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„From Concord to Moab: Ecocritical backgrounds and parallels in the works of Henry David Thoreau and Edward Abbey, and their effects on the Green Movement“

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Abstract, English:

Henry David Thoreau and Edward Abbey are both central figures to the current environmental discourse. The former for being the founder of the modern way Americans in particular and people in general think about 'nature'; and the latter for being an ideological touchstone of the radical environmental movement. These disparate figures have been compared several times by their critics, and this paper investigated this comparison in detail. Chief arguments and themes of both authors were extracted from two of their major texts, *Desert Solitaire* and *Walden*, and then analyzed on commonalities and contrasts. The themes and arguments discussed include their stances on civilization, the concept of tendencies for 'wildness' in humans as opposed to 'civilized' tendencies, the language and style employed by both authors as well as the

symbolism of plants and animals in both works. This is prefaced by a short survey of the development of the environmental movement in the USA from about 1850 to 1970, to put both authors into a historical context. The thesis was then ended with a chapter discussing the political and moral implications of the actions of both authors in regards to the modern environmental movement, concentrating on Thoreau's work "*Civil Disobedience*" and Abbey's radical eco-warrior novel "*The Monkey Wrench Gang*".

Abstract, Deutsch:

Henry David Thoreau und Edward Abbey sind beide zentrale Figuren des gegenwärtigen Umweltdiskurses in der Literatur. Ersterer für die Begründung des modernen Naturverständnisses in der amerikanischen Gesellschaft im Besonderen und weltweit im Allgemeinen; und Letzterer wegen seiner Position als ideologischer Eckpfeiler der radikalen Öko-Bewegung. Diese beiden grundverschiedenen Autoren wurden in der Vergangenheit öfter verglichen, und diese Diplomarbeit hat diesen Vergleich untersucht. Hauptargumente und Motive beider Autoren wurden aus zwei ihrer Haupttexte, *Desert Solitaire* und *Walden*, extrahiert und auf Gegensätze und Gemeinsamkeiten untersucht. Die untersuchten Motive und Argumente enthalten unter anderem die Meinung beider Autoren zum Konzept der Zivilisation, dem Konzept der Tendenzen hin zu 'wildness' im Gegensatz zu zivilisierten Tendenzen im Menschen, und betreffen die Sprache und der Stil sowie den Symbolismus von Pflanzen und Tieren in beiden Werken. Diesem vorangestellt ist ein Abriss über die Entwicklung der Ökologiebewegung von 1850 bis 1970, um die Autoren in einen historischen Kontext zu stellen. Die Diplomarbeit wurde dann mit einem Kapitel über moralische und politische Implikationen beider Autoren im Bezug auf die Moderne beendet, mit Fokus auf "*Civil Disobedience*" von Thoreau und das radikale Werk "*The Monkey Wrench Gang*" von Abbey.

List of abbreviations used:

DS = *Desert Solitaire*

MWG = *The Monkey Wrench Gang*

Introduction & Overview:

Edward Hoagland, the Thoreau of Central Park and also Vermont. Krutch and Abbey, Thoreaus of Arizona. Wendell Berry, Thoreau of Kentucky and Annie Dillard, the Thoreau of Virginia and now, I guess, of Puget Sound. John McPhee, the Thoreau of New Jersey, Alaska, Scotland and anything else he may choose to investigate. Ann Zwinger, the Thoreau of the Rockies. Peter Matthiessen, the Thoreau of Africa, South America, the Himalayas, and the wide wild sea. And others too numerous to mention. (Abbey, *Abbey's Road*)

In this paper I wish to investigate the connections between two American writers who are apart both in years and in temperament, while still being connected by their chosen topic, material and the influence they both had, in their own way, on the nascent Green movement, which started around the turning of the last century and has evolved to inspire millions the world over.

Out of the many writers who influenced this movement, not many were as divisive and controversial in their supposed influence as Henry David Thoreau and Edward Abbey. While they both wrote on nature and were both active in the preservation of the environment that they chose to dwell in and contemplate, at first glance nothing else connects them. One was an erudite philosopher from New England's 19th century, the other a curmudgeonly park ranger and self-described anarchist dwelling in the desert of Nevada and Utah in the 1960ies. Yet, Larry McMurtry saw fit to describe Abbey as the "Thoreau of the American West", a statement which has been echoed by many of his critics.

The main questions and issues I wish to discuss here are:

- What historical and cultural developments influenced the Green Movement and its literature up to the 1970ies?
- What led critics to liken Abbey to Thoreau, what are the principal parallels and contrasts between them and how did their most well-known works, *Walden* and *Desert Solitaire*, influence or prompt this comparison?
- Since their influence as such has been proven, in what ways did Edward Abbey and Henry David Thoreau influence the modern Green Movement?

To answer these questions, I have tried to single out passages from both books which deal with the same topic or material, and subjected these to a close reading, before contrasting them and supporting them with quotes and clarifications from secondary

literature where necessary. This process usually takes the form of first introducing the topic, then analyzing both texts in regards to what their main features concerning the topic area are before concluding which connections and/or contrasts there are between the two authors and their principal works as focused on this particular narrow field of interest. The last chapter takes a freer approach, and forgoes a close reading in favor of a more general description of the influence the two authors' works had on the modern Green Movement as well as some of the political implications.

1 – Short Survey and History of the Green Movement from 1850-1970:

Disclaimer:

The first issue I wish to deal with here is that an overview such as this, maybe a time line of sorts, of seminal events in the history of America as they concern the Green Movement is necessarily a focused endeavor. Even with a narrow focus on the literature and writers inspired by it and inspiring it, I am, by necessity, working in rather broad strokes; otherwise this introductory section would go far beyond the scope of this paper. The reality of this is that I had to leave out many writers who also seemed important and cannot properly include some events. The sheer scope of this national movement, which consolidated itself with others into an overarching international conglomerate of organizations, is daunting, even when one only considers its impact within the United States. So I hope I can be forgiven when I, by necessity, boil down an entire movement into a parade of about two dozen authors and seminal events over roughly a century of one country's human history.

The Green Movement, an Overview:

The Green Movement has given birth to such far-reaching organizations as Greenpeace and the World Wildlife Fund, who strive to harmonize the relationship between man and nature, but has also brought about such problematic organizations as EarthFirst! and the Earth Liberation Front. Ever since its inception in the early 19th century, the Green Movement has galvanized opinions on both sides of the debate and, as all things that serve to produce controversy, has spawned clashing opinions and stories which run the gamut from hard-evidence exposure journalism to outrageous tall tales of environmental “derring-do”. Literature about the subject has flourished, especially since after the

second World War.

The Beginning:

When Henry David Thoreau left his home in Concord, Massachusetts, one spring day in 1845 to go build a small hut in the woods near Walden pond, nobody could have even guessed at the movement that would be created by men (and increasingly, over the years, women), such as him, and what far-reaching consequences it would have not only for the United States, but indeed the whole world.

While man has written on nature for centuries, the first examples of the “Nature Writer” by modern definition were people such as Ralph Waldo Emerson, John Muir, and, of course, Henry David Thoreau. While Muir founded the Sierra Club, one of the oldest and largest conservation movements in the United States, and was inspired by both Thoreau and Emerson, Thoreau redefined the way that the American mind perceives the wilderness. In this sense, he was one of the first “nature writers” of literary history. Both Edward Abbey and Henry David Thoreau wrote on Nature, and while the former always resented the label “Nature Writer” and at the time the latter wrote, the term was not yet fully formed, they both fought against the same exploitative view man has and has had of nature. This too has a long history, as prior to Thoreau, the prevailing view on nature was taken from the Bible, and solid Christian values.

To serve man:

According to the book of Genesis, God first creates all things, all animals, all birds, all fish etc. then he gives stewardship of these to man, and charges him with their protection. This part is apparently rather conveniently ignored in favor of the next divine act, which is to give man dispense to use all of creation as Adam (no mention of Eve) sees fit.

The commandment (Genesis 1:28) which gave man dominion over his environment encouraged arrogance rather than respect. Scholastic logic held that as man was made to serve God, so the world was made for the benefit of man. Moreover, the early Christian belief in the imminence of the end of the world made efforts to protect nature seem futile. (Nash, 193)

The result of this was that for most of human history, and certainly for much of

American history, nature has been seen chiefly as a resource, and wilderness was likewise not exactly looked upon in a positive light. Beside religious motivations, this also has societal and historical roots. Man became sedentary and agricultural somewhere around 9000 years ago, retreating from the wilderness and the small hunter-gatherer tribe in favor of, first, the farm, then the village, and eventually the town, the city, the metropolis. While there were always those closer to nature, as interaction with it was a vital necessity, the general movement was one that made man a creature that looked mostly to his den and was loath to leave it.

Early man feared the night for the same reasons he feared wilderness. With the setting of the sun, while other predators began their hunts, man sought the protection of a cave and, in time, of fire. [...] In that magic circle of light there was comfort and security. The darkness beyond, like the wilderness, was terrifying. (Nash, 193)

By medieval times, in Europe at least, the woods and mountains were still vast and dark, and the homes of monsters. Werewolves, Spriggans, Bugbears and Revenants populated the stories and imaginary landscapes well into the early modern ages, and all were variations on the underlying theme that everything out there belonged to the dark pagan gods and ultimately to Satan, and only in civilization lay the salvation of man, whose divine mandate it was to bring the wilderness under his rule.

It was with this attitude that the New World was settled. Thoreau's forebears were orthodox Protestants from England, Puritans and puritan Calvinists especially, who set about their god-given task of taming the savage frontier. The Calvinists in particular saw in the wilderness a multitude of snares that could lead the righteous astray or excite their baser desires, make them take congress with dark spirits or, heaven forbid, become Deists. "Under the prod of Calvin, Puritans feared the innate sinfulness of human nature would run rampant if left to itself in the moral vacuum of wilderness. Men might degenerate to beasts or worse on stepping into the woods." (Nash, 86). They were convinced that at the heart of every man lay original sin and evil, and it had to be fought.

Transcendentalism:

Against this doctrine stood the ideas of people such as Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry

David Thoreau, Margaret Fuller and George Putnam¹. At its very core, transcendentalism turns the Calvinist assumption of a basically evil man on its head, assuming that man is intrinsically good and only corrupted by society and its institutions. These institutions were, in regards to Emerson and his contemporaries in the Transcendental Club, Harvard University and Harvard Divinity School, to name but the prime targets of their criticism. As an intellectual movement, Transcendentalism came into full form in 1840 after the publication of Emerson's essay *Nature* in 1836, but weakened in the early 1850ies due to the death of some prominent members, before petering out after a second wave of adherents towards the late 19th century, inspiring several other avenues of thinking, most prominently the New Thought movement. There were later adherents, of course, John Muir being the most important for the purposes of this essay, but more important was what Transcendentalism represented for American culture. It was the first truly American school of thought, and as such went hand in hand with Emerson's earlier "Declaration of Cultural Independence".

What it also inspired, and what was at first less obvious, was a new understanding between nature and man, something which is evident in much of Thoreau's writing. Drawing on earlier theories of the Sublime as well as Transcendentalism, he argued that nature was to be respected, revered even, vehemently rejecting the excessive pragmatism and economic approach that his fellow men took in respect to nature. In his opinion, nature was not there to serve man, nor the other way around. Nature needed man as much as man needed nature. This central idea of "wildness" was something that would often be echoed by those who came after Thoreau.

After Thoreau and Emerson: John Muir

Following Thoreau and Emerson both ideologically and historically was John Muir. Born 1838 in Scotland to a strict and fanatically religious father, the family moved to Wisconsin in 1849, and here Muir left the homestead behind to escape into nature. For even as a boy he resented his father's zealotry, a feeling which only intensified with age. While he was often described as an atheist by his critics, he himself never made such a claim and there was never a clear break with religion as a whole, though as he wrote in a letter to his friend Emily Pelton in 1865: "I never tried to abandon creeds or code of

¹ George Putnam, 1807–78; the Unitarian minister in Roxbury and founding member of the Transcendental Club.

civilization; they went away of their own accord... without leaving any consciousness of loss." (Wolfe, 1945) So it can be assumed that he himself became less and less religious over time, though it can likewise not be denied that he remained deeply spiritual, and it is important to remember his upbringing in a strict religious household, considering that he later harnessed the epic, broad and bold style of biblical language to both describe, praise and defend the wilderness he loved so much.

Other than Thoreau, whose ties to ecology and environmental protection are not always clear, and whose literature often uses nature more as a vehicle to criticize man, John Muir is close to a household name for the environmental movement. His biographer Steven J. Holmes even went so far as to say that Muir was "one of the patron saints of twentieth-century American environmental activity". Certainly, he devoted most of his life to the great outdoors, and especially to Yosemite Valley.

The grandest Temple of all: Muir's time in Yosemite from 1868.

Muir arrived in California after leaving home and wandering the continental US for a time, most notably trekking nearly 1000 miles from Indiana to Florida, an account of which is his book *A Thousand-Mile Walk to the Gulf*. Once there, he made plans to hike up the Amazon River in Brazil, but after contracting malaria on the Gulf Coast, he instead set out for California via New York. In March 1868, he arrived in San Francisco, but immediately left for Yosemite, a place he had heard and read about but never visited thus far. The experience of seeing the valley was, to use an understatement, an epiphany for Muir. About his first week there, he later wrote in his journal:

"We are now in the mountains and they are in us, kindling enthusiasm, making every nerve quiver, filling every pore and cell of us," Muir later wrote. . . . "No temple made with hands can compare with Yosemite... The grandest of all special temples of Nature." (quoted in Burns, Ken. *The National Parks*)

Just as Thoreau had the woods of Massachusetts, and Abbey would have the deserts of Utah, Muir had the mountains of California. Just as Thoreau often wrote in a dense, convoluted prose thick as the undergrowth of a primeval forest, and Abbey wrote with the somber, sometimes cold clarity of the desert night, Muir had a prose that reflected the mountains just as much. His words soared to the heights and leaped from peak to

peak, to adopt some of his style for a moment, and this prose, biblical in its grandeur, was one trait of his that let him have so much of an impact on society in his time. The other trait was his highly inquisitive mind. Studying geology around his beloved valley, he developed comprehensive ideas about the forming of Yosemite through glacial action. This theory, the following dispute with Josiah Whitney, head of the California Geologic Survey, as well as his other studies in Botany and Geology made him well-known throughout (certain) academic circles in the US.

In order to capitalize on his growing list of influential contacts (chief among which was President Theodore Roosevelt) and to reach an even wider audience, Muir used his oratory skills and logical mind to merge his religious upbringing with his more scientific view on the world. While his chief concern with nature and wilderness was the almost rapturous effect it had on the minds of men, he saw that spiritual values alone would not help preserve nature. He used the language of the Old Testament, but formed it into arguments that sought to state the usefulness of wild places beyond mere repositories ripe for future exploitation.

His success in this regard is evident in the way he managed to rally more and more people to the cause of environmental protection. One could argue that his life was now entirely devoted towards that purpose. When the Sierra Club was founded by Muir and some of his friends and acquaintances in 1892, he was elected president, and immediately set about turning the club from its original purpose as a mere nature appreciation society to a formidable grass-roots movement of environmental activists all over the country. Writing 'only' six books in his lifetime, John Muir's legacy continues to be felt in the American Mind. His biographers have stressed that not the quantity, but the quality of his writing was important. The Sierra Club continuously gained followers and strength, recruiting members from all social strata and from all over the US, to become the biggest and most important conservation society in America today, further cementing Muir as a fixture of American history. One of his greatest victories was the creation of Yosemite National Park, and even his greatest defeat, the damming and flooding of Hetch-Hetchy Valley in 1913 was eventually capitalized upon and turned into a victory by the Sierra Club when, in 1956, Echo Park was struck from the Colorado River Storage Project. Muir's vision, just as the mountains he described, eventually even outlasted himself.

What rises must fall. Crisis of importance for environmental concerns
1914-1945:

After Muir's death in 1914, a dark time began for the USA, indeed for the whole world. The Great (First World) War cost the lives of over a hundred thousand Americans, and yet it was only a prelude to the catastrophic events of the Second World War.

Ironically, from a preservationist point of view, 1914-1918 were rather good years for the wilderness. Granted, the war-time industry increased exploitation of ores, wood and oil, but the massive development projects which threatened the wilderness in Muir's time had to be postponed or were abandoned altogether in favor of more pressing needs directly related to the war effort. But with the nation twice busy preparing and fighting wars on the home front, with an interlude of reckless expansionism in the 1920ies, environmentalism was not first on the agenda, quite on the contrary.

In retrospect the Green movement did benefit from this time, but in a manner more tangential and less easy to see. For example, the rationing of ammunition all over the country led to a resurgence in game populations (to the detriment of rural populations), and the propaganda machine compelling Americans to plant 'Victory Gardens' had the unintentional side-effect of reconnecting many urban citizens with the soil. Likewise, the shortage of male labor in both wars led to a massive boost for the women's rights movement, which had a strong influence on the Green Movement in the post-war decades (Ecofeminism often argues that women's suffrage and the ecological awakening of the 60ies went hand-in-hand, and one was the product of the other. This deserves to be mentioned, but will not be dealt with in this paper). Also, the Wars brought two very important factors onto the global stage which would affect the entire planet up to the present day. The first, and most important, was the Manhattan project and the splitting of the atom; the second was the heavy intertwining of scientific progress and industrial interests.

The Atomic age and industrialized science: 1945 and onwards.

“I am become death, destroyer of worlds”

This line from the Hindu scripture *Bhagavad-Gita* was uttered by Robert Oppenheimer after the successful Trinity nuclear test in New Mexico on July 16, 1945. Trinity marked

the beginning of the nuclear age for mankind, an age which, after lasting a mere six decades, has left an indelible mark both on mankind and the planet itself.

After Trinity, development of this new “miracle weapon” progressed rapidly, and only 20 days later, radiation on a hitherto unknown scale was released by atomic bombs, first over the Japanese city of Hiroshima on July 26th, then over Nagasaki on August 6th. These were followed by numerous nuclear tests of both bloc powers until the partial test ban treaty of 1963, only a fraction of which were officially documented. These tests and the civilian applications of nuclear power created a perfect storm for the environmental movement. Not only was mankind, for the first time in history, in a position to literally obliterate all life on Earth, even the civilian applications of this new and barely understood power were incredibly problematic. Nuclear reactors require large amounts of Uranium to generate power; Uranium which, in the US, was mostly found in the Rocky Mountains of the American West. Not only was the ore itself toxic, the mining operations, often conducted via extensive surface strip mining operations, visually ravaged large stretches of land and mining techniques left even larger areas contaminated with radioactive runoff. Edward Abbey, in particular, had a special hatred for the Uranium Mines around Utah, though he (typical of him) concentrated primarily on the encroachment of government into an area of the West which had been sacrosanct on account of a lack of large lucrative resource deposits and only then on the environmental degradation aspect.

What brought the problems to light in the public eye were several accidents over the 40-year history of uranium mining in the US, which left lakes and aquifers polluted, at some times threatening the water supply of cities on the entire Colorado River, as discussed in the book *Killing our Own* by Harvey Wasserman & Norman Solomon in 1982.² But a far greater influence in the early days of the atomic age was not the fear of environmental destruction, but fear of personal harm. Nevil Shute’s 1957 novel *On the Beach* dealt with the indiscriminate way that radiation and nuclear warfare affect even

² It should be noted that the book, despite being a faithful chronicle of the way American authorities, under the pressure of emergent civil rights and environmental groups, first suppressed, then came to accept the connection between radiation and cancer, has been blamed for being overly sentimental and sensationalist when depicting the events surrounding the Colorado River incidents, most notable the Church Rock disaster. Of these vocal critics, Robert Holloway is one of the most prominent, though he himself is involved with the Nevada Radiation Safety board and funded by the Atomic Energy Board of America, another example of industrial entanglement costing scientists some of their credibility as impartial analysts.

those on the other side of the globe from a conflict, and it laid the foundation for nuclear skepticism in the US at a time when projects such as Operation Plowshare tried to convince the public that there were civilian applications for the atomic bomb, up to and including blasting all rapids out of the Grand Canyon for easier boating access; excerpts from this plan are shared in anecdotal form by Abbey in *Desert Solitaire*. The negative impact of Operation Plowshare such as blighted land, tritium-contamination, fallout from debris being hurled high into the atmosphere, as well as the international accidents at Chernobyl and, more immediate to the subject but less widely known, Three Mile Island, later cemented in the collective American conscious the cold hard truth that, even though accidents at nuclear sites were unlikely, they were devastating and their influence widespread when they did occur. Activism against nuclear proliferation and expansion of nuclear power has been on the Green Movement's global agenda since the dawn of the Nuclear Age, and recent events in Fukushima, Japan, have again put the issue into the international spotlight.

The other development concerned the way Americans looked at science. Today's scientist knows painfully well that one of the biggest problems is always funding. So when, during the war years, the military poured massive amounts of funding into every project which promised even a remote chance at yielding a device or product which would provide an edge over the Axis powers, scientists flocked to the military research centers in droves, and most of them were chemists, physicists and engineers. Though several of these institutes continued operating after the end of the Second World War, such as DARPA, the end of hostilities left many scientists with a sudden lack of funding. Luckily for them, the war had also massively expanded American industrial capacities, which also had to adapt to the new peacetime situation, often by adapting technology previously used in military applications for the civilian market. This led to a sort of 'production line' view of science, where every research project had to lead to a product which could be branded and sold, something which was relatively easy for the technical sciences and some natural sciences (first chemistry, and recently parts of biology, such as genetics), and created a massive web of interwoven relations between large companies and the scientific community, something which many activists say has divided the community along sharp demarcation lines between the 'good' or 'pure' scientists, and the 'bad' scientists who 'sell out' to the industry. The latter is a way of judging science which emerged in the counter-culture movement of the 60ies and 70ies,

and led to the traditional distrust of hardliner eco-activists towards hard science. It is true that there were some scandalous cases of whitewashing for large companies by scientists, for example, Wassermann and Solomon discussed in the previously mentioned book that the nuclear energy lobby had several pet scientists who attested to the fact that there was no connection between radiation and cancer, something which we today know is flat-out untrue and caused the death of innumerable Americans.

Also, it has spread an attitude of unquestioning loyalty towards science, which caused some massive and often exaggerated backlashes over the last half-century, where the progress of science, often represented by industry, was used as a be-all-end-all excuse for environmental exploitation. “Progress at all costs” was the credo for much of the 20th century, no matter how (il)logical and (un)applicable this progress was. The agrarian Wendell Berry wrote extensively on the subject, as he was a farmer himself and directly affected by the capricious and distant science-industrial complex. He was not one to discredit industry and innovation, seeing it as a pathway to betterment for mankind, but he was displeased at the lack of immediacy and understanding of the situation 'on the ground'. He often stated that the farming industry had forgotten that it needed the farmer to survive, not the other way around. He stressed the need for a focus in progress, for a “human economy”

A good human economy, that is, defines and values human goods, and, like the Great Economy, it conserves and protects its goods. It proposes to endure. Like the Great Economy, a good human economy does not propose for itself a term to be set by humans. That termlessness, with all its implied human limits and restraints, is a human good. (Berry, *Home Economics*, 60)

But before this part of my paper seems even more like an all-out attack on industry, it cannot be overstressed that this liaison has led to many beneficial innovations for humanity like the microwave, lasers, Teflon and civilian aviation, to name but a few out of a multitude. Funding for eco-friendly projects is given an increasingly higher priority in recent times, with industry worldwide finally adopting more sustainable forms of operation, partly due to the stubborn efforts of activist groups both within the industry itself and spread all over society. Today, there is an environmental conscience, and new products undergo complex tests towards toxicity, environmental impact and long-term effects before being declared ready for the open market. Yet it is a fact that there was a

time where all projects were approved with what in hindsight seems like reckless ignorance. Such was the case with DDT.

Silent Spring and the rage of counter-culture 1960ies-1970ies:

DDT, this once widely lauded and problematic pesticide, was the cause for a marine biologist by the name of Rachel Carson to take up writing outside her normal field of expertise, marine biology, of course, and take up arms against what she saw as a long-term threat for American biodiversity. Carson was well known before the publication of *Silent Spring*, having written several best-selling books on life in the Oceans, but the growing concerns of a small group within the scientific community roused her to attention. Ironically the book *Silent Spring*, which deals with her research into this, only mentions DDT in passing while dealing chiefly with the effects of bioaccumulation, invasive species and biodiversity. She does deal with pesticides (more aptly called biocides in her opinion, as they rarely ever only kill what was intended) and denounces the slash-and-burn approach to pest control. Many of the themes she deals with in her book were new for the time and many of her theories, though later proven true, were not widely known even within the ranks of scientists specialized on the subject. As a consequence, though the book was and is a best seller, she was attacked viciously for her ideas. Peter Matthiessen wrote a *Time* article on the subject in 1999:

Carson was violently assailed by threats of lawsuits and derision, including suggestions that this meticulous scientist was a "hysterical woman" unqualified to write such a book. A huge counterattack was organized and led by Monsanto Company, Velsicol, American Cyanamid – indeed, the whole chemical industry – duly supported by the Agriculture Department as well as the more cautious in the media. Matthiessen, Peter (March 29, 1999). "Environmentalism Rachel Carson". *Time Magazine* 153 (12).

This ongoing criticism, and the vicious, ad hominem arguments often employed in it, is in part due to an interesting effect often notable in the media, where the general public seems to get infested by a claim which, though easily refuted, stubbornly refuses to die out. Consequently, her work continues to be controversial up until today, even amounting to the frankly laughable claims that Carson should be blamed for millions of deaths from malaria, claims put forward by those who argue that DDT is the “only effective agent” against mosquitoes, according to some sources within the chemical industry.

This particular case has been investigated by John Quiggin and Tim Lambert in a 2008 article in *Prospect*. The research found that Carson never advocated the ban of DDT, she advocated the search for less harmful alternatives. Furthermore, researchers in Sri Lanka (one of the most malaria-affected countries) found that mosquitoes are becoming rapidly resistant to DDT, so different agents are employed. Lastly, DDT was never banned for the fight against mosquitoes in the US, only for its use as an agricultural pesticide, where its detrimental effects have already been studied. Yet, articles containing quotes such as these continue to be published:

Carson didn't seem to take into account the vital role (DDT) played in controlling the transmission of malaria by killing the mosquitoes that carry the parasite [...] Rachel Carson is a warning to us all of the dangers of neglecting the evidence-based approach and the need to weight potential risk against benefit: it can be argued that the anti-DDT campaign she inspired **was responsible for almost as many deaths as some of the worst dictators of the last century** (my emphasis)

Taverne, Dick. "The Harm That Pressure Groups Can Do". In Feldman, Stanley; Marks, Vincent. *Panic Nation*. London, John Blake (2005).

While it has been said by William Sidelsky, who reviewed the book for the *New Statesman* that "The tone of [*Panic Nation*] may be trenchant, but the arguments are sensible and even-handed" the above quote is still a good example for two phenomena often faced by the Green Movement in the USA, namely the use of thinly veiled falsehoods as solid facts (Merrill Goozner, another critic, was left incredulous at the amount of publicity given to proponents of claims which could be refuted "by spending just fifteen minutes in online databases that contain scientific abstracts") and the practices involved when confronting an opponent, often crossing and re-crossing the line to demonizing hyperbole. It should be noted here that in the case of Carson much of this controversy was fabricated by the fallout of a media discourse, spread by channels which were interestingly enough owned by influential lobby groups, which used their considerable clout to try and distort the issue in their favor.

The campaign also backfired, as Carson and her agent had anticipated the backlash and organized a wide range of professional supporters. The controversy generated massive public interest in the issue, and after CBS aired a TV report about Carson in 1963, which was favorably received across the USA and Canada, the support was so resounding that John F. Kennedy motioned for a congressional review of pesticide

dangers and the public release of a pesticide report by the President's Science Advisory Committee, which found her claims to be true. The continued practice used by the industry in this event, namely that of presenting what are essentially lies or non sequiturs, and the often violent media reactions to environmental issues sadly are still prevalent in American discourse and the willful ignorance of inconvenient facts continues to present a problem to the Green Movement.

This entire episode was included here to highlight how sometimes a writer can have direct and far-reaching effects with his or her work. Both Abbey and Thoreau were such writers, but their influence was either more indirect or covert, or disputed, so that it is not readily visible. Carson's case was fought out in long media campaigns and directly in the public eye at the dawn of the modern information age, which may have contributed to it. Leo Marx argued in "*The Machine in the Garden*" that a writer's chief responsibility is to highlight the issues at hand, not to solve them himself or present solutions. He says that politicians, not writers, are the ones to solve our problems. True to this, many writers have directly inspired or influenced politicians and politics, which is very clearly visible in the case of Carson, rather obscure in the case of Thoreau, and extremely controversial in the case of Abbey.

Returning to the survey, in the early 60ies Environmentalism had become a mainstream topic again, and has stayed so ever since. Writer-scientists like Carson were symptomatic of a new age of environmental awareness which ran parallel to, and intersected with, the formation of the ecological ideas of the late 19th and early 20th century into a new and discrete science of its own. Ideas like the biosphere, the food chain and the interrelatedness of organisms formed the theoretical background for this new course of study, and many tropes of modern environmental discourse are taken from this new field, Ecology. Help for nature causes also came from unusual directions, such as the Space Race. In 1972, the crew of Apollo 17 took one of the most iconic pictures of the 20th century. Earth, blue, white and green, set against the backdrop of the infinite void. This photo, called 'The blue marble', was used as the emblem of the new environmental movement, as it brought into perspective the fragile nature of our 'Spaceship Earth'. The significance of this is perhaps best embodied in this quote by popular astronomer and then NASA-scientist Carl Sagan:

Consider again that dot. That's here. That's home. That's us. On it everyone you love, everyone you know, everyone you ever heard of, every human being who ever was, lived out their lives. The aggregate of our joy and suffering, thousands of confident religions, ideologies, and economic doctrines, every hunter and forager, every hero and coward, every creator and destroyer of civilization, every king and peasant, every young couple in love, every mother and father, hopeful child, inventor and explorer, every teacher of morals, every corrupt politician, every "superstar," every "supreme leader," every saint and sinner in the history of our species lived there – on a mote of dust suspended in a sunbeam. (Carl Sagan. *Pale Blue Dot: A Vision of the Human Future in Space*)³

These revelations of our fragile earth caused a surge in environmental activism, carried in part by the Hippie culture of the 60ies and 70ies. This counter-culture movement captured some of the ideas of 'deep ecology' and used it for their own cause, mostly the ideas of recapturing wildness and reconnecting with nature. While Hippies are today often seen as a monolithic structure, the emblematic long-haired tie-dyed throng of nonconformists was only the most visible part of a rich counter-culture which indebted itself to the old nature writers. One of the more radical streaks of this were the anarcho-primitivists, whose aim was to actively combat the spread of civilization via intentional denial of it, seeing a return to a low-tech, non-hierarchical society as the only salvation of mankind. They rest their arguments on a quite literal interpretation of some passages from *Walden*, mostly the ones about Thoreau's ideas of wildness and the spirit of nature. Robert D. Richardson addressed such literal interpretations, and urged caution when perusing Thoreau “with your irony detector switched off” (quoted in Payne, 41). *Walden* is a notoriously ambiguous book, often self-contradictory, and thus very vulnerable to clashing interpretations of its supposed meaning. The anarcho-primitivists seized some of Thoreau's arguments against the encroachment of the railway as well as his skepticism towards the over-accelerated style of living in the industrial area to justify a radical stance that borders on hostility towards all of civilization and its institutions.

Cactus Ed' and *The Monkey Wrench Gang*: Edward Abbey.

Parts of this resonated with one man, who was definitely not a Hippie, Edward 'Cactus Ed' Abbey. Abbey was an 'odd fellow' by all accounts, a self-described 'registered anarchist' and advocate of primitivism, but staunchly refusing to fit into the traditional

³ This quote actually appeared as a reaction to a similar photograph taken of the Earth by the Voyager 1 spacecraft in 1990; however Sagan was an advocate of environmentalism to a degree, and the quote has often been erroneously, but fittingly, associated with the 1972 picture.

role of the 'tree-hugger'. He was a ranger in the Arches National Park in 1956 and 1957, at a time when this area of the West was a National Monument, but not yet a park. While there, he collected a large volume of journals, sketches and notes, which were later filtered into *Desert Solitaire*. Much of his work is spent describing the surroundings of the house-trailer he lived in, pointing out the myriad of species enduring in what many Americans still thought of as a moonscape (Roughly the same area where Abbey resided was part of the location of the 1953 movie *The Living Desert* by Walt Disney studios, which became one of the first commercially successful documentary movies). Roughly the other half of the book deals with his contempt for human civilization, and his defense of wilderness against its encroachment. This starts with things as small as disrupting the construction site of a new highway by pulling out survey stakes, and culminates in his almost sermonizing tirade about dynamiting Glen Canyon Dam.

Lines like those used throughout the 'Down the River' chapter of *Desert Solitaire*, as well as his general stance of aggressive resistance against wilderness exploitation, have led some to call Abbey the founder of modern Eco-terrorism. Certainly, the practice of sabotaging development projects by such actions as driving nails into trees to damage chainsaws or stealing spark plugs out of parked earthmovers is also called 'monkey-wrenching', after the book *The Monkey Wrench Gang*, written by Abbey, though the factual term for such practice is ecotage. Some groups, like the Earth Liberation Front, actually admitted to having been inspired by Abbey's book. Abbey himself never confirmed or denied rumors of his involvement, though he condoned the practice in general. After his death, his brother confirmed that Abbey took part in some actions by several groups, though not clearly associating himself with one in particular to the extent of membership. He did endorse Earth First! on several occasions though.

Where it all went from there: 1980ies to present

After the 70ies, the environmental movement developed not only exponentially, but also in a fractal manner. The style of movement as common in the US found acceptance in many countries, being copied by or subsuming many organizations beyond the American continent. The increased frequency of global industrial disasters (the Amoco Cadiz oil spill in France, the Bhopal chemical disaster in India, the Chernobyl nuclear meltdown in the Ukraine) has hardened the fronts between environmentalists and their

critics, while supporters of the Green cause, formerly chiefly academics and members of the counter-culture, now come from all walks of life. This is evident, for example, in the publication of the controversial book and movie *An Inconvenient Truth* by former US-American presidential candidate Al Gore.

This brief survey presented here only scratches the surface of developments in this area, and, as mentioned above, by necessity my view on the subject concentrates on the USA and on some few select authors. I acknowledge that much has not been said, and many connections would deserve further exploration, but I will restrict myself to the time between the publication of *Walden* and *Desert Solitaire*, comparing both the works, and their authors.

2 – Elements of Walden Pond and the Desert: Comparisons of select topics in *Walden* and *Desert Solitaire*.

With a burning spear and a horse of air,
To the wilderness I wander.
- Tom O' Bedlams Song

Edward Abbey, for his entire life, resented the label “nature writer”. He conceded that he did write about nature, but did not want to be pigeonholed with writers whom he respected, but found too different from himself. This probably stemmed from his general resentment of any sort of label, even towards those he principally agreed with. After writing *Desert Solitaire*, Abbey said in an interview:

“I dashed off that *Desert Solitaire* thing because it was easy to do. [...] and at once I was put into the “Western Environmentalist Writer” bag, category, pigeonhole. I haven't tried very hard to get out of it.” (Hepworth, 40)

As much as he outwardly resisted the label, there is evidence that he did respect Thoreau, in his own way. He was known to criticize the man for his “unctuous style” (in *Desert Solitaire*), but he did say that men like him, John Muir, Aldo Leopold and others were objects of his admiration, but due to the fact that he could not maintain the “constant level of high thinking” that these men express, he does not count them among his primary inspirations. There must have been some influence though, as several people have, over time, reinforced the “Thoreau of the West” label. Wendell Berry notes

that critics tend to “compare every writer who has been as far out of the house as the mailbox to Thoreau” but he also notes that their environmental sensibility, lack of political activism (Abbey's 'hobby' of ecotage was not done with an overt political agenda) and pronounced uncongeniality to “group spirit” connected them (qtd. in Payne). Also of note is that Abbey's skill at describing nature while interweaving his wilderness anecdotes with his views on ethics and human nature rival that of Thoreau. What other similarities, and discrepancies, they shared, big and small, will be the subject of the following chapter.

Style and Writing similarities

One similarity that is relatively readily apparent is the writing style of the two authors. They both have a very dense style of prose, and they both love playing with hidden meaning, metaphors, analogies and simile, while keeping their readers guessing what will come next. They also often employed a style of writing which could best be summed up with the words 'nature reverie', which often comes at the beginning of a chapter and takes the form of a long list of the flora and fauna surrounding the scene in the given episode (this will be explored in the following sub chapter on plants and animals), though one could also argue that this is as much a feature of nature writing as such as it is a feature of the authors, similar to the way that anecdote and lesson always take turns in the presentation of arguments. Also, both authors expect much from their readers. Both Abbey and Thoreau advocate change and admonish the reader without ever directly saying so. It is more a leading by example and goading towards an idea that characterizes the teaching style of Abbey and Thoreau. The biggest similarity is also the most subtle and the least easy to grasp. There are moments in *Desert Solitaire* where Abbey seems to channel Thoreau. There is no single passage which could be used as an easy example, but the general attitude, the descriptions, a sudden launch into a long-winded sermon on nature and man, all these small instances give one the impression Abbey took some inspiration from *Walden*, which we know he read because of *Down the River with Henry Thoreau*.

Most of these similarities can be attributed to the fact that writers such as Thoreau, Muir and Emerson established a certain way of writing about nature, and while Abbey vehemently denied being a nature writer, he certainly wrote about nature as well, and took inspiration from these men. What is more interesting is the way that certain topics

and themes are dealt with by both authors, as Abbey and Thoreau often deal with the same topics, but in different ways. 'Same topic – different solution / same solution – different topic' seems to be the guiding principle, and this relationship will be explored in the rest of the sub chapters.

“Alles was da kreucht und fleucht” - Animals and Plants in *Walden* and *Desert Solitaire*:

As both authors were not only nature writers, but writers who spent a long time in intimate contact with nature, it is only natural that animals and plants play a big part in the books of Abbey and Thoreau, who both talk at length and in exquisite detail about the animals and plants that surrounded them in their respective hermitages in *Walden* and *Desert Solitaire*.

Reading those passages, one is also reminded of the common denominator already alluded to when discussing the style of both authors. They had extremely detailed knowledge of their surrounding ecosystem, being able to both identify and name a profusion of plants and animals by common and Latin names, though both had no formal schooling in the matter. While at Harvard, Thoreau studied rhetoric, classics, philosophy, mathematics, and science. Not exactly botany and ornithology. Edward Abbey studied at the University of New Mexico, eventually earning an MA in philosophy. Both of these educations arguably did not concentrate on the taxonomic definitions of a broad range of species, yet passages such as this are found in Thoreau:

In my front yard grew the strawberry, blackberry, and life-everlasting, johnswort and goldenrod, shrub-oaks and sand-cherry [...] (*cerasus pumila*) adorned the sides of the path with its delicate flowers arranged in umbels cylindrically about its short stems [...] The sumach (*rhus glabra*,) grew luxuriantly about the house, pushing up through the embankment which I had made [...] (Thoreau, *Walden*, 76-77)

And again in Abbey:

Time to inspect the garden. I refer to the garden which lies all around me [...] about the size of the Negev [...] Inventory. Great big yellow mule-ear sunflowers are blooming along the dirt road [...] Indian paintbrush, scarlet penstemon, skyrocket gilia, prickly pear [...] Loveliest of all, however, gay and sweet as a pretty girl, with a fragrance like that of orange

blossoms, is the cliffrose, *Cowania stansburiana*, [...] (Abbey, DS, 27-29)

Both authors seem to have acquired this knowledge by themselves, through a deep desire to know more about their surroundings, and some probably came naturally as they grew up in close proximity to a relative wilderness, Concord having been surrounded by deep woods in Thoreau's days, and Abbey, for his part, undertook a formative sojourn in the Four Corners region (spending most of it in the part of the region belonging to Utah) and grew up in and around several small towns in the backwoods of Pennsylvania⁴. They were, to use a slightly antiquated term, 'wood-wise', although Thoreau for his part took this to an extreme. He was a noted bird enthusiast and amateur ornithologist, entomologist, ichthyologist, geologist, land surveyor and many other things. Some of the samples he took from the surroundings of Walden Pond are still kept at the Boston Museum of Science, and data concerning his measurements of Walden Pond are still used in climate surveys.

As a literary device, both authors use this wisdom to highlight the richness of their respective surroundings and the long list of species serves to illustrate that the woods are not silent and serene and that the desert is far from empty as well. The general interconnectedness between the many species is something both authors highlight and admire. And in the work of each author, there are animals raised above the others and lauded with closer attention, and curiously, in both works a bird takes on an important part. In the case of Thoreau it is actually several birds, but in particular the loon, which he describes in one chapter, seems to have captured his attention. For Abbey, it is the vulture, reviled scavenger but necessary member of the desert ecosystem. As different as their writing environments were, so different are the 'spirit animals' of the two authors. Both serve as a symbol for an aspect of nature, but while Thoreau praises the rare and elusive loon, Abbey prefers the vulture as a recurring symbol. In the end, one could say that both means serve the same end.

The Loon:

Though Thoreau gives the taxon *columbus glacialis* in the 'Brute Neighbours' chapter of *Walden*, today the birds are called *Gavia immer* by their Latin name, and are more commonly known as Great Northern Loons. These birds occupy a curious position in

⁴ He was born in Indiana, Pennsylvania. The family moved around a lot in those early years, and he actually spent most of his childhood near Home, Pennsylvania.

North American culture, especially in Canada, where they are on the reverse side of the 1\$ coin (commonly called the 'Loonie' in Ontario). The loon is a freshwater bird, and as such has traditionally made its home around the many lakes and ponds of the Laurentian Plateau in Canada, and of course also around the many hidden watering holes in the formerly vast forests of New England. It is an easy bird to identify as soon as it opens its beak, as the call of the loon is a sound so characteristic for the species that once heard, it can hardly be forgotten and features in various poems and legends of the first Nations.

Then at night the general stillness is more impressive than any sound, but occasionally you hear the note of an owl farther or nearer in the woods, and if near a lake, the semi-human cry of the loons at their unearthly revels.

At length, having come up fifty rods off, he uttered one of those prolonged unearthly howls, as if calling on the god of loons to aid him, and immediately there came a wind from the east and rippled the surface, and filled the whole air with misty rain. I was impressed as if it were the prayer of a loon. (Thoreau, *Walden*, 150-157)

For Thoreau, the loon was a symbol of the capriciousness and mischief nature is capable of, and the almost human emotions expressed by animals at times. He recounts an episode in late autumn, where he was rowing about the pond birdwatching, and engages in a lengthy game of cat-and-mouse with a diving loon, which seems to not so subtly mock him with its cries, going this way and that:

So long-winded was he and so unwearable, that when he had swum farthest he would immediately plunge again, nevertheless; and then no wit could divine where in the deep pond, beneath the smooth surface, he might be speeding his way like a fish [...] he appeared to know his course as surely under water as on the surface, and swam much faster there. [...] I concluded that he laughed in derision of my efforts, confident in his own resources. (Thoreau, *Walden*, 172-173)

The style of the passage, as well as the allusions to the loon being at once out of its element and yet so much at home have led some to say that Thoreau sees himself in the bird, a notion which I neither favor nor dismiss. Certainly, one could also argue that the loon represents nature herself, beleaguered as she is by man, as the loon is hunted by the villagers of Concord ("ten men to one loon" as mentioned in *Walden*) a fact which

saddens Thoreau greatly, and he is delighted when inclement weather and advancing season thwart the hunters. Hunters in general are not very popular with Thoreau. While he stresses that he bears no ill will against those who subsist on hunting, and he himself often goes fishing, at some point in his life he ceases to find the activity of hunting wholesome or worth pursuing, and he would much rather live on what nature can readily give him, at times. Thoreau is much in favor of such lifestyle choices as vegetarianism, though he himself eats fish and occasionally salt pork in the course of *Walden*. He sees those who can live on what nature gives freely without taking away the lives of other beings as morally superior to and closer to nature than those who cannot. Ultimately he would have liked himself to be part of that group as well.

What is certain in all this is that the loon, much like the duck, the whippoorwill and the partridge, all described in earlier chapters, along with the mice and foxes and even the occasional village cat and dog were confirmation to Thoreau, when he moved to *Walden*, that he now dwelt in the midst of life, at a nexus of being. As he himself called it, he was “playing at life” which, according to Nash, meant “living it with the utmost seriousness”.

The Vulture:

Considering the relatively benign looks of the loon (to the untrained eye, it closely resembles a speckled duck with a pointy beak) the vulture has a much more difficult reputation to bear. They are universally seen as symbols of death in western culture, as birds of graveyards, and reviled as refuse- and carrion eaters. Yet, under the ugly exterior lies a very utilitarian and much-needed member of the ecosystem, for carrion is a haven for disease, and needs to be done away with. Vultures are in some ways the sanitation department of nature, and at once also its grateful garbage disposals. Things left uneaten by other predators or animals succumbed to thirst, hunger or disease are quickly and efficiently recycled. This universally reviled bird fulfilling a universally needed labor must have appealed to Abbey, as he often goes out of his way to praise the bird for its function. Out of the large family of new world vultures, his chosen bird, the one native to the same Four Corners region which Abbey loved is the Turkey Vulture, *Cathartes aura*, which by looks alone can be considered an iconic symbol of the west.

Of the name, Abbey had this to say:

This vulture soars above the Fins, the Land of Standing Rocks. Soaring is the vulture's life, death his dinner. Evil foul black scavenger of the dead and dying, his bald red head and red neck featherless – the better to slip his greedy beak deep into the entrails of his prey – he feeds on corruption. Cathartes aura, his Latin title, derived from the Greek katharsis, meanings purification, and aura from the Greek for air, emanation or vapor. The airy purifier. Bird of the Sun. The contemplator. The only known philosophizing bird, [...] (Abbey, *The Monkey Wrench Gang*, 355)

Abbey sees the vulture as a strong symbol for the circle of life, or chain of being, as all that lives must die, and all that dies serves to nurture other life.

See those big black scrawny wings far above, waiting? Comfort yourself with the reflection that within a few hours, if all goes as planned, your human flesh will be working its way through the gizzard of a buzzard, your essence transfigured into the fierce greedy eyes and unimaginable consciousness of a turkey vulture. Whereupon you, too, will soar on motionless wings high over the ruck and rack of human suffering. For most of us a promotion in grade, for some the realization of an ideal. (Abbey, DS, 148)

The focus here is again on the notion of being at the nexus of nature, although Abbey is not hesitant when focusing on the more grisly aspects of nature, 'red in tooth and claw' as it were, which is his way of realism. There is a similar episode where he and several other rangers are tasked with a search and rescue operation when an elderly man goes missing on a photography trip. The man is eventually found dead from exposure and thirst (presumably), leaning against a juniper tree, staring out over an impressive vista. Abbey notes that he somehow envied the man for his death, as it was with a grandiose view to enjoy, and his dead body would have soon been beneficent to the scavengers of the Arches region.

Looking out on this panorama of light, space, rock and silence I am inclined to congratulate the dead man on his choice of jumping-off place; he had good taste. He had good luck – I envy him the manner of his going: to die alone, on rock under sun at the brink of the unknown, like a wolf, like a great bird, seems to me very good fortune indeed. (Abbey, DS 267)

Abbey goes on to describe this feeling of envy towards the dead man in more detail, hedging a bit as to not seem too morbid or presumptuous talking about the dead man. The fact that he pays attention to the feelings of the dead man at all serves as a marker that this issue is important to Abbey, who commonly held few human practices sacred.

To Abbey, the circle of life and death is a self-sustaining wellspring, and death is a part of life. He likens it to a plow which overturns the soil to cover the remains of the old harvest and makes room for the new growth. His idea seems to be that man comes from nature and returns to nature, thus going full circle, though he too acknowledges that it is normal for human nature to rebel against this fading away, which mankind is “proclaiming through art, religion, philosophy, science and even war”.

The vulture and the loon are by far not the only birds, let alone the only animals which Abbey and Thoreau use as examples for the workings of nature. *Walden* contains many episodes where Thoreau encountered diverse species in the woods surrounding his cabin, and he sometimes even delves, somewhat ironic in his tone at these points, into local folk tales and superstition. A story about a “flying cat” is of note here, and he at length recounts the peculiar behavior some foxes express when hunted. Lastly, one cannot forget the importance of moose for Thoreau, which is mentioned less prominently in *Walden* and more in his writings about his visits to Maine: considering his last word was moose (alternatively it was recorded as being 'Indian'), he must have felt a strong connection to these animals. Abbey for his part also mentions the nighthawk, the coyote, wild horses and his views on the greater meaning of predator and prey are outlined in an episode involving a horned owl, an animal which Thoreau also encounters and mentions.

Ants – Nature's own despotic Empires:

A final interesting parallel about the animal kingdom is the two authors' views on ants. Thoreau describes a battle between two colonies of ants in his wood-yard, smaller red ants against bigger black ones, “red republican against black imperialist” as Thoreau puts it. He is fascinated by their struggle, and goes on that “I was myself excited somewhat even as if they had been men. The more you think of it, the less the difference” (*Walden* 152-153). He watches the battle rage for some time, carrying three combatants locked in mutual struggle into his hut to further observe them, and muses on the similarity of the struggles of ant and man, and how important the battle must have been to those concerned, while in the big picture it meant nothing.

Why here every ant was a Buttrick⁵ - “Fire! for God's sake fire!” - and

⁵ Major (later Colonel) John Buttrick, commander of rebel forces at battle of Concord early in the

thousands shared the fate of Davis and Hosmer. There was not one hiring there. I have no doubt that it was a principle they fought for, as much as our ancestors, and not to avoid a three-penny tax on their tea; and the results of this battle will be as important and memorable to those whom it concerns as those of the battle of Bunker Hill, at least. (Thoreau, *Walden*, 153)

If Thoreau's tone seems mocking here, that is because his stance on warfare in general and armies in particular is that of a pacifist, as outlined in *Civil Disobedience*. While he sees the struggle for freedom as a necessary one, he is not exceptionally fond of warfare, fighting or violence in general, and the juxtaposition of the local Concord heroes of the 'war that made America' with the humble ant is probably quite deliberate.

Abbey, for his part, is also reminded of civilization and man when he looks at ants, though other than Thoreau's mild interest, he is not especially fond of them, going so far as to rake apart an ant hill he encounters while hiking near his ranger post. This is a stark departure from Abbey's normal behavior towards nature, which is characterized by a strong benevolent indifference interspersed with a 'take only what you need' attitude when it comes to food and water. He does not make excuses for the wanton destruction of the anthill, instead admitting that he deeply dislikes ants. They apparently rouse his ire as they are the natural followers of ranchers in the West, whom he equally detests. In *The Monkey Wrench Gang*, the character Dr. Sarvis sums up the author's opinion in a short lecture delivered early in the book:

The anthill, is sign, symbol and symptom of what [...] we must find a way to oppose and halt. [...]like the Fullerian foam fungus, [it] is the mark of social disease. Anthills abound where overgrazing prevails. The plastic dome follows the plague of runaway industrialism, prefigures technological tyranny and reveals the true quality of our lives, which sinks in inverse ratio to the growth of the Gross National Product. (Abbey, *MWG*, 84)

Both Thoreau's interest and Abbey's anger are understandable from a biologist's point of view. Ants have always fascinated mankind as the genus *formicidae* is the only one we know besides the genus *homo* which engages not only in the building of vast edifices below and above ground but also the organized conquest, destruction, enslavement and subjugation of others of its kind. Sadly there is no record of either Thoreau or Abbey

American War of Independence. Private Abner Hosmer and Captain Isaac Davis were the first casualties of that battle.

ever coming across a termite mound, their reactions might have been worthy of record as termites, other than ants, never fight to conquer, but always to defend, and their constant gnawing often serves to bring the works of civilization crashing down.

Animals – Conclusion:

Overall, the animal kingdom forms the second panel of the nature triptych of animal-plant-land which itself serves as the canvas upon which both authors paint their stories about nature. Animals are an obvious choice, as everyone can relate to animals stories, which is something both Thoreau and Abbey knew very well. Animal anecdotes are, of course, a lynchpin of nature writing, as they are easier to write engagingly about. Pages have been filled (mostly by John Muir) about the splendor of the sequoia tree, its regal bearing, incredible size and cathedral-like crown, and surely it is completely deserving of all that praise; stories about this tree are, however, easily beaten out of a person's mind by some amusing or terrifying account of an animal encounter. This has its roots in human nature, animals were always more of a thing to watch out for than plants, and our interaction with them has shaped our interests. Indeed, one of the first things a biology teacher in training learns is that animate nature will always outpace inanimate nature in the race for student attention.

Research indicates that most younger children do not even consider plants to be alive in the same sense as animals. It is a classic anecdote that no student will keep his attention on slides on the nature of the coniferous growth cycle if a blackbird flaps against the window. Birds are indeed an obvious choice, as they are something of enormous immediacy for people. While not everyone will have seen a coyote in his life-time or encountered a bobcat, everyone knows and sees birds every day.

Birds are something of a bridge between civilization and wilderness, as they have followed us into the cities and taken up home in our midst, similar to other synanthropic⁶ species like the rat, fox and badger, but are always readily visible. The reason for this is simply that birds have largely been ignored by mankind. While other larger fauna has been hunted to extinction or driven to the fringes by encroaching cities, bird populations survived or even thrived (though there are, of course, exceptions to this, as the passenger pigeon and dodo bird can attest. Or rather, could). As such, birds

⁶ Synanthropic species (Greek: 'syn anthros' i.e. 'with man') – Animals which adapt to living with humans. Cf. German "Kulturfolger". There is apparently no common word for this in English.

are important for nature writers, as they can be followed, quite literally, from city to forest.

Plants, on the other hand, are an obvious choice because they make up most of living nature, though less of an obvious choice as animals, as noted above. Thoreau wrote about the plants surrounding him because he was, quite tritely, trying to see the trees for the forest. In much other literature, the plants are merely in the background while the action plays out. In nature writing, they are not only in the foreground, they sometimes are the *dramatis personae*. This is not as evident in the books studied for this paper, but it is an important feature. Abbey pays more attention to individual plants, likely because they are not that numerous in Arches National Park. The desert is a stark environment, ruled by water scarcity, where living things survive on small islands of moisture with vast tracts of emptiness in between. A good thing in Abbey's mind, as it afforded "a perfect ratio of water to rock, of water to sand, insuring that wide, free, open, generous spacing among plants and animals, homes and towns and cities, which makes the arid West so different from any other part of the nation." (Abbey, DS, 159)

Both the plants and the animals also serve as a reminder for man that there is a world out there which is divorced from his normal urban experience, one which he can choose to visit and experience, at first glance. When delving deeper into both 'Abbey' and 'Thoreau', one realizes that in their opinion, it is not an option to visit the wilderness, it is an obligation.

The primal forces in civilized man – Abbey and Thoreau on the subject of 'wildness':

The concept of „wildness“ as an attribute of man is something which crops up in much of nature literature, and it could be argued that in the form concerning ecocriticism and the Green Movement it was, if not invented, then at least fleshed out and popularized by Thoreau. The concept as such is divorced from the usual attributes which correlate with the adjective 'wild', which is overall more of a negative term. A wild man is one that has fallen back into barbarism and savagery or is in any way not in control of himself, a highly undesirable characteristic, especially in the more settled and reserved 19th century circles Thoreau moved in. So how is it that a gentleman of New England would see something as this as a desirable thing in a man? And which concept of wildness can

be found in Abbey's work, and does it resemble Thoreau's idea at all?

Thoreau's nature spiritualism:

As observed by Roderick Nash in *Wilderness and the American Mind*, Thoreau tried to formulate his theory on the matter by examining himself, first and foremost, and his reaction to wilderness. As Nash points out:

In his twenty-third year, 1841, he wrote to a friend: "I grow savager and savager every day, as if fed on raw meat, and my tameness is only the repose of untamableness." A few months later he confessed in his journal that "it does seem as if mine were a peculiarly wild nature, which so yearns toward all wildness." (Nash, *Wilderness*, 87)

This mentioning of the word 'wildness' was at the beginning of the formulation process for a set of principles which were later formed into a lecture he gave at the Concord Lyceum in 1851. The transcendentalist approach was relatively new at the time, and the lecture was the beginning of a new understanding of wilderness in American society, the literary groundwork for which had begun in 1836. As noted in the survey, early American attitudes were derived from the Bible, in the sense that man is lord over nature, and Calvinist doctrine, in the sense that wilderness contained 'evil energy' or something quite as esoteric which would serve to ruin man and lead him astray. Combining this assumption with the ideas of 'manifest destiny' and 'frontier' the land was seen as a resource to be used, not a place to be admired or enjoyed. A staple of transcendentalism is the belief that a higher reality exists beyond the one we see, and through proper living and understanding oneself, man can come closer to this elevated state of being. This concept is somewhat similar in principle to the Buddhist mental state of 'nirvana', but mostly in so far that both describe an idealized state of being reachable through self-improvement and meditation. Beyond that, transcendentalism interprets this "realm of spiritual truth" more as a philosophical state of mind and living, rather than a state of religious serenity and earthly rapture.

Also, meditation usually conjures up a mental image of saffron-robed monks with shaved heads quietly contemplating a mountain stream. This is at once very like and very unlike what Thoreau had in mind, as even though he too contemplated nature, his idea of meditation was rather one of intuition and contemplation of the world through

the lens of one's imagination. It also involved getting closer to the primal undercurrents of man, to peel off the veneer of civilization and channel a more primordial man from time to time, as evident in one of his observations while at Walden Pond:

As I came home through the woods with my string of fish, trailing my pole, it being now quite dark, I caught a glimpse of a woodchuck stealing across my path, and felt a strange thrill of savage delight, and was strongly tempted to seize and devour him raw; not that I was hungry then, except for that wildness which he represented. [...] I found in myself, and still find, an instinct toward a higher, or, as it is named, spiritual life, as do most men, and another toward a primitive rank and savage one, and I reverence them both. I love the wild not less than the good. (Thoreau, *Walden*, 139-140)

For Thoreau, this simultaneous existence of higher and baser desires in man was another sign of the manifestation of nature. He himself had expanded on an original summary of transcendentalism by Emerson by posing the following hypothesis: “[I]s not Nature, rightly read, that of which she is commonly taken to be the symbol merely?” (qtd. in Nash, 85). In this statement, the Transcendentalists connection to Deism becomes apparent.

Thoreau – Deism and Transcendentalism:

Deism has been an element of human thought since Greek antiquity, but the European Christian version of this worldview was a product of the Age of Enlightenment and the scientific revolutions which followed it. Though considered by more stringent dogmatists to be atheists, Deists did believe in the existence of God, or a god-like being, however they insisted that God did not directly interfere with the universe and man, instead letting it work by the principles of science and the laws of nature, which were being discovered and codified at the time. They rejected that the bible was the revealed word of god (or indeed that any religious text was the transcription of divine utterance), they rejected dogmatism and demagogy, and did not believe in miracles or prophecies, instead seeking rational explanations for these phenomena. While many reactionary elements of the clergy were appalled at this, calling it a rejection of God, Deist saw the reason they employed to interpret the universe as a divine gift. God creates the universe and the laws to govern it, creates man, gives man reason so he can understand and admire the creation, then retreats. Many Deists were influenced by the works of Sir Isaac Newton, and they were the basis for their idea of a 'natural religion' in the sense that it was governed by the laws of nature, and not religious catechism. They were not,

however, influenced by Newton's views on religion.

Transcendentalism agreed with Deism in large stretches, mostly that the universe was created by god; that it was neither inherently good nor evil; that god had a transpersonal relationship to all of creation and not just a personal one to mankind; and that it was governed by the laws of Nature. The main difference for Transcendentalist was the way in which this universe was to be experienced. Deism primarily advocates the use of rational thought and scientific inquiry, while Transcendentalism urges the individual to use his intuition and imagination. In this it makes deeper forays into the realm of spirituality than Deism, but it does not travel an entirely new path, it merely follows it to its end.

Nature is the ultimate source for religion in this view, and as Emerson put it “in the wilderness, I find something more dear and connate than in the streets or villages...in the woods we return to reason and faith.” (Emerson, *Works*). Again, this stands in contrast to the Calvinist fear of the “moral vacuum” encountered in places away from the watchful eye of the church. Transcendentalists felt that wilderness would not diminish their human nature, but expand it, “maximize “ it, as Nash wrote. He further states that this process was a slow transition, and over several generations the fear of the early New England settlers gave way to the confidence “in wilderness and in man” that their descendants in Concord felt in the face of the untamed land beyond their towns and villages.

Historically speaking, Transcendentalism was a relatively short-lived school of thought, effectively dissipating after about 50 years. Many ideas were absorbed into other schools of thought, and the connection with Deism was again highlighted. So much in fact that modern deists consider Emerson, and sometimes Thoreau, as members of the 'third wave' of Deism.

Another interesting feature of *Walden* which could be used to argue in favor of Thoreau's connection to Deism is found late in the chapter “Spring”, from page 203 to 204, where the author muses on the similarity of certain structures in nature. He is viewing a clay and sand railroad embankment that is thawing out in the spring sun, drawing random patterns, which alternatively remind him of leaves, veins and other features of organic nature. He describes the structures as foliage, but often finds them akin to “the bowels of the globe”, taking it as evidence that all life is structurally

connected and similar in design.

It is wonderful how rapidly yet perfectly the sand organizes itself as it flows, using the best material its mass affords to form the sharp edges of its channel. Such are the sources of rivers. In the silicious matter which the water deposits is perhaps the bony system, and in the still finer soil and organic matter the fleshy fibre or cellular tissue. What is man but a mass of thawing clay? [...] Is not the hand a spreading *palm* leaf with its lobes and veins? The ear may be regarded, fancifully, as a lichen, *umbilicaria*, on the side of the head, with its love or drop. [...] (Thoreau, *Walden*, 203)

Interestingly enough there is a deistic and scientific approach to this, as the patterns that underlie the formation of blood vessels, hoarfrost, lightning bolts and many other seemingly random self-repeating patterns were discovered to follow a stringent set of laws. Work on this phenomenon began as early as the works of mathematician Gottfried Leibniz in the 17th century, and reached a milestone about half a century after the death of Thoreau with the works of Helge von Koch and Waclaw Sierpiński. Another 50 years would pass until Benoit Mandelbrot formalized several centuries worth of knowledge into a term very common in biotechnology and modern mathematics. What Thoreau observed that day were 'fractals', self-similar patterns⁷ in nature, which influence everything from the patterns in snowflakes to the structure of the human brain and are as such often used as examples of an underlying order to 'creation' by deists and are seen as proof for the “divine architect” concept of God.

However, Thoreau never mentions any god in his reverie, only referring to “the earth” and “nature” several times. This should probably not be over-analyzed into thinking that Thoreau was following some sort of self-styled animism. He often personifies nature, such as in the chapter 'Solitude' or prominently in 'Higher Laws', 'Spring' and as an aside at many other points in the books. But even though it has been suggested, this probably does not mean that Thoreau was an adherent to a sort of 'christian voodoo', mingling animist practices with Christianity, but then again we cannot be certain, as Thoreau was always fond of being ambiguous, as previously noted. One counterpoint may be that he was said to be familiar with the theories of Charles Darwin, which were published in America two years before Thoreau's death, and that he supported them. Sadly, he never got a chance or never intended to confirm this, so the anecdote has to be relegated to the many apocryphal tales told about Henry David Thoreau. What becomes clear from his

⁷ Which means that they seem the same no matter from what distance they are viewed. Moving ever closer, a tree resolves into a network of branches, which resolves into a network of twigs, a network of leaves, a network of veins in a leaf, etc. As above, so below.

writing in *Walden*, and again in *Walking*, the *Maine Woods* and his other writings on nature, he felt a connection to nature and all things in it which for him was as strong as the faith in God for other people.

In 'Solitude' especially, he describes how he is part of a greater whole, for as he says when rain keeps him inside, it is good for his bean crops, which need the water; and should it rain so much his beans rot, he can still take comfort that it will be good for the grasses in the uplands, and so forth. By this philosophy, nothing is ever wasted, and nothing in nature is wicked or opposed to man, simply indifferent as one is indifferent to one's own blood cells. Surrounded as man is on all sides by nature, Thoreau sees no way how he could feel alone and remarks that "no place could ever be strange to me again."

Abbey – Gaia theory and atheism:

Edward Abbey was not as inclined to spiritualism and religion as some other elements of the counter-culture movement of his time. Hippies are often associated with neo-paganism, wicca and other esoteric revivalist religious movements. Edward Abbey was definitely not a Hippie. His father, Paul Revere Abbey, was a noted anarchist, socialist and atheist, and most critics and biographers of Abbey agree that his father's views had a strong influence on him. He had lengthy conversations about his belief, or absence of belief in organized religion, with his friends, and also gave lectures about the topic. Among these friends, Jack Loeffler stands out as the one who compiled these conversations and lectures in the semi-biographical book *Adventures with Ed: A Portrait of Abbey*:

Is it not possible that rocks, hills and mountains, and the great physical body of the Earth itself may enjoy a sentience, a form of consciousness which we humans cannot perceive only because of the vastly different time scales involved? . . . Say that a mountain takes 5,000,000 of our human or solar years to complete a single thought. But what a grand thought that single thought must be. If only we could tune in on it. The classic philosophers of both east and west have tried for 5,000 years more or less to convince us that *Mind* is the basic reality, maybe the only reality and that our bodies, the Earth and the entire universe is no more than a thought in the mind of God. But consider an alternative hypothesis. That Buddha, Plato, Einstein and we are all thoughts in the minds of mountains, or that humanity is a long, long thought in the mind of the Earth. That we are the means by which the Earth, and perhaps the universe becomes conscious of itself. (Loeffler, 127–8).

This is a rather deistic approach to a belief system, and actually one that is mirrored in

the Gaia hypothesis, a theory proposed by the scientist James Lovelock in 1965, and essentially describes an experiment and series of simulations which tried to prove that all organisms on the planet interact in a tightly knit mesh of interdependent relations, and that organisms could alter their surroundings fundamentally by their actions, voluntarily or not. At the time, climate science was in its infancy, and the theory was not taken seriously at first. Lovelock refined it over the years to prove that it was in fact a scientific inquiry and not a neo-pagan teleology, as some critics have alleged.

Regardless, the idea of a world-conscious is rather old, and some ancient Greek and Roman cults did worship Gaia (or Terra in Latin) as the metaphorical and literal representation of Earth in a sort of duality faith. This also resonates with many pantheistic and animistic cultures, which Abbey admired or at least held in higher esteem than the churches of his time. Pantheism is the belief that there is no anthropomorphic god, and that creation and God are essentially the same thing (Greek: pan – all, theos – god) which would mean that the very rocks one stands on are God's own essence, which would have interesting implications for mining companies; Animism on the other hand is the idea that all places in nature are associated with various spirits that inhabit certain locations of power. Animism was the most widespread form of religion before the rise of Abrahamic monotheism in the west (though there were several other models of faith existing in parallel) and is still practiced widely in some regions of sub-Saharan Africa, East Asia and South America. It was also the major religious system of North American tribes before Christianization.

Abbey is clearly in favor of this system, at least if one believes the accounts of Jack Loeffler about his conversations and lectures with Abbey:

I regard the invention of monotheism and the otherworldly God as a great setback for human life . . . Once we took the gods out of nature, out of the hills and forests around us and made all those little gods into one great god up in the sky, somewhere in outer space, why about then human beings, particularly Europeans, began to focus our attention on transcendental values, a transcendental deity, which led to a corresponding contempt for nature and the world which feeds and supports us. From that point of view, I think the (American) Indians and most traditional cultures had a much wiser world view, in that they invested every aspect of the world around them – all of nature – animal life, plant life, the landscape itself, with gods, with deity. In other words, everything was divine in some way or another. Pantheism probably led to a much wiser way of life, more capable of surviving over long periods of time. . . . Call me a pantheist. If there is

such a thing as divinity . . . then it must exist in everything, and not simply be localized in one supernatural figure beyond time and space. Either everything is divine, or nothing is. All partake of the universal divinity – the scorpion and the packrat, the Junebug and the pismire. Even human beings. All or nothing, now or never, here and now (Loeffler 1989: 14–15).

For an American in the rural and religiously reactionary backwaters of the West in the 60ies and 70ies, this was probably not an easy opinion to espouse. His opinion of christian church institutions was always wary at best, though neither *Desert Solitaire* nor *The Monkey Wrench Gang* do more than to satirize some practices of faith in a roundabout way. For example, Abbey makes numerous references to the odd interplay between church and politics in Utah in *The Monkey Wrench Gang*, where reverend Love sees his position as pastor as more of a stepping stone towards a political career than an actual religious calling. But it is not characteristic of Edward Abbey to give a clear picture about any of his actual beliefs anywhere in his literature. His heartfelt sermons, and the ones were the reader can be almost sure he is truthful, are those reserved for railing against whom he thought did the greatest harm to his western paradise. The Industry, the Government, and Civilization in general.

But animism or not, Abbey seems to subscribe to the same all-including circle of life Thoreau described, in its factual and certainly quite grisly form. Plants feed herbivores, herbivores are devoured by carnivores, carnivores die and are rendered down by scavengers and bacteria, their rendered-down remains rejuvenate the soil and make plants grow again. Everything feeds off of everything, and while that may seem cruel by human standards, nature simply does not follow the same principles. In our modern worldview, killing is a completely detached phenomenon for most people. We know, objectively, that the meat we eat comes from animals, but subjectively that thought is easy to push aside when all we see of any given animal is the nicely dressed meat in the pan. Earlier societies, which were hunters and gatherers, felt a much more immediate connection to the animals they hunted, and it was an often-quoted practice among native American tribes to thank one spirit or another for providing the animal, and the animal itself for giving up its essence for the benefit of another.

This is something Abbey outlines in his anecdote about the predator-prey relationship of the horned owl and the rabbit:

The horned owl may be the natural enemy of the rabbit but surely the rabbit is the natural friend of the horned owl. The rabbit feeds the owl. One can imagine easily the fondness, the sympathy, the genuine affection with which the owl regards the rabbit before rending it into edible portions. Is the affection reciprocated? In that moment of truce, of utter surrender, when the rabbit still alive offers no resistance but only waits, is it possible that the rabbit also loves the owl? We know that the condemned man, at the end, does not resist but submits passively, almost gratefully, to the instruments of his executioner. [...] is it love? Or only teamwork again – good sportsmanship? (Abbey, DS, 123)

Abbey and the rabbit:

As I am returning to the campground and the truck I see a young cottontail jump from the brush, scamper across the trail and freeze under a second bush. The rabbit huddles there, panting, ears back, one bright eye on me. I am taken by the notion of experiment – on the rabbit. Suppose, I say to myself, you were out here hungry, starving, no weapon but your bare hands. What would you do? What *could* you do? (Abbey, DS, 40)

This short paragraph prefaces one of the most controversial passages in a controversial book. In an encounter with a cottontail rabbit there is an episode which mirrors Thoreau and the woodchuck in many aspects. Both encounters happen on the way home from another endeavor, both center around small woodland creatures, and both are a thought experiment on the connection of wildness in man and his more noble bearing as opposed to the animal.

There are a few sandstones scattered along the trail. I pick up one that fits well in the hand, that seems to have the optimum feel and heft. [...] Should I give the rabbit a sporting chance, that is, jump it again, try to hit it on the run? Or brain the little bastard where he is? Notice the terminology. A sportsman is one who gives his quarry a chance to escape with his life. This is known as fair play, or sportsmanship. Animals have no sense of sportsmanship. Some, like the mountain lion, are vicious – if attacked they defend themselves. Others, like the rabbit, run away, which is cowardly. (Abbey, DS, 41)

After that thought, Abbey diverges strongly from Thoreau, who theorized about seizing the woodchuck and devouring him whole. Abbey, true to his nature, puts thought into action:

I rear back and throw the stone with all I've got straight at his furry head. To my amazement, the stone flies true (as if guided by a Higher Power) and knocks the cottontail head over tincups, clear out from under the

budding blackbush. (Abbey, DS, 41)

The rabbit is quite dead, and Abbey is amazed at what he has done for all but a few seconds before exulting in his deed, and seeing it as the consummation of a new relationship between him and nature. Many people criticized what they saw as a callous and unnecessary cruelty against nature, going so far as to accuse Abbey of being a hypocrite as he decries despoiling nature on the one hand and kills the rabbit without even eating it afterward.

If I am allowed a short personal note here, I myself think many of those people were guilty of that old German figure of speech which is about inflating a mosquito into an elephant. Furthermore the author often liked to deliberately antagonize his readers with these stark reversals in his prose (considering he wrote about being a humanist who would rather kill a man than a snake just a few pages before) and positively derived delight from being challenged about these occurrences in his lectures. For his part in this episode, Abbey feels no guilt at this action because for him, it is a part of how (human) nature works. Nature does not play nice or fair and is usually a rather cruel and bloody affair, no matter how human beings would like to hold her up to the same standards as most of themselves ostensibly have. It is true that Abbey relates the wanton destruction of a small part of nature for no other purpose than as an experiment. But the paradox here is less jarring if one considers this a lesson on the duality of man. One would be hard pressed to find a person who outright says that he hates nature and wishes her reduced, yet scores of miners, engineers, chemical plant owners, property speculators and so on and so forth do just that. Nature on the other hand, does not judge right or wrong, or give out merit points on good sportsmanship, or say one thing while doing another, it just is. It exists as a pure, self-sustained microcosm made up of countless autonomous cells, sustained by its own momentum. And now the Solitaire himself has connected to this wholeness of being through this self-reflected act:

No longer do I feel so isolated from the sparse and furtive life around me, a stranger from another world. I have entered into this one. We are kindred all of us, killer and victim, predator and prey (Abbey, DS, 41-42)

Finally, by Abbey's logic, nothing is wasted here. He himself cannot eat the rabbit, as "the meat is probably infected with tularemia⁸" so he leaves the dead body to vultures

⁸ A bacterial disease carried by many rabbits and rodents; extremely virulent in humans and often fatal.

and maggots who, he correctly surmises, will find use for it. Nothing is lost, nothing is wasted, the dead rabbit will make an easy meal for a scavenger, which will thrive because of this act. The only thing lost, in the long run, is “a consciousness here and there”.

The dual nature of anthropomorphizing in Abbey:

Both Thoreau and Abbey reveled in literary ambiguity. Both Roderick Nash and Daniel Payne (for Thoreau and Abbey respectively) have noted that self-contradiction, double meanings and vague statements are deliberately employed by both authors. In Henry David Thoreau's case we know he did this because he liked his readers to think. With Edward Abbey one could be led to believe he liked his readers to think they were being made fun of. There are plenty of examples for this in *Desert Solitaire*, and in Abbey himself as well, but one that stands out continuously is that of his differing and wavering attitudes to ascribing human qualities to nature.

He stated himself, early in *Desert Solitaire*, that he was trying to achieve a spiritual understanding of nature free of human qualities:

The personification of the natural is exactly the tendency I wish to suppress in myself, to eliminate for good. I am here not only to evade for a while the clamor and filth and confusion of the cultural apparatus but also to confront, immediately and directly if it's possible, the bare bones of existence, the elemental and fundamental, the bedrock which sustains us. I want to be able to look at and into a juniper tree, a piece of quartz, a vulture, a spider, and see it as it is in itself, devoid of all humanly ascribed qualities, anti-Kantian, even the categories of scientific description. To meet God or Medusa face to face, even if it means risking everything human in myself. I dream of a hard and brutal mysticism in which the naked self merges with a non-human world and yet somehow survives still intact, individual, separate. Paradox and bedrock. (Abbey, DS, 7)

A mere 11 pages later, however, he wonders at the calls of the mourning doves drifting through the canyon:

Also invisible but invariably present [...] are the mourning doves whose plaintive call suggest irresistibly a kind of seeking-out, the attempt by separated souls to restore a lost communion. *Hello...* they seem to cry, *who ... are ... you?* And the reply from a different quarter. *Hello ... (pause) where ... are ... you?* (Abbey, DS 18)

This seems in direct contradiction to what Abbey has said before, as are numerous other episodes, such as the time in 'Serpents of Paradise' where he befriends a gopher snake, and even carries it around in his shirt.

We are compatible. From my point of view, friends. After a week of close association I turn him loose on the warm sandstone (Abbey, DS, 22)

Again, this can superficially be seen as flip-flopping on the the part of the author, but if one looks more carefully, this issue is dealt with in a way more complex than readily apparent. First, Abbey is quick to correct himself in the case of the doves:

No doubt this line of analogy must be rejected. It's foolish and unfair to impute to the doves, with serious concerns of their own, an interest in questions more appropriate to their human kin. Yet their song, if not a mating call or a warning, must be what it sounds like, a brooding meditation on space, on solitude. The game. (Abbey, DS 18-19)

And in the very act of correcting himself he stays open to the idea of a different kind of conscious contemplation in nature's denizens. Much as Thoreau allowed for his "brute neighbors" to have a life and motivation that is completely separate from their human kin but not completely alien to it, Abbey likes to keep the reader guessing in an area humans can simply only guess at. We do not know the inner motivations of animals, as the only reference point we have is that of ourselves. In a previous quote, the idea of the "unimaginable consciousness of a turkey vulture" was mentioned. This is indeed true. How can man even imagine a life determined by invisible updrafts, soaring motionless for hours, with eyes that can detect movement of minute creatures from a mile away? Or to use another example, who can relate to the cottontail? A life on the run, survival determined by constant flight between one cover and the next? Or indeed, who can know why the loons loon, as it were? Humans can approach this in thought experiments, but can never know this, and when Abbey wishes to reject "the personification of the natural" he is also talking about the hubris of man who thinks he can know exactly what animals feel by projecting his own thoughts. Behavioral experiments in the last decades have shown us that animals are indeed capable of some emotion. We know what dogs dream, that chimpanzees mourn, that ravens actually enjoy playing pranks. Animals have emotions per se, that much is sure, but how, if it all

do these relate to human emotions? Just as Abbey merely wishes he could divest himself of any vestige of anthropomorphism, man can merely guess at the minds of animals.

Values of living for both authors:

One of the areas where Thoreau and Abbey contrast the harshest is in their outlook to everyday life, and their views on such common American themes as war, guns, violence and even food and drink.

For the latter's part, it has been noted several times in the past that the eco-activists in *The Monkey Wrench Gang* are not what you would expect of the stereotypical environmentalist of the 60ies. After all only one of them, Bonnie Abbzug, smokes marijuana. They like to drink beer, they litter the highways, they hunt, and are generally quite abrasive in attitude and demeanor. Just like Edward Abbey and his friends, whom they were made to resemble, allegedly. This was probably as much a product of the times and place as it was one of personal humors. The group surrounding Abbey was not a very conformist one to begin with, and when they were labeled as troublemakers first and terrorists later, they reveled in the knowledge that whatever they did, they were not making things worse for themselves. The cudgel of society that is the label “un-American” is hardly a new addition to the culture of the US, even though it became most prominent in our time in the long and painful aftermath of the 2001 terrorist attacks in New York. Back in Abbey's time, the same label was applied, quite quickly, to any non-conformist or outspoken liberal who edged to closely to what was perceived as “communist values”, a sort of catch-all term for anyone who did not agree with the establishment, which was certainly something that could be said of the author of *Desert Solitaire* and his friends.

But perhaps one can turn again to *The Monkey Wrench Gang*, and narrow down the focus on the three male characters somewhat, seeing an aspect of the ever-divisive personality of Abbey in each of them. Doc Sarvis, Seldom-Seen Smith and George Washington Hayduke are all Edward Abbey, or at least parts of him, and give a good overview of what he saw as right and wrong in America and indeed the world.

Beginning at the end of the order, George Washington Hayduke (whose naming scheme reminds one readily of Paul Revere Abbey) represents much of Abbey's ire. A Vietnam

veteran, he is opposed to warfare, seeing it as an exploitation of men. Abbey was a veteran of World War 2, even though he never saw combat, but nevertheless spent two years in allied-occupied Italy. As a member of the military police, he was mostly “checking on servicemen in Italian brothels”, according to *Confessions of a Barbarian*. His idea of war was that it was a waste of human potential, as they were fighting the wrong people entirely. In one of his compiled journals, *A Voice Crying in the Wilderness (Vox Clamantis in Deserto): Notes from a Secret Journal* he wrote that “The tragedy of modern war is that the young men die fighting each other - instead of their real enemies back home in the capitals”. Who could forget his famous misattributed quote about how “man will never be free until the last king is strangled with the entrails of the last priest” which, together with his advice for young men to throw away their draft cards, made the FBI open an official investigation file on him, a point of pride and vindication for Abbey, no doubt.

Though he and Abbey oppose warfare, Hayduke is not opposed to use violence to get things done, as is often apparent when the other members of the gang have to restrain him from more radical pursuits, which could physically harm or kill people. He is extremely attached to his guns and would never give them up. Abbey similarly was a strong supporter of his second amendment rights, but not as is usually the case today by saying that he needed them to defend himself against crime or personal harm, but specifically true to the original text of the amendment, to overthrow a government which had become a tyranny, a point in time seemingly never far off for Abbey. He calls the rifle the “weapon of democracy”, and the only reason he is not more popular with the pro-gun lobby is that he is just as rancorously opposed to people who fetishize their guns as he is to those who would take them away. This view also often rankles supporters of Abbey, who are, by far and large, liberals. Liberals who, by the traditional label, are in favor of gun control. The issue, however shrouded by layers of deception as it is, is one close to Abbey's heart, as analyzed by Wendell Berry in *A few words in defense of Edward Abbey* (1985):

The most interesting brief example of Abbey humor that I remember is his epigram on "gun control" in his essay "The Right to Arms." "If guns are outlawed," he says, "only the government will have guns." That sentence, of course, is a parody of the "gun lobby" bumper sticker: "If guns are outlawed, only outlaws will have guns." It seems at first glance only

another example of sacred cow goosing—howbeit an unusually clever one, for it gooses *both* sacred cows involved in this conflict [...] Mr. Abbey's sentence, masquerading as an instance of his well-known "iconoclasm," slices through the distractions of the controversy to the historical and constitutional roots of the issue. The sentence is, in fact, an excellent gloss on the word "militia" in the Second Amendment. And so what might appear at first to be merely an "iconoclastic" joke at the expense of two public factions becomes, on examination, the expression of a respectable political fear and an honorable political philosophy, a statement that the authors of our Constitution would have recognized and welcomed. (Berry, 1985)

If Hayduke is the overt ire, the deliberate agent provocateur fighting a battle against windmills and millers alike, Seldom-Seen Smith is the quiet observer. Smith, the true man of the west in the group, wise in all the arroyos, canyons, gulches and ravines, just as Abbey was in his chosen part of Four Corners, and as suspicious and wary of every state institution as the man himself. A Jack Mormon⁹, he takes carefully calculated jabs at the religious establishment he is a part of, knowing its not even close to honest in dealings with itself and others, and shakes his head at supposed "innovation" for its own sake, and attitude which flows into quotes such as this:

[T]hose people like Love and the Governor got no conscience. They'd sell their own mothers to Exxon and Peabody Coal if they thought there was money in it; [...] Them's the kind of folks we got runnin' this state, honey: Christians; my kind of folks. (Abbey, *MWG*, 358)

Both he and Hayduke cheerfully litter the highways of the west with their beer cans, rationalizing that if the state builds roads they did not want with taxes they did not want to pay, they can use the same money to clean up on the property they effectively co-own. "Any road that I wasn't consulted about that I don't like, I litter" (*MWG*, 68) Abbey had a similar attitude to littering on highways, even though he was, at the same time, strongly opposed to littering in the wilderness, which might stem from his occupation as a park ranger "plucking Kleenex flowers from the bushes" every day. Smith is also Abbey in his relationship to humans, or more specifically his wives. He spends weeks in solitude in the canyons, only to return again to the farms his wives keep for companionship (and sex), just as Abbey regularly returns to Moab just to meet some other humans, whether he likes them or not. Lastly, Smith is a farmer even though

⁹ i.e. a Mormon who keeps a good relationship with the Church of Latter-day Saints, but is not a regular attendant at services, and who does not involve himself much in church policies and politics. Mildly pejorative.

he dislikes farms. He maintains a melon farm together with one of his wives because he fears that he might have no place for himself if the government seizes the wilderness. This sentiment was also one of Abbey's, and was also addressed by Berry:

[Abbey] is, I think, one of the great defenders of the idea of property. His novel *Fire on the Mountain* is a moving, eloquent statement on behalf of the personal proprietorship of land: *proper* property. [...] But his advocacy of that kind of property is balanced by his advocacy of another kind: public property, not as "government land," but as wild land, wild property, which, belonging to nobody, belongs to everybody, including the wild creatures native to it. He understands better than anyone I know the likelihood that one kind of property is not safe without the other. [...] You cannot lose your land and remain free; if you keep your land, you cannot be enslaved. [...] This, and not nature love, I think, is the real motive of his outrage. His great fear is the fear of dispossession. (Berry, 1985)

Much like Thoreau, Abbey would probably have had no problem abandoning most of modern life's comforts and move out to his own little patch of land. In fact, as his illness was getting worse towards the end of his life, he spent most of his time in a little writing cottage at the edge of the Sonora desert, west of Tucson. Given more time, he would have probably stayed there, quite content, with nearly none of the trappings of civilization save for, perhaps, a refrigerator.

Rounding out the trio of personalities is Dr. Sarvis, the middle-aged doctor on a self-imposed crusade against pollution and industrialization which he sees as a moral obligation towards his patients. As more and more wilderness is bought up and despoiled, more people move to the cities and create more and more pollution, which kills more and more people, or so is his logic. Sarvis is the embodiment of the academic in Abbey. Throughout *Desert Solitaire*, occasional attacks against the intelligentsia of the US are thrown in. Abbey has an obvious disdain for engineers and land developers, but he also is outwardly wary of any learned man. This is another Abbeyism, as he himself earned a BA in English and later an MA in philosophy, so he was very much a 'college boy' himself. And beyond his university education, he was generally knowledgeable on a wide variety of subjects, if only so he could know his enemy better

The third bridge [...] was of arch construction, all steel and concrete, built to bear the weight of forty-ton haulers loaded with carnotite, pitchblende, bentonite, bituminous coal, diatomaceous earth, sulfuric acid,

Schlumberger's drill mud, copper ore, oil shale, sand tar, whatever might yet be extracted from the wilderness. (Abbey, *MWG*, 121)

Summing up his views, Abbey liked to eat red meat and beans (In fact, bacon and beans are mentioned whenever food is concerned in *Desert Solitaire*, and Abbey seems to have subsisted near exclusively on bacon and beans except when he traveled on Green River, supplementing his diet with catfish), liked to keep his guns close, to keep the government out of his affairs and to drive big cars, as is evident in the big cherry-red Cadillac he bought himself (his “pimp mobile” as it is so drolly called in *Confessions of a Barbarian*). This makes him an atypical environmentalist, which was probably just fine for Abbey, who resisted any and all labels attached to him by friends and enemies alike. Or, as Berry put it:

No sooner has a label been stuck to his back by a somewhat hesitant well-wisher than he runs beneath a low limb and scrapes it off. (Berry 1985)

Thoreau, on the other hand, was much more in the vein of the modern eco-activist, but would perhaps seem overly eager in some regards, were he around today. The first and most easily marked difference is that of diet. All his life, Thoreau aspired to reach that higher spiritual living he himself described, and one of the most important prerequisites for this was, according to Thoreau, giving up eating food out of sensuousness. Now sensuous, to Thoreau, had a generally negative connotation. One has to remember the time and place he lived in to grasp the implications of this. New England was a region heavily influenced by Puritanism. This strain of Christianity advocates a certain restraint in all manners, and is certainly opposed to overindulgence. This has given them a reputation of being rather dour and stern people or as Henry Louis Mencken, the 'Nietzsche of Baltimore', put it:

Puritanism: The haunting fear that someone, somewhere, may be happy. (Mencken, “A Mencken Chrestomathy”, 1949: 624)

This is satire of course, but Puritanism did proscribe sexual excesses and stimulants, and while not directly opposing alcohol, coffee, tea and tobacco, they did try to avoid them if at all possible and urged others to follow their example (Sex was another thing entirely, and dealing with 19th century attitudes to sexuality would be beyond the scope of this paper and is thankfully not pertinent to the topic at hand). To say this much,

Thoreau worked to follow the example of the Puritans, though this of course put him in direct conflict with his desire to embrace the wildness inside of him, which he loved equally compared to his nobler side, as he says in 'Higher Laws'. In a way, his life-long commitment is a personal journey which can, out of a necessity of character, never be finished. To swing completely to either side, becoming the paragon of either virtue or of the primal urge, would necessitate to abandon the other side, which Thoreau never wanted: "We are conscious of an animal in us, which awakens in proportions as our higher nature slumbers" (Thoreau, *Walden*, 146). This of course also implies that the reverse is true and the animal recedes when the higher being advances. But, as said before, Thoreau at least aspired to greatness, as becomes clear when one looks at some select quotes, such as what he had to say about alcohol:

I would fain keep sober always; and there are infinite degrees of drunkenness. I believe that water is the only drink for a wise man; wine is not so noble a liquor; and think of dashing the hopes of a morning with a cup of warm coffee, or of an evening with a dish of tea! [...] Even music may be intoxicating. (Thoreau, *Walden*, 144)

There are numerous quotes such as this in 'Higher Laws', even though in his reasoning for temperance Thoreau mostly concentrates on eating meat and hunting game. It has to be pointed out that, even though the chapter has a very sermonizing tone to it, the one admonished in it is chiefly Thoreau himself. As said before, he aspires to greatness, but feels no superiority towards those who do not. He lauds the practices of vegetarianism, chastity (noting that this is not the same kind of chastity commonly understood, and that he does not know what it could all encompass), work and teetotalism, but also notes that he cannot always follow all of these as best as he would like. Knowing this, it is easy to suppose that even though he would like others to follow his example, he knows it is hard, and this is probably acknowledged best in Thoreau's opinion on hunting.

On the hunt with Henry David Thoreau:

Thoreau is opposed to hunting, in the broadest sense. He seems to contradict himself when he states that the hunter is the greatest friend of the animal which is hunted, but then says that no human older than an adolescent would wantonly murder any creature which reveres its own life as much as the killer. The idea is that through seeing one as kin to all creatures, one loses the desire to kill them. He abandoned hunting before

coming to *Walden* pond, saying that he carried his gun chiefly as an excuse and insisted he used it for ornithology and going after rare birds, before going on to say that he soon abandoned that too, believing that there must be a better way to study birds than to shoot and mount them. This was common practice among ornithologists of the time, among them John James Audubon, famous for this extensive body of work in the area of bird and nature drawings and paintings.

It is interesting that Thoreau at several points mentions the Veda, one of the oldest Hindu scriptures, as many sects of Hinduism also proscribe killing for food, and certainly Thoreau's principles would resonate with some Buddhists. At times, it seems, killing for food makes him feel he is incurring some form of karmic debt:

I have found repeatedly, of late years, that I cannot fish without falling a little in self-respect. I have tried it again and again. [...] but always when I have done I feel that it would have been better if I had not fished.
(Thoreau, *Walden*, 142)

Again, here admiration for the vegetarian lifestyle is expressed; he says that some beans or a potato would have fed him quite as well as any fish, and would have been less filthy to prepare and less trouble and doubt involved in procuring them. He sees hunting as unnecessary for living, but at the same time encourages his friends to let their sons go hunting to their hearts' content, for as he says, those of a nobler nature will outgrow it in time. Though when he goes on to say that "the mass of men are still and always young in this respect"(142) he concedes that not everyone holds himself to the same lofty ideals as he does. He also concedes that some men need to hunt. He himself resorts to fishing when other food is scarce while at *Walden*, and during his trips to the Maine woods he remarked that the killing and eating of Moose was a necessary part of the Indian's life, and that he would not want him to abandon it. Again, Thoreau seeks to strike a balance between wild and settled, between rank and noble, between the two extremes of wilderness and nature. And true to his assumed persona as the simple hermit, the degree of renunciation of the temptations of the flesh is part of the *Walden* experiment, to have as little between himself and the wellspring of life and nature as possible. To him, wilderness symbolized everything about the nature and qualities of man which was unexplored, hidden and untapped. His message, as noted by Nash, was for the reader of his works to be "the Lewis and Clark and Frobisher of your own streams and oceans; explore your own higher latitudes." (qtd. In Nash, 89)

Concerning war and violence against man, he is a pacifist and would thus never agree with Abbey on the issues of gun control. They are, however, both opposed to warfare, and Thoreau is opposed to the idea of the army as an institution of the state in any case, as will be examined in the last chapter. It is obvious from *Civil Disobedience*, and also covertly from *Walden* that he sees war as a deplorable waste and a poor solution to conflicts in the fullness of time (Cf. the episode with the ants, as described in 'Brute Neighbors').

In the end, Thoreau has high ideals, and other than some romantic writers, he holds himself to them and strives towards them, but acknowledges that his way might not be the way for everyone:

Every man is the builder of a temple, called his body, to the god he worships, after a style purely his own, nor can he get off by hammering marble instead. We are all sculptors and painters, and our material is our own flesh and blood and bones. Any nobleness begins at once to refine a man's features, any meanness or sensuality to imbrute them. (Thoreau, *Walden*, 147)

Wildness and Values – Conclusion:

When looking at the two works, one again finds many contradictions, and many overlaps in the values and arguments of the authors. What is certain is that both of them drew inspiration and strength from their discovery of wilderness, as far apart in time and space as those respective formative experiences were. What is also certain is that both, at least in parts, followed a form of pantheistic or animistic path of discourse with nature in their literature. Thoreau more in the vein of the structured forms of Deism, Abbey more in a ramshackle personal cargo cult seeking the wisdom of older societies while at the same time vehemently denying any sort of religion. Both authors also subscribe to a certain amount of anthropomorphic reading into the behavior of animals:

I have often noticed the inquisitiveness of birds, as the other day of a sparrow, whose motions I should not have supposed to have any reference to me, if I had not watched it from first to last. It flitted [...] as near me as it dared, and again to its first position, very restless all the while. Generally I should have supposed [...] that it was altogether accidental,—that the chipping of this sparrow eight or ten rods away had no reference to me,—for I could see nothing peculiar about it. But when I brought my glass to bear on it, I found that it was almost steadily eyeing me and was all alive with excitement. (Thoreau, *The Journal of Henry D. Thoreau*, Volume 2 125-126)

In his encounters such as this with owls, loons and even semi-feral cats, Thoreau seeks the animals as a conduit to get closer to an understanding of wildness and then of himself. Abbey states that he wishes to put aside the practice of reading human notions into the behavior of animals, and see them for what they truly are. However, by saying that he merely wishes to do this, and by often stating that animals obviously have concerns of their own and some sort of inner working, he admits that he cannot fully divorce himself from that notion, as he clearly wishes to learn something from the animals as well, as is evident in the episode where he goes hiking in the canyons and comes eye to eye with a doe and its fawn. There is a moment of near absolute stillness, where Abbey's prose hints at a mounting tension towards some incredible revelation, reminding one of old hunter myths from the dawn of man. But the moment passes and the deer (predictably) flee. Abbey's reaction ("Come back! I want to talk to you!") betrays his conviction that something might be learned here. In any case, much of the prose (of both works) has a solemn, reverent undertone when talking about nature more often than not, mirroring perhaps the ideas of John Muir, to whom his Yosemite was "the greatest temple of all". As said, while this does not necessarily point towards any sort of nature religion on the part of either Abbey or Thoreau, it does show that to them nature was something sacred, and that in their opinion, much could be learned from it.

Concerning their values, one must remember that a curmudgeonly wasteland dweller and anti-establishment anarchist of the 1960ies cannot be held to the same standards as a respectable if eccentric gentleman from the 1850ies. Times were different, and so were morals, so it is not surprising that there are few connections when the personal values of Thoreau and Abbey are examined. Perhaps it is less surprising that they have so little in common, but that they have anything in common at all. What they do share, their love for nature, their opposition to state-controlled violence etc. could all be ascribed to them being "Environmentalists", to use the modern term. Yet this would probably be a disservice to both of them, as they both are more than that. As Roderick Nash notes, Thoreau's writing is often about nature on the surface only, and he instead writes about human nature as much as anything, trying to give a lesson to live by. Wendell Berry and Daniel Payne have noted similar things about Abbey, though in his case, the lesson is more of an admonition, and it is aimed at everyone all at once.

The ones that came before – Natives, Redskins, Indians:

The American Indians or Native Americans or First Nations (or what they themselves might choose to call themselves) are a constant theme in the background of American narratives, especially when concerning nature, land and control thereof. That the way the American government has dealt with the indigenous population, which was already badly treated by the colonial powers, was at best questionable does not need repeating here. Reparations have been made, and progress towards a better tomorrow is slow but steady. That much can be said, but the mistakes of the past are difficult to erase, hence anything dealing with 'Indians' (and even the word Indian) is a delicate subject, as with any oppressed or formerly oppressed minority. But in the case of the first Nations, it is even more difficult because they tend to have their culture stripped and tend to be grouped together against their will. The picture of the typical 'Native American' in the mind of most non-native Americans is that of chief Sitting Bull, complete with buckskin suit and feather headdress. He is a member of the Sioux, a semi-nomadic plains tribe which, similar to the Cree and Crow, traveled with the buffalo herds. But also in this group are tribes like the Pueblo, the Dakota, the Micmaq, the Cherokee and the Paiute, all with radically different customs, practices, cultures and sometimes even with their own ancestral animosities towards other tribes. This sense of a vanished culture, the squalor often seen in the reservations, along with the general admiration for the stoicism expressed by the 'typical Indian' (again a stereotype) has made writing about the affairs of the native population a loaded subject.

As such, Abbey's treatment of the Indians in his prose has earned him massive amounts of negative critique, and he has been called a racist and bigot by many because of it. It is true that Abbey is not gentle in his treatment of Indians, and he does call them rather problematic names ever so often:

Damned redskin savages,” Doc said. [...] what do we pay them welfare for? You can't rely on these aborigines to do anything right. (*MWG*, 188)

In order to survive, more and more of the Navajos, or The People as they used to call themselves, are forced off the reservation and into rural slums along the major high ways and into the urban slums of the white man's towns which surround the reservation. [...] They are the Negroes of the Southwest – red black men. (Abbey, *DS*, 129)

But again, Abbey was misunderstood. He does not hate the Natives, he is angry with them because he believed they could do better. He is holding them in the same contempt that he holds his own 'race', the Whites, only seeming more glaring because he blames the Natives for being cowed into adopting the unsustainable lifestyle the White Man leads in the USA (and indeed most places he dwells except for Scandinavia).

[T]he desire on the part of the more ambitious Navajos to imitate as closely as they can the pattern of the white man's culture which surrounds them, a typical and understandable reaction. Despite such minor failures the Navajos as a tribe have made good use of what little monetary income they have. It is not entirely their fault if the need remains far greater than tribal resources can satisfy. (Abbey, *DS*, 132)

In the same passage, Abbey also attacks 'false friends' of the Navajo and Paiute, always white men who, under the guise of 'development' try to pry the last tangible possession the Indians have from them, the reservation, which is

[W]orn out, barren, eroded, hopelessly unsuited to support a heavy human population but even so [...] it provides the Navajo people with a firm base on earth, the possibility of a better future and for the individual Navajo exile a place where, when he has to go back there, they have to take him in. (Abbey, *DS*, 135)

This again denotes Abbey's insistence on the importance of property, and he then goes on to describe the counter-measures which have been proposed to improve the situation on the reservation. Industrialization, relocation, better education, child subsidies, etc. He calls these well-intentioned but unimaginative, and regards them as even more evidence that both Whites and Indians are attempting to turn Indians into Whites. Furthermore, in his opinion these proposals are fruitlessly put forward again and again, the world over, in response to human misery everywhere. His main objection to these proposals is that they are completely ignorant of the special situation of the Indian and that

they fail to take into account what is unique and valuable in the Navajo's traditional way of life and ignore altogether the possibility that the Navajo may have as much to teach the white man as the white man has to teach the Navajo. (*DS*, 133)

The rest of the chapter 'Cowboys and Indians' devotes itself to alternate harangues

aimed at the Navajo Indians (giving up the old ways, having too many children etc.) and the Whites (exploiting the Navajos as a tourist attraction, not explaining population control to them, treating them as second-class humans etc.). It also notes that the major disadvantage of the Navajos in comparison to Whites is that they were brought up in a culture which honors community and sharing, abhors selfishness, and simply does not teach one how to profit from the labor of another, how to exploit the weakness of your fellow man, or how to trample others underfoot to get ahead; in short, Navajo culture is incompatible with modern business culture.

So at most, Edward Abbey should be accused of superficial cultural insensitivity and unrealistic expectations, for after all, many tribes tried to continue their old ways but were forced to adapt in the face of the rapid changes brought on by the Whites. Abbey's disappointment comes from his reverence for the old ways of the Indians, and in the conversations with Loeffler he sometimes pointed out that he felt he lived in the wrong time:

Abbey loved the natural world, and felt himself “out of synch” with the time into which he had been born. He told me he would have been at home in the Pleistocene as a hunter-gatherer; or as a Plains Indian riding bareback through the early nineteenth century. (Loeffler, *Encyclopedia*, 3)

As such, the Indian lifestyle was a sort of wish-fulfillment for Abbey, and seeing it shatter against the harsh reality that the Native Americans were not much different or better than the poor Whites surrounding them must have been a harsh blow to a cherished image. And seeing how Abbey dealt with most other frustrations in his work by raising his fist and hurling a literary brick, how else should he have reacted? He cares deeply about the Indians and their plight, and blames all parties involved for the current predicament and misery. As always, he chooses no side but his own.

For Thoreau the actual encounter with Indians was different from what he expected as well. Living as he did in New England, where by the middle of the 19th century Indians had all but vanished, he also had a certain mental image of them. As quoted in Nash, in his youth Thoreau had penned a college essay titled “Barbarism and Civilization”, which was a treatise heavily in favor of the Indians and their constant connection to nature and its “educational and moral influence”, as perceived by Thoreau. To him, the 'savage' was to be admired as he was “free and unconstrained in Nature, is her inhabitant and not her guest, and wears her easily and gracefully.” (Sanborn, 253). But

all this changed with his first visit to the actual wilderness, when he journeyed to the woods and mountains of Maine. This experience shocked him into reality in many ways, and he realized then and there that “vast, Titanic, inhuman Nature has got [man] at a disadvantage, caught him alone, and pilfers him of some of his divine faculty.” (qtd. in Nash 91). He also realized his folly for idealizing Indians in his mind. The ones he met in Maine seemed to him “sinister and slouching fellows” who made “coarse and imperfect use ... of Nature.”

This experience had to be reconciled with Thoreau's earlier views, also espoused in *Walden*, of the Indian as an ideal citizen of Nature¹⁰. Typical for him, Thoreau tried to create a harmony between his old and new points of view, saying that “roses bloomed in vain while only wild men roamed” indicating that it needed a more civilized man to appreciate some of the finer things in nature. Yet, far from trying to put civilization into a superior position, he went on to lament that most civilized men who wandered out into Nature did so for personal gain or exploitation, hunting, fishing, mining, logging, etc. “For one who comes with a pencil to sketch or sing, a thousand come with an axe or rifle.”. It was a hard lesson learned, and did away with the “child of nature” view he had on Indians. He condensed this into the conclusion that “savages have their high and low estates and so have civilized nations.” It was his way of dealing with this misconception, and he can be forgiven more easily than Abbey for simply not knowing, as the only contact he previously had with the old ways of the Indian were the arrowheads he dug up near Walden pond.

Arrowheads played a part in Abbey's appreciation of the Indian in *Desert Solitaire* as well. Arrowheads are some of the most enduring and prevalent cultural artifacts to be found of tribal cultures everywhere, being often chipped out of solid minerals such as flint or obsidian, and can be found all over the continental US (and indeed the world). Abbey found these often:

Trace the drainages upstream and look in shady alcoves under the canyon walls; there in the sand and dust [...] you will find the mother lode, the place where the naked, indolent savages lounged about making jokes,

¹⁰ “Indians were in perfect harmony with Nature” is a common stereotype which, as many stereotypes, is not exactly correct. For example, recent paleontological research has revealed that horses were not originally introduced to North America by Europeans, but had existed there in the distant past before being hunted to extinction by the ancestors of the native tribes.

pictures and conchoidal fractures in flint. [...] if you are extremely lucky, you may discover a complete and intact arrowhead. Possibly a spearhead. Some of them in translucent obsidian – volcanic glass, “Apache tears.” (Abbey, DS, 75)

These arrowheads are not the only artifacts to be found, and indeed the area where Abbey treks and camps was once part of the land inhabited by the scattered tribes today called the Anasazi¹¹. They had a rich and complex culture featuring elaborate pottery, jewelery and burial rites. They were the builders of the spectacular dwellings perched under cliff overhangs and in hidden valleys, which can still be seen today and are sometimes sprawling and extensive systems of rooms carved into soft rock. They defended themselves by building these fortress-like dwellings high in the rock face, and so repelled several invasions by other tribes, and traded extensively as visible by artifacts made from coral, which must have come a long way. And then they vanished, quite rapidly in historical terms, leaving behind their cultural artifacts, dwellings and numerous intricate stone carvings and drawings. Abbey takes some time to describe the drawings he finds around the canyons and muses over the disappearance of the Anasazi. Their drawings often depict hunting scenes, animals (often long extinct) and humans. Most puzzling however are the drawings of what, for lack of a better word, can only be described as demons. “apparitions out of bad dreams”.

“semihuman and superhuman beings with horned heads, immensely broad shoulders, short limbs and massive bodies that taper down to attenuated legs. [...] sinister and supernatural figures [...] Most are faceless but some stare back at you with large, hollow, disquieting eyes. Demonic shapes, they might have meant protection and benevolence to their creators and a threat to strangers:
Beware, traveler. You are approaching the land of the horned gods...”
(Abbey, DS, 127)

Neither Abbey nor modern science can answer what happened to these people, and Abbey mentions some of the more popular grounded theories like climate change or massive invasion by foreign tribes. In the end, he does, however, admire what is known of their lifestyle, ascribing the petroglyphs, which must have taken much time and effort

¹¹ An exonym, i.e. outgroup name, from the Navajo language meaning “ancient enemies” or “ancient foreigners”. Exonyms are a common feature in Native American tribal names, as the main source for these were other tribes, who were not always on good terms. A very famous example are the Iroquois, who called themselves Haudenosaunee or “builders of longhouses”. The name “Iroquois” was an adaptation by the French, using a word their Allies, the Huron and Algonquin, called the tribe. This word, by varying accounts, meant “real adders” or “killer people”.

to create, to a lifestyle which afforded considerable leisure-time to the hunter-gatherers who sometimes must have camped out for days while creating the drawings.

So finally, both Abbey and Thoreau look wistfully at the vanished culture of the Indians, but react differently to its remnants. They both eventually see that contemporary Native Americans are not much different in some respects from contemporary Whites, and they both reflect and modify their cherished image of the culture. But while Thoreau includes these realizations in his constant tightrope-walk between primal and civilized, Abbey rages at the fact that the Natives might have done better and laments them as yet another victim of Civilization.

The 'Men of Nature', Alec Thérien and Viviano Jacquez

Another victim of civilization is, in Abbey's opinion, the cowboy and dude-wrangler Viviano Jacquez, whom he meets while working for a rancher. Viviano is an interesting parallel character to the French-Canadian wood chopper Alec Thérien whom Thoreau meets while living at *Walden*. Both characters can be interpreted as a symbol for 'man in nature' or a civilized man who more closely approaches an ideal way of living for the respective authors. Both authors dedicate some of their text to these men. In *Walden*, this takes the form of praise and admiration. In *Desert Solitaire*, it is an elegy, almost an obituary. At least at first glance. As always, things are not as clear-cut as they originally seem, neither with Thoreau, nor Abbey.

Starting with Thoreau and Alec Thérien, the latter is first described very favorably by Thoreau, likening him to an ancient Greek hero, and that might just be the image that is conjured up when one reads the physical description of the man:

He was cast in the coarsest mould; a stout but sluggish body, yet gracefully carried, with a thick sunburnt neck, dark bushy hair, and dull sleepy blue eyes, which were occasionally lit up with expression. (Thoreau, *Walden*, 97)

If one notices this description seems not entirely favorable, then the rest of the description will seem like less of a surprise. Thoreau alternates between praise and criticism, at times seeming almost condescending. He points out that Thérien is one of the most genuine and honest men he has ever met, an expert and even an artist at his

chosen craft of logging, content in the simplest of things, and a prime example for what it should mean to be a man living in nature. Yet Thoreau also admonishes him indirectly for being uninterested in discussions of the wider world, not having ranged beyond his basic education, and not keen on reading or writing at length. Also while he seems to spend a lot of time with the man and calls him a most agreeable companion in his own way, Thoreau never calls him a friend, or even mentions his name, saying he is sorry that he “cannot print it here”, without giving a reason, leaving a divide between them that seems to be of Thoreau's creation. Some readers puzzled at this episode of inconsistency in the otherwise genial and warm Thoreau, who could find good words even for his enemies, but if one looks at the following quotes from the passage:

Such an exuberance of animal spirits had he that he sometimes[...]

He was so genuine and unsophisticated that no introduction would serve to introduce him, more than if you introduced a woodchuck to your neighbor.

But the intellectual and what is called spiritual man in him were slumbering as in an infant.(Thoreau, *Walden*, 98-100)

What can be proposed as an explanation here is that Thérien (which is an old Quebecois spelling of 'terrien' which is French for 'earth dweller' or 'land owner') represents one extreme of Thoreau's two worlds. The woodcutter has fully immersed himself in his wildness, has become a paragon of primal energies bent to good in man, but as a necessity has let his more 'noble', i.e. intellectual aspects atrophy, has specialized himself in the ways of nature, as it were. For Thoreau, who wishes to find a balance between his two worlds of civilization and wilderness, he is both to be admired and pitied. He has ranged much deeper into the depths of his spirit than Thoreau ever will, getting closer to nature and wildness than most other men, but has been entrapped by this action. This man is, for Thoreau, a cautious tale about not specializing too much in his own pursuit, lest he stray too far one way or another. He does not take Thérien for stupid, he rather thinks him more as being rich in wisdom, but poor in intelligence, and that his reservedness comes from an innate humbleness stemming from his deep satisfaction with his own ways.

[H]is thinking was so primitive and immersed in his animal life, that, though more promising than a merely learned man's, it rarely ripened to anything which can be reported. He suggested that there might be men of

genius in the lowest grades of life, however permanently humble and illiterate, who take their own view always, or do not pretend to see at all; who are as bottomless even as Walden Pond was thought to be. (Thoreau, *Walden*, 101)

So Alec Thérien is an emblematic figure to Thoreau, forming one end of the scale as the paragon of nature, with the unnamed paragon of civilization at the other end, with Thoreau himself trying to keep the balance in the middle.

The Canadian wood chopper is a symbol as much as a man, and so is Viviano Jacquez. Albeit he is a symbol for a way of life that is dying out. Like Thérien, he is a foreigner, but a Basque sheepherder turned cattle wrangler seems a bit more outlandish than a French-Canadian lumberjack (in itself almost a cultural stereotype). However, America is made up of such immigrant stories, so we should be inclined to believe Abbey. Viviano is, as Abbey recalls “*muy hombre, muy macho*” and certainly somehow resembles the opposite to the description of Alec:

He is short, dark and savage, like most good Basques, with large brown glamorous eyes which seem to appeal to the ladies; (Abbey, DS, 106)

But Abbey describes him more fondly than Thoreau does his man of nature, and this is because Abbey sees in him a sort of ideal of the West. Ambling from job to job and interested less in setting money aside than in working as a cowboy for another day, he seems to be right at home in the rough outback of the Canyonlands, as iconic as the West. He has his shortcomings, which Abbey does not leave out:

He has been infected with the poison of prejudice. Infected and victimized. With his dark skin and Spanish accent he is often taken for a Mexican, which he resents, because he despises Mexicans. He also despises Indians. Even his own heritage: “dumb Basko” he once called himself. [...] he responds to prejudice by cultivating a prejudice of his own against those whom he feels are even lower in the American hierarchy than he is: against the Indians, the Mexicans, the Negroes. (Abbey, DS, 106-107)

Abbey feels sorry for Viviano, and he seems to pity him “too late to make a liberal out of Viviano Jacquez”. He also thinks he has found the reason for this, which is revealed in Viviano's other shortcoming, a love for too much beer:

Inadvertently when drunk he exposes the wistful desire to somehow

disappear and merge into the pale-faced millions who own and operate America. (Abbey, DS, 107)

So the Basque's shortcomings are regrettable, but the reason is clear: He wishes to assimilate himself into a group that doesn't want him, and his way of life is eroded by modern civilization. He is a symbol of the lifestyle of the West, and much as the picture offered in his famous work *The Brave Cowboy*, he is the last of a doomed race. Much like the image of the Indian, the image of the Cowboy was being transformed from an outdated way of life to a tourist attraction. And not just Viviano is affected, but so is his employer Roy Scobie, and some other friends of Abbey's, such as like Ralph Newcomb and Bill Eastlake, who once were cowboys.

Cowboyism rides rampant as never before on a field of golden neon dollar signs but job openings for working cowboys are scarce. The cattlegrowing industry almost everything else has been mechanized and automated. [...] Now it is simply a component of the lab to market food-processing apparatus (Abbey, DS, 138)

For Abbey, civilization has overtaken this lifestyle, which is as much part of the collective identity of America as the minutemen and frontiersmen, and it has left it wrangled in the dust like a calf at a rodeo circuit. It was then warped into a Disneyland version of itself: while the actual cowboys all become hired help, do odd-jobs or change careers, make-believe cowboys continue despite the harsh reality, just as movie-screen Indians continue to be the dominating image of Native Americans in the collective imagination.

Cowboys and Indians disappear, dying off or transforming themselves by tortuous degree into something quite different. The originals are nearly gone and will soon be lost in the overwhelming crowd. Legendary enemies, their ghosts ride away together – buddies at last – into the mythic sunset of the West. (Abbey, DS, 140)

Man and Nature – Conclusion:

“The man of nature” is a symbol for both Thoreau and Abbey, a sort of anecdote turned into a literary tool for the elaborate illustration of a point. Thoreau's Alec Thérien is something of a superhuman apparition of the wilderness to Thoreau, serving as an example of a man who has cut himself loose from civilization altogether. Abbey's Viviano Jacquez, on the other hand, is a man who was cut loose from his lifestyle by

civilization, against his will, and is the symbol of the vanishing West, which is beleaguered on all sides and on all levels by civilization, the biological, the geographical, the historical and even the ideological.

Unfettered civilization in *Walden* and *Desert Solitaire*; reactions thereto:

“We are caught”, continued the good doctor, “in the iron treads of a technological juggernaut. A mindless machine. With a breeder reactor for a heart.” (Abbey, *MWG*, 65)

Many elements of this sub chapter will crop up again in the final chapter when dealing with the effect that the views of both authors had on the Green Movement. Here however, this paper will concern itself more with what views both authors hold on civilization as an institution onto itself, and how they reconcile their environmental conscience with the demands of daily life, both in the 19th and 20th centuries.

Henry David Thoreau – Man on the Edge:

When reading *Walden*, it becomes apparent that one of Henry Thoreau's reasons for coming to his wilderness refuge was to reconcile the two worlds he found clashing within himself, civilization, on the one hand, wilderness, on the other. He remarked to his friend Emerson that all his life he had felt himself “living a sort of border life”. His ideal was always balance, a middle position, drawing strength from wilderness and putting it to good use in civilization. He said as much in his lecture to the Lyceum in Concord, where he pointed out examples in *Hamlet*, the *Iliad* and the *Bible*, underscoring that “in literature it is only the wild that attracts us.” He lauded the wilderness as an “inexhaustible fertilizer of the intellect” (qtd. in Nash, 88). This continuing contact between the wilderness and civilization is, according to Thoreau, a central concern for a nation, and the reason why, in his view, America was a rapidly expanding nation full of ideas and daring, while nations with hardly any wilderness left, such as England, were stagnant and moribund (these arguments were later partially taken up by experts who were looking into the frontier myth in American culture). Another example he brought onto the floor of the Lyceum was the story of Romulus and Remus, suckled as they were by a wild wolf, noting that this nurturing by wilderness was what created the city of Rome. This was far from just a fable to Thoreau, who argued that as long as the Romans kept some essential concept of wildness and a

connection to wilderness inside of them, they prevailed, and that they fell to northern, comparatively uncivilized, invaders once they lost that connection. “In short, all good things are wild and free” (qtd. in Nash, 88). But as noted in the sub chapter about Indians, complete wilderness was not an option, so again the symbol of balance. For Thoreau, Nature needed civilized man to appreciate it, and civilized man needed wilderness to refresh his faculties and get back in touch with himself.

Edward Abbey – Man over the Edge:

That nature and civilization needed each other was clear to Abbey as well, though for somewhat different reasons. He acknowledged Thoreau's ideas as good and often spoke at length about the replenishing effect nature has upon man, if properly experienced. For Abbey, the problem was that civilization adapted everything to itself too stringently and tended to get in the way. One chapter in *Desert Solitaire* is specifically marked “Polemic” and it weighs in on industrial tourism and the way Abbey sees a problem with how man deals with nature. His view is that man should go into nature, with as little in the way of technology between himself and the great outdoors as possible, and just experience it. Regard, for example, the way Abbey talks about the flashlight he carries:

There's another disadvantage to the use of the flashlight: like many other mechanical gadgets it tends to separate a man from the world around him. If I switch it on my eyes adapt to it and I can see only the small pool of light which it makes in front of me; I am isolated. (Abbey, *DS*, 15)

This idea of technology cutting man off from nature is a theme Abbey often returns to, as with the episode with the diesel-generator which powers the lights in his house trailer.:

The lights are so bright I can't see a thing and have to shade my eyes [...] Nor can I hear anything but the clatter of the generator. I am shut off from the natural world and sealed up, encapsulated, in a box of artificial light and tyrannical noise. (Abbey, *DS*, 15)

While Thoreau's arguments here are not quite so aimed at technology, he does advocate a simple life, sometimes coming off as a bit extreme, as in the chapter Economy:

I had three pieces of limestone on my desk, but I was terrified to find that they required to be dusted daily, when the furniture of my mind was all undusted still, and threw them out the window in disgust. (Thoreau, *Walden*)

This is of course the typical hyperbole employed by Thoreau, but he does point out that a man is impoverished in his faculties when he is tied down, metaphorically and physically, by too many possessions, and has to constantly worry about them and move them about. This in turn cuts him off from the opportunity to just get up and leave for the wilderness to replenish himself, making him a poorer man.

Abbey for his part also thinks that man should leave his possessions at home, especially if said possessions include a mobile home. He uses an entire chapter to explain his negative stance towards the tourism industry, industrialized mass-tourism in particular. In his mind, once the wilderness has been surveyed, made accessible via road and outfitted with amenities, it is not a wilderness any more, but another tourist attraction managed by the government. And the government is always a central worry of Abbey's, as already explored above. He shares the notion with Thoreau that wilderness is necessary to uphold civilization. Though his reasons for this are of a less idealistic bent. Wilderness has to be there, even if it is not seen. There is a passage in the chapter 'The Heat of Noon: Rock and Tree and Cloud' where Abbey sits near his trailer in the heat of July and remarks that the view of the distant snow caps on the mountains give him some respite from the heat, because he could theoretically get into his car and go there. Giving another example, he says that he may never go to Alaska his whole life, but the fact that it exists is good to know.

A man could be a lover and defender of the wilderness without ever in his lifetime leaving the boundaries of asphalt, powerlines, and right-angled surfaces. We need wilderness whether or not we ever set foot in it. We need a refuge even though we may never need to go there. (Abbey, *DS*, 162)

Civil, and not-so-civil disobedience:

A refuge from whom, one might wonder? Abbey makes this perfectly clear very quickly, a refuge from a tyrannical government. For Abbey, wilderness is a refuge for the guerrilla, an equalizer in the fight between a technologically superior foe against the determined resistance of land-wise patriots. Abbey earnestly discusses this scenario, and even though he admits that it seems “at the moment, like a fantastic thesis.” he stresses that the moment of the government turning on its people, and moreover on the world, comes closer and closer with the advance of technology and the pushing back of wilderness. Possibly speaking from his own wartime experience, he cites Germany as

one of the most densely populated, overdeveloped and technically unified nations of Europe, which also gave birth to the “most thorough of tyrannies”. While this whole rhetoric may seem close to raving, technically the advocated strategy might hold. It has before, as Vietnam and the Vietcong have proven. And if a more recent example is in order, one need only look to the bogged-down conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq in recent years, where resilient tribal minorities are staging a chillingly effective war of attrition against the technologically vastly superior western coalition forces, to see that even GPS and remote weaponry are no ultimate cure against a well-entrenched foe engaged on his own terms.

Daniel Payne, in *Voices in the Wilderness*, has dedicated a chapter to analyzing the reasons behind Abbey's anger, and the “near apocalyptic vision of totalitarianism” which cropped up again and again in his work. As Payne notes, Abbey does not cite any specific part of the government, or any party or politician, as the source of the problem. Indeed, he concurs with then-President Eisenhower, who was himself concerned about the military-industrial complex despite having been a General in WW2. The institution of the government as such when seen as affiliated with industry is the problem, according to Abbey. He sees himself as the original patriot in the service of wilderness when he quotes Jefferson: “The tree of liberty is nourished by the blood of tyrants; it is its natural manure.” And as said, the tyranny Abbey refers to is not so much that of the government, but of the industrial complex that nourishes it, depleting the land and depriving it of wilderness.

And “a civilization which destroys what little remains of the wild, the spare, the original, is cutting itself off from its origins and betraying the principle of civilization itself” (Abbey, DS, 211). What causes this, in Abbey's mind, is a system of intermingled industry and politics, which could lead only to ruin. Or as Seldom-Seen Smith puts it: “[A]nd if you don't attack [the system], it strip-mines the mountains, dams all the rivers, paves over the desert and puts you in jail anyway.” (Abbey, *MWG*, 112). Payne states that “Abbey's belief that wilderness serves as a protective hedge against the coercive power of the techno-industrial state helps to account for his uncompromising views on wilderness preservation” (157) This would make Abbey a more militant and violent version of Thoreau, who advocated that men of conscience should disobey a government which has no principles or acts in ways that a man could not reconcile with his own conscience. While Thoreau had matters like slavery or warfare in mind, Abbey

extends this to a government which enslaves its own citizens to corporate interest and makes war upon its own wilderness. The State is expanding, and in order to expand, it eats the wilderness. Man needs wilderness to function, ergo the state is an obstacle, nay, an enemy, and man must prepare accordingly. Such could be Abbey's logic in the matter.

At least it seems so. Abbey did say of himself that he grew more radical with age, and it becomes hard to sift out the hyperbole and willful deception so typical of Abbey. The latter half of the chapter 'Monkey Wrenching, Extremism, and Edward Abbey' by in *Voices in the Wilderness* by Payne is devoted to musings about how serious exactly Edward Abbey is when he tells us to gear up and bunker down in a box canyon. Abbey once said "all of my statements are lies", which nicely illustrates the living paradox he was, the persona he created for himself:

the radical environmentalist roaring down the highway in a Detroit land yacht with a pink flower on the hood and an NRA bumper sticker on the back, throwing beer cans out the window while giving a tirade about the destruction of the American wilderness. (Payne, 157)

Perhaps a final proposition on how to deal with this 'escalation of principles' is the anecdote about how Abbey saw a bumper sticker reading "Question Authority.". Abbey wrote that Thoreau would have agreed but amended it to "Always Question Authority." which would have prompted Abbey to add the word "All," in front of Authority. "Always Question All Authority." I would say, that to properly appreciate both Abbey and Thoreau, one should omit the words "All Authority" from the quote.

Technology and the Progress of Man:

Here both authors can come to one unified conclusion: progress for progress's sake is a path to ruin for man. The idea of an "expand or perish" civilization is abhorrent to them, and while Abbey points firmly at the US government in the 1960ies as an example of such a malformed civilization, Thoreau saw examples of this back in his day as well. In the chapter 'Sounds', and again in 'The Ponds', Thoreau remarks upon the railway passing Concord and the Pond, and how it has changed the landscape. "We do not ride the railroad; it rides upon us" he was heard to say, emphasizing that in his opinion, the railroads and trains, practical as they were, simply served to make men dependent on a technology they did not need, and crave wares they had no use for. When he makes a

long list of the fine things the railroad brings from all over the world, it is not hard to detect the sarcasm when he praises the fine ox-hides from Spain, with so many oxen roaming the countryside near Concord. Thoreau acknowledges the progress and achievement, and is astounded by the massive energy released by this “iron horse” which tirelessly traverses the largely untamed continent. This contrast is reminiscent of the fascination described by Leo Marx in *The Machine in the Garden*. The transformation of the landscape from wild to pastoral to urban is accelerated by the railroad, and Thoreau is simply skeptical about the necessity of this speed. While it is fine and good to be able to travel so fast, what use is it if you have no real reason to travel? He has a similar opinion about the other great innovation of his lifetime, the telegraph: “We are in great haste to construct a magnetic telegraph from Maine to Texas; but Maine and Texas, it may be, have nothing important to communicate.”

While he is not against technology in principle, he fears the escalation of innovation as a means unto itself, enslaving man to his own creations. Abbey had a similar opinion of things, as evident in the above example with the flashlight, though he acknowledges the invention of the refrigerator as something of monumental benefit. But, adding onto the already skeptical views of Thoreau, he sees the problem in the big picture of the USA in the middle of the Cold War and at the dawn of modern consumer society. For Abbey, the constantly increasing consumption was just a symptom of a deeper evil in society, pushed ahead by the union of politicians and businessmen, as outlined in *Monkey Wrench Gang*:

Peabody Coal [is] only one arm of Anaconda copper; Anaconda only a limb of United States steel; US Steel intertwined in incestuous embrace with the Pentagon, TVA, Standard Oil [...] the whole conglomerated cartel spread out upon half the planet Earth like a global kraken, pantentacled, wall-eyed and parrot-beaked, its brain a bank of computer data centers, its blood the flow of money, its heart a radioactive dynamo (Abbey, *MWG*, 172)

His opinion was that technology should be servant, not master, and that the farmer and rancher, the logger and the fisherman especially should be complemented and not replaced by technology. Abbey saw a slow and creeping supplanting of the old ways of the West as a monetary conspiracy against the common man. He outlined as much in a list of a possible ascent to power of a dictatorial regime in the US, which deserves to be quoted in its entirety:

1. Concentrate the populace in megalopolitan masses so they can be kept under close surveillance and where, in the case of trouble, they can be bombed, burned, gassed or machine-gunned with a minimum of expense and waste.
2. Mechanize agriculture to the highest degree of refinement, thus forcing most of the scattered farm and ranching population into the cities. Such a policy is desirable because farmers, woodsmen, cowboys, Indians, fishermen and other relatively self-sufficient types are difficult to manage unless displaced from their natural environment.
3. Restrict the possession of firearms to the police and the regular military organizations.
4. Encourage or at least fail to discourage population growth. Large masses of people are more easily manipulated and dominated than scattered individuals.
5. Continue military conscription. Nothing excels military training for creating in young men an attitude of prompt, cheerful obedience to officially constituted authority.
6. Divert attention from deep conflicts within the society by engaging in foreign wars; make support of these wars a test of loyalty, thereby exposing and isolating potential opposition to the new order.
7. Overlay the nation with a finely reticulated network of communications, airlines and interstate autobahns.
8. Raze the wilderness. Dam the rivers, flood the canyons, drain the swamps, log the forests, strip-mine the hills, bulldoze the mountains, irrigate the deserts and improve the national parks into national parking lots. (Abbey, *DS*, 164-165)

Civilization - Conclusion

What both men are concerned about in this self-sustained cycle of innovate-exploit-expand is, of course, the overt depletion of nature. Thoreau shook his head at the ravenous appetite for lumber and coal the train had, which denuded a part of Walden Pond even before he moved there, while Abbey rages against the global mining, logging and manufacturing industries. But they also fear a loss of self determination, as becomes rapidly apparent in Abbey's list. Both are fierce individualists, that much is certain, and the rapid advance into a more and more technologically determined life brings with it a loss of individuality, something which both authors felt strongly about. Abbey's vision of a homogenized, parceled and packaged America seems almost dystopian. Much of

this vision was included in his novel *Good News*, which painted a bleak picture of America in the future. This nightmarish picture might stem from the times he lived through, with two World Wars and the Korean war fresh in the mind, while the first soldiers were sent to Vietnam and the next disaster. But Thoreau too feels that the over-industrialization of New England and America can lead to no good, and he too does not wish for the individual to vanish in the crowd of big cities.

What is an enduring and massive symbol of industry, and what I personally feel is important to illustrate the complex relationship between technology and the authors, will serve to end this chapter. I shall examine in detail one example of the things civilization has wrought that can be found both in *Walden* and *Desert Solitaire*; which reveals a more direct connection between Abbey and Thoreau.

Dams – Symbol, Artifice, Edifice:¹²

Dams play a major part in both works, much more so in Abbey than in Thoreau, but both serve as interesting symbols of man's encroachment into nature and his manipulation of the "natural order".

Historically, they have been used since the early ages of Mesopotamian high culture. As mankind became settled, steady supplies of water became necessary, and as a direct result, most early cultures thrived along great rivers, such as the Indus, the Nile, the Euphrates and the Yellow River, all of which continue to be important settlement areas to this day.

Dams are one of the most pivotal inventions of history, and were a requirement for later developments in irrigation and agriculture, which in turn made civilization as we know it possible. So one would be led to think that dams are an all-around beneficial and positive symbol for the advancement of man and his continuing march towards innovation. This has been true for most of history, but it changed when it became apparent that the massive structures of the modern era were a cause of negative environmental impact, leading to the silting of rivers, the radical altering of ecosystems and sometimes even worsening the droughts that their reservoirs were supposed to prevent.

¹²Disclaimer: All statistical data of this section taken from: "Colorado River System Consumptive Uses and Losses Report 1996-2000". U.S. Bureau of Reclamation. 2004-12

Dams and Thoreau:

Some of this was already evident as early as the 19th century, as Thoreau himself complains about the building of a nearby dam in *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers*, which led to the flooding of acre upon acre of pristine woodland in what he deemed an unnecessary regulation project: “I for one am with thee [Shad]¹³, and who knows what may avail a crow-bar against that Billerica dam?” There is another reaction of his to meadows being flooded by this dam project in the Concord area. As noted by Roderick Nash, the dam was created to spur industrial growth in the region but wound up disrupting the very farmers it was supposed to support, by raising the water level of the river, making previously fordable sections impassable. In 1859, a group of farmers brought a lawsuit against the Billerica dam and hired Thoreau, who worked as a surveyor at this time, a self-taught skill at which he was, according to Emerson, “naturally talented”. The dispute dragged on and was quite bitter. Thoreau records in his journal that at a court proceeding in 1860, one farmer called the Concord a river which was “dammed at both ends and cursed in the middle”.

Thoreau is noted for his general dislike of progress for progress's sake and his skepticism towards unchecked development. This, along with the comment that Thoreau made about wishing to take a crowbar to the dam, led some critics to label him as an early eco-activist. Some even say that this is evidence for a supposed involvement in, or at least sympathy for, what would later come to be termed ecotage; though this might as well be an exaggeration of his anarchist sympathies, reimagined through our modern understanding of the word. It is clear that he was no friend of extensive human encroachment into his Concord environment or indeed the environment at large, but there is no evidence that he ever involved himself in more than verbal resistance.

Dams and Abbey:

Edward Abbey, on the other hand, was an overt and active critic of human encroachment, and while his involvement with ecotage remained as ambiguous as the stances he advocates in his books throughout his life, there is evidence brought forward by his brother and two of his close friends, Jack Loeffler and William Eastlake, that he did indeed engage in such projects, though it remained unmentioned which and to what

¹³ A herring-like fish native to much of the Atlantic, which spawns in rivers.

extent until long after his death. Loeffler wrote an article where he shared some personal anecdotes about his friendship to Abbey, and therein is found this excerpt:

Now that Ed lies far beyond the reach of the statute of limitations, it can be revealed that he did *not* limit his attacks against wilderness rapists to his writing [...] he physically destroyed those metal marauders that raze wilderness. He pulled up stakes. He closed roads. He did everything the could think of to thwart the juggernaut of so-called human progress *save one thing* – he never, ever caused harm to another human being. (Jack Loeffler. “Edward Abbey, Anarchism and the Environment.” *Western American Literature*)

What is clear is that Abbey was strongly opposed to dams in general and to one dam in particular. In *Desert Solitaire*, there is a long and extensive chapter about a canoe trip through Glen Canyon made with a friend shortly before the filling of the reservoir of Glen Canyon Dam. The entire extended anecdote is used as a vehicle to alternatively praise the beauty and diversity of the (largely unexplored) Glen River Canyon system and to condemn its destruction by the dam project. And in the book *The Monkey Wrench Gang*, Glen Canyon dam features even more prominently, being something of an antagonist in the background, and the main reason and target of ire for the book’s protagonists to become involved in ecotage, with the dynamiting of the dam being the final goal of their campaign, though they never do reach it. Likewise Abbey advocated the violent removal of the dam throughout his life. The chapter about the Glen Canyon, 'Down the River', has this to say:

Instinctively we expect a miracle: the dam will never be completed, they'll run out of cement or slide rules, the engineers will all be shipped to Upper Volta. Or if these fail some unknown hero with a rucksack full of dynamite strapped to his back will descend into the bowels of the dam; there he will hide his high explosives where they'll do the most good [...] (Abbey, *DS*, 205-206)

There is little doubt that Abbey often wished he himself could be that unknown hero.

The Dichotomy of Dams in Environmental Discourse:

These edifices have probably been such an enduring symbol for the Green Movement because grappling over them is representative of the elaborate dance between compromises which often has to be employed by activists. At the same time, the mix of benefits and detriments created by a dam makes it both an obvious and difficult target for environmental criticism.

To stay with the Grand Canyon examples, the object of Abbey's vilification, Glen Canyon Dam, is part of the Colorado River dam system which, together with Hoover Dam and 27 other major dams, provides water and power to millions of people on the Pacific coast and in the Southwest. This regulation provides irrigation to some of America's most productive breadbaskets, like Imperial Valley in California. Agriculture aside, the fact that so much power (around 12 billion kWh according to official studies) is generated by water alone is astounding, and considering the pollution created by the theoretical amount of coal, gas or oil power plants (let alone nuclear ones) needed for an equivalent output, the dams are certainly beneficial for the air quality. Their construction provides hundreds of jobs over an extended period of time, and their reservoirs can be used to irrigate massive swaths of farmland and quench the thirst of entire cities, while they produce no obvious pollution of the air or ground and are reliant not on fossil fuels but only on the rivers they are built on, making them a welcome symbol for 'clean energy'. And, of course, the image of man taming something as wild as a raging river is a powerful symbol of civilization.

On the other hand one cannot forget the damage caused to the local and general environment by such a profusion of river development. Water quality, as again demonstrated by the Colorado, becomes a problem with as much as 15% of its annual flow lost to evaporation in such enormous reservoirs as Lake Powell and Lake Mead, resulting in droughts downriver. Likewise, the loss of sediment and flow has led to the desertification of the Colorado Delta, threatening marine habitats hundreds of miles from the dams. This factor is often downplayed by the bureau of reclamation, which is again a sign of the "manifest destiny" approach to land development employed in the US, as wilderness is viewed as inefficient, as previously discussed. Furthermore, the reservoirs themselves can become 'tourist blights' used for little more than recreational boating. Lake Powell, behind Glen Canyon dam, is infamous for its water pollution caused by careless tourists. The lakes also leech minerals out of the surrounding rocks, cause an imbalance in salinity within the lake, as evident by the massive 'bathtub rings' visible on the canyon walls during low tide. So the powerful symbol of man taming nature can be viewed as a powerful symbol of man abusing nature and meddling where he needn't meddle.

This goes some way to explain how dams have been an iconic symbol and a convenient

rallying point on both sides of the environmental debate for decades. It arguably began with the campaign against the Hetch-Hetchy regulation project and the later Echo Park project, both of which were opposed by the Sierra Club and represent their biggest defeat and victory, respectively, and are also considered formative moments in the history of that organization. The approach and reaction were novel at the time, as previously the American public had been overjoyed by any federal development project for the obvious benefits, and nobody had considered remote wilderness areas worthy of protection. After all, if some canyons are flooded in a remote part of Nevada, what does it concern the LA citizen if he receives fresh and plentiful water in return? John Muir struck a chord here, possibly inspired by Thoreau, calling the many canyons the “grandest of all temples” as previously mentioned (it was one of the most enduring catchphrases attributed to him) and convincing Americans that these remote areas were indeed worthy of protecting, if only for them to be there. This is connected with the at the time still emergent idea of ‘wildness’ and how modern man needs ‘wilderness’, which will be touched up in the next chapter.

Dams and the authors discussed – Conclusion:

Thoreau, who urged passive resistance against damage to nature and wanted his readers to preserve and appreciate what they could while they could, was different from Abbey in so far that the latter favored more of a direct approach. Abbey advocates an all-out attack from many different angles, and despite his suggested methods ranging from the very radical (the actual destruction of a dam in the size category of Glen Canyon Dam by explosives would cause widespread devastation downriver, and could indeed have nation-wide repercussions due to disruption in hydroelectric power plants on the Colorado) to the mildly disruptive (George W. Hayduke’s rule #1 in *Monkey Wrench Gang* is “always pull out survey stakes” [which is something Abbey himself was fond of doing, as was mentioned previously]) he never advocated violence against humans, only against technology. This tentatively connects him with Thoreau, who was a pioneer on the subject of non-violent resistance against the state, though this connection admittedly traverses a massive gray area of what constitutes ‘violence’.

What can be said though is that both Abbey and Thoreau loved man, but hated man’s works, and at the same time, their idea of what was to be done about those works diverged wildly after following the same path for a short time. While the subject of

dams is very central to Abbey and only tangential for Thoreau, I believe that there is a certain amount of resistance against uncontrolled artifice in the work of both authors. Yet the way they react to it serves as more of a dividing factor than a unifying one. For while Thoreau ultimately hopes for a balance between civilization and nature, Abbey hopes that modern civilization will one day collapse under its own weight and forcefully return to a more primitive state:

"Time and the winds will sooner or later bury the Seven Cities of Cibola, Phoenix, Tucson, Albuquerque, all of them, under dunes of glowing sand, over which blue-eyed Navajo bedouin will herd their sheep and horses, following the river in winter, the mountains in summer, and sometimes striking off across the desert toward the red canyons of Utah where great water falls plunge over silt-filled, ancient, mysterious dams." (Abbey, *DS*, 160)

3 – Resist, Revolt, Reform. Abbey, Thoreau, and Environmental action.

"You can't sink a rainbow."

-Motto of Greenpeace

While there have been many authors who were nature writers, and even more who were not self-identified nature writers but, like Thoreau and Abbey, wrote about nature. From there on outward, the circle of authors with an influence that reached beyond their literature inspiring people is considerably smaller still. Of these, Edward Abbey and Henry David Thoreau stand out as being both extremely influential and free of political activism. Some of their actions were of course politically motivated, but they did not primarily use political means to achieve their goals. Neither of them, like John Muir, founded a grass-roots organization like the Sierra Club. Neither of them tried to run for any office, or actively participated in organized environmental causes (if one looks past Abbey's participation in the 1979 publicity event for Earth First! at Glen Canyon Dam and later roundabout support of the group). However, their writing has not simply inspired people, it has cast ripples throughout society which go beyond what most authors in recent history can claim.

Thoreau's essay "Civil Disobedience", originally titled "Resistance to Civil Government", served as a model for non-violent resistance which influenced people as well-known and diverse as Martin Luther King, Mohandas Gandhi, President John F. Kennedy and various writers such as Ernest Hemingway, Marcel Proust and Sinclair

Lewis, according to W. Maynard in his book *Walden Pond: A History*. Not all of these individuals claim Thoreau as their main influence, but he is actively acknowledged by most of them. Edward Abbey has a somewhat more dubious claim to fame, as his novel *The Monkey Wrench Gang* together with *Desert Solitaire* and his other books inspired the formation of several environmental groups, some of which exist to this day. They run the gamut from mostly peaceful groups, like Greenpeace and the World Wildlife Fund, to more radical groups, such as the Earth Liberation Front and Earth first! which have at various times been listed as radical political groups and even terrorist organizations by national and international authorities.

“Civil disobedience” – Henry David Thoreau

I heartily accept the motto, – “That government is best which governs least;” and I should like to see it acted up to more rapidly and systematically. Carried out, it finally amounts to this, which also I believe, – “That government is best which governs not at all;” and when men are prepared for it, that is the best kind of government which they will have. (Thoreau, *Walden*, 224)

These words are the beginning of the treatise *Civil Disobedience*, and reading it one is surprised by two things: First, to see that it found purchase among so many dissimilar people, not because it is not insightful or important, but because it presents an in-depth look into the moral fabric of one man and his personal convictions so strongly. It is a testament to how novel the ideas presented therein were at one point that it reached out across the globe. Second, because it is essentially a well-mannered and heartfelt critique of democracy. Most people know the famous quote by Winston Churchill about how democracy is the worst form of government but better than the alternatives, but few know that criticism directed at modern democracy, where the opinions of the majority become law and practice, was penned at a date as early as this.

Elements of the text were delivered in a lecture by Thoreau in 1849, some time after having been imprisoned for alleged tax-evasion. In it he explains his reasoning behind the act, which was not an attempt to withhold funds from the state to keep for himself, but to refuse to support a government whose policies he objected to. These policies, at the very core, were the Mexican-American War and slavery. But for Thoreau, these two issues were not seen isolated or as problems merely from a political or commercial point of view, they were shattering the foundations of his trust in the government.

Thoreau was a pacifist and an abolitionist to his very core, and as such these issues were

for him a moral question as much as anything else. Why should a man owe his allegiance to a government which acted in a manner one found deplorable oneself? And was one not becoming guilty by association of all the crimes of the state by not trying to keep it from committing them? Thoreau found that most of his fellow men “serve the State thus, not as men mainly, but as machines, with their bodies.” (226) They were thereby reduced to functions of the state, having let it turn them into tools, debasing themselves and being no more for the state but straw, or dirt. He stresses, however, that they are good citizens in their bearing still. But only “[a] very few, as heroes, patriots, martyrs, reformers in the general sense, and *men*, serve the State with their consciences also, and so necessarily resist it for the most part; and they are commonly treated by it as enemies.” (226) Not content to simply admonish, he considered his options for action. He did this with the full knowledge that he was confronting a much larger and uncaring opponent, the government. But, as Thoreau put it, “[u]nder a government which imprisons any unjustly, the true place for a just man is also a prison.”(233)

This is the power of Thoreau's message, because in contrast to many other high-principled individuals, he was ready to stand up for his beliefs and suffer what may come. What was perhaps a fact which enabled Thoreau not to fear being imprisoned was that at the time he already lived as simply as possible, so there was hardly any property for the state to seize, and if one believes his accounts, Thoreau was unfazed by the prospect of imprisonment:

[A]s I stood considering the walls of solid stone, two or three feet thick, the door of wood and iron, a foot thick, and the iron grating which strained the light, I could not help being struck with the foolishness of that institution which treated me as if I were mere flesh and blood and bones, to be locked up. (Thoreau, *Walden*, 236)

True in fashion to the popular German revolutionary song of the time, “Die Gedanken sind frei”, Thoreau, in his cell, considers himself freer than his fellow men outside, as he stands firmly on his principles and morals, and is not indebted to a state which staged an invasion into Mexico and allows humans to be kept as property. This is because besides being an abolitionist and a pacifist, he was also a fierce believer in the power of the individual. As a principled man, he felt the need to “declare war” on the government, but as a pacifist, he could and would not use violence, even though he said that “[a]ll men recognize the right of revolution; that is, the right to refuse allegiance to and to resist the government, when its tyranny or its inefficiency are great and

unendurable.” This revolution, in his mind, could start small, and for an individualist, the success of this revolution was not as important as the significance of the act itself:

A minority is powerless while it conforms to the majority; it is not even a minority then; but it is irresistible when it clogs by its whole weight [...] If a thousand men were not to pay their tax-bills this year, that would not be a violent and bloody measure, as it would be to pay them, and enable the State to commit violence and shed innocent blood. (Thoreau, *Walden*, 233)

As Thoreau mentions in this lecture, there had been other ways of influencing government. The model of democracy meant that the leaders were chosen by the people, and that any individual could petition for change. But Thoreau saw that the rule of the majority was more a tyranny in many cases, and that lobbying groups could make sure that the 'right' candidate would be voted for, just as kingmakers of old. The rule of the majority was as such not ideal, for unless all men were men of conscience, it was just another form of oppression. And against this oppression, Thoreau urged action, but actually on a smaller scale. “Let your life be a counter friction to stop the machine” (231) as he said. What was novel here was the way he proposed to bring this counter friction to bear. Not via political counter-movements, not via civil upheaval, but by direct action.

Thoreau – The just man:

Direct action for Thoreau meant to withdraw his monetary support, however small, from the state. A symbolic gesture which, if picked up by enough men of principle, could bring the State to its knees softly and without violence. Kill the war machine by starving it of fuel. As such, Thoreau can be described as a fiscal conscientious objector. This specialized example served as an inspiration to many people, who were impressed by his then novel method of resisting a government, and his conviction and determination when standing up for his principles:

I became convinced that noncooperation with evil is as much a moral obligation as is cooperation with good. No other person has been more eloquent and passionate in getting this idea across than Henry David Thoreau. As a result of his writings and personal witness, we are the heirs of a legacy of creative protest. The teachings of Thoreau came alive in our civil rights movement; indeed, they are more alive than ever before. Whether expressed in a sit-in at lunch counters, a freedom ride into Mississippi, a peaceful protest in Albany, Georgia, a bus boycott in Montgomery, Alabama, these are outgrowths of Thoreau's insistence that evil must be resisted and that no moral man can patiently adjust to injustice. (Martin Luther King Junior, *Biography*)

Thoreau was a great writer, philosopher, poet, and withal a most practical

man, that is, he taught nothing he was not prepared to practice in himself. He was one of the greatest and most moral men America has produced. At the time of the abolition of slavery movement, he wrote his famous essay "On the Duty of Civil Disobedience". He went to gaol for the sake of his principles and suffering humanity. His essay has, therefore, been sanctified by suffering. Moreover, it is written for all time. Its incisive logic is unanswerable.

(Mohandas Gandhi, *For Passive Resisters*)

These are two of the most well-known men of the last century paying homage to Henry David Thoreau. So how is it that so few people know of him? I myself did not know about the far-reaching implications of *Civil Disobedience* and actually, while having read excerpts, never connected it with the author of *Walden*. My opinion on the matter is that Thoreau's legacy was like a cultural virus. Our entire modern protest structure, from sit-ins to peaceful demonstrations, is indebted to Thoreau. His influence is so far-reaching and complete that he has been eclipsed by his own work, work which has altered human culture so far that a protest that turns violent is something appalling that is reported worldwide, and not the norm any more.

The Monkey Wrench Gang and the formation of Earth First! – Edward Abbey

While never calling himself an environmentalist, Edward Abbey definitely participated in the environmental discourse and also favored direct action to protect the environment. In his case, however, the direct action in question was somewhat more problematic. It is best summed up when in his work *Journey Home*, he says "you don't argue with engineers – you have to derail them." (quoted in Payne, 159) which is exactly what the motley crew of beer-drinking, highway-littering neo-Luddites does throughout the book *The Monkey Wrench Gang*. Whether it's something as spectacular as trying to bring down bridges over the Colorado with thermite charges, or something as disruptive but harmless as pulling up survey stakes (rule #1 of the monkey wrencher) Edward Abbey was always advocating a very direct form of direct action. And, as Thoreau, he was not shy to put words into action either, as is evident from the short biographical time line printed at the back of the edition of *The Monkey Wrench Gang* used for this thesis. Between 1959 and 1975 he participated in several smaller 'ecotage' activities, mostly with like-minded friends, which mostly amounted to sawing down billboards and pouring sugar and dirt into the fuel tanks of parked road construction vehicles. Perhaps at the time they still thought about the political impact of their actions,

but over time, for Abbey himself at least, this changed into being mainly about spite. More on that further into this chapter, let us first begin with terms & definitions.

Origins of Sabotage and Ecotage:

Having used the word several times in this paper already, it is perhaps time to explain what ecotage means in detail, simply because the term is so important to Abbey and the group which chose him as their patron saint, Earth First!. The word itself is easily identified as a portmanteau of ecology and sabotage. Sabotage is probably of old Dutch origin, referring to the wooden shoes, now more commonly called clogs, worn by workers. These workers, reminiscent of the 'followers' of Ned Ludd in England, fearing that automated looms would replace them, jammed their shoes into the wooden gears, hence, they sabotaged them, leading to the word sabotage (and possibly to the word clogging). Or so the story goes, which indubitably appealed to Ed Abbey, who was a fan of the (mostly fabricated) story of Ned Ludd. About ecotage now, especially when concerning Abbey, Daniel Payne had several things to say in *Voices in the Wilderness*. According to him, ecotage may be a modern word creation, but the practice, as noted above, goes back to Thoreau's fantasies about taking a crowbar to Billerica dam or further than that, even though today Abbey is the writer most closely identified with direct action of that kind. By these very direct actions, Abbey and his associates, both directly and indirectly, willfully crossed over into a moral gray area between activism and terrorism. This is a central struggle for anyone engaging in this kind of activity, and "this debate over tactics, the question of whether violence used in the defense of the earth is justifiable, that raises some of the most troublesome issues for environmental activism." (Payne, 161)

There is not even a consensus on what constitutes violence in this case. The common activities of such groups include, as again mentioned above, the disruption of construction sites, the active picketing and obstruction of mines, logging areas and the like, as well as the sabotaging of equipment through acts such as pouring sand and sugar into fuel tanks, and driving nails into old-growth trees slated for logging. All of this is directed against property, and follows the first rule of the eco-warrior, as pointed out by Dr. Sarvis to Hayduke in *The Monkey Wrench Gang*: "[...] Rule Number One is, Nobody gets hurt. Nobody. Not even yourself". This is an important distinction for ecotage participants, as they do not see their acts as morally reprehensible. Illegal, yes,

but not morally wrong. The law, of course, has a different opinion.

Terrorists or Activists – Accusations on both sides of the debate:

Under current and previous US law, this sort of action does constitute violence. Violence against property, but violence nonetheless, moving the government to label certain groups as 'eco-terrorists' and classifying them as a domestic terrorist threat, thus associating them, verbally and legally, with people like the Oklahoma City Bomber Timothy Veigh. As a rebuttal, activists like David Foreman who, in 1979, with several friends formed the environmental action group Earth First!, cleaves close to Abbey when he says that the only acts of ecoterrorism in the USA are acts committed by the government and its affiliated businesses against nature. They saw (and possibly see) their actions as an act of defense against invasion:

For many of us, perhaps for most of us, the wilderness is as much our home, or a lot more so, than the wretched little stucco boxes, plywood apartments, and wallboard condominiums in which we are mostly confined by the insatiable demands of an overcrowded and ever-expanding industrial culture. And if the wilderness is our true home, and if it is threatened with invasion, pillage and destruction — as it certainly is — then we have the right to defend that home, as we would our private rooms, by whatever means are necessary. (An Englishman's home is his castle; an American's home is his favorite fishing stream, his favorite mountain range, his favorite desert canyon, his favorite swamp or patch of woods or God-created lake.) (Abbey, in Foreman, *Eco-Defense*, 8-9)

Justifiable or not, it is obvious why the state would be worried about them. For example, Earth First! published a book in 1985 named *Eco-Defense: A field Guide to Monkey-wrenching* which contains many insightful comments by Abbey in its foreword (labeled Forward! in the book, the above quote is taken from that passage). Availability of the book is limited by legal factors, it was however possible to view both the foreword, which is also quoted by Daniel Payne, and the table of contents. The book is apparently meant as a manual for the aspiring eco-warrior, detailing everything from the pros and cons of ceramic and quartz tree spikes, to modification of off-road vehicles, camouflage techniques, technical manuals for the most commonly used earth-moving equipment (and their weak spots), operational procedures of police and military as well as guides to successful counter-propaganda and legal manuals of the 'what to do if you are arrested' kind. The current reprint even has an appendix on how to evade modern boarding tactics by coastal authorities. The legal clamor about a book such as this is

understandable, as it is essentially a manual for training a radical group.

Though this radicalism is indeed justifiable in Abbey's opinion:

Representative democracy in the United States has broken down. Our legislators do not represent those who elected them but rather the minority who finance their political campaigns and who control the organs of communication — the Tee Vee, the newspapers, the billboards, the radio — that have made politics a game for the rich only. Representative government in the USA represents money not people and therefore has forfeited our allegiance and moral support. We owe it nothing but the taxation it extorts from us under threats of seizure of property, or prison, or in some cases already, when resisted, a sudden and violent death by gunfire. (Abbey, *Eco-Defense*, 8)

So as he puts it, this discourse already presupposes that all other avenues available to the common citizen have failed. This claim is similar to what Thoreau argued in his call for direct action, though cast in a much more radical mold. Abbey is also a conscientious objector in the sense that he denies the state the funding for continued exploitation in the name of progress. “Growth for the sake of growth is the ideology of the cancer cell” as Abbey puts it, and the opposition to this comes from a deep moral conviction, just as deep as that of Thoreau. However, as Thoreau dares the state “come and take me to prison”, Abbey's dare in later years was more “come and I'll take you all with me”. If this seems undemocratic, that is because, again, he is of the opinion that the normal avenues of citizens, such as lobbying and petitioning, but even demonstrations and non-violent direct action have already failed to yield any results, so a more radical approach was in order. And to follow this, Abbey rejects the procedures of democracy entirely, thereby avoiding being entrapped within them, something which Payne describes was a problem often faced by Deep Ecologists like Bill Deval and George Sessions, who felt that they were “trapped in the very political system they criticize” (Payne, 164) and that having to use the language of the system they oppose just to justify their claims was weakening their message.

“The problematic Edward Abbey” - Abbey and his polemic:

Perhaps to avoid just that, Abbey shook off the mantle of the respectable environmentalist (not that he held it long in any case) and decided to mount his soapbox and yell away. This, of course, makes him a problematic character for his followers and even a detriment to the environmental cause as a whole. As noted in

Payne, many environmentalists privately voiced very radical opinions, great figures like John Muir among them, but in public discourse, they tended to reign in their more radical streaks and softened their blows with circumspect arguments and a careful choice of words, something which Abbey never even attempted. “Not only does Abbey decline to do this, but he often takes a confrontational tone that seems almost calculated to alienate” (Payne 163) This deliberately abrasive style, coupled with his pranksterish attitude towards criticism, and a long literary tradition of willful deception and paradox, has led some critics to even argue that he does not support eco-activism, or ecotage at all. And if one judges him only by his works of fiction, such as *The Monkey Wrench Gang*, the claim might hold. But once his essays and his long history of interest in the interaction of violence and politics are taken into account (The thesis topic which he worked on to receive his MA at the University of New Mexico in 1956 was “Anarchism and the Morality of Violence”) it becomes clear that he was indeed a discontent and a radical. His personal views in later years backed this up:

I'm [...] something of an anarchist, because I learned long ago to distrust the government, and not only the government but all big institutions: big business, big military, big cities, big churches, big labor unions [...] any institution that grows so large that it's no longer under the control of its membership. My kind of anarchism is no more than democracy pushed as far as it can be pushed, government by the people, decentralized power in all its forms. (Abbey, *MWG*, Appendix, 8)

Also, as friends and family have confirmed, most of the acts committed by the gang in the book *The Monkey Wrench Gang* that did not involve explosives were, at one point or another, committed by Abbey, or at least facilitated by him, a fact which was kept well hidden until after his death, despite the FBI keeping a file on him, and thus an ongoing investigation, for most of his adult life. And while *Eco-Defense* is apparently still a closely-scrutinized manifesto in the eyes of authorities, what also was pointed out by Payne is that *The Monkey Wrench Gang* actually contains some very detailed information about proper monkey-wrenching and, with some reading between the lines and a bit of literal extraction, could very well be stripped-down to a similar, if far less detailed, field manual for would-be wrenchers. Patterns within patterns, as appropriate for Abbey. And as mentioned above, Abbey sees these actions as making use of his constitutionally enshrined rights to action against an unfair state. Thus the democracy

which he talks of is one that he feels is flawed in America in his time, representation not being immediate enough for him, and thus the moral and conscious-driven man is forced into action. Since democracy has failed, anarchy should reign, and the only action he can conceive of in this situation is direct action. Sawing down billboards, spiking trees, even blowing up dams could all be seen as attacking the state in effigy. Again, the statement seems outwardly political, but if we take Edward Abbey at least partially seriously, then he had, at that point, long ago rejected the democratic process as such. Should we go on to believe that, then his actions are not political, but a battle of principle against an omnipresent enemy.

Earth-First! And the Problems of Radicalization:

This narrative of a disillusioned moderate driven to radicalism by an uncaring state is the founding myth of Earth First!. David Foreman, one of the group's founders, was a pro-environment lobbyist before the inception of the organization. According to the group's website, he became frustrated with what he viewed as a system controlled by the state to further its own interest while paying lip service to environmental concerns. And much like Abbey, he blames not only the government, but also scientists, industry and even other environmental groups which are too apologetic or ready for compromise:

Are you tired of namby-pamby environmental groups? Are you tired of overpaid corporate environmentalists who suck up to bureaucrats and industry? Have you become disempowered by the reductionist approach of environmental professionals and scientists?

If you answered yes to any of these questions, then Earth First! is for you. Earth First! is effective. Our front-line, direct action approach to protecting wilderness gets results. We have succeeded in cases where other environmental groups had given up, and have drawn public attention to the crises facing the natural world. (David Foreman, Earth-First web resource)

The website is filled with a lot of bravado and environmental chest-pounding, but this sort of posturing seems to be a necessity for the group as a whole. Their activities, however, are not all centered on ecotage and attacking the establishment. First off, as the rather reliable articles on the history of the movement state, a lot of the more radical actions attributed to the group were done by a splinter-cell of the original organization, the “Earth Liberation Front”, which, along with the “Animal Liberation Front” and other such organizations, focuses on the criminal dimension of direct action almost exclusively and is labeled as an

international terrorist organization, disavowed by the organization which spawned it. This splintering is normal for such groups when they grow and mature, as some members wish to continue the original, more radical course, while others see their responsibilities shift with growing public awareness. For example, as the group grew, more and more left-liberal anarchist elements trickled into the group who couldn't stomach Edward Abbey and his rather conservative attitudes towards hunting and gun-control, for example.

What this splintering has also brought about was the founding of an NGO tax-deduction organization which was aimed at procuring funds for environmental research and education. Founded as the Earth First! Foundation in 1982 it consolidated itself into the Fund for Wild Nature, which aims to provide funds to grass-roots organizations and individual research projects.

Knowledge is fighting the power – Research as Eco-activism:

Using research projects to bring about change in ecological policy is not by any means a new approach. Even before Rachel Carson wrote *Silent Spring*, concerned scientists and professionals have eloquently pointed out what they saw as shortcomings or flaws in policy and public activity. Besides *Silent Spring*, I was able to at least briefly look at *At the Cutting Edge*, published in 1988, which is a scientific treatise on the problems facing Canada and its ravenous resource industry. Such books are numerous and have many things in common, such as their professionalism, being backed up by the opinion of experts in their field, and a dense structure of well-formed arguments and facts.

What they sadly also have in common is that their style makes them less accessible for the 'mainstream reader'. Breaking into the mainstream is a huge challenge for environmental literature, and *Silent Spring* was such a best-seller because it created a storm of controversy in popular media, and because of the anticipation and preparation of said storm by Carson and associates. It was a topic on the radio, on TV and in newspapers, and it dealt with dangers which could affect everyone, everywhere. *At the Cutting Edge* presents many compelling arguments against unchecked deforestation, and contains endorsements and studies from such prolific figures as American biologist David Suzuki. However,

the book is a scientific treatise, and it did not create an impression on the public mind anywhere near as strong as *Silent Spring*. It contains language used in ecological research, it is laced with statistics and charts, it is overall a very impressive book which eloquently presents its arguments, and I personally enjoyed reading it very much. But, even when paying attention to the pitfalls of subjectivity, my opinion on the matter is skewed even further by my biological studies. I enjoy reading about biology, and botany and ecology, but I am aware that not many people would favor the highly scientific writing style. *At the Cutting Edge* is, in its entirety, a good set of arguments in an environmental debate in parliament, but not very convincing to the average person, who would probably not pick it up, let alone read it.

What could, among other things, be a factor for this is that deforestation seems such an abstract problem. Having been to Canada personally, I can vouch for the fact that large tracts of it are indeed covered in trees. It seems the woods are healthy, vast, and everywhere. And while it is true that very large areas of forest are cut down every day, this usually happens in remote areas where the common citizens cannot see it, and moreover the scale of these operations is such that metaphors in the vein of 'the amount of forest cleared each day amounts to x football fields' have to be employed to make the numbers comprehensible. Also, the dangers of deforestation are remote to the average citizen. While everyone can agree that a loss of songbirds and butterflies would negatively impact quality of life for everyone immediately, it is hard to grasp the importance of a few thousand trees on the other side of the second largest country in the world, especially when the time it takes for the impacts of this denuding of landscape to become noticeable is measured not in years, but decades. This is only one example, but it is descriptive of one of the largest weaknesses of the professional environmental discourse in general. Only when the ozone holes over Australia were already open, only when the radioactive cloud from a Ukrainian reactor forced half of Europe inside for months on end, only when this immediacy between environmental problem and everyday life was established beyond any doubt did the discourse grab the attention of the mainstream. After that, initiatives were formed, policies agreed upon, and everything went along rather quickly.

One good example of a good mainstream-scientific presentation of a problem is the documentary film *An Inconvenient Truth* funded by and filmed with Al Gore.

The movie presents scientific facts in a manner that can easily be understood by non-scientists viewers, and it represented a singular viewpoint, namely that global climate change is caused at least in part by human contributions, and that sustaining our current course could lead to massive repercussions. The movie itself was interesting and created much support for environmental projects in the USA and elsewhere, but what was, from a critical point of view, even more important was the debate it ignited. Immediately after the movie came out, it was attacked from all sides by those opposed to the idea of human impact on global climate change. It was, of course, praised by proponents of the theories presented within, but there were professional and unprofessional voices in this who detracted it. A debate had, however, been ignited, and the topic was back in mainstream media after years of languishing at the sidelines of popular discourse.

So books like *The Cutting Edge* are usually employed as a set of facts bundled as a political tool. Some of them, like *Silent Spring* or a media spectacle like *An Inconvenient Truth*, are about the right thing at the right time and create a sensation. But most others are mainly used to take the debate to a different level.

Science and industry – a match not quite made in heaven

As mentioned earlier in this paper, the entanglement of science and industry represents a problem on many levels, the least of which is that it tends to create distrust between scientists and nature activists in some cases. Also, it means that certain political entities and companies ostensibly have scientific fact on their side, as they fund scientists who espouse theories and hypotheses close to their own opinions, thus forming a power base of sorts.

To combat this, independent scientists or scientists of opposing viewpoints release such hypotheses and theories which contradict or expose their colleagues. Contradiction has the intended effect of keeping scientific discourse alive and creating an environment in which all viewpoints are treated equally. In the case of *An Inconvenient Truth*, there was a considerable amount of well-founded discourse, as the issue is not one of pro- or contra- climate change theory, as it is for US-American mainstream media and the binary vision employed by those working in it, but rather a multifaceted debate on whether there is change, and if, what caused it, and to what extent with dozens of theories presented on every level. Serious and factual coverage is necessary, as there is often a lot of very

emotional and unprofessional media coverage by less reputable outlets, often sponsored by those in the industry who would lose money over something like a proven link between CO² emissions and hurricanes. This is essentially a continuation of the campaign against Rachel Carson in the 1950ies, discussed in the survey at the beginning of the paper.

The other function of scientific media is more closely tailored to Thoreau and his “corporation of men with conscience” as exposure of spurious claims is a way for the scientific community to stave off association with the less scrupulous members of the community. To give a notorious example: There is an old and well-published article on the health benefits of tobacco smoking, which was later systematically dismantled in scientific discourse, but managed to maintain some of its claims, false as they were, until it was exposed that the entire study was funded by Philip Morris. So in a sense, these independent scientists act as conscientious objectors to the unchecked entanglement of science and industry by opening a new front on a higher level, away from traditional activism.

A sad truth, rather than an inconvenient one, is that the industry these scientists fight holds far more funding money than even sympathetic universities, and the threat of funding cuts often cows these institutions into cooperation as well. The debate on ozone depletion was almost nipped in the bud by lobby groups from the appliance industry, and there is still a sizable and almost militant group of media and industry representatives who never tire of attacking climate theory as a “dangerous hoax”, as mentioned above.

The violent reaction here is understandable, as a change away from polluting and unsustainable practices would, as already mentioned, cost these people money. Money they would much rather spend, apparently, on maintaining the status quo and suppressing uncomfortable facts. The arguments have also largely remained the same, usually casual allusions to how these activists would cause a shrinking in industry, cost money for the state, that they would much rather have that people should lower themselves to the level of a woodchuck and walk on four legs, to borrow a clause from John Greenleaf Whittier, one of Thoreau's critics. And it is at this point where environmental groups must step in to help finance these projects, at least in part. The most widely known of these groups, which also manages to represent principles of both Thoreau and Abbey, is Greenpeace.

Greenpeace today is one of the largest and certainly the most public environmental activism group in the world, and it has come a long way from the original grass-roots movement it was rooted in. True to Thoreau, they are beholden to no government, being funded exclusively by close to three million private funding organizations and countless private donors worldwide. They employ their wealth to organize peaceful demonstrations in dozens of countries and use their revenue to fund research projects the world over. And while Abbey would have probably mistrusted their size, he might have seen that global problems require a global organization to tackle them. And he would have certainly approved of some of their activities. Their techniques encompass the gamut from the peaceful (sit-ins, awareness campaigns) and official (support of pro-environment lobby groups, petitioning) to the more unofficial and obstructive (intercepting whaling boats, picketing train-tracks to stop nuclear waste transports, and occupying trees in danger of being felled, to name but a few). So the modern environment group represents, in a way, a synthesis of what both Thoreau and Abbey argued for: Not consenting to policies which go against one's conscience, resisting by peaceful means for as long as possible, and not being afraid of direct action should the need arise. The spirit of this is carried on in more peaceful and scientifically-minded groups such as the World Wildlife Fund, and also in more radical and direct-action oriented groups as Sea Shepherd and even Earth First!

Can you sink a rainbow? – Government reactions to direct action

Behavior by groups such as these did, in the fullness of time, create enemies for these groups (as it always does). And the bigger and more vocal the group, the bigger the enemy. Thoreau was put into jail not so much for but as a result of his activism, but for refusing to pay a particular poll tax. Abbey had an FBI investigation monitoring him for decades, and again and again activists were imprisoned for their activities.

While the apocalyptic future of Abbey's visions where activists are shot out of trees with automatic rifles like opossums in a Louisiana swamp has not come to pass (yet?), there was always a legal and personal risk involved with any sort of activism, and environmental activism is no exception here. One good example would probably be the sinking of the Greenpeace fleet flagship, 'Rainbow Warrior', carried out on July 10,

1985, by elements of the French secret service, DGSE. The boat had been moored in Auckland, New Zealand, to participate in blockading actions against French nuclear tests on the Moruroa Atoll. Wishing to prevent this from happening, the French government, not used to dealing with this sort of activism, tasked a military unit with stopping the operation, and the task force decided that the only way to do this would be to sink the ship.

The operation was a disaster for the French government. Of the eight agents covertly, and illegally, inserted into the territory of what was at the time a close ally of France, two were apprehended on charges of falsified passports after the incident, and were then exposed to be agents of the French government. This, along with the fact that the unit dispatched had misjudged the reactions of the ship's crew (there were two explosions, the first one was meant to drive the crew off the ship, so there would be no fatalities when the second, larger, device would detonate) which led to the drowning of photographer Fernando Pereira, which in turn caused a public outcry both in New Zealand and in several other countries. The fact that no foreign leaders condemned what was effectively an attack on sovereign territory, the lax to non-existent prosecution of those involved, as well as the positively colonial attitude the French government used in negotiations with the government in Wellington led the country to turn away from its traditional allies in Europe and the United States and more towards Asian-Pacific nations.

On the environmental front, the immediate aftermath of the incident saw a rash of calls for radical action which would have been much in the vein of Edward Abbey. It is often that the use of violence against essentially peaceful groups galvanizes those groups and those around them, creating a radical and often violent new group, but thankfully, something quite different happened. Spurred by the incident, a flotilla of private ships from New Zealand sailed to Moruroa to protest the nuclear tests, instead of just one ship. The catastrophic effects that the bombing had on international relations for France was one of the biggest factors leading to France halting their nuclear tests at the atoll.

In this example, the disproportional reaction by a government backfired and served the cause it was supposed to combat, much like the media campaign aimed at discrediting Rachel Carson. However, there are still world-wide crackdowns on environmentalists, and activists in general are still forced to occupy a sort of on-the-fence position between legality and illegality if they want their causes to be heard and addressed.

Conclusion Civil Disobedience and Political Implications

It is probably a safe bet to say that both Edward Abbey and Henry David Thoreau had some part in shaping modern activism culture. When concentrating on environmental activism, they may even be said to have contributed in almost equal amounts. Thoreau gave us a modern way of approaching non-violent resistance to states and projects, while Edward Abbey gave us a dubious framework of morality which enabled more violent direct action, as well as a fall-back plan of all-out resistance which one can only hope we will never need. Nevertheless, they have both left their mark on modern discourse, and even if their names will be forgotten, their contributions probably never will.

4 – Overall Conclusion and musings about the future

“What a long, strange trip it's been”

- Robert Hunter

Much has happened since a young man in Concord, Massachusetts, went into the woods to get to the bottom of the mystery of his life, and global events and the pace of life have picked up dramatically since another young man decided to savor his freedom before being drafted into the military by hitchhiking across America. While our time is probably no more violent than any other, with our new and ultra-connected lifestyle facilitated by the modern communication age and our most singularly wondrous tool, the Internet, it seems like every conflict is happening at our doorstep. This, along with prolific actions of international terrorist organizations has hardened the world's governments against their own people. Our present, the far and middle future for the two deceased authors, would probably seem quite dystopian to them. But at the same time, this interconnectedness has opened new avenues of possible courses of actions for interest groups world-wide, and has given the environmental movement political clout that has to be reckoned with. The hippies and tree huggers have indeed cut their hair and gotten jobs, and even if they do not realize it, they are indebted to one man from Concord and one man from Moab.

And while one cannot truthfully speak for the dead, I should think that Henry Thoreau would have been pleased with the way that some people took up his ideals of non-violence, as might the fact that alternative conflict resolutions have become viable and global phenomena. Abbey on the other hand would have probably felt vindicated by the increasingly hostile reactions to peaceful protests in countries such as the UK and the United States.

As far as the two authors are concerned, I feel that Larry McMurtry was justified in comparing Thoreau and Abbey, as while they do not share that many ideological similarities, they both faced similar problems in their writing and approached the same issues, only in ways unique to either of them. I found over the course of compiling my arguments for this paper that the parallels between *Desert Solitaire* and *Walden* were never straightforward and never easy. Especially when it comes to the radical stances of Abbey and the comparatively mild ones of Thoreau, the connection seems to fray at the edges, even in danger of being severed. But as both Roderick Nash and Daniel Payne, whose works were central to my research, have said about the authors, neither of them is easy to read. Both Thoreau and Abbey love to test their reader's attention, and they both love to show off their knowledge for the sake of underpinning an argument. They both lead the reader astray, as over a forest path or through a winding canyon, and time and again one is surprised by what is around the corner. It is never a placid spring of knowledge, ready to be savored, and more often than not the path leads into a patch of quicksand or a bramble patch. Both authors do not offer knowledge, they offer opinions and viewpoints, and from these viewpoints one has to extract and collect knowledge like water from a trickle spring.

And despite the connections being there, they always remain ambiguous, because even though it was not said about Thoreau as directly as about Abbey, they both resisted all labels, and comparing two such divergent and wildly independent personalities and their bodies of work is always a challenge not unlike trying to track a loon across a seemingly bottomless lake.

I have not been able to explore every avenue of thought that came up during the writing of this paper, and by necessity some things were left unsaid as my research into them was simply not complete. As stated in the survey at the beginning of this paper, it would certainly have been interesting to explore some more. Some passages from *Down the River with Henry Thoreau* would have hinted at further knowledge, and certainly reading *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack River* would have been interesting, but deadlines have a way of looming like dams, and while the literary explorer loses himself in the byways of a river, time marches ever on, until it is time to return the mind to solid ground, where thoughts are put to paper and forever trapped, like insects in amber.

Or as Thoreau said:

“If you have built castles in the sky, let not your dreams go to waste; Just

build the foundations under them."

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