CHAPTER – III

PASTORAL ECOLOGY AND WILDERNESS

“Wilderness is the state of complete awareness. That is why we need it.”

Gary Snyder

The pastoral as a major construction of nature that has its roots in the classical tradition, is considered both as a literary genre as well as a literary mode in various kinds of literature. In both these forms literary techniques are employed to present a simplified articulation of what is actually a complex social order in an exaggerated and romanticized style. This historical literary perspective of the pastoral as a representation of rural subjects and aspects of life set in a “Locus Amoenus”\(^2\), a beautiful rural place, is far removed from the concept of pastoral that we encounter in the contemporary literature. Yet, a relook at the historical status of the pastoral can provide a firm ground for an analysis of the modern American concept of pastoral ecology.

Terry Gifford’s classification of pastoral into three types of literary tradition clearly highlights the diversity that is available in the various constructions of nature. The first type had its origin as a concept of retreat from the cities and towns to the countryside. This form of pastoral was later developed into a major poetic genre in Europe during the Renaissance. The second type is more general in nature and includes all writings that implicitly or explicitly contrast the countryside with
the urban setting. In the third type of the pastoral the term is used mostly in a deprecatory sense as it idealizes the rural life to the extent of ignoring the difficulties of life and work conditions there in reality.3

The origin of the classical pastoral can be traced to the Hellenic period; Hesiod’s *Works and Days* that depicts a golden age when the human race lived in harmony with nature is considered the beginning of this genre. After Hesiod, pastoral poetry continued with Greek Theocritus’ *Idylls*, which represented nature as a “rural retreat and repose.”4 Greg Garrard points out how “[f]rom the outset, pastoral often used nature as a location or as a reflection of human predicaments, rather than sustaining an interest in nature in and for itself.”5 One exception was Virgil’s ‘Ecologues’ where some references to environmental problems that existed during the Roman civilization can be found. Another major characteristic of his work was the use of the ‘pathetic fallacy’, which was later degraded into a practice of wrongly attributing feelings and thoughts to nature.

The literature of the Romantic Revival which was a reaction against the Industrial Revolution championed the second type of pastoral that contrasted the countryside with the urban areas. In his analysis of the ‘romantic pastoral’ Greg Garrard conducts a comparative study of Wordsworth and John Clare and points out that for Wordsworth nature was ‘home’, not a place that needs to be protected:

“... in any case it seems clear that Wordsworth’s enthusiasm for ‘nature’ does not correspond to modern ecological concern. Wordsworth is, on the whole, far more interested in the relationship
of non-human nature to the human mind than he is in nature in and for itself."^6

Compared to him, John Clare (1793-1864) appears to be a true poet of nature and hence he can be considered as a forerunner of the green movement in literature.

Unlike the British Romantic models, American pastoral, with Thoreau as its pioneer, opted for a distinctive path for itself. While the pastoral is an old-world construction of nature, it is ‘wilderness, an icon of primitive nature that caught the imagination of the green literary movement in America. According to Greg Garrard, American nature writings exhibit the pastoral elements in two major forms:

“... the protagonist leaves the civilization for an encounter with non-human nature, then returns having experienced epiphany and renewal. Moreover, the more domestic forms of pastoral seen in American literature and culture seem to emphasise agrarianism, a political ideology associated with Thomas Jefferson that promoted a land owning farming citizenry as a means of ensuring a healthy citizenry.”^7

This classification of the pastoral in contemporary American literature is very realistic as almost all writers opt for one of these orientations.

The concept of wilderness as a pastoral refuge can be attributed to the pioneers’ act of leaving their homes to have an encounter with the untamed
landscapes of the New World. In that context wilderness has more implications than a mere refuge. Thoreau and Abbey have upheld wilderness as a place of sojourn in this sense. Wendell Berry’s works espouse the idea of farming as an ideal relationship with nature.

The influence of pastoral on ecocriticism is evident in the fact that its founding text, Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring*, invokes the ancient tradition of the pastoral to portray natural beauty and a harmonious relationship that humanity and nature have shared once. By tracing the transformation of the motif of peace and beauty into an ecocatastrophe Carson indicates implicitly how the traditional pastoral has undergone many changes in order to reflect a changed paradigm of ecological factors represented in literary works. The concept of nature as stable presence has been used to counterbalance the human sphere which is perceived as a space in a state of constant flux.

As Greg Garrard points out ecocriticism identifies two major orientations in the modern pastoral ecology. The first of these is based on the ecological theory of the early twentieth century U.S ecologist, Frederick Clements (1874-1945) who postulated a version of the pastoral in which the nature is seen as a stable and harmonious entity in the absence of human interference. Many contemporary American nature writers follow this school of thought and hence advocate a pristine wilderness that is maintained at a distance from the civilization. Nature or the wild becomes a dream, a lost Eden that should be regained in order to achieve complete freedom and peace. Though the Clementsian view had become outmoded by 1940s it nevertheless continues to mould the modern environmental discourse.
Modern ecologists like Colleen Clements and Richard Bewer critique this earlier concept of stasis and argue that though nature maintains a kind of equilibrium, it is ever changing in its own way:

“Ecosystems do maintain a kind of equilibrium, but it is characterized as much by change as by stasis: ‘Equilibrium, or balance, or stasis is not . . . a well-meshed, smoothly working, serene system but one representing many stasis breakdowns compensated for by new inputs which keep the oscillations within certain critical limits.’”

This post-modern ecological notion that nature, even when it is undisturbed by human beings, is not constant but in a state of flux, presents us with another paradigm within the ecocritical approach to nature writings. Espousing a pristine wilderness untouched by human actions appears to be an illusory idea and hence what ecocritics and many of the contemporary American writers advocate is the need to employ human discretion in the use of nature in order to lead a sustainable way of life.

Ecocriticism views wilderness as a touchstone of American identity. Thoreau’s *Walden* is usually considered as the pioneering work that upholds this wilderness tradition. American nature writings exhibit a variety of perceptions and representations of wild nature. It is seen as a place of recreation or a place of sojourn to escape from human civilization. Besides, wilderness is sometimes projected as a refreshing and invigorating refuge for the protagonist who leaves human society for an encounter with nature. In all these contexts wilderness is
juxtaposed with the urban-industrial culture. Garrard points out how ecocritic Leo
Marx observes a trend in American culture and literature to project ‘wilderness’ as
a ‘middle place’:

“. . . contemporary literary criticism, driven by preservationist
politics, sees the wild as the ultimate destination of American
pastoral, Leo Marx argued that it seeks a neo-classical “middle
landscape” between civilization and true wilderness. Here American
literature, emerging in the nineteenth century in the midst of massive
industrialization, can attempt to mediate between competing values,
‘the contradiction between rural myth and technological fact.’”¹⁰

David Mazel in an essay “‘A beautiful and thrilling specimen” George
Catlin, the Death of Wilderness and the Birth of National Subject’ quotes the words
of Roderick Nash to show how he endorses the ecocritical view that wilderness is
the touchstone of American identity:

“[Wilderness] was the basic ingredient of American civilization.
From the raw materials of physical wilderness, Americans built a
civilization; with the idea or symbol of wilderness they sought to
give that civilization identity and meaning.”¹¹

David Mazel agrees with Nash about the wealth of connotations that makes
any attempt to define the term ‘wilderness’ in a universally acceptable way a very
difficult effort. According to him, the term is “heavily freighted with meanings of a
personal, symbolic, and changing kind” and that “[t]here is no specific material
object that is wilderness. The term designates a quality . . . that produces a certain
mood or feeling in an individual and, as a consequence, may be assigned by that
person to a ‘specific place’.”12

Ecocritics’ interpretation of the ‘wilderness experiences’ of human beings is
quite similar to the ecopsychologists’ analysis of human psyche in relation to the
wild. Ecocritics believe that the various moods and feelings that originate in human
beings in the presence of wilderness do not originated in nature; instead they
“reflect a historically contingent mood of the speaker that has been projected back
on to nature.”13

David Mazel in order to probe into the psychological reasons that lead to a
bifurcation of the human world from the realm of wild again quotes the view of
Roderick Nash:

“Conceived as a region where a person was likely to get into a
disordered, confused, or “wild condition” writes Nash, the key
image is “that of a man in an alien environment where the
civilization that normally orders and controls his life is absent.”14

This view implicitly suggests that the sense of insecurity in human psyche is
one of the impulses that alienate man from wild nature.

To throw light upon the psychological implications of American nature
writing Mazel employs the argument of another prominent ecocritic Scott Slovic. In
his major work *Seeking Awareness in American Nature Writing: Henry Thoreau,
Annie Dillard, Wendell Berry, Barry Lopez* (1992) Slovic posits the
psychoanalytical orientation of much of American nature writing, thus enforcing
ecocriticism’s implicit relationship with ecopsychology. According to him, America’s best nature writers

“. . . are not merely or even primarily, analysts of nature or appreciators of nature – rather, they are students of human mind, [preoccupied] with the psychological phenomenon of awareness.”¹⁵

This observation helps David Mazel explain the significance of wilderness to American nature writers and what enables them to enlist the wild as the other constituent of human self.

Ecopsychologists attribute great significance to life in the wilderness as they believe that wilderness can contribute positively to the development of the human psyche and thus enable human beings to lead meaningful lives. Ecopsychologist Chellis Glendenning in her essay ‘Technology, Trauma and the Wild’ elaborates how living in the wilderness influences the psychology of human beings:

“Nature-based people lived every day of their lives in the wilderness. We are only beginning to grasp how such a life served the inherent expectations of the human psyche for development to full maturation and health. In nature-based people who today maintain some vestiges of their relationship to the Earth and their Earth-based cultures, we can discern a decided sense of ease with daily life, a marked sense of self and dignity, a wisdom that most of us can admire only from afar, and a lack of addiction and abuse that have become systemic in civilization.”¹⁶
According to Chellis Glendening, a life in the wild used to provide the primal people a sense of satisfaction through “physical nourishment, vital community, fresh food, continuity between work and meaning, unhindered participation in life experiences, personal choices, community decisions and spiritual connection with the natural world.”¹⁷ In the absence of these natural and healthy support systems human beings try to find temporary satisfaction in certain addictions and dysfunctions.

Ecopsychologist Steven Harper, while discussing the advantages of ‘wilderness therapy’ or ‘wilderness practice’ which is considered as “the boldest ecopsychological method”, observes that the modern people inhabiting the urban areas usually turn to wilderness to become whole again. In his essay, ‘The Way of wilderness’ included in the book Ecopsychology, describes the potential of wilderness to provide transformative experiences:

“When we are truly willing to step into the looking glass of nature and contact wilderness, we uncover a wisdom much larger than our small every day selves. Uninterrupted and undisturbed nature takes care of itself.”¹⁸

Steven Harper upholds ecopsychology’s major contention when he states that “[o]ur relationship with nature is more one of being than having. We are nature; we do not have nature.”¹⁹ Hence he considers wilderness as a “leaderless teacher” who can guide humanity to attain a state of attentiveness and awareness. This is an act of initiation that ensures a personal transformation, not through external preaching or force, but arising from within oneself. Once there is an inner
awakening the alienation between the self and nature is healed forever. Steven Harper delineates the transformation that reverberates through the body-mind system on linking with the wilderness in nature:

“Upon entering wilderness, one of the first things almost everyone experiences is an enlivening of the five senses. Suddenly, we are bathed in (and sometimes overloaded with) new sounds, awesome sights, interesting textures, different smells and tastes. This awakening of our senses, or perhaps better stated, “coming to our senses”, is a subtly powerful and underrated experience. People learn how greatly some of our basic modes of perception have been dulled in order to survive in the urban world; many have been deadened unnecessarily. As long as we remain unaware of the richness of our senses we have little choice about what we sense, and thus our perception is censored.”20

The change of perception that is the outcome of a sensory aliveness and alertness is potent enough to curtail the irresponsible ecocidal activities of humanity. Once man attains this mindfulness, he becomes capable of being one with wilderness which helps him identify his inner wilderness. Recognizing one’s own psychic wilderness and merging it with the physical wilderness outside is viewed in ecopsychology as reclaiming one’s ‘primordial self’. It ensures a harmonious life with nature:

“As we reexperience our forgotten primordial self, we have the opportunity to catch experiential glimpses of the origin of the
primordial images, the archetypes. The awareness of ourselves, our
environment, and the relationship between them, or simply the
awareness of our expanded self, is the experience of wholeness. We
must even reown our *incompleteness* if we are to become whole
again. The experience of wholeness, however brief, is perhaps the
most healing experience available to us.”

In an age when human beings are striving to lead a sustainable way of life,
reclaiming one’s ecological self and thus endorsing the ecological identity has
become very important. Wilderness is the arena that can enable man to achieve it.
An analysis of the perceptions and wilderness experiences of some of the
contemporary American nature writers foregrounds the convictions and
assumptions of ecopsychologists and ecocritics.

Joni Adamson’s observation about the ways in which the concept of
wilderness has undergone a paradoxical change in the writings of the contemporary
American environmental writers is relevant in the present context. Ecocritic Glen
Love has once pointed out how “literary pastoral tradition posits a natural world, a
green world, to which sophisticated urbanites withdraw in search of lessons of
simplicity which only nature can teach”; but the terms by which “pastoral’s
contrastive worlds are defined do, from an ecological viewpoint, distort the time
essence of each.” Affirming this view, Joni Adamson argues that the
environmental writers have stylized and simplified ‘the green world’ according to
their assumptions. Hence the pastoral set up has become
“. . . a place where the main character or characters retreat to sylvan groves in order to attain a critical vision of the good, simple life that will sustain them when they return to the world of human culture, which, despite its complexity, is really the most significant and desirable landscape.”23

Joni Adamson shares Glen Love’s perception of the salient features of the contemporary nature-oriented literature of America. According to Love, there is “. . . a greater understanding of [nature’s] complexity, a more radical awareness of its primal energy and stability and an acute questioning of the values of the supposedly sophisticated society to which we are bound.”24

Their mode of entry into the pastoral is different from the traditional pattern and the green world is given prominence in their writings over the apparently more desirable and sophisticated urban world. Many ecocritics like Joni Adamson feel that the emphasis on the natural world is realistic and relevant in the complex life situation of modern individuals:

“The pastoral desire to retreat from an increasingly technological, industrialized, urbanized environment into a simpler, cleaner, greener world is perhaps more understandable today than ever.”25

Edward Abbey considers his perception of the wild quite different from that of most of the Europeans. His attitude to nature is intensely biocentric:

“To most Americans, to most Europeans, natural beauty means the sylvan pastoral and green something productive and pleasant and
fruitful pastures with tame cows, a flowing stream with trout, a
cottage or cabin, a field of corn, a bit of forest, in the background a
nice snow-capped mountain range. At a comfortable distance.”

On the contrary, Abbey does not opt for such a shallow view. For him even
“a seared wasteland, a sinister and savage desolation . . . [is] infinitely
fascinating.” The significance of wilderness should not be measured by
humanity’s aesthetic or materialistic needs. Reflections on the desert wilderness
bring this awareness to Abbey:

“What is the meaning of desert? It means what it is. It is there, it will
be there when we are gone. But for a while we living things – men,
women, birds, that coyote howling far off on yonder stony-ridge –
we were a part of it all. That should be enough.”

Abbey is a staunch believer in the worth of wilderness and is convinced that
it needs no defense but more defenders. To him, science of ecology does not seem
to be an adequate reason for preserving wilderness. He clarifies that his idea of
preservation of wilderness is different from maintaining nature as a “living
museum”. According to him, there are better reasons for keeping wilderness as
wilderness, with its untainted freedom and purity:

“We need wilderness because we are wild animals. Every man needs
a place where he can go crazy in peace. Every boy scout deserves a
forest to get lost, miserable and starving in . . . For terror, freedom
and delirium. Because we need brutality and raw adventure, because
men and women first learned to love in, under and all around trees,
because we need for every pair of feet and legs about ten leagues of
naked nature, crags to leap from, mountains to measure by, deserts
to finally die in when the heart fails.”

Abbey has an intense conviction that wilderness is inevitable for civilization
as without wilderness the civilization can be doomed. Referring to the role of the
vast Siberian Forest in the lives of the prisoners of Solzhenitsyn’s labor camp, he
states what wilderness means to him. For humanity wilderness is “the hope of
escape, of refuge, of survival, of hope itself.”

Once man gets an opportunity to break out of the artificiality of human
cultural construction and enters the wilderness, he gains the strength and will power
to face the risks posed by wilderness:

“The boundary around wilderness area may be an artificial, self
imposed and sophisticated construction, but once inside that line you
discover the artificiality drop away; and the deeper you go, the
longer you stay, the more interesting things get – sometimes fatally
interesting. And that too is what we want: wilderness is and should
be a place where, as in Central Park, New York City, you have a fair
chance of being mugged and buggered by a shaggy fellow in a fur
coat – one of Pooh Bear’s big brothers. To be alive is to take risks;
to be always safe and secure is death.”

Besides the purity and freshness, Abbey here highlights the rugged nature of
the wild. Joni Adamson comments on Abbey’s preference “the rugged
individualism” in her analysis of Desert Solitaire, a work that Adamson considers
as in the tradition of Owen Wister’s *The Virginian* and Zane Grey’s *Riders of the Purple Sage*. According to her, Abbey seems to lament not only the taming of the wild, but also the passing of the rugged individuals who lived in free landscapes, who were symbols of freedom, vigor and creativity. In this context wilderness reminds one of the pioneers on the frontier who were rugged individuals. Joni Adamson quotes the environmental historian, William Cronon’s comments on Frederick Jackson Turner’s 1893 classic academic statement of the closing of the frontier and the myth of primitivism, ‘Frontier Thesis’. According to Cronon,

“The Turner’s thesis argued that easterners and immigrants, in moving to the wild unsettled lands of the frontier, shed the trappings of civilization, rediscovered their primitive, racial energies, reinvented direct democratic institutions, and thereby reinfused themselves with vigor, and independence and a creativity that were the source of American democracy and national character.”32

Cronon’s view shows how the wild country, apart from being a place of ‘religious redemption’ and ‘national renewal’, was also “the last bastion of rugged individualism.”33

Abbey’s description of his journey through Glen Canyon before it was dammed shows that he has shared the exhilarating freedom and the rejuvenating freshness of the wild that the pioneers might have experienced during the frontier days:

“Suppose, we say that wilderness invokes nostalgia, a justified not merely sentimental nostalgia for the lost America our forefathers
knew. The word suggests the past and the unknown, the womb of earth from which we emerged. It means something lost and something still present, something remote and at the same time intimate, something buried in our blood and nerves, something beyond us and without limit.”

The image of the lost wilderness that Abbey presents has parallels in American literature. Ecocritic J. Gerard Dollar in an essay, ‘Misogyny in the American Eden: Abbey, Cather, and Maclean’, refers to the “Wilderness Edenic”, the twentieth century version of the Western Eden:

“. . . the presentation, and indeed veneration, of the Western wilderness as a site for men both to escape women and to bond with other men . . . usually associated with Hemingway, is disturbingly widespread.”

Abbey’s description of his “magical and Edenic journey through the doomed Glen Canyon of Southern Utah”, in the company of his friend, Newcomb, is considered to be one of this kind:

“Here we find the Western wilderness as a paradise, the natural world as a place of refuge, an escape from a debased civilization and the site of self-discovery, even epiphany. Glen Canyon is Abbey’s cathedral; this is where he comes face to face with the sacred. The idyllic river journey leads Abbey and his friend back to Eden . . . The liberating wilderness experience Abbey ecstatically celebrates is
founded on a wilderness/civilization (or purity/debasement) binary that he frequently invokes . . .”

During the trip down Colorado River, leaving Newcomb in their temporary camp, Abbey goes alone for an excursion into a side canyon. The twists and turns of the canyon, its pure, crystal-clear streams, mysterious and inviting sub canyons to the sides, magically green cottonwood, grass and other plants, the silence of the place broken only by the singing canyon wren – all these touch Abbey deeply, inspiring him to sense the mysterious spiritual meaning of nature:

“Is this at last the locus Dei? There are enough cathedrals and temples and altars here for a Hindu pantheon of divinities. Each time I look up one of the secretive little side canyons I half expect to see not only the cottonwood tree rising over its tiny spring – the leafy god, the desert’s liquid eye – but also a rainbow-colored corona of blazing light, pure spirit, pure being, pure disembodied intelligence, about to speak my name.”

Abbey feels that if man fails to find solace in nature and depends on “fantasies of the supernal” it is because of a weak imagination that gets exhausted very easily:

“If a man’s imagination were not so weak, so easily tired, if his capacity for wonder not so limited, he would abandon forever such fantasies of the supernal. He would learn to perceive in water, leaves and silence more than sufficient of absolute and marvelous, more than enough to console him for the loss of ancient dreams.”
His absolute faith in the eternal power of wilderness prompts Abbey to declare:

“'I am not an atheist but an earthiest. Be true to earth.'”\(^{39}\)

Abbey considers his love for wilderness as a hunger and more than that, as an expression of his loyalty to earth. Such a deep love makes him redefine the ‘Original Sin’:

“'... it is also an expression of loyalty to earth, the earth which bore us and sustains us, the only home we shall ever know, the only paradise we ever need – if only we had eyes to see. Original Sin, the true original sin, is the blind destruction for the sake of greed of this natural paradise which lies all around us – if only we were worthy of it.'”\(^{40}\)

Abbey is quick to clarify that the concept of earthly paradise is inclusive not only of the beautiful and ideal, but the ugly, weak and cruel too. It has disease, degeneration and death too in it:

“Paradise is not a garden of bliss and changeless perfection where the lions lie down like lambs... and the angels and cherubim and seraphim rotate in endless idiotic circles, like clockwork, about an equally inane and ludicrous – however roseate – Unmoved Mover. - - -the Paradise of which I write here and now, the actual, tangible, dogmatically real earth on which we stand.”\(^{41}\)

Once Abbey is deep in wild nature, “in the lonely, sweet, remote primeval world”, away from the dry world of men and women, he feels ecstatic:
“Wilderness. The word itself is music.

Wilderness, wilderness . . . We scarcely know what we mean by the term, though the sound if it draws all whose nerves and emotions have not yet been irreparably stunned, deadened, numbed by the caterwauling of commerce, the sweating scramble for profit and domination.

Why such allure in the very word? What does it really mean? Can wilderness be defined in the words of government officialdom as simply “A minimum of not less than 5000 contiguous acres of roadless area? This much may be essential in attempting a definition but it is not sufficient, sometimes more is involved.”

Abbey’s ecstatic descriptions of Edenic wilderness can be found in his novels too. In Monkey Wrench Gang Seldom Seen Smith, during his journey down Colorado River, fondly recalls similar trips earlier, and relives the inimitable, insatiable pleasures that wilderness alone can offer:

“This was the forty-fifth trip down the Grand Canyon for Smith, and so far as he could measure, its pleasure was not staled by repetitions. But then no two river trips were ever quite alike. The river, the canyon, the desert world was always changing, from moment to moment, from miracle to miracle, with in the firm reality of mother earth. River, rock, sun, blood, hunger, wings, joy – this is the real, Smith would have said . . . All the rest is androgynous theosophy.
All the rest is transcendental transvestite transactional scientology or whatever fad of the day, the vogue of the weak.”

Dr. Sarvis’ observation about modern man’s attitude towards wilderness betrays Abbey’s cynicism about humanity’s irresponsible and ignorant ways:

“The reason there are so many people on the river these days is because there are too many people everywhere. . . The wilderness once offered man a plausible way of life. Now it functions as psychiatric refuge. Soon there will be no wilderness. . . Soon there will be no place to go. Then the madness becomes universal. And the universe goes mad.”

Abbey pities the modern man inhabiting the urban-industrial society who has exiled himself from earth and isolated himself “within a synthetic prison of his own making”. He may not even become aware of the pleasure that he has lost or how essential wilderness is to human life:

“Wilderness is not a luxury but a necessity of the human spirit, and as vital to our lives as water and good bread. 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 tries to probe into the depth of human psyche to identify the irrational forces that work behind the ecocidal activities of modern men inhabiting the urban landscape. Standing alone near the Rainbow Bridge, listening to the
“deep dead stillness” of the canyon, he meditates on the troubled psychic landscape of these men:

“All alone in the silence, I understand for a moment the dread which many feel in the presence of primeval desert, the unconscious fear which compels them to tame, alter or destroy what they cannot understand; to reduce the wild and prehuman to human dimensions. Anything rather than confront directly the antehuman, the other world which frightens not through danger or hostility but in something far worse – its implacable indifference.”

As Scott Slovic has pointed out, Abbey, the writer, leaves nature and enters the psychic landscape of man for a deeper understanding of nature and the realization he gains can provide a vantage point for environmentalists.

Abbey juxtaposes culture and wilderness in almost all his writings, attributing contradictory characteristics to them. In ‘The Prelude’ to his novel A Fool’s Progress: an honest novel while portraying the childhood days of the protagonist, Henry, the school is symbolically set opposite to the woods on Allegheny Mountain,

“... the green and vernal, the deep and haunted the dark transpiring forests of the Appalachian hill...”

Henry’s decision to return to his parents’ farm in order to rise out of the ruins of his life in Arizona, shows his conviction that Stump Creek is home, a symbol of health. In a letter announcing his decision to his brother, Henry writes:
“We got to draw the line somewhere and may be Stump Creek is the place.”

Even in an inebriated state, Henry’s sense of perception is sharp, when his thoughts wander to the evergreen nature. His evocation of the regenerative power of wild nature reminds one of Hopkins’ poem, ‘Spring’:

“There is a kind of order in the natural world. The laws of compensation continue to function. For every action a reaction, for every blow a counterblow, for every torn leaf a fresh bird, for every death a new life. The pulse of the spring of life cannot be suppressed. No matter how much iron and cement and asphalt and Astroturf and Du Pont fiberglass and driller’s mud and Hereford Cowpies they pour upon earth, the grass will overcome. Will come and over-come. But it may take a while.”

Abbey’s belief in the spiritual power of nature is reflected in the words of Henry when he defines his journey home to the wooded hills as a pilgrimage to the East. Once he enters the wooded canyon country he senses an absolute freedom. Throwing his head back and with his hands on the wheel, he howls loudly like a hound dog:

“His dog joins in, they howl together forlorn and furious . . . they put everything in and get everything out.”

Reflecting Abbey’s perception, Henry paints the picture of Eden in American wilderness, projecting it as a site for escape:
“In to the sweet air and the smell of yellow pine, into the grasslands among the ancient cinder cones, into the freedom of the open range. . . Good God, it is a relief to escape, if only for an hour, the squalid anthills, big or little, show Low or Shanghai of the twentieth century man. A world without an open country would be a Universal Jail.”

Joni Adamson critically analyses the kind of relationship Abbey maintained with the wilderness:

“He did not go back to nature for recreation, an activity he associated with cars and trailers and motor boats and water skiing. Rather, he held himself above all that; he was participating with the wilderness, spiritually re-creating himself in the tradition of Henry David Thoreau confronting immediately and directly the bare bones of existence.”

The four years when Abbey worked as a fire lookout, he had been away from the world of human beings. During this period, he, in the company of the wild nature, had undergone a transformation which was brought about by a sharpening of sensibilities. He became acutely aware of himself and of all other beings which are alive and sentient stationed all around him. In Journey Home: Some Words in Defense of American West he narrates his experience:

“Walking there day after day, among those slim, trim trees, so innocent (it seems) in their white and green or white and gold, you become aware after not only of trees but also of trees’ awareness of
you. What they felt I have no notion . . . But their conscious presence was unmistakable. I was not alone.”

A sharpened sense of awareness enables Abbey to perceive the mysterious element in nature experiences. He exclaims:

“The life of trees. We know so little about this strange planet we live on, this haunted world where all answers lead to more mystery.”

Even while floating down Colorado River, Abbey feels this deep sense of mystery:

“One wishes to go on. On this great river one could glide forever – and here we discover the definition of bliss, salvation, heaven, all the old Mediterranean dreams: a journey from wonder to wonder, drifting through eternity in to ever-deeper, always changing grandeur through beauty continually surpassing itself: the ultimate Homeric voyage.”

It is this deep mystery involved in the life in nature that makes it beyond the comprehension of human beings. The features that are characteristic of the wild are perceivable, yet they do not yield to human rationale:

“We think we perceive character or “personality” in the shape, face, eyes of our fellow humans; why not find something similar in the appearance of plants – especially trees? Obviously analogues come at once to mind: the solemnity of the dark, heavy, brooding spruce; the honest, hopeful nobility of the yellow pine, the anxiety of white fir . . .”
Abbey's perception of desert wilderness as a refuge from loneliness and isolation from men of his kind is equally mysterious and ironic. During his stay in Arches National park, he starts using the housetrailer as a mere storage place and kitchen because the artifacts of America that surround him inside it often remind him of Albuquerque, the city that he has left behind. Staying outside the housetrailer enables him to overcome such loneliness – inducing memories:

“. . . living outdoors on the terrace enables me to escape that other form of isolation, the solitary confinement of the mind.”\textsuperscript{57}

When he sits near the fire of a small heap of burning juniper to have his meal, he feels that the panorama of the vast desert and its distant mountains seems to invite him to contemplate on the larger world around him. His mind wanders from the narrow confines of his inner world,

“. . . to contemplate a far larger world, one which extends into a past and into a future without any limits known to the human kind.”\textsuperscript{58}

Abbey removes his shoes and digs his toes into the sand; the contact that he makes with the wild earth provides him an overwhelming sense of exhilaration, powerful enough to fill him with equanimity. Yet this self-awareness is temporary:

“Certainly I was still by myself . . . but in the midst of such a grand tableau, it was impossible to give full and serious consideration to Albuquerque. All that is human is melted with the sky and faded out beyond the mountains and felt, as I feel – is it a paradox? – that a man can never find or need better companionship than that of himself.”\textsuperscript{59}
Joni Adamson in an analysis of Desert Solitaire in an essay, ‘Abbey’s country – Desert Solitaire and the Trouble with Wilderness’ places Abbey in the tradition of John Wesley Powel, John C. Van Dyke, Mary Austin and Joseph Krutch as he writes lyrically about American west. Endorsing Don Scheese’s assessment of Desert Solitaire, Adamson points out how Abbey differs from other nature writers:

“Distinguished by his harsh, iconoclastic, extravagant narrative voice, Abbey advocated not just love for wild lands but political activism. Because he openly participated in monkey-wrenching acts to preserve wilderness (such as pulling up a government road surveyor’s stakes), Abbey became a kind of green prophet, drawing many a back packer and prospective monkey-wrencher into the “back to nature” cult of 1960s and the “back to the wilderness” movement of the 1970s.”60

It is his advocacy of political activism for the preservation of wilderness that differentiates Abbey from other nature writers.

There is another very peculiar argument that Abbey puts forward both in Desert Solitaire and in The Journey Home as a reason for the preservation of wilderness. He feels that democracy is facing a threat of extinction and in such a situation even the relatively open societies can also succumb to dictatorship. Then the increasing social conflicts will inevitably force the authoritarian elements “to suppress individual freedoms, to utilize the refined techniques of police surveillance . . . in order to preserve . . . the status quo, the privileged position of
those who now so largely control the economic and governmental institutions of the United States.”

In the* Desert Solitaire* too, Abbey expresses the same fear when he tries to emphasize the need to preserve wilderness:

“. . . the wilderness should be preserved for political reasons. We may need it someday not only as a refuge from excessive industrialism but also as a refuge from the authoritarian government, from political oppression. Grand Canyon, Big Bend, Yellow Bend, Yellowstone and High Sierras may be required to function as basis for guerrilla warfare against tyranny.”

Abbey admits that his fear about the threat to democracy and individual freedom may be a fantasy, yet he is not ready to rule out the chance as history demonstrates that the personal liberty is in danger from within or without the state. Technology, by providing more effective weapons has worsened the situation:

“The value of wilderness . . . as a base for resistance to centralized domination is demonstrated by recent history. In Budapest and Santo Domingo, for example, popular revolts were easily and quickly crushed because an urbanized environment gives the advantage to the power with the technological equipment. But in Cuba, Algeria and Vietnam the revolutionaries, operating in mountain, desert and jungle hinterlands with active or tacit support of a thinly dispersed population, have been able to overcome or at least fight to draw
official establishment forces equipped with all of the terrible weapons of twentieth century.”63

Abbey seems to harbor an anxiety that if ever America plans to have a dictatorial regime to rule over its people, it will try to employ oppressive techniques. It will

“. . . 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.”64

Hence he views the preservation of wilderness as a strategic weapon against the encroachment of industrial estate on nature as well as against any anti-democratic political activism.

Wilderness, according to Abbey, is an inevitable entity for a meaningful human life. In his writings he affirms his faith in its tremendous power and grace:

“We can have wilderness without freedom; we can have wilderness without human life at all; but we cannot have freedom without leagues of open space beyond the cities, where boys and girls, men and women, can live at least part of their lives under no control but their own desires and abilities, free from any and all direct administration by their fellow men.”65

Human life is inextricably linked to wilderness and the preservation of the wild can be considered as one of the main goals of life. Abbey views wilderness as
a lost Eden or a refuge, a station to fight against the onslaught of industrialism or authoritarianism. He admits that these perceptions of wilderness may be censured by others as utopian and too idealistic. Yet he argues that the chances of idealistic situations becoming real cannot be completely ruled out in the modern context:

“There comes a point at every crisis in human affairs when the ideal must become the real . . . If we wish to save what is good in our lives and give our children a taste of good life, we must bring a halt to the ever-expanding economy and put the growth maniacs under medical care.”66

Abbey’s love for wilderness, especially the desert wilderness, was a love at first sight and it is an intense and passionate love that makes him possessive about it. In The Journey Home he expresses his passion, may be implicitly admitting the strangeness of that feeling:

“When I take on my next incarnation, my bones will remain bleaching nicely in a stone gulch under the rim of some far away plateau way out there in the back of beyond. An unrequited and excessive love, inhuman no doubt, but painful anyhow, especially when I see my desert under attack . . . This kind of love that makes a man selfish, possessive, irritable. If you are thinking of a visit, my natural reaction is like a rattlesnake’s – to warn you off.”67

It is this passionate love for wilderness that inspires Abbey to exhort all lovers of the wild to resort to any necessary action, even if it takes the form of militant activism, for the preservation of the wild:
“To save what wilderness is left in the American Southwest – and in the Southwest only wilderness is worth saving - we are going to need all recruits we can get. All the hands, heads, bodies, time, money, efforts we can find . . . those who learn to love what is spare, rough, wild, underdeveloped, and broken will be willing to fight for it, will help resist the strip-miners, highway builders, land developers, weapon testers, power producers, tree chainers, clearcutters, old drillers, dam beavers, subdividers . . . before that zinc-hearted, termite-brained, squint-eyed, near-sighted, greedy crew succeeds in completely californicating what still survives of the great American desert.”

Authentic experience of the wild is what Abbey yearned for throughout his life. He contrasts such experiences with the “merely synthetic experience of books, novels, TV, [and] regular urban living.” The sense of oneness that he feels with wilderness is quite similar to the ecopsychologists’ concept of ‘primal matrix’. He describes such an experience that he had in the desert in Beyond the Wall:

“The power of the desert, of the planet, surges like electricity up through my boots . . . to heart and head and out through song into the moony sky, completing the circuit.”

The solitary walks through the desert wilderness have gifted Abbey a rare state of awakening that resembles a dream. Resting by the side of a primitive road in the desert, beside the dim tracks winding through a wild landscape that looked like some medieval legend, he feels an unusual sensation of waking up:
“It was a sensation, a suffusion, of absolute well-being, a warm, buzzing, friendly, leisurely dream, refreshing as good water, deep as this sky, old as those hills over yonder, leaving with me an afterglow of sweetness and happiness that now, ten hours later, I still recall with a sense of serene delight . . . A brief awakening that slips through my grasp, elusive as a rainbow of light, when I try to cling to it.”  

It is these kinds of invigorating, rejuvenating wilderness experiences which are an integral part of Abbey’s life that have essentially framed the author’s attitude towards nature. They have provided a multidimensional character to Abbey’s wilderness perception. In his writings one can often find descriptions of his experience of ‘enlivening of the five senses’ and a “reexperience” of the ‘forgotten primordial self’ that the ecopsychologists consider essential for a holistic development of a healthy psyche.

Ecocritic Joni Adamson feels that Abbey’s vision of the desert as a “wilderness escape” indicates a thorough historical shift in the perception of the natural world. To prove this point she draws attention to the views of William Cronon expressed in his essay, ‘The Trouble with Wilderness’:

“ . . . only 250 years ago in American and European history, ‘wilderness’ meant ‘deserted’, ‘savage’, ‘desolate’, ‘barren’ – connotations that were anything but positive. But by the end of nineteenth century this view had changed. Henry David Thoreau’s 1862 declaration that in the wilderness was the preservation of the
world suggests the shift in values occurring in the United States. As great expanses of wild country fell under the plow and the ax, many people under the influence of Romanticism such as Wordsworth and John Muir came increasingly to value those ever-shrinking rugged terrains in which one might go to perceive the divine or the sublime in nature. No less important, adds Cronon, “was the powerful romantic attraction of primitivism, dating back at least to Rousseau – the belief that the best antidote to the ills of an overly refined and civilized modern world was a return to the simpler, more primitive living.”

Following the psychological tradition of contemporary American writing, Gary Snyder perceives wilderness as a physical extension of the unconscious, which projects it as a state of mind that represents the freedom and the untapped possibilities of the unconscious. In this perception, wilderness and unconscious mind become the unexplored and explorable topographical and psychic realms respectively. They are fields of activities and sources of power and personal energy, characterized by remoteness and mystery; two unexplored realms “enticing yet forbidding.”

In Turtle Island as well as in The Practice of the Wild Snyder examines the origin and the semantic changes the two words ‘nature’ and ‘wilderness’ have undergone. According to him, the term ‘nature’ has two meanings – (i) outdoors, as a world apart from the features and products civilization and human will, the physical world including all living things and (ii) the natural world or its collective
objects and phenomena, including human actions and intentions. Wilderness is seen as

“... a place where the wild potential is fully expressed. As a field where the diversity of living and non-living flourish, it represents wholeness.”74

Gary Snyder desires to redefine humanism and democracy to provide representation to the non-human world. He feels that he has to represent his constituency which is wilderness and this desire seems to be an expression of his ‘ecological conscience’:

“I wish to be a spokesman for a realm that is not usually represented either in intellectual chambers or in the chambers of government.”75

According to Snyder, this wilderness that he wants to give voice to exists at two levels – a ‘wilderness outside’, which consists of the “wild nature, the wild, self-contained, self-informing ecosystems” and the ‘other wilderness’, which is the wilderness within human beings.76 Knowledge about the interrelatedness and interdependence of human and non-human prompts Snyder to accept plants and animals as ‘people’ of the wild land that our planet is.

Snyder considers wilderness as the old habitat of human beings; hence he perceives man’s relationship to it as an inseparable one. This perception links human world to wilderness for ever:

“The world is nature, and in the long run inevitably wild, because the wild as the process and essence of nature is also an ordering of impermanence.”77
According to this view the preservation of the wild is not an obligation of human beings. By preserving the wild man is actually preserving his own world. Hence, Snyder calls for a ‘new world’ where “the civilization can live fully and creatively with wilderness.”

Knowing the wild becomes the real education for man. In the poems in ‘Lookout Journal’, the first section of Snyder’s Earth House Hold, he highlights the educational aspect of wilderness:

“One does not need universities and libraries
One needs to be alive to what is about
Saying “I don’t care.” (p.2)

In Practice of the Wild he states that the lesson that humanity must learn from nature is to live without causing harm to other human and non-human beings. According to Snyder, nature is a text that always remains ready for human scrutiny:

“A text is information stored through time. The stratigraphy of rocks, layers of pollen in a swamp, the outward expanding circles in the trunk of a tree, can be seen as texts. The calligraphy of rivers winding back and forth over the land leaving layer upon layer of traces of previous river beds is a text.”

Snyder believes that the dichotomy of the civilized and the wild is an artificial separation that the ignorant man has created for his own ends and that it has to be resolved as early as possible. He argues that human species itself is wild in nature as “our breeding has never been controlled for the purpose of any specific yield.” To substantiate this argument he highlights Thoreau’s description of the
wild as a savage mother who combines love as well as cruelty and indifference in her nature.

The wilderness perception of Snyder is moulded by his knowledge of the pre-agricultural cultures and of the principles of Buddhism. He describes how the pre-agricultural people considered the wild as sacred; even in the early stages of the agrarian culture when parts of the wild land was transformed into agricultural fields, it was ritually cultivated, giving due respect to its sacredness. Snyder traces the agricultural practices which gradually destroyed the sacredness of the wild. In the fertility religions the idea of cultivation was conceptually extended to describe a kind of training in social forms that guarantees membership in an elite class. But the practice of agrarian theology still degraded the wild. Wilderness came to be vested with certain negative connotation. Snyder feels that the consequences of this development were negative. He seems to oppose the metaphor of weeding out the wild from human nature which is usually employed in agrarian theology. Using the metaphor of weeding out the wild aspects in order to refine the human nature becomes problematic because it provides a negative connotation to the concept of wild. To illustrate this argument he points out how “the gradual weeding out the wild from the natures of the members of the ‘Bos’ and ‘sus’ clans – cattle and pigs – gradually changed animals which were intelligent and alert in the wild into sluggish meat making machines.”

Another dimension of the modern agricultural practice that Snyder criticizes is the trend of considering a land ‘good’ only if it is ‘productive’ according to the plans of the cultivators. Usually such a ‘good’ land is placed in opposition to the
‘wild, which again projects the wild as something that is unproductive and hence bad. Snyder opposes this view:

“. . . yet wild nature cannot be called unproductive; no plant in the endless mosaic of micro and macro communities is ever out of place.”82

This awareness of the intrinsic worth of all things in nature makes Snyder advocate the ‘old ways’, ‘the lores that predated agriculture.’ According to him,

“The kings of Israel began to cut down the sacred groves, and the Christians finished the job. The idea that “wild” must also be “sacred” returned to the Occident only with the Romantic Movement. This nineteenth century rediscovery of wild nature is complex European phenomenon – a reaction against formalistic rationalism and enlightened despotism that invoked feeling, instinct, new nationalism and a semantised folk culture. It is only from very old place-centered cultures that we hear of sacred groves, sacred land, in a context of genuine belief and practice. Part of that context is the tradition of the commons: “good” land becomes private property; the wild and sacred are shared.”83

In the essay ‘Passage to More Than India’ included in Snyder’s Earth House Hold the author refers to the Buddhists’ attitude to wild nature:

“Buddhist Tantrism, or Vajrayana as it is known, is probably the finest and the modern statement of the ancient Shamanistic –yogic-Gnostic-socioeconomic view: that mankind’s mother is Nature and
Nature should be tenderly respected; that man’s life and destiny is
growth and enlightenment in self-disciplined freedom, that the
divine had been made flesh and that flesh is divine; . . . This has
been harshly suppressed in the past as threatening to the church and
state. Today, on the contrary, these values seem almost biologically
essential to the survival of humanity. ⁸⁴

Snyder supports the wisdom of many tribal cultures in which making a
contact with the wild realm of nature is considered an essential stage in the passage
to maturity. Without a link with the wild, a man can never become a complete man:

“In many American Indian cultures it is obligatory for every member
to get out of the society, out of the human nexus, and “out of his
head”, at least once in his life. He returns from his solitary vision
quest with a secret name, a protective animal spirit, a secret song. It
is his ‘power’. The culture honors the man who has visited other
realms.” ⁸⁵

The authentic wilderness experiences are believed to have the potential to
provide rare and powerful states of mind and powerful energy flows from the earth
and the wild nature to human bodies. This process is the source of tremendous and
unlimited power to the human mind. Snyder feels that Americans have lost the
opportunities to experience such authentic wilderness experiences. Still wilderness
is a very significant entity in the life of America and it is understood in a different
sense:
“For Americans, “nature” means wilderness, the untamed realm of total freedom – not brutish and nasty, but beautiful and terrible.”86

Snyder considered Rousseau’s concept of ‘Noble Savage’ as one of the most remarkable systems of thought in America. It projects the wild as more educative and rational than any civilized society. Supporting this image of the wild, Snyder opines that a class-structured society raises a barrier to any attempt to imbibe certain values from nature because such a society reflects a kind of mass ego and it is essential for it to transcend this ego:

“To transcend the ego is to go beyond society as well. “Beyond” there lies, inwardly, the unconscious. Outwardly the equivalent of unconscious is the wilderness: both of these terms meet one step even further on, as one.”87

Snyder thinks that poetry is the most potent medium to express the rare states of mind created by wilderness experiences. Hence he considers poetry as an ‘ecological survival technique’.

While deliberating on the threats to wilderness in modern times, Snyder seems to be optimistic. He does not believe in the statistics showing the small percentage of wilderness that exists in America. According to Snyder, “wilderness may temporarily dwindle, but wilderness won’t go away” because,

“By shifting scales, it is everywhere: incredible populations of fungi, moss, mold, yeast and such that surround and inhabit in. . . Exquisite complex beings in their energy webs inhabiting the fertile corners of the urban world in accord with the rules of the wild
system, the visible hardy stalks and stems of vacant lots and railroads, the persistent raccoon squads, bacteria in the loam and in our yogurt.”88

It is quite evident that Snyder expects the wild to thrive despite the loss of many life forms in the recent past due to human agency. While projecting the wild as indestructible, Snyder is aware that though it may thrive in and around urban landscape, it may not be available in future as an invigorating spiritual presence to man, if he does not lead a sustainable way of life. In order to clarify this view he focuses on the subtle differences between ‘nature’ and ‘wilderness’:

“Nature is subject, they say, of science. Nature can be deeply probed, as in microbiology. The wild is not to be made subject or object in this manner; to be approached it must be admitted from within, as a quality intrinsic to who we are. Nature is ultimately in no way endangered, wilderness is. The wild is indestructible, but we might not see the wild.”89

To prove that wilderness can exist with an urban culture, he gives the example of modern Japan, which could preserve its “sacred landscape consciousness” intact along with its industrial development:

“Even in the midst of the onrushing industrial energy of the current system, shrine lands still remain untouchable. (jinja and omiya) . . . We are grateful for these microscopic traces of salvaged land in Japan because the rule in shrines is that (away from buildings and paths) you never cut anything, never maintain anything, never clear
or thin anything. No hunting, no fishing, no thinning: leaving us a very few stands of ancient forests right inside the cities. . . Without the shrines we wouldn’t know so well what the original Japanese forest might have been.”

Though Snyder approves the preservation of these ancient shrines, he is against this kind of compartmentalization of the good, sacred wild and the urban-industrial landscape because it implies a license to degrade urban landscape limitlessly. His contention is that if a land is good, it is because the soil there has wildness in it.

Like Abbey, Snyder too highlights the spiritual aspect of wilderness experiences. He describes a journey through wilderness as a ritual:

“Step-by-step breath-by-breath walk up a trail, into those snowfields, carrying all on the back – is considered as wilderness pilgrimage – an “ancient” set of gestures as to bring a profound sense of body-mind joy.”

In *Practice of the Wild*, Snyder laments the loss of many species. He accepts death as a part of natural process, but feels that the loss of lineages is something that must be rigorously resisted. This is because Snyder considers every species as a pilgrim through time and hence its loss is irreversible.

“The industry prizes the younger and the middle-aged trees that keep their symmetry, keep their branches of even length and angle. But let there also be really old trees who can give up all sense of propriety and begin throwing their limbs out in extravagant gestures, dancing
poses displaying their insouciance in the face of mortality, holding themselves available to whatever the world and the weather might propose. *I look up to them:* they are like the Chinese Immortals, they are Hamshan and Shi-de sort of characters – to have lived that long is to have permission to be eccentric, to be the poets and painters among trees, laughing, ragged, and fearless. They make me almost look forward to old age.”92

Snyder’s love for the wild seems to be a sincere and selfless love which resembles the love that every man feels for his own life.

Wendell Berry possesses a holistic perception of wilderness in which nature in its fundamental state is considered wild. A man lives in the midst of wilderness, in a small clearing that it has allotted us out of its tolerance of our presence. As it is hospitable to us wilderness can also be dangerous for humanity as we are completely dependent on it:

“We are creatures obviously subordinate to nature, dependent upon a wild world that we did not make. And yet we are joined to that larger nature by our own nature.”93

Wild nature becomes humanity’s historical base which holds its biological and cultural roots. Hence, Berry considers the preservation of the pristine and undiminished world of wilderness as the prime responsibility of man as it is the most significant legacy that he has inherited:

“We began in a world that was pristine, undiminished by anything we have done, at various times in our history the unspoilt wilderness
has again imposed itself; its charming and forbidding invitation, upon our consciousness. It is important that we should preserve this memory. We need places in reach of every community where children can imagine the prehistoric and the beginning of history: the unknown, the trackless, the first comers.”

Berry agrees with Abbey that humanity needs wilderness untouched by man, some places that Abbey calls “absolute wilderness”. Hence Berry too accepts the preservation of wilderness as a necessary agenda in human life:

“The reason to preserve wilderness is that we need it. We need wilderness of all kinds, large and small, public and private. We need to go now and again into places where our work is disallowed, where our hopes and plans have no standing. We need to come into the presence of the unqualified and mysterious formality of creation.”

Wilderness, according to Berry, can make a man humble by erasing his ego and sense of false pride, which usually inculcate a feeling in him that he must do something on every place that he comes across, in order to develop it. Only an encounter with the wild can cure man of this urge:

“We need places that we forbear to change, or influence by our presence or on even by our understanding, places that we accept as influences upon us, . . . that we enter with the sense, the pleasure of having nothing to do there; places that we must enter with a kind of cultural nakedness, without comforts or tools, to submit rather than
conquer. We need what other ages would have called sacred
groves.”96

Berry considers wilderness as an essential standard of civilization and a
cultural model. The undisturbed and the unexplored wild land can act as a standard
to measure the impacts of human culture on nature:

“We need wilderness as a standard of civilization and a cultural
model. Only by preserving areas where natural processes are
undisturbed can we preserve an accurate sense of the impact of the
civilization upon its natural sources. Only if we know how land was
can we tell how it is . . . As a cultural model, the wilderness is
indispensable.”97

Berry contends that wilderness has significant implications as it is linked
not only to humanity’s present, but also to its past and future. Wilderness is our
“source’ and ‘preserver’: it is thus “an essential measure of our history and
behavior.’ Hence it is indispensable for the study of human nature. Similarly,
wilderness can help man to define his potentials and possibilities. The preservation
of the wild becomes inevitable as humanity has to assess itself in relation to it at a
scale that extends from the present to the past and future.98

Concern for wilderness is considered to be an essential attribute of any
conservation movement. While analyzing the wilderness conservation movement in
America, Berry appreciates its activists for their awareness about the severity of
human influences on natural world, but censures their tendency to efface the human
presence in order to preserve the wild as it is as an act that has serious and long-standing implications:

“The conservation movement cannot enact properly man’s relationship to the world. They divide the country into that land they wished to preserve and enjoy (the wilderness areas) and that which they consigned to use by others . . .”99

This limited vision of the conservationists is problematic as it creates a disastrous split of the land into ‘vacation-oriented’ and ‘crisis-oriented’. As a contrast to such ecologically cataclysmic trends, wilderness was an integral part of the human world in ‘primitive’ cultures; it acted as a yardstick to man’s realization of his actual position in the universe. Like Snyder, Berry also considers the primeval concept of wilderness as a prototype of the modern society’s revived interest in seeking enlightenment in the wild:

“Until modern times we focused a great deal of the best of our thoughts upon such rituals of return to the human condition seeking enlightenment or Promised Land or the way home, a man would go or want to be forced to go into the wilderness, measure himself against the Creation, recognize finally his true place within it, and thus be saved both from pride and from despair. Seeing himself as a tiny member of the world he cannot comprehend or master or in any sense possess, he cannot think of himself as a god. And by the same token, since he shares in, depends upon, and is graced by all of which he is a part, neither can he become a fiend; he cannot descend
into the final despair of destructiveness. Returning from the wilderness he becomes a restorer of order, a preserver.”

Berry traces the changes in humanity’s perception of wilderness. According to him industrialization and the consequent romanticizing of wilderness is largely responsible for the institutionalization of wilderness, which has now been reduced to a ‘scenic’ place to be viewed for aesthetic pleasure:

“Because of railroads and improved highways the wilderness was no longer an arduous passage for the traveler, but something to be looked at as grand and beautiful from the high vantages of the roadside. We became viewers of “views”. And because we no longer travelled in the wilderness as a matter of course, we forgot that wilderness still circumscribed civilization and persisted in domesticity. We forgot, indeed, that the civilized and the domestic continued to depend upon wilderness – that is, upon natural forces within the climate and within the soil that have never in any meaningful sense been controlled or conquered. Modern civilization has been built largely in this forgetfulness.”

The concept of wilderness as a scenic spot has made man an observer, distancing him from it and thus creating a sense of awe in him. It has made him stand apart and take in the statistical details proving nature’s greatness in order to enable him to appreciate the creation:

“Once we had climbed or driven to the mountain top, we were awed by the view, but it was an awe that we felt compelled to validate or
prove by the knowledge of how high we stood and how far we
saw.”

The inordinate pride of man in his ability to comprehend his achievements
statistically and also in his position as a creator has stamped out his sense of
humility. The materialistic and mechanical achievements of mankind have robbed
humanity of all excitement in climbing a mountain or floating on a river. Reflecting
on self-glory has become an obsession for modern man:

“What, after all, should one get excited about a mountain when one
can see almost as far from the top of the building, much farther from
an airplane, farther still from a space capsule. We have learned to be
fascinated by statistics of magnitude ad power.”

The tendency for self-glorification landed humanity in one of its worst
predicaments. The creations of man not only magnified his potential, but
diminished him too as it constantly reminded him of his inability to control or limit
his own creations. This imperfection incapacitated him from feeling whole and
healthy:

“Past the scale of the human, our works do not liberate us – they
confine us. They cut off the access to wilderness of Creation where
we must go to reborn – to receive the awareness, at once humbling
and exhilarating, grievous and joyful, that we are a part of Creation,
one with all that we live from and all that, in turn, live from us.”

Berry censures the modern tendency of the urban-industrial society to
alienate itself from wilderness which is its source and preserver. Exploring the
psychological implications of this tendency, he identifies the fear lurking in human
psyche that man may fail to gain absolute control in his encounters with the wild:

“... the most dangerous tendency in modern society, now rapidly
emerging as a scientific-industrial ambition, is the tendency towards
encapsulation of human order – the severance, once and for all, of
the umbilical cord fastening us to the wilderness or the Creation. The
threat is not only in the totalitarian desire for absolute control. It lies
in the willingness to ignore an essential paradox: the natural forces
that so threaten us are the same forces that preserve and renew
us.”¹⁰⁵

If man has to overcome this fear, he must learn to live in harmony with the
wild and Berry is optimistic that man can live more or less in harmony with the
native wilderness:

“I am betting my life that such a harmony is possible. But I do not
believe that it can be achieved simply or easily or that it can ever be
perfect and I am certain that it can never be made once and for all,
but is the forever unfinished life work of our species.”¹⁰⁶

In The Landscape of Harmony, reflecting on the role of the profit-oriented
economy in alienating man from his native wilderness and creating a callous
attitude towards nature in general, Berry suggests that three questions must be
asked by humanity with respect to a human economy in any given place:

“1. What is here?
2. What will nature permit us to do here?
3. What will nature help us to do here?"107

The first question is considered as the most significant one as the second and third questions are ruled by the first. In order to ask the second and the third intelligently, it is essential that the first question has to be answered. Yet according to Berry, such an important question has not been asked or answered in the whole history of American economy. Neglecting the first question and its answer has resulted in certain attitudes and actions that are detrimental to humanity as well as to wilderness which is the source of humanity. In an essay on the preservation of wilderness included in his book The Landscape of Harmony Berry points out this fact:

“All the great changes, from the Indian wars and the opening of the agricultural frontiers to the inauguration of genetic engineering have been made without a backward look and in ignorance of whereabouts. Our response to the forest and the prairie that covered our present fields was to get them out of the way as soon as possible. And the obstructive human population of Indians and ‘inefficient’ or small farmers has been dealt with in the same spirit. We have never known what we were undoing. We cannot know what we are doing until we know what nature would be doing if we were doing nothing. And that is why we need small native wilderness widely dispersed over the countryside as well as large ones in spectacular places.”108
The second and third questions that Berry has suggested must define the agendas and work of human beings on earth. If humans plan the course of actions without taking into consideration what nature would permit them to do in a particular landscape, those plans are likely to be a failure. Such actions may even turn out to be ecocidal:

“If we do not work with and within natural tolerances, then we will not be permitted to work for long. It is plain enough, for example, that if we use soil fertility faster than nature can replenish it, we are proposing an end that we do not desire. And to ignore the possibility of help from nature makes farming, for example, too expensive for farmers . . . It may make life too expensive for humans.”109

Berry warns his fellow human beings that if they fail to ask and answer these three questions, even the motherly affection and care of mother nature can turn sour.

“Nature provides bountifully for her children, but, as we would now say, she is also extremely permissible. If her children want to destroy one another or commit suicide, that is alright with her. There is nothing, after all, more natural than the extinction of species; the extinction of all species, we must assume, would also be perfectly natural.”110

In the poem, ‘Prayers and the Sayings of the Mad Farmer’ in the Collected Poems the warning note is sounded again when Berry points out that belittling the
land by destroying its wildness for commercial purposes actually amounts to man
belittling himself:

“If he raises a good crop at the cost
of belittling himself and diminishing
the ground, he has gained nothing.
He will have to begin over again the
next spring, worse off than before.” (p.131)

In the section ‘The Country of Marriages’ of the Collected Poems Berry
advocates the nurturing of wilderness, which is a fundamental feature of nature. He
expresses his conviction that there is plenty in the wild nature to satisfy the
reasonable needs of humanity. In the poem ‘The Arrival’ he expresses his
conviction:

“Like a ride it comes in,
wave after wave of foliage and fruit,
the nurtured and wild,
out of the light to this shore.
In its extravagance we shape
the strenuous outline of enough.” (p.153)

The same conviction finds expression in the poem, ‘The Wild Geese’:

“. . . What we need
is here. And we pray, not
for new earth or heaven, but to be
quiet in heart and eye
clear. What we need is here.” (p.156)

Berry celebrates the wild nature and its inherent wisdom in the poem, ‘The Wild’. Wilderness thrives in human absence, yet the wisdom of humanity lies in harmonizing its life with the wild in the universe:

“In the empty lot – a place
not natural, but wild – among
the trash of human absence,
the slough and shamble
of the city’s seasons, a few
old locusts bloom.

. . .

. . . A man
could not make a habit
of such color,
such flight and singing.
But they’re the habits of this
wasted place. In them
the ground is wise.” (p.19 – 20)

A complete merging with wilderness gives a new identity for the poet in ‘Window Poems’ V:

“. . . He is
a wilderness looking out
at the wild.” (p.76)
The joy of this new identity is intense. Identifying his inner wildness, the poet attains a harmony of his self with the wilderness of nature. The poem, ‘To a Siberian Woodsman’ is an expression of the intense joy that he experiences in his union with the wild:

“. . . I am the out breaking of this ground.

My words are its words as the

wren’s song is its song.” (p.96)

Wendell Berry is one American writer and thinker who has reflected deeply about reconciling love of wilderness with the human need to farm the land. He perceives an agricultural practice rooted in healthy culture as the ideal means to preserve wilderness:

“An enduring agriculture must never cease to consider and respect and preserve wilderness. The farm can exist only within the wilderness of mystery and natural force. And if the farm is to last and remain in health, the wilderness must survive within the farm.

That is what agricultural fertility is: the survival of natural process in the human order.”

Berry envisages a farm which yields a place for wilderness in it, not as a wood lot, but as a “sacred grave” – “a place where Creation is let alone, to serve as instruction, example for refuge; a place for people to go, free of work and presumption, to let themselves alone . . .” He contends that it is the modern society’s refusal to accommodate wilderness in farming that deepens the gulf between culture and nature, which results in the ecocidal habits of modern man. In
order to bridge the worlds of human culture and wild nature Berry proposes an integration of wilderness into domesticity, for which he visualizes the wild thriving in the “margins” of farms:

“A healthy farm will have trees on it – woodlands, where forest trees are native, but also fruit and nut trees, trees for shade and windbreaks. Trees will be there for their usefulness: for food, lumber, fence posts, firewood, shade and shelter. But they will also be there for comfort and pleasure, for the wildlife that they will harbor, and for their beauty. The woodlands bespeak the willingness to let live that keeps wildness flourishing in a settled place. . . . The most revealing sign of the ill health of industrial agriculture – its greed, its short-term ambitions – its inclination to see trees as obstructions and to strip the land bare of them.”

In the section ‘Clearing’ of Collected Poems, Berry portrays the farm as an expression of the wild. The wild that is waiting in the margins of farms indicates the promise of rejuvenation. In the poem, ‘From the Crest’, the farm eagerly welcomes the wild:

“Like a man, the farm is headed
for the woods. The wild
is already veined in it
everywhere its thriving.”  (p.193)
The ‘Window Poems’ provide ample proof for Berry’s faith in the resurrection of the wild. In the poem 12, the transience of an artificially-created world of human culture is presented:

“The country where he lives
is haunted
by the ghosts of an old forest.
In the cleared fields
where he gardens
and pastures his horses
it stood once,
and will return. There will be
a resurrection of the wild.”   (p.82)

Bill McKibben, like Edward Abbey, envisions wilderness as an escape from the world of human beings and expresses a deep desire “to get caught up in the timeless meaning of the forest.”114 But his observations of nature in reality appall him when he notices the ubiquitous changes brought about by industrialization and urbanization. He finds that the concept of nature, with wilderness as its fundamental element is quietly wiped away by the modern society and this makes him propose his theory of ‘post-natural age’ in which we live today. When McKibben describes the transformation that nature has undergone, he is actually lamenting the loss of the old construct of nature as a pristine wilderness.

According to McKibben, wilderness as a source of pleasure and joy became a literary convention only during the time of Romantics. Before that it was a
symbol of the ugly and cruel. Quoting the example of Bob Marshall, who founded the Wilderness Society when he set off to explore Alaska’s Brooks Range, he points out how many American explorers exhibit a “yearning to be the first one to see a piece of wilderness which is free from human presence.” Thoreau too has expressed his desire to escape into the wilderness. These instances inspire McKibben to stress the need of pristine wilderness, substantially untouched by human beings. In *The End of Nature* he expresses this belief:

“One proof of the deep-rooted desire for pristine places is the decision that Americans and others have made to legislate “wilderness” to set aside vast tracks of lands where, in the words of the federal statute, “the earth and its community of life are untrammeled by man, where man himself is a visitor or who does not remain”.”

McKibben’s contention is that if we cannot have pristine wilderness that is untouched by human beings, we can at least maintain a wilderness which is less violated by human interference. Yet, the present plight of the wild nature and humanity’s attempts to preserve it make him pessimistic. He describes how in the 50,000 acres of state wilderness behind his house, the silence and peace is daily broken by the practice flights of Air Force jets. He criticizes humanity for its attempts to rewrite the laws of nature blindly but effectively.

Even though McKibben argues that we are living in a ‘post-natural age’, he does not lose hope as he has trust in the power of human imagination. According to him,
“Nature, while often fragile in reality, is durable in our imagination. Wilderness, the idea of wilderness, has outlasted the exploration of the entire globe. It has endured the pesticides, and pollution. When the nature around us is degraded we picture it fresh and untainted elsewhere.”¹¹⁷

This tendency of McKibben to entrust human imagination with the responsibility of dismissing a degraded and diminishing wilderness has attracted the censure of many ecocritics. David Mazel, for instance, in his critique of McKibben’s The End of Nature quotes McKibben to highlight his trust in “[o]ur ability to shut the destroyed areas from our minds, to see beauty around man’s degradation”¹¹⁸ According to McKibben,

“If the ground is dusty and trodden, we look at the sky; if the sky is smoggy, we travel to some place where it is clear; if we can’t travel to some place where it is clear, we imagine ourselves in Alaska or Australia or some place where it is clear, and that nearly as well.”¹¹⁹

David Mazel points out the problem inherent in this attitude to nature. Though he seems to be lamenting the physical changes that the landscape has undergone, McKibben actually seems to be more concerned about the concrete damages to the cultural invasion of the well-guarded psychic territory. Referring to McKibben’s description of how the sound of motor boats not just the disturb swimmers across Adirondack lake, but even get into their minds, David Mazel comments:
“Despite the presence of the summer homes, McKibben can
experience the luminal setting as wild so long as he can perform this
crucial forgetting ‘of human society and of people’. But it ceases to
be wild when its cultural inflection interferes with the process of
repression, when that inflection “gets in the mind” and disrupts the
act of imagining wilderness.

This sort of repression is characteristic of an entire historiography of
wilderness, a historiography to which McKibben clearly subscribes. . .”\textsuperscript{120}

McKibben, like Abbey, quite evidently perceives wilderness as a refuge, a
lost Eden, which is placed opposite to the world of culture. The ubiquitous changes
in the environment force him to rely on the power of imagination to forget the
cultural incursion into the world of wilderness.

Wild nature has some spiritual significance too for McKibben. He accepts
the ancient belief that nature as connected to God is an expression of many divine
characteristics like benevolence, immortality, grace, design etc as revealed in the
seasons in nature’s beauty and in the natural fabric of life and decay:

“. . . it is not in “God’s house” that I feel his presence the most – it
is in her outdoors, on some sun-warmed slope of pine needles or by
the surf. It is there that the numbing categories men have devised to
contain this mystery – sin and redemption and incarnation and so on
– fall away, leaving the overwhelming sense of goodness and
sweetness at work in the word.”\textsuperscript{121}
McKibben defends this notion saying that this habit of perceiving divinity in nature is not confined to our ancestors but extends to some of the great naturalists who have seen the wild outdoor world in this light. As an instance he quotes John Burroughs:

“We now use the word Nature very much as our fathers used the word God.”122

McKibben points out how Thoreau too considered nature as a reality that can enable man to realize the sublime.

Another perception of wild nature is as a constant and an omnipotent entity that engenders a sense of security in human beings. In this image McKibben perceives the world of wilderness beside the world of human culture as a constant reminder of man’s dependence on nature. In this way of viewing wilderness of nature is attributed with an ethical responsibility. As an independent and omnipotent entity, endowed with an element of divinity, wild nature exerts a control over human nature:

“Earlier man had a comforting sense of security when he was surrounded by a world which was not his creation. But now we are surrounded by a world which is our own making. . . Nature has always provided the “deep contrast rhythms” even if, in our turbo-charged and jet-propelled arrogance, we have come to think that we are independent of the earth’s basic pulses. We still rely on the earth’s “basic integrity and equanimity” to give us a “safe and stable context”.”123
Unlike Snyder and Berry, McKibben makes no attempt to integrate wilderness into domesticity. As in the case of Abbey he is aware of the need for a pristine wilderness as a refuge and as a lost Eden. Besides, he attributes a spiritual and ethical dimension to wilderness.

Annie Dillard’s pilgrimage into wild nature opens a world of beauty and mystery before the writer, which is succinctly captured in her powerful work, *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*. As ecocritic John Tallmadge points out, Dillard uses the ‘excursion format’ for this work, which is an effort to transform and rewrite humanity’s relationship to nature. Two kinds of approaches to nature are usually portrayed in literary works using the excursion format – the approach of a naturalist who merely records his observations during a local excursion or ramble or the approach of writers like Wordsworth who get lessons about the conduct of life and the motions of the human mind. John Tallmadge observes how both these trends are amalgamated in Thoreau. His walks “followed by reflective journalizing provided scientific awareness, moral and psychological understanding. This complex Thoreauvian excursion has been most influential in our tradition in which nature has been viewed as a source of religious revelation or a standard moral value.”

Annie Dillard’s *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* also presents a series of excursions into wilderness of Tinker Creek, in a valley in Virginia’s Blue Ridges, which provide her an opportunity to explore its beauties and mysteries. Dillard charts out a particular plan for exploring the neighborhood for which she adopts Thoreau’s suggestions. She has proposed to keep “a meteorological journal of the mind,” “telling some tales and describing some of the sights of this rather tamed valley,
and exploring, in fear and trembling, some of the unmapped dim reaches and unholy fastnesses to which those tales and sights so dazzlingly head."\textsuperscript{125}

Dillard realizes that humanity is gifted with a vast landscape, full of precious and mysterious sights and that it is one of the major purposes of life to view these and share its intricacy:

"There are lots of things to see, unwrapped gifts and free surprises. The world is fairly studded and strewn with pennies cast broadside from a generous hand. . . If you crouch motionless on a bank to watch a tremulous ripple thrill on the water and are rewarded by the sight of a musk rat kit paddling from its den, will you count that sight a chip of copper only, and go your rueful way? . . . But if you cultivate a healthy poverty and simplicity, so that finding a penny will literally make your day, then, since the world is in fact planted in pennies, you have with your poverty bought a lifetime of days. It is that simple. What you see is what you get."\textsuperscript{126}

According to Dillard, what man needs to do is to keep his eyes open. She compares nature to a beautiful drawing of a tree, which can appear puzzling to children. But the trained eye of a specialist can find the most "incredibly well-hidden" things there. As an observer and explorer of the wild, Dillard wants to train her eyes to see the hidden treasures.

The creek with its smooth flow of water becomes a symbol of life for Dillard. Tinker Creek and the wilderness around it act as an anchor for her:
“...it keeps me steadied in the current, as a sea anchor does, facing the stream of light pouring down.”

This image of a supporting and empowering wild nature that moulds her thinking process itself gets many shades added to it as the writer delves deeper into wilderness. The wooded landscape around the creek and its mountains present a world of mystery before Dillard, inviting her to explore it and to know the spirit of the wild:

“The creeks – Tinker and Carvin’s – are an active mystery, fresh every minute. Theirs is the mystery of continuous creation and all that providence implies: the uncertainty of vision, the horror of the fixed, the dissolution of the present, the intricacy of beauty, the pressure of fecundity, the elusiveness of the free, and the flawed nature of perfection. The mountains – Tinker and Brushy, McAfee’s Knob and Dead Man – are passive mystery, the oldest of all. Theirs is the one simple mystery of creation from nothing, of matter itself. . . The mountains are giant, restful, absorbent. You can heave your spirit into a mountain and the mountain will keep it, folded and not throw it back as some creeks will. The creeks are the world with its stimulus and beauty; I live there. But the mountains are home.”

While in the midst of wild nature Dillard experiences a tremendous power that permeates nature; she recognizes it as the spirit that the Creator has imparted to the creation. It is an uncontrollable and limitless power that moves through all
created things of the universe. Yet wilderness is the true expression of immeasurable power:

“The power we seek, too, seems to be a continuous loop. I have always been sympathetic with the early notion of a divine power that exists in a particular place or that travels about over the face of the earth as a man might wander – and when he is “there” he is surely not here . . . the spirit seems to roll along like the mythical hoop snake with its tail in its mouth. There are no hands to shake or edges to unite. It rolls along the mountain ridges like a fireball, shooting off a spray of sparks at random, and will not be trapped.”

Dillard employs a special technique when she is in the wild nature, to observe and to know the wild in its myriad forms. She keenly observes even the minutest details of the wild landscape and uses the knowledge she has acquired as a yardstick in her evaluation of human life in its relationship with nature. On one such occasion she observes:

“The present of our lives looks different under trees. Trees have dominion . . . some trees, like giant sequoias, are, practically speaking, immortal, vulnerable only to another ice age. They are not even susceptible to fire . . . Some trees sink tap roots to rocks; some spread wide mats of roots clutching at acres. They will not be blown. We run around under these obelisk-creatures, teetering on our soft, small feet. We are out on a jaunt, picnicking, fattening like puppies
for our deaths. Shall I carve a name on this trunk? What if I fell in a forest: Would a tree hear?"  

The wilderness that surrounds Dillard moulds her character, thoughts and feelings, thus finally shaping her attitude to life itself. The realization of this influence of the wild nature on her prompts Dillard to express her gratitude to nature:

“This sycamore above me, below me, by Tinker Creek, is a case in point; the sight of it crowds my brain with an assortment of diverting thoughts as the slivers of pressure from grass on my elbow’s skin.”

Standing on the wooded banks of the creek, watching and feeling the flow of water in the creek, Annie Dillard is happy that she is a creek-side person as the life there inspires and enlivens her:

“The creek rests the eye, a haven, a breast; the two steep banks vault from the creek like wings.”

Dillard vividly depicts how experiences of the wild nature crosses the physical plane and enters the psychic territory and creates a state of sharpened sensibilities and an awakening of consciousness:

“I want to come to the subject of the present by showing how consciousness dashes and ambles around the labyrinthine tracks of mind, returning again and again, however briefly to the senses: “If there were but one erect and solid standing tree in the woods, all creatures would go to rub against it and make sure of their footing.”
But so long as I stay in my thoughts, my foot slides under trees. I fall, or I dance.”

This awakening of the consciousness enables Dillard to experience the present deeply and intensely. The past is stirred and it gets connected to the present. The acute awareness of the present links her to the future too:

“These trees stir me. The past inserts a finger into a slit in the skin of the present and pulls . . . Live water heals memories. I look up the creek and here it comes, the future, being borne aloft as on a windy succession of laden trays. You may wake and look from the window and breathe the real air, and say, with satisfaction or with longing “this is it”. But if you look up the creek in any weather, your spirit fills, and you are saying with an exulting rise of the lungs, “Here it comes!””

The wilderness assumes the role of an educator for Dillard. She feels that if man has the patience and readiness to observe and learn, wild nature may willingly impart a wealth of knowledge to him. It is interesting to see how Dillard, not unlike Emily Dickinson, the great American mystic poet of the nineteenth century, adapts some doctrines of conventional Christian religiosity to her new vision of life spiritually enriched by nature. In doing so she gives such religious concepts a new metaphoric force. Hence she is able to exclaim:

“My God, I look at the creek. . . It never stops. If I seek the senses, and the skill of children, the information of a thousand books, innocence of puppies, even the insights of my own city past, I do so
only, solely, and entirely that I might look well at the creek. You
don’t run down the present, pursue it with baited hooks and nets.
You wait for it, empty-handed, and you are filled. . . The creek is the
one great giver. It is, by definition, Christmas, the incarnation. This
old rock planet gets the present for a present on its birthday every
day.”

Dillard also describes the role of wilderness from an ethical point of view.
She seems to believe that the wild nature can purge the human conscience if we can
completely submit ourselves to it:

“Trees stir memories; live waters heal them. The creek is the
mediator, benevolent, impartial, subsuming my shabbiest evils and
dissolving them, transforming them into live moles, and shinners, and
sycamore leaves. It is a place even my faithlessness hasn’t offended;
it still flashes for me, now and tomorrow, that intricate, innocent
face. It waters an undeserving world, saturating cells with lodes of
light.”

Dillard’s perception of divinity that permeates the diverse world of nature
inspires her; this explains the presence of the religious imagery and metaphors in
her work, Pilgrim at Tinker Creek. The metaphor of a pilgrim that she employs to
portray her state while in the midst of wild nature quite evidently indicates the
religious undercurrents in Dillard’s thinking. According to her, acquiring
knowledge from nature merely for the sake of gathering information is of no avail
to humanity; the intense joy that one derives from nature is indeed spiritual.
“A generous spirit signs on this motley crew . . . The creator goes off on one wild specific tangent after another, or millions simultaneously, with an exuberance that would seem to be unwarranted, and with an abandoned energy springing from an unfathomable font. What is going on here? The point of the dragon fly’s terrible lip, the giant water bug, birdsong, or the beautiful dazzle and flash of sunlighted minnows, is not that it all fits together like clockwork – for it doesn’t, particularly, not even inside the goldfish bowl – but that it all flows so freely wild, like the creek, that it all surges in such a free, fringed tangle. Freedom is the world’s water and weather, the world’s nourishment freely given, its soil and sap: and the creator loves pizzazz.”

The meditation on the profundity of the mysterious and intricate creation and man’s position in the vastness and variety of the universe creates awe in Dillard’s mind. The experience of the wild assumes the status of a sublime spiritual experience which enables her to realize the meaninglessness of human ego and faithlessness:

“. . . our faithlessness is a cowering cowardice born of our very smallness, a massive failure of imagination. Certainly nature seems to exult in abounding radicality, extremism, anarchy. If we were to judge nature by it common sense or likelihood, we wouldn’t believe the world existed. In nature, improbabilities are one stock in trade. The whole creation is one lunatic fringe. If creation had been left up
to me, I’m sure I wouldn’t have had the imagination or courage to do
more than shape a single, reasonably sized atom, smooth as a
snowball, and let it go at that. No claims of any and all revelations
could be so far-fetched as a single giraffe.”138

This view substantiates Dillard’s belief that the wilderness with its intricacy
and complexity can engender humility and reverence in human minds. Then man
may realize that the beauty of the wild nature is a sign of God’s exuberance and
hence he must be grateful to Him for it:

“This, there is the extravagant landscape of the world, given, given
with pizzazz, given in good measure, pressed down, shaken together,
and running together.”139

There are two paradigms for the nature experiences that Annie Dillard goes
through during her encounters with wilderness. As a passionate explorer of
mysterious nature she is filled with amazement at its intense and intricate beauty
when she watches certain sights such as the flight of redwings from the Osage
orange or the world inside a goldfish bowl, while at the same time sights like that of
the giant water bug hugging a frog to suck the life out of it appalls her. She realizes
the existence of cruelty and horror in the natural world. Dillard tries to define her
mission in this paradoxical situation:

“I am passionately interested in where I am as is a lone sailor sans
sextant in a ketch on the open ocean. . . Fortunately, like the sailor, I
have at the moment a situation which allows me to devote
considerable hunks of time to seeing what I can see and trying to
piece it together... I must start somewhere, so I try to deal with the
giant water bug in Tinker Creek and the flight of three hundred
redwings from an Osage orange, with the goldfish bowl and the
snake skin, and let those who dare worry about the birth rate and
population explosion among solar systems.”

Dillard admits that her intention is to keep herself to the various meanings
of the reality of the wild. She seeks the “wild and the extravagant” spirit that moves
through an intricate network of the wild and she feels exhilarated by the experience:

“Landscape consists in the multiple, overlapping intricacies and
forms that exist in a given space at a moment in time. Landscape is
the texture of intricacy, and the texture is my present subject.
Intricacies of detail and varieties of form build up into textures. A
bird’s feather is an intricacy; the bird is a form; the bird in space in
relation to the air, forest, continent, and so on, is a thread in texture... .
. Wherever there is life there is twist and mess: the frizz of an arctic
lichen, the tangle of brush along a bank, the dogleg of a dog’s leg,
the way a line has got to curve, split or knob. The planet is
characterized by its very jaggedness; its random heaps of mountains,
its frayed fringe of shore.”

Quite paradoxically she finds herself forced to accept the horrors and
cruelty inherent in the wild as constituents of the mystery of the world. Though
with some difficulty she has to admit this truth of nature:
“. . . there is beauty and grace in the universe that are tangled in a
rapture with violence.”¹⁴²

_Pilgrim at Tinker Creek_ begins with a shocking image of a wild tom cat,
which would jump through the open window of her room in the middle of the night
and leave Dillard’s body cover with paw prints in blood. The significance of this
image is the way Dillard coalesce the wild in to a domestic situation. Similarly, the
giant water bug that hugs the frog before it slowly sucks the life out of it is also a
blending of domesticity with the wild. In both these images Dillard highlights her
acceptance of both the beauty and the horror of the wild nature:

“That it’s rough out there and chancy is no surprise. Every living
thing is a survivor on a kind of extended emergency bivouac. But at
the same time we are also created.”¹⁴³

Despite accepting these two opposing paradigms of any authentic nature
experience as inevitable, Dillard fails to hide the feeling of an ‘unholy revulsion’
that she feels while watching a praying mantis and a wasp devouring a honeybee.
Yet she watches the shocking and horrifying cruelty in the world of insects
patiently. To her surprise she finds nature indifferent to the uncontrolled fertility
and cruel death in large numbers present in the lower strata of the creation:

“The remarkable thing about the world of insects, however, is
precisely that there is no veil cast over these horrors. These are
mysteries performed in broad day light before our very eyes; we can
see every detail, and yet they are still mysteries.”¹⁴⁴
Dillard analyses why human beings loathe witnessing the horror and cruelty that exist in the life of the wild. In order to know the psychology behind this response she considers her own life a case study. Dillard admits that she has left her home, ‘the world of human culture’, in order to opt for a life in nature, with a definite purpose:

“I had thought to live by the side of the creek in order to shape my life to its free flow.”

Despite leaving the world of culture, she involuntarily applies its code of morality to all that she observes in nature. Then she realizes that when she approaches the ways of nature with the values of the human world it causes revulsion in her mind towards the apparent brutality and lack of concern for individual lives that she finds in nature. She exclaims,

“. . . the world is a monster. Any three-year-old can see how unsatisfactory and clumsy is this whole business of reproducing and dying by billions . . . But wait, you say, there is no right or wrong in nature; right and wrong is a human concept. Precisely: we are moral creatures, then, in an amoral world. The universe that suckled us is a monster that does not care if live or die – does not care if it itself grinds to a halt. It is fixed and blind, a robot programmed to kill. We are free and seeing: we can only try to outwit it at every turn to save our skins.
This view requires that a monstrous world running on chance and death, careening blindly from nowhere to nowhere, somehow produced wonderful us.” 146

Dillard’s acceptance of the brutality and horror of nature as complementary to its beauty and mystery is a forceful affirmation of the wild. She compares these paradoxical features to two branches of a stream that meet at the creek.

The wild landscape with its intricate beauty and mystery along with all its brutality and lack of concern has great impact on Dillard’s psyche. According to her, man is a freakish creature, cursed with “excessive emotion”, but on his confrontation with wilderness of nature he learns to calm down. The quiet mind enables him to taste the absolute freedom that exists only in nature. Genuine wilderness experiences help Dillard realize the true worth of returning to wild nature. The description of the marvelous experience of “a garden in the wilderness” during an exploration of the secluded ‘Lucas Place’ on the opposite side of the Oxbow in Tinker Creek depicts the exhilaration that she feels in the wild:

“This is what I had come for, just this, and nothing more. A fling of leafy motion on the cliffs, the assault of real things, living and still, with shapes and powers under the sky – this is my city, my culture, and all the world I need.”147

While watching a goldfinch alighting on the head of a purple thistle Dillard recalls that the thistle is a part of God’s curse on Adam as mentioned in the Bible, ‘The Book of Genesis’. Though she is aware that the Christian theologians interpret the fall of man from the divinely created perfection through his act of disobedience
which incurred the wrath of God on humankind as a ‘curse’, her deep love for
dnature does not allow Dillard to perceive earth as a cursed ground:

“If this furling air is fallen, then the fall was happy indeed. If this
creekside garden is sorrow, then I seek martyrdom. This crown of
thorns sits lightly on my skull, like wings. . . Creation itself was the
fall, a burst into the thorny beauty of the real.”[^148]

In her intense love for wild nature, Dillard rejects the “shining world where
everything fits” which is the ideal projected by the technological society:

“. . . [I] am wandering awed about on a splintered wreck I’ve come
to care for, whose gnawed trees breathe a delicate air, whose
bloodied and scarred creatures are my dearest companions, and
whose beauty beats and shines not in its imperfections but
overwhelmingly in spite of them, under the wind-rent clouds,
upstream and down. Simone Weil says simply, “Let us love the
country of here below. It is real; it offers resistance to love”.”[^149]

In Annie Dillard’s vivid autobiographical narrative, *The Writing Life*, which
gives an insight into the working life of an author, she describes the role of nature
and its characteristic wilderness in moulding the writer’s thoughts and feelings. She
observes the magnificent scenes of nature in their myriad shapes and returns to her
study with certain indelible impressions created in her mind. Once she is in her
room, she slams the doors and windows as she no longer wants to see anything:
“The green spot in front of my eyes outshines everything else in the shade. I lie on the bed and play with the bird bone until I can see it.”

The imaginary recreation of the sights she has seen in the wild crystallizes into her writing. Dillard describes this process as an outcome of the imagination meeting the memory in the dark. During this activity wilderness as a physical reality is internalized and incorporated into the psychic reality.

As a writer, Dillard recognizes the significance of the wild and wants to add the dimension of time to the landscape of the world. This welcomes her to the mysteries of the universe and enables her to accept the beauties and horrors of wild nature as the offshoots of the same branch. In *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* Dillard highlight this act as the focus of her writing life:

“What I want to do, then, is add time to the texture, paint the landscape on an unrolling scroll, and set the giant relief globe spinning on its stand.”

Despite the efforts of the urban-industrial culture to relegate wilderness to the background, the regenerative power of nature has maintained it as a prominent entity in the life of modern man. Wilderness is still a mystery that challenges the human psyche. Almost all contemporary environmental writing from America highlights it as an inevitable entity in human life and analyzes its implications for human life. The pastoral as a traditional literary genre is not used much by these writers, yet they consider it as a fundamental form that has its advantages in the
present scenario as the pastoral form can provide a contrast to the urban-industrial landscape.

Another significant trend of modern environmental literature is the psychological dimension it has added to the concept of wilderness. Even when wilderness is viewed as a refuge, it is widely projected as an arena that provides physical and psychological nourishment. It seems to enliven the senses and create a sense of acute awareness, which results in a change of perception in human beings. Many contemporary American nature writers share their first-hand wilderness experiences of this dimension in their writings. In this respect the traditional pastoral seems to have acquired more complexity and depth so as to suit the needs of the modern ecological perspective.

A desire for authentic wilderness experiences is expressed with great urgency in contemporary nature writings. The writers project wilderness as a rational, spiritual and psychological dimension of nature. Though they all stress the need to preserve it, there are vast differences in the methods that they suggest for this end. The perceptions of Edward Abbey and Bill McKibben postulate Frederick Clements’ theory of pastoral as they consider the possibility of preserving a pristine wilderness that is untouched by human beings by curbing human incursions into it. Gary Snyder and Wendell Berry succeed in achieving a harmonious balance between domesticity and wilderness when they smoothly incorporate the wild into their workplaces. They implicitly defend the post-Clementsian view that irrespective of the presence or absence of human impact, nature is in a state of flux. Hence the wild, instead of being preserved as an untouched entity, should be
integrated into domestic life. The integration of domestic and the wild is the source of a harmonious life in the universe and it can be maintained if humanity leads a sustainable way of life. Both Snyder and Berry express their confidence that such a way of life can be a practical reality as they have realized it through the pattern of life they have adopted for themselves.

For Annie Dillard wilderness is an intricate and mysterious world full of beauty and horrors. It is situated on the margin of the domestic landscape and she projects it as the neighborhood. Exploration of this amazing world is as inevitable for her as the air she breathes. Its environs facilitate the merging of Dillard’s self with the self of the wild. The coalescing of the wild and domesticity in the writings of Snyder, Berry and Dillard expunge the ‘otherness’ of the wilderness and make it an integral part of human life.
END NOTES

5. Greg Garrard, 35.
27. Abbey, *Beyond the Wall*, 55.
32. William Cronon quoted by Joni Adamson, 36.
33. Joni Adamson, 36.
36. J. Gerard Dollar, Reading the Earth, 98.
42. Abbey, *Desert Solitaire*, 207.
45. Abbey, *Desert Solitaire*, 211.


Joni Adamson, 37.


Abbey, *Desert Solitaire*, 120.

Abbey, *Desert Solitaire*, 121.

Abbey, *Desert Solitaire*, 121.

Joni Adamson, 34.


Abbey, *Desert Solitaire*, 163.

Abbey, *Desert Solitaire*, 164.

Abbey, *Desert Solitaire*, 165.


Abbey, *Beyond the Wall*, 14.

Abbey, *Beyond the Wall*, 34.

Abbey, *Beyond the Wall*, 49.

Joni Adamson, 35.


Snyder, *Turtle Island*, 106.

Snyder, *Turtle Island*, 108.

Snyder, *The Practice of the Wild*, 5.
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111. Berry, *The Unsettling of America*, 130.
115. McKibben, 54.
116. McKibben, 55.
117. McKibben, 58.
119. McKibben quoted by David Mazel, 138.
120. David Mazel, 139.
121. McKibben, 71-72.
122. John Burroughs quoted by McKibben, 72.
123. McKibben, 98.
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