hemos sido testigos de cómo el río ido deteriorando, y como esto ha afectado nuestras vidas” (“Since then we have been witnesses to how the river has deteriorated and how this has affected our lives”) (2). This personal account emphasizes the local connection far more powerfully than the 2001 Plan. While the first version states that AEURHYC represents a local voice, the 2004 version chooses to lead out with one particular voice to make the arguments about the region's preservation all the more personal and intimate. By emphasizing the intimate connection to the river and their ongoing observations about its drastic declines and the impacts this has had on the livelihood of those living in the delta, López endows AEURHYC with a unique ethos, one based on first-hand knowledge of how this region has changed over time. Yet, as will be discussed shortly, López does not relegate his comments to focusing just on what was. Rather, his recollections move the audience to consider what can be.

López's act of witnessing is a powerful rhetorical strategy that many environmental causes have adopted. Evident in works such as *Testimony: Writers of the West Speak on Behalf of Utah Wilderness* which emerged in light of the state's intense debates about wilderness preservation in the mid-nineties, this tool has inspired other collections about wilderness areas in Alaska and Nevada that witness to the state's natural beauty.²³ At the heart of this act of witnessing, or “speak[ing] from the truth of our lives,” as *Testimony's* editors explain, is story (Trimble and Williams 3). According to rhetorician Sharon Crowley who looks to Aristotle's emphasis on “exemplary narrative

²³ These texts include: *Arctic Refuge: A Circle of Testimony* (2001) and *Wild Nevada: Testimonies on Behalf of the Desert* (2005). As with *Testimony*, *Arctic Refuge's* editors presented Congress with this book to urge greater wilderness protection, in this case, of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.

. . . that makes a point by illustration or comparison” to construct compelling arguments, story is “the most efficient means of garnering attention” (197-98). Because story often provides a more subtle approach to transmitting beliefs and values, it is no surprise that AEURHYC opens this plan with Lopez’s testimony regarding the river and what he and others experienced as the river and delta have drastically transformed from places of plenty to entities in grave need of rehabilitation. While an audience may disagree with his assessment, ultimately his story is his own; he is the sole authority on his childhood recollections about the river. As such an authority, his words command attention and credibility.

While previous articulations of the region have come from outsiders like the Spanish, British, and American explorers of centuries past, and the more modern day observers like Sykes, Leopold, Waters, and Bergman, López creates an important space for a local voice that works, in López’s words, “presentar una resena de cómo disfrutábamos este río, y que a su vez brinda un panorama de la situación actual y fundamenta las actividades de la asociación descritas en este plan estratégico” (“to present a review of how we have taken advantage of this river and also provide an overview of the association’s activities and its actual situation in this strategic plan”) (2). What is most significant in this closing of the preface’s first paragraph is the emphasis given to the “actual” situation that defines the organization’s role in restoration. Rather than relying on outsider observations by those whose time in the delta is intermittent, López argues that the Plan reflects generations of day-to-day living with the land. Thus, the Plan offers a unique insider viewpoint of what this river means to the local communities, businesses, and other interests.

Underlying López's rhetorical refashioning of the delta as a lived space where memory is deeply infused into the land is a strong bioregional ethos as articulated in chapter two. A bioregional perspective that speaks more closely to this sense of connection within the Mexican delta and which draws on the pervasive Spanish/Mexican cultural presence that defines this area and the greater American Southwest is *querencia*. For five hundred years this Spanish term has meant a return to the place in which one was born or from where one proceeds, according to Mexican author Luis González y González (7).²⁴ More specifically, Estevan Arellano, a New Mexican poet, historian, and advocate for the Rio Arriba or Upper Rio Grande Region and its small Hispano communities describes *querencia* as "that which gives us a sense of place, anchors us to the land, and makes us a unique people" (35). American nature writer Barry Lopez adds to this definition while elaborating on what this term represents. He suggests that it refers to "The place from which we speak our deepest beliefs. . . . And it carries this sense of being challenged. . . . it applies to our challenge in the modern world, that our search for a *querencia* is both a response to threat and a desire to find out who we are" (39-40).²⁵ For AEURHYC's members whose livelihoods and homelands face continual threats from the diminished quantity and quality of water that reach the delta, *querencia* implicitly underscores the rhetorical appeals to this region as a prized living and working space.

One of the most obvious ways in which *querencia* infiltrates AEURHYC's documents is through references to future generations. As Arellano explains, *querencia*

²⁴ The original Spanish reads: "Va para quinientos años que la palabra *querencia* se usa como equivalente de inclinación a volver al sitio donde uno se ha criado. Del mismo término nos servimos para designar la tierra de donde se procede."

²⁵ Lopez traces this term to its roots in the tradition of Spanish bullfighting, something that Ernest Hemingway extensively elaborates on in *Death in the Afternoon* (1932) wherein he explains that *querencia* is "a place the bull naturally wants to go to in the ring; a preferred locality" (150). It is here that "[the bull] feels that he has his back against the wall and in this *querencia* he is inestimably more dangerous and almost more impossible to kill" (150).

carries with it the idea that “we didn’t inherit the land from our parents; we have it borrowed from our kids” (37). In the 2001 version of the Plan, the mission statement explains that the organization is dedicated to rehabilitating the delta’s wetlands while also ensuring smart economic development that will not “poner en riesgo los recursos naturales de las próximas generaciones” (“put the natural resources of the next generations at risk”) (4). López equally reaffirms AEURHYC’s commitment to restoring and protecting the region for the benefit of those in future generations so that they may “disfrutar de el como alguna vez nosotros lo hicimos” (“enjoy it as we have once did”) in the more recent version (2). The repetition of this idea and the ongoing focus on this goal makes clear AEURHYC’s dedication to place and the viability of those who will inhabit it in years to come. By appealing to *querencia* and the attention it gives to later generations, López’s preface moves beyond the nostalgia and loss that he shares with Leopold to look instead to future possibilities where the river and delta can again flourish. Like Sykes who relied on his observations to project what the delta would become without an adequate and reliable water source, López builds on AEURHYC’s earlier successes to foretell a new, more promising era for the delta. Despite the years of decline, which could easily leave López and others hopeless about the area’s future, they will embrace optimism and the slow progress already made to improve conditions. Such embedded appeals to the shared responsibility to future generations reinforce the intimately expressed connections the people have with the delta and with future members of the community.

With the intent of restoring the delta so that future generations may benefit from it as López and others before him have, he returns again to personal narrative to underscore

his authoritative position as one who knew the delta before it drastically changed (2). He begins this section with “Recuerdo que en 1952 se abatió un chubasco de verano que inundó todo” (“I remember when in 1952 a sudden summer downpour flooded everything”) (2). Shifting the focus from the collective “we” to “I,” López shares personal recollections of the river that continue to hold significant meaning for him. He recalls how as a five year old he returned to the river after the flood waters of the previous year had receded and marvels at the nearly twenty foot high river banks that had been carved out by the river’s force (2). He then goes on to list the abundance of the delta’s flora and fauna that once thrived in the riparian and wetland habitats along the river. Up until 1960, López recalls that the river was in constant flux as significant runoff continued to augment the river’s load, making those areas bordering the river prime habitat for animals like beaver, lynx, fox, raccoons, and the leopard, not to mention the domestic animals that roamed the area (2). Drawing on this trope of abundance as other delta writers have done to emphasize the historic and quasi-idyllic characteristics of the region, López briefly shifts the narrative to the dramatic changes that followed the benchmark year of 1960 when he notes that this was the first time that the delta’s infamous tidal bore stopped its charge upriver (2). Like the pulsating tides that wreaked havoc on ships trying to navigate the Colorado’s mouth into the Sea of Cortez, López’s reflections oscillate between remembrances and critique. While hinting at the disappearance of “El Burro,” he describes the special relationships that those living in the delta had with the river (2). In a place where summer temperatures regularly exceed 100 degrees Fahrenheit, “las aguas del río fueron nuestro único alivio durante los largos días de verano” (“the river’s waters were our only respite during the long days of summer”)

(2). He then relates the fun he had with others after a day's work when the people would go to the river for swimming contests and mud fights (2).

Shifting again to nostalgic recollections that underscore the vanishing of this place as he once knew it, López's work is like the tide that ebbs and flows to leave different impressions on the land. Where his use of nostalgia and a vanishing landscape work to set up his appeals to address future generations, they also allow him to unite the experiences of a people living in a remote section of Mexico with a broader audience. By sharing memories from his past, he invites readers to consider their own special childhood memories and connections to places of significance. At the same time, López's stories aid the reader in seeing how those in the delta are not so different from people in other places; they find great satisfaction in their home place and have an appreciation of the beauty that surrounds them. Inherent in all these appeals is the human presence. They do not celebrate a human-less past that is more apparent in Leopold's treatment of the delta. Instead, López celebrates both the native and non-native species that made their home in the region, and implicitly acknowledges the human component through the reference to the domesticated livestock. And unlike Leopold who visited the region for sport, López is here because this is his *querencia*, his home-place. Rather than a place to escape to, the delta is the land of his ancestors and descendants. Although he laments a lost past, López also looks to the future and what positive changes can come to the region.

However, López interrupts these halcyon memories to shift his attention to the main culprit in the river's demise: the United States. Having just outlined the bounty and beauty that once permeated this region, López shifts his focus to the effects of the United

States' reclamation boom, which placed countless dams, dikes, and diversions in the way of a free-flowing river. According to López, with the river pooling behind Glen Canyon Dam from the 1960s to the early 1980s, there no longer was enough water to counter the effects of the Gulf's tides and wind which formed giant sand bars across the river channel. When the United States had to release massive amounts of water in the early 1980s because of high precipitation rates in the upper basin, the delta region and the greater Mexicali Valley repeatedly flooded because of the blockade which prevented the water from reaching its historic outlet. Damaging livelihoods and placing the greater Mexicali Valley in danger, the United States' manipulation of the river had drastic effects on those in Mexico (2-3).²⁶ Whereas the Colorado River literary tradition has by and large neglected the injustice of these effects, López directly addresses them.

The numerous changes in the river and the delta over López's lifetime lead him to lament the region's economic and environmental losses. He writes, "Da mucha tristeza ver que lo que era un caudaloso río se haya convertido en un sucio dren que en partes solo alcanza cinco metros de ancho" ("It is very sad to see what was once a river with a very large flow be converted into a dirty drain that in places is only five meters wide") (3). From the nostalgic and celebratory descriptions of the river in López's opening paragraphs, the preface shifts to a more pessimistic view on the present state of the river noted through the blame placed on the United States and those "criminales" that had recently set fire to the vegetation along the Hardy River (3). Ecocritic Scott Slovic identifies negotiations of praise and blame as powerful rhetorical strategies to alert audiences to environmental issues. From his analysis of American nature writing Slovic

²⁶ The floods had a particularly devastating effect on Campo Mosqueda, a popular ecotourism site along the Rio Hardy. See *Red Delta* pp. 194-197 for a detailed account of the flooding and the resulting lawsuit filed by Jesús Mosqueda González against the United States for damages.

concludes that authors employ “discrete rhetoric” or “embedded rhetoric” as they shift between “rhapsodic” (praise) and “jeremiadic” (blame/warning) registers to explore the natural world and provoke an audience to action (82-86). In López’s case, the text relies on discrete rhetoric or a “relatively clean split . . . into rhapsodic and jeremiadic halves” rather than the more integrated embedded rhetorical approach to provide a view of the delta and argue for its preservation (88).²⁷ While an embedded approach may be more effective in other situations, López’s preface ensures that the audience understands the drastic changes that have characterized the river over the last few decades as a result of the United States’ involvement and control of the river.

To further underscore the need to work to restore the river to a healthier version of its former self, López concludes the preface reasserting the connection the local people have with the river and delta, their role as witnesses to the delta’s changes, and the charge to other groups and society as a whole to unite with AEURHYC (3). Shifting again his pronoun use this time from “I” back to the collective “we,” López states that it is the river that all those living near it rely on to “sobrevivir” (“survive”) (3). He expresses hope that things can change with the involvement of others, but insists that such participation is “urgente” (“urgent”) (3). With such help, López believes that the area can be rehabilitated to the point that the wealth of resources that once characterized and of which he and those in the region are “testigos” (“witnesses”) can return once again (3).

I consider this preface at length because it occupies such an important place within the overall Plan. As this is the first piece of information a reader encounters after the title page, it shifts one’s expectation away from reading a more instrumentally

²⁷ A good example of embedded rhetoric is seen in Childs’s writing of desert water where politicized viewpoints about how to live in the desert are deeply embedded within the “epistemological inquiry” that defines his writing (Slovic, “Epistemology” 90).

motivated text that outlines procedural information about organizational structures and fiscal reports to one that centers on the specific values and desires of this particular community. Although instrumentally motivated discourses outline “the governance, guidance, control, or execution of human activities” or more simply, the actions a group should perform, such discourse lacks the persuasive power that rhetorically aimed discourse carries that can galvanize support and the desire to act (Beale 94). To articulate AEURHYC’s role in the delta’s restoration, López relies on a balance of celebration, nostalgia, warning, and invitation and the repetition of images and phrases that evoke this group’s *querencia*. Even though this use of epideictic rhetoric that includes praise and blame suggests Beale’s poetic realm of discourse, López uses it to argue for the viability of this organization, their needs in protecting their lands and livelihoods, and for a greater Mexican presence in the decisions made regarding the Colorado River.

The rest of the Plan is divided into five sections: an overview of AEURHYC’s makeup that includes a listing of its achievements through 2004; its immediate goals; its vision and mission statements; its strategy and goals for 2004-2006; its financial plan; and indicators of performance and impact. Throughout the document, the organization’s appeals to community involvement and governmental recognition are apparent. In the “¿Quién es AEURHYC?” section, the group elaborates on its various constituencies and notes its ongoing commitment to address the ecological, economic, and cultural needs of the area. Rather than a purely environmentally focused group, broader issues of environmental justice are inherent in AEURHYC’s concerns to respond to how human needs and communities interact with the non-human world. The editors of *The Environmental Justice Reader* (2002) explain environmental justice as “The right of all

people to share equally in the benefits bestowed by a healthy environment,” that includes “the places in which we live, work, play, and worship” (4). The primary goals of this movement

attempt to redress the disproportionate incidence of environmental contamination in communities of the poor and/or communities of color, to secure for those affected the right to live unthreatened by the risks posed by environmental degradation and contamination, and to afford equal access to natural resources that sustain life and culture. (4)

Noted for its economic hardship, lack of abundant and clean water, and marginalized (in terms of how the United States has historically viewed those living in the region) groups, the delta represents one of the continent’s most significant environmental justice issues.

Whereas the previous chapter noted how writers like Abbey looked to remote reaches of Glen Canyon as a retreat from reality, the delta is a place where work and everyday living is inherent in considerations of the region’s future. In its most basic form, AEURHYC’s Plan is a call for environmental justice as it advocates for the well-being of the ecosystem which sustains the many groups who make their home here. In the Plan’s section “Nuestroslogros” (“Our achievements”), it lists what it has accomplished over the last two years. First among a list that includes establishing a financial base to operate, financing dikes, and creating nearly 2,500 acres of wetlands, the Plan places the involvement of the Cucapá tribe and the local inhabitants into AEURHYC’s activities as the top two achievements of this period (5). Recognizing the need to integrate local groups—many of whom, like the Cucapá, have faced significant challenges as they’ve

watched the decline of their homeland's resources—AEURHYC establishes its priorities with the connections between the human and natural communities clearly in mind.

The efforts to involve the Cucupá and the Plan's emphasis on this particular achievement further emphasize the role that collaboration and cooperation play within this organization and within the larger project of rehabilitating the delta. Similar to the 2001 Plan, this version emphasizes the many partnerships that comprise this organization, specifying in greater detail how such collaboration and cooperation works within the group. As the 2001 version provides an organizational chart that outlines the group's various constituencies, the 2004-2006 text provides further commentary on *el Consejo* or the council which is comprised of two representatives from the following areas: the tourist industry, the fishing community, the Cucupá tribe, agricultural interests, and tourists/visitors to the area (4). Added to these groups include representation from more than fifteen communities in the Hardy and Colorado Rivers areas (4). But rather than just list these partnerships as the 2001 Plan has done, this more developed account includes photographs that show the council at work. The one pictured below captures AEURHYC members at a planning workshop. Such visual representations of a diverse group of



Miembros de AEURHYC en el taller de planeación estratégica.
© AEURHYC

stakeholders meeting together add significant credibility to the claim that the Council's decisions "se basan en las opiniones de todos" ("are based on everyone's opinions") (4). They also reinforce later discussions throughout the

text that refer again to establishing partnerships between invested parties that include governmental and non-governmental agencies to make their voice heard and to address the delta's challenges (8-11). However, the clearest indication of AEURHYC's commitment to many voices derives from the penultimate page that includes a photograph of the Board of Directors: Francisco Guzmán De Dios, Camerina Hurtado Espinoza, and Germán Muñoz López. This is accompanied by a list of the other members of the Council along with their respective affiliations: Florentino Flores Torres (Fishing), Mario Oman Escudero Saiza and Jesús Mosqueda Gonzalez (Tourism), José Justino Pérez Ibarra and Mario Alberto Meza Solórzano (Agriculture), and Mónica González Portillo and Onésimo González Saez (Cucupá) (15). Together, these images and the listing of names within the broader emphasis on collaboration and partnerships showcase AEURHYC's strong commitment to making these links a reality.

Confronted with water policies forged by distant national powers, this group is emerging as a significant player in shaping the politics of the region. These documents represent their voice and their needs and reflect what they deem are the best practices needed to preserve and restore the delta and their homes. They also provide a clear vision for how to re-envision the region. With their emphasis on collaboration and a keen sense of place, they demonstrate what type of discourse should govern management and policy directives. But their reconstruction of the delta extends beyond just the written discourse itself. The various photographs throughout reinforce the organization's mission and provide a clear indication of its vision for the delta's future. Like the title page's photograph, the 2004 document includes another image of the Rio Hardy whose caption below reads: "La parte superior del Río Hardy muestra la vision que se tiene para su parte

sur y el Río Colorado” (“The upper part of the Hardy River shows the vision we have for its upper region and for the Colorado River”) (7).

This image provides a tangible idea of what AEURHYC hopes to achieve for the natural



La parte superior del Río Hardy muestra la visión que se tiene para su parte sur y el Río Colorado.
© Carlos Valdez

environment through its collaborative efforts. By working together with the region’s many stakeholders, such rehabilitation of the delta’s wetlands is possible. Not only has AEURHYC seen success in these efforts, it has also garnered attention from Mexico’s Pronatura with whom it has formed a very tight alliance. As Osvel Hinojosa-Huerta and Yamilet Carrillo-Guerrero observe, “Slowly but steadily, government agencies in Mexico are recognizing AEURHYC as an organized group of local communities and individual stakeholders whose voices deserve to be heard” (“Restoration” 20). The creation and implementation of the Plan is sure to further reinforce AEURHYC’s voice in dictating future developments in the region.

The Delta’s Future and the Role of Collaboration

Apparent in the sentiments expressed in this chapter’s epigraph, water and land are resources that deserve protection and preservation. Water is not a commodity to be sold, as the Spanish proverb suggests, and neither is land something to be developed to the point that open space becomes only a memory. But in the case of the delta, perspectives that only foreground a wilderness appeal are ultimately detrimental to AEURHYC’s cause. For too long the delta has been a blank spot on the map. While such

“invisibility” fostered scientific knowledge and freedom for those seeking a refuge from more civilized regions, lack of awareness about the close link between the land and its inhabitants has compromised the freedom of those living there. While a return to those conditions that Leopold praised—the endless maze of water and vegetation—would certainly benefit those living in the area who depend on a reliable presence of water, AEURHYC’s position represents a clear environmental justice concern where the needs of people directly linked to a specific locale need to be balanced with those of the land. In light of AEURHYC’s mission, making the delta a highly visible spot on map will usher in the freedom to preserve people and the biotic communities on which they depend.

AEURHYC’s efforts have played an instrumental role in bringing much needed exposure to this region and in establishing a governance model based on collaboration and cooperation between multiple constituencies. However, this community organization represents just one voice—albeit a very unique one—emanating from the delta today. In the spirit of what Craig Childs experienced as he entered the desert for answers to understand desert water, López, delta researchers, and the region’s advocates have viewed the river and its surrounding land as the primary catalyst for creating the binational approach that currently governs many of the area’s restoration and management efforts. In a 2008 article, Francisco Zamora-Arroyo, Director of the Sonoran Institute’s Upper Gulf of California Legacy Program, and a group of Mexican and American advocates and scientists trace the shifting attitudes by the United States and Mexico to the high water years on the Colorado during the 1980s and 1990s (“Collaboration” 871). As a result of the flooding that occurred in the delta during this period after years of little to no water reaching the Gulf, the delta responded, prompting

numerous individuals on both sides of the border to “explore the possibility that it could be restored” (871). Through the delta’s natural regeneration during this period, many individuals expressed hope that in fact something could be done to bring the river and delta back to a healthier version of their former selves. AEURHYC represents one of the most prominent Mexican voices bringing about this transformation.

However, as the authors of this article conclude, “Water alone is not enough to restore the Colorado River Delta” (884). Despite the periodic flows that do make it to the sea and which provide necessary moisture for the various wetlands throughout the area, much more has to be done to ensure that the delta ecosystem that presently exists not only survives but thrives into the future. Clearly needed is an ethic that values the land and a people’s rightful connection to that land. Again, Arellano makes a salient point about this relationship:

If we want the land to be taken care of properly, . . . We must have people living on and from the land who are able and willing to take care of it. . . . We have to understand that we cannot save the land and water apart from the people or the people from the land and water. To save either, we must save both . . . (35-36)

While Arellano addresses his comments to the situation in the Rio Grande watershed, his observations aptly describe the current events in the delta. The lower Colorado River and delta’s survival are inextricably linked to how humans in and out of the region decide to view these natural entities. And as has been discussed at length, the fate of the people living in the region is clearly contingent on restoring and preserving the delta’s environment. Fortunately, in the spirit of AEURHYC’s motions to bring disparate groups

together, a host of voices on both sides of the border advocate collaborative and cooperative measures between the United States and Mexico to define how the land and river and the people and economies dependent on them can prosper well into the future.

A major turning point and catalyst in the cooperation that extends across the international border came in 2000 when the International Boundary Water Commission added a provision to the 1944 U.S.-Mexico Treaty. Known as Minute 306, this addendum identified preliminary efforts by a small group of interested parties on both sides of the border to address the delta's ecological health and mandated binational collaboration to see the ongoing engagement by a greater number of participants to work toward restoring the region (1). The document provides for a "framework for cooperation" between the two countries "through the development of joint studies that include possible approaches to ensure use of water for ecological purposes in this reach and formulation of recommendations for cooperative projects, based on the principle of an equitable distribution of resources" (2). Words like "cooperation," "joint," and "equitable" reflect a significant turn in U.S.-Mexico relations over water from the language representative of the early half of the twentieth century that positioned Mexico's water needs as a nuisance and afterthought to the United States' grand plans for development. At the vanguard of this movement to promote binational cooperation and equity are AEURHYC and its partnerships with Mexico's Pronatura Noroeste in San Luis Rio Colorado, Sonora, México and the Sonoran Institute based in Tucson, AZ.

Since this landmark decision to amend how the two nations approached the delta, countless binational efforts have ensued. Jose Marcos and Steve Cornelius, of the University of Arizona and the Sonoran Institute respectively, trace in "Mapping the

Organizational Landscape in the Colorado River Delta: the Big Picture on Binational Collaboration” the major events that have led up to the culmination of Minute 306 and those that have continued afterwards. When AEURHYC published its second Plan, Marcos and Cornelius note, more than twenty non-profit groups on both sides of the border were involved in delta restoration projects (23). Other major governmental and non-governmental organizations include the University of Arizona, Defenders of Wildlife, Environmental Defense, and the Pacific Institute in the United States and the Universidad Autónoma de Baja California, the Intercultural Center for the Study of Deserts and Oceans (CEDO Intercultural), and the Institute of Environment and Sustainable Development of Sonora (IMADES) in Mexico. These groups have sponsored numerous studies, reports, and other documents and facilitated further partnerships between the two nations that demonstrate the strength of the Mexican voice in the delta and a growing binational presence that together are presently working to save the environmental, cultural, and economic resources of the region.

One of the most important examples of this collaboration is the 2005 *Conservation Priorities in the Colorado River Delta: Mexico and the United States* report. Prepared by members of the Sonoran Institute, Environmental Defense, the University of Arizona, Mexico’s Food and Development Center, Pronatura Sonora, and the World Wildlife Fund, this document is the product of a binational workshop that identified the direction for future conservation efforts. AEURHYC’s vision for restoring this home-place for the benefit of future generations through collaborative efforts resonate throughout the preface’s opening statements. They identify the groups involved in the booklet’s production who “are committed to restoration of the Colorado River

Delta and Upper Gulf of California over the long term” (iii). At the same time, the authors “invite other non-governmental and governmental organizations, local users, scientific institutions, and the general public to join our future efforts toward a comprehensive conservation plan for the region” (iii). Published both in Spanish and English, *Conservation Priorities* also adopts a format similar to AEURHYC’s 2004-2006 Plan as it begins with a testimonial by Exequiel Ezcurra from Mexico’s National Institute of Ecology. Like López, he too employs nostalgia for a vanished delta, looking back to Sykes’s book as a reminder of what once was. But as he describes the effects of the flooding in the 1980s, he exclaims, “The Delta was back—perhaps a ghost image of its original glorious self, but nonetheless it was back!” (1). With such hope of a greater restoration he invites the reader to consider the region’s future and the value of this report in providing a “roadmap for many years, a fundamental guide for conservation efforts (1). Building on the range of discourse AEURHYC’s documents initiated, this report along with others such as the Colorado River Delta Water Trust’s 2010 funding prospectus place collaborative efforts to restore the delta at the core of their governing principles.²⁸

While these documents represent a significant step forward in bringing the Mexican perspective into the larger discursive understandings of the Colorado River watershed, current technological developments transmit the rhetoric of *querencia* and collaboration in regards to the delta throughout the watershed to transcend the physical and discursive borders that have typically defined the river. In 2011, Nuestro Río

²⁸ This group was created and is maintained by Pronatura Noroeste, the Sonoran Institute, and the Environmental Defense Fund. It aims to “identify cooperative water management projects between water users in [Mexico and the United States] that will produce benefits for both nations” (3). See http://sonoraninstitute.org/images/stories/delta_water_trust_10-22-10__130pm_lores.pdf.

launched a website and Facebook page to promote the Latino voice in the river's future development. Their website explains that "Nuestro Río is a network of Latinos in the West that use our collective voice to educate our communities about the history of Latinos and the Colorado River and to tell our story as we advocate for a healthy river for generations to come" ("About and Contact"). Drawing strength from the well-established Hispano presence in the Rio Grande watershed and the acequia or ditch culture that continues to characterize Hispano communities through the region, this group draws upon the principles inherent in *querencia* to advocate for a greater connection to the Colorado River.²⁹ Their page "Our Story" defines *querencia* in light of Barry Lopez's explanation and adds that it is "A place in which we know exactly who we are" (Nuestro Río). Separated from the Mexican Delta and AEURHYC by geopolitical boundaries, Nuestro Río nonetheless shares a powerful bond with its neighbors south of the border. Invoking *querencia*, this group draws on a pervasive cultural motif that elicits a shared identity rooted in the rich *mezcla* [mixture] of Spanish, Mexican, and Native ancestry. In doing so, a pan-Latino cause emerges in the borderlands region as it unites both the United States and Mexico and the Colorado River and Rio Grande watersheds.

The rise of these tributary voices—those from the Mexican Delta and the Latino voice here in the United States—make significant and necessary contributions to how we approach the river today. As Bergman reminds us, "to change the relation of the delta to its own river, we have to rewrite the river of our imaginations" (21). Imagined as the property of the United States which exerted its authority in dictating how and for whom it should be developed, the Colorado had little chance of connecting with its delta in a way

²⁹ The website points out that Hispano communities also settled along the tributaries of the San Juan River which is part of the Colorado River basin. Thus, a Hispano presence has existed for centuries in both watersheds although much more prominent then and now in the Rio Grande.

which would preserve the integrity of both entities. As AEURHYC's strategic plans argue, such approaches have cut the river off from the well-being of those in the delta who rely on it for their survival. But what the 2001 and 2004 plans reveal along with binational efforts of various governmental and non-profit organizations is that new ways of imagining the river are already well-established. Whether implicitly or explicitly made, appeals to *querencia* turn the delta region and the lower Colorado River that flows through it into a place worthy of reverence, beauty, and protection as this is home for many human and non-human communities and the land that shapes their identity. References to collaboration invite a rethinking of priorities and a greater willingness to compromise on both sides of the border but particularly within the United States.

Of course, neither of these re-imaginings—*querencia* and collaboration—is perfect. People firmly entrenched in a land can often become too insular as they harbor xenophobic attitudes. Likewise, collaboration can prove inefficient and at times counterproductive to environmental rehabilitation. Addressing this latter issue, Bret Birdsong, Professor of Law at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, suggests that a long history of collaboration defines the Colorado River watershed evident in the numerous treaties between the U.S. and Mexico. Despite the inequitable collaboration inherent in these agreements, as I have noted above, Birdsong concludes that “there is no shortage of ‘collaboration’ going on up and down the river that directly affects the interests of the delta” (854). “The problem,” he suggests,

is that the collaborations are yielding decisions that merely reflect the priorities of entrenched economic interests. If collaborations are to solve the problem of the delta, then they must be structured in some way to give

ecological interests a voice that has heretofore largely been silenced by a combination of exclusion from the collaborative process and exclusion from the legal framework in which the collaborative processes take place.

(854)

As a lawyer, Birdsong's solution to the inherent problems associated with collaboration is not surprising. In order to make collaboration a viable enterprise throughout the delta, agencies, governments, and other interested parties must be compelled by the legal process to recognize the environment's unacknowledged voice. While this approach is absolutely necessary in facilitating efforts to make lasting and beneficial changes in the delta, other methods are needed beyond what economic and legal models can provide.

Recalling Helen Ingram's call for humanists to get involved in water management decisions, this chapter outlines how a rhetorical analysis of two largely obscure Mexican documents provides a useful foundation on which to begin the significant task of changing countless attitudes about how the Colorado River and the delta have been viewed in the past. At the vanguard of these efforts to alter perceptions and invite new partnerships, and even mend old ones, AEURHYC and its 2001 and 2004 strategic plans command a significant place within the discourse about the river. As they negotiate instrumental and poetic discourses, they ultimately create documents fully committed to the articulation of the stakeholders' needs and values. As such, these plans are powerful rhetorically motivated texts that evince how a set of tributary voices works to not only justify their existence but command attention as formative players in the destiny of a particular region. The reverence such documents invoke for the delta, the river, and the present and future generations dependent on their resources leave us today with a

working vocabulary by which we can rethink our own connections to the watershed, its diverse peoples, and the future generations that will inhabit it. Perhaps as more and more groups throughout the watershed come to recognize and speak of their own *querencia*, they too will be willing to extend a hand of good will and cooperation to ensure that these precious homelands can endure for years to come.

Gathering Waters: The Future of Colorado River Discourse

“You have to get over the color green;
 you have to quit associating beauty with gardens and lawns . . .”
 —Wallace Stegner, *Where the Bluebird Sings to the Lemonade Springs*, 45

The water year 2010-2011 was one of the wettest on record for the Colorado River’s upper basin.³⁰ With extraordinary snowfall during the winter and spring months coupled with cooler than normal temperatures in April and May throughout the Rocky Mountains, the snowpack in some of the headwaters regions in Colorado, Utah, and Wyoming exceeding 150% of average at the beginning of May 2011 (National Resources Conservation Service). Skiers and snowboarders reveled in the epic La Niña year that kept resorts open through the Fourth of July, river rafters became giddy at the runoff caroming down the Green and Colorado Rivers that recalled the historic flows of the early 1980s which saw Lake Powell nearly breach Glen Canyon Dam, and weather forecasters projected flooding throughout the upper basin (Romano; Merrill; Berwyn).³¹

With predictions of another La Niña year, many water gurus hoped 2011-2012 would be another banner year for the watershed. However, nearly a year after witnessing some of the highest snowpack and runoff flows in recorded history, the snow totals are mediocre, with many places throughout the upper basin well below their average totals.

³⁰ The water year begins on October 1 and ends September 30.

³¹ Because dam managers failed to release enough water in anticipation of the huge snowmelt that year, Lake Powell surpassed full pool and threatened to overtop to the dam. Significant damage occurred to the dam’s spillways as they discharged huge amounts of water, creating epic rapids in the Grand Canyon. Because of the drought during the early 2000s, the reservoir was much lower than in 1983 and 2011’s flows did not pose a similar threat.

The Bureau of Reclamation notes that in early February of this year the upper basin is 77% of average with projections suggesting that the end of the water year will see the basin anywhere from 51% to 117% of average (“Lake Powell Current Status”).³² While there are still a few months left where storms could dump much needed snow throughout the region, the unknowable future leaves many anxiously wondering about how much river water will be available for the countless needs throughout the watershed.³³

Despite this unpredictability, there is one thing that water managers throughout the region can count on in the future: the Colorado River will face increased demands as more and more users and uses compete for this limited resource. If we are to ensure that there is enough water for future generations we must take stock of our current expectations and demands and recognize where significant changes can be made. Maintaining the status quo and sweeping the inevitable under the rug is not only inadequate, but irresponsible. Thus, we stand at a major crossroads where only our inability to imagine prevents us from making improvements. With this challenge before us, Bergman’s words about the delta as referenced in the previous chapter ring true for the river and watershed as a whole: “to change the relation of the delta to its own river, we have to rewrite the river of our imaginations” (21). In order to establish a more sustainable and workable relationship with the Colorado we have to imagine the river in a new light. We have to be more aware of the power that past, present, and future discourse about the river has in shaping our attitudes and behavior toward it. But in working toward solutions there is the temptation to, as Robert Adler explains, “narrow your focus, break

³² These are based on the period from 1981 to 2010.

³³ As of April 1, 2012, areas throughout the upper basin show snowpack totals to be below 50% of average. See “Mountain Snowpack as of April 1, 2012”. National Resources Conservation Service. <http://www.wcc.nrcs.usda.gov/ftpref/support/water/westwide/snowpack/wy2012/snow1204.gif>

things down into their component parts, and work on them in smaller pieces” (268).

While localized efforts are necessary to restore areas like the delta, a more productive, long lasting approach is to employ a watershed perspective. Adler understands this as he further reflects in the closing pages of *Restoring Colorado River Ecosystems*: “Ironic though it may seem, a better approach to the immense complexity of Colorado River restoration may be to broaden rather than narrow our focus, and to consider a wider range of issues and potential solutions than are reflected in existing efforts and institutions” (269).

Sharing Adler’s belief in how to address the complicated issues that characterize the Colorado River, I have attempted in this dissertation to both enlarge our understanding of the river’s significance through a watershed approach and consider non-traditional methods (at least in terms of water policy) that urge us to think differently about how to arrive at workable solutions. Whereas so much of Colorado River policy has relied on a limited range of perspectives to mandate how and where the river is to be manipulated, Beale’s discourse model opens up a whole new avenue for exploration in terms of how traditional perspectives and those of the tributary voices shape the river and the watershed. As it plots out a schematic for understanding the different ways in which discourse constructs reality, Beale’s quadrad invites us to be more aware of difference and its value in understanding a highly contested natural resource. It also suggests that there is no one particular discourse or perspective that defines the river’s significance.

In effect, Beale’s model encourages us to recognize that there are many diverse ways of expressing what the Colorado means and, as this dissertation has shown, that those voices which approach the river through a broad range of discourse may be the

most useful in how we move forward. For those texts considered in this project, his framework opens up Childs's text to demonstrate that science and aesthetics are not exclusive to one another, that they together provide a fuller understanding of what the desert is and what it can offer to those who encounter it. For the women boaters' texts, it shows how their fiction and non-fiction accounts negotiate a well-established and exclusive genre tradition in which their marginalized perspectives enter a dominant discourse and appropriate it for their own ends of making their voices heard. Beale's discourse model also fosters a conversation about how those in the delta employ various discourses to accomplish a number of goals, not the least of these being their focus on establishing a governance model that encourages dialogue from all its stakeholders. In each case, these tributary voices rely on a variety of genres and their inherent rhetorical features to create a more complex and nuanced view of the river that extends our vision beyond traditional depictions of the river. At their foundation these voices compel us to recognize the potential power of negotiation, and to understand that our surroundings must be built upon an ongoing conversation with people who have unique approaches to the watershed and its uses as well as other ways of knowing. Using Beale's ratios to listen for different discursive registers, these tributary voices attune us to be more sensitive to nuance, uncertainty, and wonder that define their reactions to the river.

Future Considerations

Of course, these chapters on desert writing, Grand Canyon boating, and delta preservation are just a few of the examples of the numerous tributary voices that add to and enrich our understanding of the Colorado River. They represent what I have attempted to initiate in this dissertation: a greater awareness of the multiple realities that

exist about the river and watershed and a needed conversation regarding the value that these voices have in shaping how we think and act toward the river. Just as one who is more aware of the many smaller creeks and streams that form a river has a stronger sense of its origins and overall formation, greater attention to the Colorado's many tributary voices ensures that we come away with a better grasp of what the river means to diverse groups. By understanding what the river means to a larger constituency there is the hope that future decisions will be more equitably made. At the same, a greater awareness of the range of responses and ways of viewing the river increases the likelihood of discovering alternative and even better approaches to how the Colorado is currently managed. Thus, by employing this watershed perspective and its emphasis on tributary voices, this dissertation paves the way for the recovery and introduction of a host of perspectives that may provide the discourses, images, and metaphors that can facilitate the necessary rethinking about our relationship to the river. Some of these could include Mary Austin's participation in the deliberations leading up to the signing of the 1922 Compact at Bishop's Lodge as another powerful example of a woman negotiating a man's world; the reactions of the Hispano communities along the San Juan River in northern New Mexico which were condemned with the creation of Navajo Dam in the 1950s; or the water poetry of Greg Hobbs, a Justice of the Colorado Supreme Court, whose work celebrates Colorado as the "Mother of Rivers." The list could go on and on as an awareness of tributary voices encourages a consideration of those lesser known, forgotten, or ignored perspectives which nonetheless contribute to the grand stream of discourse about the river.

If there is one tributary voice, however, that should take precedence over others it is that of the region's indigenous peoples. In terms of the "first in time, first in right" metaphor used throughout this dissertation, these Native voices don't quite fit the model to no fault of their own, of course. Although they were the first in time, they certainly have not been able to exercise dominance within the discursive constructions of the river as Western myths have. However, that is changing in light of the 1908 Winters Doctrine which granted water rights on federal lands based on the date of the federal protection of those lands. With many tribal reservations established in the nineteenth-century, this ruling makes them the senior right holders. Until recently, tribes have not been in a position to perfect their claims. Yet as James Powell submits, "Indian water rights are the slumbering Monstro of the Southwest" as they now look to make good on the government's promise (154). State and local governments will have to negotiate with tribes if they are to increase their allocations, potentially creating a scenario where the old protagonists of the West again face off against one another, fighting this time for water rather than land. Participants within these negotiations would be well served if they possess a greater awareness of the ways in which tribes like the Navajo, Hopi, Havasupai, Hualapai, and Chemehuevi, for example, have viewed and currently interact with the Colorado.

Beyond these avenues for future consideration, this dissertation encourages a conversation about other watersheds and bioregions. In essence, this project is a case-study for how one can harness the watershed model and Beale's semiotic grammar of motives to engage a particular physical entity like the Colorado River and reveal the discursive complexity that exists. Thus, this approach can apply to other watersheds and

bioregions through the nation and elsewhere to gain a greater understanding of the human connection to these places. Buell argues that “The success of all environmentalist efforts finally hinges not on ‘some highly developed technology, or some arcane new science’ but on ‘a state of mind’: on attitudes, feelings, images, narratives” (*Writing for an Endangered World* 1). Such belief is at the core of this dissertation as it offers a reorientation of perspective from a limited, exclusionary view of the river serviced by powerful myths to a more expansive outlook that embraces a diverse set of “attitudes, feelings, images, and narratives” that include restraint, respect, empowerment, collaboration, and hope. This is not to say that the more traditional roles of science and technology will not play a role in the Colorado’s future. On the contrary, they will play a crucial part in our response to environmental challenges, and as I will suggest shortly, these efforts are part of a larger reorientation of how we as a culture envision the environment. By opening ourselves up to the breadth of beliefs and stories about the Colorado or any other entity for that matter and understanding their impact in how various peoples engage the natural world, we better position ourselves to those ideas that can instigate positive change.

Humanism, Ecospeak, and Alternative Discourses

For many people involved with environmental concerns, this attention to the role of discourse in shaping issues that we so often look to science and technology to solve may seem out of place. But as rhetoricians Jimmie Killingsworth and Jacqueline Palmer suggest, “human thought and conduct are rarely, if ever, unmediated by language and other kinds of signs” (3). As we engage questions of how to apportion water or to address any other environmental obstacle, it is essential that we grasp how language shapes our

ideas and prompts actions. For this reason, Killingsworth and Palmer admit that “it is understandable—possibly inevitable—that rhetorical scholars enter the environmental discussion through the gate of humanism” (3). Like the legal and policy experts noted above, these authors who specialize in rhetorical analysis recognize that we must engage environmental issues beyond what science and policy has provided in the past. They keenly understand that our discourse has a direct correlation to whether or not we arrive at solutions. The authors recognize that by utilizing a humanist approach we can better avoid the discursive logjam of “ecospeak,” or a “form of language and a way of framing arguments that stops thinking and inhibits social cooperation rather than extending thinking and promoting cooperation through communication” (9).

Having an awareness of the range of discourse that exists about the natural world allows us to identify ways of thinking and talking that negotiate what often tend to be static categories. For the authors, discourse about the natural world typically comes in three forms that depict nature as an object, a resource, and as a spiritual/aesthetic entity as articulated by specific fields such as science, government, business and industry, agriculture, social ecology, and deep ecology (11). This continuum or spectrum upon which these authors plot a general range of environmental discourse becomes, in effect, a reworking of Beale’s semiotic grammar of motives adapted to environmental thought and action. In each case, a framework provides insight to how discourse shapes reality with Beale’s work showing how the four primary aims cover the span of discursive production while Killingsworth and Palmer’s model uses a tripartite view to address the range of environmental rhetoric. Therefore, in the case of the texts considered in this dissertation the negotiations of scientific, poetic, rhetorical, and instrumental modes allow the

language we use to talk about the river to break out of the rigid categories that depict it as just an object, an exploitable resource, or source of enlightenment. The negotiation also invites new voices to join those that typically perpetuate these views on nature. Thus, understanding desert water transcends scientific inquiry and objectification in Childs's work and relies on what story and a reverential approach to the desert can reveal. Out of this negotiation he creates a middle ground, one in which science and story mingle to create a conversation with the desert. While McCairen, Buyer, and Teal ground their works in the nature-as-spirit realm, by drawing on poetic and rhetorical discourses they work within and around a traditional genre and its exclusive perspectives to reshape the source from which much nature-as-spirit discourse emanates. In doing so, they also create a dialogue within a literary tradition and between those constructing it to offer ways in which the individual and the community can approach the river. As for AEURHYC and its strategic plans, the instrumental, poetic, and rhetorical discourse it employs ensures that no one way of framing discussions about the river dominates. Portraying the river and delta as both a precious resource and site for great inspiration, AEURHYC demonstrates how often antithetical discourses can work together for the benefit of human and non-human communities alike.

Other rhetoric scholars have perceived a similar relationship between discourse motives and environmental debate as they create their own environmental rhetorical framework. In *Green Culture* (1996) Carl Herndl and Stuart Brown align poetic discourse with the nature-as-spirit orientation, scientific with nature-as-object, and instrumental as nature-as-resource, with all of these housed under the canopy of rhetorical activity that describes how each of these perspectives work toward bringing about a desired action

within an audience (11). What Killingsworth and Palmer's and Herndl and Brown's models suggest is that rhetorical analysis is a highly productive tool through which to understand how discourse shapes the natural world. This sentiment is at the core of a New Western Rhetoric. It attempts to negotiate the many competing interests along the Colorado River through a greater awareness of the range of discourses and how they mingle through different forms and genres. Such an understanding invites the first step toward recognizing common interests and acknowledging where greater collaboration and conversation can bring about productive change.

Inherent in this awareness is that conflict is a natural part of the process. Just because we recognize and have a greater understanding of the varying perspectives that exist about the river, or any other natural entity for that matter, does not imply that the river's future will escape heated discussion. As the aforementioned projections about the river indicate, deliberations will be part of the natural landscape. However, the hope of a New Western Rhetoric and its emphasis on tributary voices will help facilitate an "open space of democracy" as Terry Tempest Williams suggests, a space in which "there is room for dissent . . . there is room for differences" and where "the health of the environment is seen as the wealth of our communities" (8). Such are the sentiments expressed throughout my analysis. Childs grounds his understanding of the desert and its water in difference and the communal knowledge that exists across time, space, and among different groups, whereas dissent typifies what McCairen, Buyers, and Teal seek to achieve in their texts. Yet, while their counter-narratives challenge to status-quo, by engaging an established genre they dialogue with it and thereby suggest that the river can be a place for both men and women. In this vein, AEURHYC builds on what these other

writers attempt to do as they powerfully argue that the delta's destiny is intimately tied to cooperative efforts of the region's diverse communities and interests.

The "open space of democracy" these tributary voices create through a process of dialogue and debate establishes a heightened awareness for the places in which we live, thereby creating an ethic of place that can prompt its inhabitants to take a greater interest in its success. Of this ethic Charles Wilkinson explains that it "Requires respect toward other constituent parts of the community" (*The Eagle Bird* 140). However, he assures his reader that it

in no sense means that the ethic tends toward a homogenous society. On the contrary, the ethic of place is founded on the worth of the subcultures of the West and thereby promotes the diversity that is the lifeblood of the region. . . . The overarching concern therefore is not to deny that conflict will occur but rather to acknowledge an ethic that sets standards for resolution and, as importantly, provides a method for dealing with disputes. (140)

An ethic based on a New Western Rhetoric and its inherent watershed approach makes the initial steps toward establishing this kind of productive methodology through which we can more fully engage place and our diverse connections to it. Awareness of other perspectives invites sympathy and sympathy leads to a willingness to negotiate and discuss the difficult water issues we will face in the future. This ethic, informed by rhetoric's ability to bring together the watershed's divergent voices, fosters participation and mitigates the power of those dominant myths that have played such an influential role in this part of the American West.

While I have examined how a number of tributary voices reflect this ethic of place, it is worth noting that a humanist position on water issues has begun to infiltrate disciplines such as law and policy that have traditionally dictated the Colorado's management. Earlier in this conclusion I noted how Adler advocates a broadening of focus in how we approach the river; my analysis of the selected tributary voices certainly responds to this appeal as I have considered texts very much outside the purview of most river discussion. Yet Adler suggests that this readjustment of vision needs to happen within those disciplines that most often shape the river. Looking to the intrepid explorers who brought the river to light for a larger audience, he concludes that "It will take a different kind of courage to explore new dimensions of law, science, and policy so that we can find and achieve a new vision for the Colorado River . . ." (270). Certainly, alternative methods and models are needed within these disciplines that have dominated the poetic, legal, political, and cultural texts that shape our perceptions of and actions upon the Colorado River and its watershed. By doing so, there exists the hope similar to extending the scope of those invited to participate in river decisions that by searching for new ways of engaging and employing these disciplines a greater wealth of options will exist by which to tackle current and future challenges. Likewise, in reassessing how these fields contribute to our understanding of the river, there is the possibility that the "new dimensions" Adler seeks may result in more interdisciplinary conversations that moves us away from ecospeak. In terms of the law and policy, a humanist approach has already begun this work.

One approach to rethinking legal discourse comes from Wilkinson, another prominent natural resource lawyer in the West, who is perhaps the most outspoken writer

from the legal field on the subject of rethinking discourse. In *Eagle Bird: Mapping A New West* (1992), he asks the reader, “How, ultimately, do we make a rich, a full, a complete water policy?” (60). In his attempt to answer this question, he surprisingly emphasizes alternative discourses that challenge the traditional legalese that most often shapes water policy. He explains:

Water means too many things to too many people for it to be pat, one-dimensional, bound up in single ideology, as is the case with prior appropriation. Another, related part of the answer is that we must move away from jargon, from bland words and thinking that dehumanize what ultimately are intensely human, even spiritual, matters. (60)

In this two-pronged response, Wilkinson acknowledges the inadequacy of legal precedents like prior appropriation to address the current challenges in water management. He also understands that the typical discourse that drives policy is inappropriate to convey the many values nature embodies and which people experience. This is a theme Wilkinson notes throughout this text, pointing out earlier that he is concerned about the “language of the law, why it is that the words of our laws do not carry the high pitch so evident in the arts and literature,” and in his example of the bald eagle, “why it is that laws do not speak of [its] wonder and majesty” (8). As a successful lawyer and legal scholar, Wilkinson is no doubt well-versed in what is otherwise instrumental discourse. Yet, he admits that in order to more adequately represent the natural world and the range of values to which people assign it, the language of the law must incorporate more poetic language into the discourse that dictates how humans may act toward a particular entity. Melding language indicative of the nature-as-resource and

nature-as-spirit perspectives, Wilkinson invites a richer understanding of the environment's value and a greater participation between discourse communities that promote these typically divergent viewpoints.

Adler and Wilkinson both recognize that more needs to occur within their fields of specialty and those which most often dictate water policy. And as is most apparent in Wilkinson's evaluation of legal language, the challenges that face the natural world require alternative forms of language. Fortunately, developments in these fields over the last two decades or so acknowledge multiple perspectives. In essence, we see a watershed model and an awareness of tributary voices reshaping current policy in a number of arenas. For example, in 1997 the Secretary of the Interior signed into action the Glen Canyon Dam Adaptive Management Work Group to "provide an organization and process for cooperative integration" (Bureau of Reclamation, "Glen Canyon") of a variety of factors in studying the dam's impacts on the Colorado (Bureau of Reclamation, "Background"). This group consists of thirteen different agencies including the Bureau of Reclamation, Department of Energy, National Park Service, Navajo Nation, Pueblo of Zuni; two environmental groups; two recreational organizations; the seven basin states; and two federal power entities (Bureau of Reclamation, "Adaptive Management Work Group"). With multiple meetings each year, this diverse group of interests and backgrounds represents one of the most tangible witnesses to how a watershed model operates and works toward progress. As the group's webpage states:

Adaptive management is a dynamic process where people of many talents and disciplines come together to make the right decision in the best interests of the resources. After nearly 15 years of study, negotiations,

compromise, and production of a world class EIS, implementation of the Adaptive Management Program on the operation of the Glen Canyon Dam has become a reality. (“Glen Canyon Dam”)

While the organization continues to face significant challenges as it attempts to regulate the dam’s effects downriver, this “dynamic process” of collaboration that relies on “negotiations” and “compromise” models a productive approach for addressing other Colorado River issues throughout the watershed.³⁴

Not only has a watershed approach addressed the management of the Colorado in the Glen Canyon –Grand Canyon region, it has become the basis for how the Law of the River now looks to the river. Following years of drought in the early 2000s which severely tested cities throughout the watershed, water officials recognized that the current position regarding each state’s obligations for delivery as dictated by the Law of the River deserved some reconsideration. Once again, the Department of the Interior stepped in to facilitate negotiations between the seven basin states and work toward solutions that could help the region move forward in light on ongoing shortages. In 2007, the Secretary of the Interior signed a Record of Decision which ushered in the “Colorado River Interim Guidelines for Lower Basin Shortages and the Coordinated Operations for Lake Powell and Lake Mead” (U.S. Department of the Interior).

Central to this document’s management of shortages are provisions which protect both the upper and lower basins in times of shortages (U.S. Department of the Interior).

³⁴ Related to the Adaptive Management Program is the Colorado River Management Plan (CRMP). The most recent version (2006) likewise draws on the input of numerous governmental, tribal, scientific, and recreational viewpoints to manage the Grand Canyon corridor. Along with addressing these perspectives, it also employs a range of discourse similar to AEURHYC’s strategic plan. Juxtaposed with the plan’s numerous tables and charts that outline the boating permit system and riparian monitoring practices are photographs of sublime landscapes, crashing rapids, and pensive rafters taking in the scenery. Watercolors of the canyon’s geologic and biotic wonders and an image of an Anasazi figurine also fill this operational document. See <http://www.nps.gov/grca/parkmgmt/crmp.htm> for more information.

Patricia Mulroy, General Manager of the Southern Nevada Water Authority which oversees the water needs of Las Vegas and surrounding communities, explains that the Interim Guidelines are a way to both address the lower basin anxiety of depleting reservoirs and the upper basin's fear that the lower basin will make a "call" on the river (Mulroy, Interview). Based on the prior appropriation doctrine, this call would require that the upper basin send its required allotments downriver before it meets its own needs. For this most outspoken advocate for Southern Nevada, this first in time, first in right approach to water management "has lost its usefulness, particularly in relationship to community to community, city to city, state to state" (Mulroy, Interview). When asked about how she foresees future discussions about the Colorado, she responds: "I think the dialogue would be all 7 states are talking about all 7 states and how to manage shortages rather than this artificial divide between the upper and the lower basin. I think that's going to have to become a thing of the past at some point" (Mulroy, Interview). At the core of Mulroy's observations is a watershed approach, one that goes beyond these man-made delineations to consider how the watershed as a whole can share the burden of shortages more equitably rather than one area suffering at the behest of another as dictated by prior appropriation (Mulroy, Interview).

While the Interim Guidelines provide a mechanism for allaying some of the hard decisions states will face when severe shortages emerge, they are far from a perfect solution. Likewise, the management documents for the Grand Canyon and Glen Canyon Dam provide much better means of bringing divergent points of view together than in the past but they too will be put to the test as time and conditions change. In the end, a watershed approach is not a cure-all for the infinite number of disputes that will dictate

Colorado River use in the future. It is a point of departure, a means of initiating an approach that can lead to workable solutions. Mulroy shares this belief as she considers the 1922 Compact and similarly minded documents as they do “not mark the final stage of problem-solving, only the beginning” (“Collaboration and the Colorado River Compact”).

While I have noted in chapter two the limitations and exclusions inherent in the Compact, Mulroy correctly observes its strengths as it brought together seven different states with many different agendas, and through collaboration, were able to create a document that has stood for ninety years. Pointing to the Compact’s language that provides for the “equitable division and apportionment of the use of the waters” and “to promote interstate comity” (“Collaboration and the Colorado River Compact”), she views this document as a model for future decisions that will have to be made about the Colorado and one that has allowed for the most recent Interim Guidelines. Reflecting on her career negotiating water issues, she asserts that

the best arrangements are those in which parties demonstrate a willingness and commitment to (1) collaborate with one another, (2) share risks and benefits equitably, and (3) construct agreements that are binding but alterable through good-faith negotiation and the unanimous assent of all the participants. (“Collaboration and the Colorado River Compact”)³⁵

Although the 1922 Compact did little to address the needs of Mexico and the basin’s many tribes, it nonetheless establishes a precedent for a watershed approach to difficult

³⁵ Mulroy is a prominent figure in Colorado River politics who has brought a number of creative approaches to addressing Las Vegas’ water needs. Notwithstanding her insight and emphasis on collaboration, she has also come under attack for her plans to pump water from rural north-central Nevada to the state’s most populated area.

water decisions. The hope is that as we move forward that more participants will have a voice in how share this most precious resource.

Essentially, what underscores all of these efforts and beliefs about changes to the current system of Colorado River management is a humanist approach, one rooted in a New Western Rhetoric which recognizes the contributions that different discourse communities make to our understanding of a particular geographical space. Thus, even those like Adler, Wilkinson, and Mulroy who are heavily grounded in law and policy perceive the value of placing a humanist position at the headgates of water issues as Helen Ingram has suggested and which I noted in the Introduction. Put another way, what these individuals suggest is the “vision corrective” that Buell describes in his consideration of environmental literature (*Writing* 246). We need to think differently than we have in the past about water issues if we are to successfully confront the challenges that we are certain to face in the coming years. This dissertation has attempted to begin this shift in perspective to recognize the wealth of ideas and perspectives that have and will continue to shape this river. By emphasizing the value of a New Western Rhetoric and its attention to the watershed model and tributary voices as we consider the discursive constructions of the Colorado, we ensure that those discourses attuned to cooperation, community, and conversation will play a major role in ongoing management decisions.

Toward Tomorrow’s Confluences

As a final thought on the connections between discourse, the Colorado River, and the West’s future, I take a page from Mark Reisner’s introduction to *Cadillac Desert*. On a night-flight headed to Los Angeles, the author finds himself staring down at the lights

scattered along Utah's Wasatch Front which punctuate the otherwise black void of the Intermountain West. Pondering the effect of aridity on the region's settlement and the Western obsession with water and remaking the desert, he notes "Westerners call what they have established out here a civilization, but it would be more accurate to call it a beachhead" (3). Despite all our efforts to turn the desert into a garden, the West is by and large still a place where different shades of brown dominate the landscape.

This realization was reinforced to me near the completion of this dissertation as I boarded a plane in Seattle on my way home to Albuquerque. The sun poked through the clouds on this particular winter's morning, bringing warmth and light to a city that I find stunningly beautiful yet too dreary for my likes. As the plane climbed through the fog to cruising altitude, a view of the Cascade Range and Mt. Rainier opened up below me, their snow covered slopes gleaming in the bright morning's sunlight. Thick forest blanketed the mountains and hills, a sea of deep green stretching out as far as I could see. In only a matter of minutes, we crossed into the Cascade's rain shadow and a much more familiar world of barren hilltops and dry washes came into sight. After another hour or so, we crossed over Utah's West Desert and the Wasatch Front and into the Colorado River watershed. Snow hardly covered the Wasatch, which are typically buried deep below winter's snows this time of year, an ominous sign for a long, dry year ahead. Soon the canyon country came into sight, and then, to my great satisfaction, the Green River.

From 38,000 feet the canyons opened onto the earth like millions of capillaries, branching every which way as they dug deeper into the land through gravity's relentless pull. The jumbled cliffs of the San Rafael Swell were made miniscule, the great plateaus and buttes south of Green River, Utah looking like a child's sandbox creations.

Eventually, the Colorado came into sight, an equally serpentine river carving its way around and through billions of years of geologic history. Moab, Utah and the La Sal Mountains were visible to the east. And then, as we continued on our southeasterly course, I saw it: the confluence. Awkwardly twisting and craning my neck to get a better glimpse through the window, I could barely see where the Green and the Colorado meet. Miles away from the nearest town and where an eons-old ritual continually played out, their waters comingled and moved downriver on their ancient course to the sea.

Having lived the bulk of my life in areas that draw on the river and traveled throughout the watershed from source to mouth myself, I have spent many years reflecting on the significance of the Colorado.³⁶ Visiting the headwaters in Colorado and Wyoming, many of the diversions moving water through the Continental Divide to the Front Range, the dams of the Central Utah Project which transfer water into the Great Basin, lakes Mead and Powell, Las Vegas, the extensive irrigation projects of the Imperial and Mexicali valleys, and the delta's dry river bed and few wetlands, there is no doubt as to the Colorado's influence in this region. Meeting with farmers, ranchers, environmentalists, lawyers, dam operators, Park Service personnel, professional river guides, dam managers, city water officials, Native activists, and Mexican scientists and ecotourism operators, I recognized the vast range of interests and perspectives that shape the Colorado physically and discursively. And yet, when hurtling through the sky tens of thousands of feet above the ground at nearly five hundred miles an hour, the Colorado seems quite insignificant. The river and its tributaries appear as tiny, sinuous threads

³⁶ In 2003, I traveled with Project WET's "Discover a Watershed: The Colorado" program and later worked with the Colorado Foundation for Water Education. With each of these groups I traveled through the watershed and Colorado respectively and also had the opportunity on two different occasions to spend time in the delta meeting with educators, scientists, farmers, and ecotourism guides from the area.

weaving their way through millions of acres of mountains, valleys, and deserts. With so much of the watershed void of significant greenery despite all the efforts to reclaim the desert, reality seems to trump any belief that this place could be entirely redeemed. From my vantage point soaring high above the desert interior of the Colorado watershed, I realized, as Reisner had decades earlier, that John Wesley Powell was prophetic in his observations about the West.

But despite how meager the river may seem, the reality is that millions do and will continue to rely on this unpredictable water source. And for the foreseeable future, Powell's vision is not much more than a pipe dream. However, while it is unrealistic to think that we can physically reorganize the West according to his model, we can certainly carry the spirit of it into the countless deliberations that will exist between cities, states, and nations. With the fate of so many in the United States and Mexico resting on an over-allocated, highly regulated and stressed river, perhaps our greatest resource in addressing the Colorado's challenges is the shared hope in the future of the region and a commitment to see the river flow onward toward its age old confluences.

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