HE RE-ENCHANTED LANDSCAPE: BRET HARTE’S AND
JOHN MUIR’S SPATIAL PRODUCTIONS

A Thesis
Presented
to the Faculty of
California State University, Chico

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts
in
English

by
William V. Lombardi
Spring 2010
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DEDICATION

To my partner Jenny and our son Hawk, for their love, patience, and support: I dedicate this project to them.

And in memory of my mother, Marge Lombardi, in whose library I found *Coleridge Walks the Fells* and *A Walking Tour in Southern France* many years ago. She loved literature, history, and nature, and was herself a prodigious walker. Her spirit permeates my approach to this endeavor.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In Fall of 2007 I came to Dr. Geoff Baker with a request: direct me to sources that will provide me with the language to talk about space, particularly the language of fictional spaces. He introduced me to the work of Bachelard, Anderson, Moretti, McClure, and Lefebvre. Many others remain names on a long reading list that I am certain will enrich my literary studies for years to come. I owe Dr. Baker a debt of gratitude for his interest in my pursuits, his support of my scholarship, and for acting as my advisor to the Graduate Equity Fellowship I received that eventually made much of the present work possible. I would also like to acknowledge the guidance and support of Dr. Andrea Lerner, who introduced me to the work of Annette Kolodny, Roderick Nash, Frederick Turner, and Henry Nash Smith. I am indebted to Dr. Lerner for the conversations stemming from our independent study in Native American and Hispanic literature of the American West; these, and other conversations growing out of our work together as her Teaching Assistant, gave me my first opportunities to fashion my arguments about place-based literature and literary studies. Her perspective has proven vital to my thesis. And lastly, but absolutely not least, I would like to acknowledge the supreme guidance of Dr. Lynn Houston. Throughout my career as an undergraduate and graduate student, she has presented me with opportunities that forced me to develop as a scholar. I feel, because of her generous efforts and kind support, my writing and my ideas have reached a level of complexity of which I had not suspected myself capable. The
roots of this thesis date from Spring 2007 and the first work I did on the literature of California with Dr. Houston. By her guidance I received two grants that enabled me to visit research libraries containing primary materials which weigh heavily in my research. I cannot express my gratitude for all her insights. I truly appreciate the guidance of my thesis committee.
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ABSTRACT

THE RE-ENCHANTED LANDSCAPE: BRET HARTE’S AND
JOHN MUIR’S SPATIAL PRODUCTIONS

by

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California State University, Chico

Spring 2010

How do we discuss the role of place in literature? This thesis considers the
influence of what is commonly thought of as setting in a text and offers new approaches
to the field of place studies by examining the fictional productions of Bret Harte and the
non-fiction essays of John Muir. Through the act of “re-placing” their work, examining
their imaginary landscapes in the context of the landscapes that inspired them, I employ
fieldwork, historiography, and biography to reconnect what I call the fictional space with
the historical space. I also propose that the literatures of the American West can be
classified into enchanted, disenchanted, and re-enchanted periods, which re-
contextualizes present discussions of both these authors. The end result is a more clearly
denoted conception of the relationship between site and text.
CHAPTER I

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Overview

In the *Atlas of the European Novel*, Franco Moretti differentiates between historical space and fictional space. Historical space is what we think of as the “real” or the actual space; fictional space is the result of an author’s spatial production, what we commonly would call the setting of the narrative. Additionally, Moretti distinguishes between the study of literature in space, and the study of space in literature. The study of literature in space evaluates the author’s rendering of a location in comparison with the historical space. The study of space in literature examines the production of the author’s fictional spaces (3). Moretti uses maps as analytical tools to arbitrate between these two. The present undertaking is both a study of literature in space *and* a study of space in literature; as such, I alternate chapters dedicated to both areas of inquiry as they relate to the work of Bret Harte and John Muir. In this sense, while Harte and Muir will be my focus, the goal of this project is more broadly intended to establish the principal importance of place in fiction. Harte and Muir, then, are my case studies, acting as the subjects of my theoretical approach: I contend that both authors’ landscapes should be read within the critical framework of the enchantment, disenchantment, and subsequent re-enchantment of the American West. Reading Western landscapes through this lens changes the way its literature is currently appraised.
Because of this assertion, I have extended Moretti’s practice of mapping to include a component of fieldwork to put myself in direct contact with the landscapes that inspired their writings, in order to better evaluate their productions. I have spent a substantial amount of time researching and visiting the sites found in Harte’s and Muir’s work because it is my belief that the literary scholar exploring both the historical and the fictional space brings the roles of place, text, and author more comprehensively into focus. The combination of site-specific and textual study, within the format of enchantment, disenchantment, and re-enchantment, which I will later discuss in some detail, not only situates these authors’ work in specific environments, it establishes a new and important protocol by which to judge their productions. I identify this active, interdisciplinary scholarship, and what it attempts to achieve, as “re-placing” a text.

The theme of the current project, spatial production in the California landscapes of Bret Harte and John Muir, stems from research I had undertaken in my senior honors thesis on California’s first poet laureate Ina Coolbrith. Both men were close friends and literary associates of Coolbrith’s in San Francisco and Oakland. All three writers were primary contributors to the West’s first great literary magazine, the Overland Monthly; Coolbrith and Harte were central to its first, most impressive manifestation under the ownership of Anton Roman, and Muir was the focal point of its second incarnation with John Carmany as owner (Worster, A Passion for Nature 219). With the exception of Muir, and him only in certain theoretical and political circles, these Overland authors today face a critical obscurity common to California authors of this period, despite their early influence on American literature of the 19th century.
In reconstructing her life in the Feather River region I had unearthed formerly overlooked information that placed Coolbrith, as a ten year old emigrant child, in the goldfields of the Sierra Nevada within three miles of where Bret Harte eventually staged what are considered by many to be his first, best short stories. I had discovered that “The Luck of Roaring Camp,” “The Outcasts of Poker Flat,” and “Tennessee’s Partner,” despite ample arguments to the contrary, can only be mapped onto the country lying between the South Fork of the Yuba River and the South Fork of the Feather River in the foothills of Northern California; furthermore, I was aware that while Harte was writing these stories, he and Coolbrith had comprised two thirds of the “Golden Gate Trinity,” who, along with Charles Warren Stoddard, amounted to the brain trust of the Overland. From these apparent coincidences I posited, based on Harte’s connection to Coolbrith and Coolbrith’s memories of the land and her experiences on it, that Poker Flat, located on Canyon Creek, a tributary of the North Fork of the Yuba River, is in fact the “Poker Flat” of Bret Harte’s tales.

I was surprised that this is not the commonly held belief. I quickly learned that critics disbelieve in Harte’s portrayal of the “Real West,” that his characters are “stock figures” (Scharnhorst, Bret Harte: Opening the Literary West 43), for example, and his landscapes comprise a “dream world” (O’Conner 161) rather than an actual, mappable landscape. I also learned that generally, if Harte’s landscapes are “placed” at all, they are most often located in the Southern Sierra, and that his place names are assumed to be “in most instances… merely… ‘convenient counters’” (Stewart, Bret Harte 304). Although I am somewhat in agreement with the critical appraisal of his characters, I disagree with the “dream world” and “convenient counters” critique of his landscapes as presently
received. Moreover, I now believe that as “predictable types” (Stegner, “Introduction” vi) his characters are necessarily products of the spaces he produces and the myths allied with them. Because of what I feel is a critical blind spot, I made it my goal to “re-place” these first influential stories in their rightful locale.

Following Muir’s first period of “town dark” in 1874, what he calls his “strange Oakland epoch” (Muir Correspondence 1874:7), he departed the city in October of that year for his initial assents of Mount Shasta. He also made plans to visit his old Wisconsin friend Emily Pelton for the first time in her Brownsville home, in the foothills on the divide between the watersheds of the Feather and Yuba Rivers, on his return trip. Interestingly, Muir’s excursions through Pelton’s locale, soon after his closest period to Coolbrith, just happen to coincide with much of the same region Coolbrith had lived in or traveled through during the Gold Rush, the same area covered by Harte in his preeminent fictions four years prior to Muir’s trip. In Muir’s case, my goal was a reconstruction and historicizing of his time in this region, with the intention of similarly “re-placing” the chapters “A Windstorm in the Forests” and “The River Floods” from The Mountains of California (1893). Both relate incidences during his Brownsville stay that, through the revision process, in their final incarnation in Mountains, have been drained of “place.” Except that he names the Yuba and the Feather, their landscapes grow increasingly vague until little detail of either watershed is recognizable.

As part of the re-placing project, the establishment of a connection to a historical space, the compelling randomness linking these separate events suggested to me the feasibility of forming a mappable literary geography comprised of these authors’ fictions which could be overlaid onto the watersheds of the Feather and Yuba Rivers, one
that was bound by interpersonal relationships heretofore not closely scrutinized in this context. This realization has presented me with the opportunity to examine a single landscape as reproduced in separate works, written at approximately the same time, published in the same place for the same audience, by two authors writing in dissimilar genres, and who are otherwise rarely compared with each other in any sustained analysis. The act of re-placement, proving that Poker Flat is “Poker Flat” and reconstructing Muir’s Feather River excursion, has become for me equivalent elements of a single, specific undertaking: that of forming a complete understanding of how each author represents space in relation to the spaces themselves.

To create the clearest picture of Harte’s and Muir’s spatial productions in their texts in relation to the actual landscape, with the purpose of enhancing the general practice of textual analysis, my research includes literary biography, historical renderings of the landscape they describe, and notably, my own knowledge of and fieldwork in the region. In discussions of place in literature, the close textual analysis necessary to valuable literary scholarship generally fails to fully compass the signified space beyond issues of mimesis. I believe the underused practice of fieldwork in the study of place-based literatures produces a more vital and insightful narrative whole, because it indicates that the scholar, to his or her credit, is grappling with *site* as much as with text. Using Muir’s various biographers as an example, to the scholar writing in-place, that is, possessing local knowledge, Nicolas Witschi’s “Sierras,” instead of Sierra, in his analysis is mildly compromising; Donald Worster’s claim that Muir’s “dead rivers” alludes to waterways succumbed to environmental degradation through unsound mining practices rather than to the auriferous channels of ancient rivers in the region is unconscionable
(233); and Michael P. Cohen’s rote, “Knoxville, or Brownsville, as it is now called,”
(139) taken directly from Muir’s essay, betrays his merely generic knowledge of the
region about which he is writing. Each of these instances, in works of otherwise
tremendous importance to Muir scholarship, describes the absence of site in their author’s
textual analysis, causing their work to suffer from a placelessness that is eerily
poststructural, thereby missing the larger meaning of Muir’s spatial production in their
textual analysis and calling into question their own definition of realism. How can an
author’s realism be questioned if the critic has never set foot on the site? If the consensus
on the definition of place is “a meaningful location” (Cresswell, Place: A Short
Introduction 7), and meaning is founded on intimacy, then failure to re-place the site of
the text is a failure on the critic’s part to become entirely intimate with their subject.

The idea of literary fieldwork, the practice of “following in the footsteps of”
an author, is decidedly as much an act of tourism as it is serious scholarship. Barry Lopez
in Arctic Dreams (1986), describing his attempt to reach the Yukon Territory, recalls:

We took our bearings from a country in our heads— it was an idea [sic] that
brought us here, to a spot on the tundra we would be hard pressed to distinguish in
terms of plant life or animal life or topography from the tundra a mile farther to the
east, or back to the west. To come here at all was an act of carefree innocence. We
stood around for nearly an hour. We took each other’s pictures. We were delighted
by the felicitous conjunction of this good weather and our idea of “the Yukon
Territory.” (293)

My experience visiting Poker Flat in Sierra County was much the same. After
taking pictures of the shady, moss covered piles of rounded river rock that had been
moved by miners years before, and of the last remaining building on the flat, held up by
braces angled into the dirt by Plumas County historian Scott Lawson and others during a
work party a decade ago, and walking up and downstream in search of the cemetery, there wasn’t much else to do except imagine.

And yet, Lopez recognizes the importance of the “unobservable realities” that give meaning and purpose to a place (296). “Following in the footsteps of” an author is an attempt to directly encounter myth, as if the sensory experience of “being there” will, by some alchemical process, reconstitute the immaterial magic of a text. That is the tourist’s dream, to include him or herself in the magic of an author’s beloved creation.

But because it is also an attempt to come to terms with an idea, in this sense the scope of the literary tourist’s experience can become more significant: when included with the application of local knowledge, what is otherwise a manifestation of “carefree innocence” additionally confronts cultural production since it encompasses the memory, nostalgia, and desire of the author, the reader, and their respective societies, the intangibles of meaning not necessarily accessible unless imagined in-place. The literary fieldworker has a deeper contact with the historical space, and thus a potentially richer connection to the fictional space because of it. One has the opportunity to develop a more intuitive relationship with texts they explicate. Standing in Poker Flat, struck by the absence of the text, yet simultaneously aware of it as a signifier, the reciprocity between site and text is magnified, if not exactly reconciled. Consider the experience of the two Dutch physicists described by cultural geographer Yi-fu Tuan in Space and Place (1977) when visiting Kronenberg Castle, where Hamlet was said to reside:

Isn’t it strange how this castle changes as soon as one imagines that Hamlet lived here? As scientists we believe that a castle consists only of stones, and admire the way the architect put them together. The stones, the green roof with its patina, the wood carvings in the church, constitute the whole castle. None of this should be changed by the fact that Hamlet lived here, and yet it is changed completely.
Suddenly the walls and ramparts speak a whole different language… Yet all we really know about Hamlet is that his name appears in a thirteenth century chronicle. No one can prove that he really lived, let alone that he lived here… [but, because Shakespeare located him thus], Kronenberg becomes quite a different castle for us.

The stones of the historical space are transformed by the quintessence of the fictional one. Like Lopez’s experience on the Yukon tundra, drawn there because of its legend, the Harte scholar stands in the shade of a ponderosa pine amid the remoteness and quiet of the otherwise undifferentiated forest of Canyon Creek, just as Tuan’s Dutch scientists may have stood within the walls of any castle in northern Europe; yet, the same awe the Dutchmen feel in Kronenberg is palpable on Poker Flat because of the ghosts of John Oakhurst and Mother Shipton; a nondescript space, by the idea of their presence, Poker Flat becomes a place. The primary insight Tuan’s example of firsthand amplification confers upon Harte scholars, since Harte’s veracity is often disparaged, is the knowledge that fieldwork even in fictionally connected places mutually enhances the experience of site and text both, while defining the meaning of each. The second insight to be gleaned by Harte scholars from the above example is of the imaginative sway fiction yields over its followers: myth-like, it tells the predisposed what to imagine.

The literary fieldworker asks two questions: The first is in regards to spatial practice, the lived experience, “How does Poker Flat the historical space change when we believe “The Outcasts of Poker Flat” transpired there?”; and the second, its inverse, is in regards to spatial production in literature: “How is the “The Outcasts of Poker Flat” the fictional space transformed when placed in Sierra County?” I contend the conclusions formulated from the preceding questions by the Harte scholar working in-place are better informed than those of scholars unfamiliar with the site because the in-place scholar has
their own personal experiences to draw from as well. John P. O’Grady refers to adding personal experience to literary scholarship playfully as potentially “incurring the wraith [sic]” (ASLE Homepage) of the scholarly community because doing so may be perceived as softening or diluting it by including the “I.” Yet O’Grady proposes the importance of storytelling in studies of place-based literature in particular. He claims that by including some of one’s own story, the ghosts of one’s own experience in their research, despite its possible hazard of critical reproach, forms a type of bonded, narrative scholarship. And so, I believe that literary fieldwork and narrative scholarship together enhance the ordinary explication of fictional space.

Of the reciprocal relationship between myth and location, Lopez acknowledges that, “The land… compels the minds of the people” (202). The fundamental question, then, is whether “Specific stories are the product of specific spaces” (100) as Franco Moretti claims in *Atlas of the European Novel*, or if Yi-fu Tuan in *Topophilia* (1974) is correct in stating: “The fact that the images are taken from the environment does not, of course, mean that the environment has ‘determined’ them” (113). What is the role of place? Following in the footsteps of an author puts the scholar in position to critically assess these two opposing viewpoints, a vantage not afforded to those studying out-of-place.

To accentuate the findings of my fieldwork, the reason I include significant amounts of literary biography and historicizing of the authors, the land, and their texts is because I believe that in place-based writing the three are inextricably bound. Literary biographer Gary Scharnhorst, in his president’s address to the 1998 Western Literature Association conference stated:
I believe the western American literary landscape must include western biography as both literature and history… Western writers are regional historians and may even be better at recounting western history than the professional historians are. In any case, we have inherited and helped to promote a tradition of new western literary biography which fits hand in glove with the new western history, revisionist in its assault on the myths and codes of westward expansion. Certainly western American writers, and so western literary biographers, challenged these myths and codes long before the historians did so. (emphases added; Scharnhorst, In Defense n pag)

“. . . arguing for the integrity and importance of western literary biography” (Scharnhorst, In Defense n pag) in response to what he calls new western history, Scharnhorst obliquely charges the study of spatial production in place-based literature with the inclusion of biography, particularly in the case of an author such as Harte who has suffered more directly from misplaced revisionism than perhaps any other western writer. Scharnhorst, in the above, is not arguing against revisionism and new western history entirely, but in favor of revisionism judiciously executed: elsewhere in this speech he recognizes the valuable recovery work that has resulted in important biographies of authors marginalized either because of their gender or their ethnicity; nor does Scharnhorst suggest new western biography remain wedded to an inert idiom of creating representative men, but rather, he proposes that literary biography be thought of as the vanguard of revisionist work.

Since then, an exemplary text in this regard is Steven J. Holmes’s The Young John Muir (1999), which shows that literary biography can be innovative instead of outmoded. Allowing ecocriticism a new critical access point, Holmes’s project is to, through a biography of Muir’s formative years, establish “patterns of relationship with… specific environments” (9), giving scholars an original and vital lens through which to gauge Muir’s later, mature works and practices. It is Holmes’s belief that, “in this way
[Muir’s] mythic images can be more closely tied to his concrete experience” (9); restated, Holmes here expresses that the patterns of Muir’s early life, exposed in his biography, enable the reader and critic to reestablish realism in Muir’s work, essentially through re-placement. Holmes calls this “environmental biography” (9), and it is essential to the linking of text and site.

And so, regarding the scope of this work, in content I have included the above elements; in form, traditional textual examinations will alternate with narrative chapters devoted to biography, historicizing of the texts, and fieldwork.

The immediate challenge of this undertaking is to examine how “the new western history” has caused Harte’s fiction and Muir’s non-fiction to suffer the same critical fate of questionable realism. Yet, the problem of how to re-place literature often regarded as placeless underscores the great need to do so. Wallace Stegner, viewed at once as the progenitor of the new history and as a champion of the rearguard, in his essential introduction to The Outcasts of Poker Flat and Other Tales (1961), wrote of Harte: “Whatever virtues he had, they were not the virtues of realism. His observation of the Gold Rush country, character, and society was neither very accurate nor very penetrating; neither was much of it firsthand” (viii). Most criticism of Harte follows in this vein. Similarly, of the realism of Muir’s landscapes, Lawrence Buell writes in his equally influential The Environmental Imagination (1995): “Muir never seriously considered that the ‘pathetic fallacy’ might be fallacious” (192), that “at its worst [Muir’s prose exposes him] as an out-of-date provincial trying to revive a secondhand transcendentalism to thrill the partakers of its genteel aftermath” (193), and that Muir “recreated nature in the image of his own desire” (194). Buell is equally critical of Harte,
appraising his writing as “androcentric sentimentalism” (*Imagination* 175). Stegner’s issues with Harte, and Buell’s claims against Muir and Harte, are representative of, and underscore the foundation for, the decline in critical reception most California writers in the latter third of the 19th century now face, but these evaluations likewise expose Stegner and Buell to the poststructuralist argument *against* the possibility of objective realism. Additionally, they lack the benefits of a more pragmatic, involved approach that includes mapping and fieldwork such as I have done.

More recently, Nicolas Witschi has tried to undo misrepresentations of Harte’s and Muir’s realism in his *Traces of Gold: California’s Natural Resources and the Claim to Realism in Western American Literature* (2002). He argues convincingly that Harte and Muir actually played a more formative role in the development of American realism as a movement than is widely assumed (19). It is interesting to note, though, that Stegner’s unfavorable estimation of Harte’s realism is predicated on his lack of firsthand knowledge of the gold country, while Muir’s firsthand experience there, at least according to Buell, yielded the identical negative critical result. Ironically, in fact, Stegner uses Muir as an example of realistic description superior to Harte. He claims, “Harte had no such personal familiarity with the Sierra as his contemporaries Clarence King and John Muir had, and no such scientific accuracy of observation” (viii). To further complicate this question of descriptive accuracy, though, and just as ironic, is Witschi’s contention that Muir outright “borrowed extensively from Harte,” that he:

[C]ontinued the transformation, initiated by Harte’s tales, away from corporeal physicality in prose, successfully evicting both the miner and all evidence of his industry from the surface of the scenery. Muir needed to move through the literary history of the Gold Rush in order to erase the material history of that event.
from the landscape and, more importantly, from how that landscape could be rendered in words. (11)

While the preceding comments speak provocatively about Muir’s project as a writer, they likewise confuse earlier comparisons to Harte. Instead, they suggest that the source of Muir’s spatial production was equal parts inherited literary or social agenda as well as firsthand account, and that in his “rendering” it is the unequal reception of the former part of this equation that garners his critics’ greatest disdain. Nonetheless, I believe Witschi’s work suggests a compromise can and must be reached when discussing western realism between the obvious subjectivity of the writers, “regional historians” in their own right, and that of their critics. If the myth of the western landscape is equal in influence to its physical places, then discussions of problems of mimesis, realism in its literature, miss their mark.

Instead, what must first be recognized in western literature are the patterns inherent to it, and then these must be properly historicized and theorized so that they can be read as a whole, rather than in parts, which is currently the case. I assert that the correctly historicized 19th century American West produces three distinct periods, each distinguished by the spatial production of its authors and the spatial practice of their audience, predicated on the colonial project of westward expansion: its first and earliest phase is defined by the consciously “empty” landscape in settler culture (Buell *Imagination*), sometimes cruel wilderness, sometimes pastoral garden (Marx *The Machine in the Garden*), contrasted with and contemporaneous to the “sacred” landscape of indigenous peoples oppositional to imperialism (Said 1978; Anderson 1983); the second phase is defined by the imperial landscape, created by the burgeoning of scientific
exploration mid-century and its associated industries, official histories, and mappings; and the final phase, to which I believe Harte and Muir belong and whose landscapes are rendered in reaction to conquest, is defined by landscapes of “erasure” (Witschi *Traces*) and myth creation (Stegner “Introduction”), in which the landscape that was “mapped and gridded” (McClure *Late Imperial Romance*) by the imperial project is “re-opened” (Buell *Imagination*) to romance and adventure by its literature. Therefore, in the literatures of the first phase, the open spaces of the West are best characterized as enchanted; the rapidly closing spaces of the West in the literatures of the second phase characterized as disenchanted; and the rationalized landscapes inherited by the third phase, including relic spaces as yet untouched, are best described as re-enchanted, because their literatures consciously participate in myth production and / or de-rationalization.

The above three part rubric stems from principles found in John McClure’s *Late Imperial Romance*, which also resonates from Tuan and Morris Berman. It is my intention with the present work to focus what is McClure’s essentially global approach into a regional format, which in this case has, even more specifically, localized applications. According to Yi-fu Tuan, “nations and cultures established since the eighteenth century have been much more concerned with gaining power and control through geographic knowledge than through the construction and refinement of symbolic space, with its attendant rituals, ceremonies, and art” (*Passing Strange and Wonderful* 177). McClure’s primary claim is that Western consciousness worldwide divided the globe into spheres of order and disorder, reason and magic, and the imperial project set out to tame and rationalize, through “exploration, conquest, and conversion” the non-
western, disordered, magical sphere. This project was narrated in romantic terms that “valorized these ventures” (2). Yet, in the course of filling in the blank spots on the map, the spaces necessary to “the ordeals and sacrifices and triumphs that are the stuff of romance,” imperialism eventually created “a world utterly devoid of romantic regions” (3); by “civilizing” it, in addition to the human and environmental cost, colonization had used up the romantic possibilities of its resource. Morris Berman, in *The Reenchantment of the World* (1981), also writing from a global perspective specifically of the Western consciousness, states: “[the Western world] has, since roughly 2000 B.C., been progressively disenchantment, or ‘disgodded’” (58). His comment increases the range of Tuan’s claim, and places McClure’s argument in an even broader context than he suspects. Berman describes this slowly eroded, disgodded world as “largely lost to our imaginations; a world of resonance, resemblance, and incredible richness” (65). Writing specifically of the American experience, Tuan elaborates: “As modernization proceeds, American space may still be beautiful and regionally varied, but it will be a different kind of beauty and variety, for it will lack the amplitude of emotional resonance that only a deep engagement with nature and the rhythm of the seasons can produce” (181). The literature of re-enchantment McClure postulates in reaction to the nonetheless communally felt loss of landscapes capable of providing space for adventure is perhaps rooted in what remained of the fields of sensitivity and perception Berman and Tuan suggest Westerners once possessed. In other words, at its core, re-enchantment became an affirming act of imagination and nostalgia for writers and their audiences; this is particularly true of late 19th and 20th century Americans, to whom open space is equated to the freedoms associated with the American West. Because of this, the broad and long
history Berman outlines behind McClure’s blueprint is rightly well adapted to site specific local literatures, especially California literature during the era of my project’s focus; especially if, as Tuan claims, regionalism is threatened by modernization, then romantic literature written about a single region on the cusp of modernity becomes incredibly important as documents of historical significance, as Scharnhorst’s address suggested.

In its first, enchanted phase, perhaps beginning with the questionable adventures of Sir Francis Drake in the 16th century and reaching its apotheosis in 1849 and the years immediately following, emigrant journals and the rudimentary maps they used comprise the foundation of California myth in literature. Statewide, Bayard Taylor’s eponymous *El Dorado* (1850) is the recognized authoritative Gold Rush document. Conscious of the New World trope inherited from the Spanish, Taylor’s book infused the California he witnessed with the mythical potency of the long sought after imaginary land. Tuan’s work in cultural geography situates Taylor’s authorial impulse: “Facts require contexts to have meaning, and contexts invariably grow fuzzy and mythical around the edges” (*Space and Place* 88). The emblematic three hundred year old search for gold in the Americas predetermined that the exodus to California would become mythological, Taylor simply popularized the trope. No less surcharged, fortunately there are also a number of exemplary texts directly relevant to the Feather and Yuba Rivers from this period upon which my project will also draw: Alonzo “Old Block” Delano’s *Life on the Plains and Among the Diggings* (1854), Louise “Dame Shirley” Clappe’s *The Shirley Letters* (1855), and J.S. Holliday’s edited William Swain journals of the period *The World Rushed In* (1981). The former two have often been noted as being the sources
of Bret Harte’s, and by Witschi’s association John Muir’s, tales. They, along with the myriad other Gold Rush journals and reminiscences are the originators of the tropes and the misinformation, and they entail the natural disasters responsible for human loss cemented in California legend. The foremost maps associated with this period, Trask’s of 1852 and Goddard’s of 1857, are notable primarily for their open spaces, their lack of trustworthy detail, and intriguingly, their willful cartographic references to lands of “perpetual snow” and “unexplored regions.” Because “myths flourish in the absence of precise knowledge” (Tuan, *Space and Place* 85), the unknown, as represented spatially on these documents, must have been especially potent and provocative and productive of an enchanted space.

According to historian Kevin Starr, “No other phase of the American frontier witnessed such a pouring forth of prose” (*Americans and the California Dream* 50). Gary Kurutz’s bibliography *The California Gold Rush* (1997) substantiates Starr’s claim, listing over 700 works published between 1848 and 1853 (Qtd in Kowalewski 207). In Starr’s estimation:

> What holds the literature together… is its collective return to primary experience. For a few brief years, in far-off California, the bottom fell out of the nineteenth century. Americans--- and not just Americans of the frontier--- returned en masse to primitive and brutal conditions, to a Homeric world of journeys, shipwreck, labor, treasure, killing, and chieftainship… Moments of stark experience, recorded without self-consciousness and yet shot through with mythic power, filled their narratives [with scenes which were] not out of place in an epic memorializing a lost world and ancient heroes. (51)

> In short, the emigrants’ lives, because of the challenges the land presented them with, became enchanted. Such blurring of past, present, and legend is indicative of the reorientation necessary to a successful existence in an unknown country, and is a
precursor to the disorientation fundamental to re-enchantment; the epic the emigrants imagined and the myths forming around it were a direct result of open space, and their primary experience made its timelessness “real.” Their distance from home and the known, their loneliness, and the cultural palimpsest their presence imposed on the region are responsible for this initial phase of enchantment.

The middle phase, that of California’s disenchantment, its rationalizing, disgodding, mapping, and gridding, began with Josiah Whitney’s State Geologic Survey in 1860 and reached its peak with the succession of state histories produced by Josiah Royce, Hubert Howe Bancroft, and John and Theodore Hittell in the 60s, 70s, and 80s. Although it has no “official” end, this phase of conquest and expansionism in the American West can rightly be called complete in 1890, following the national census that caused Frederick Jackson Turner to postulate the frontier’s closing. If, as Turner states, “The wilderness masters the colonist” (“The Significance of the Frontier in American History” 4), meaning the colonist must meet his environment on its own terms, and as noted above those terms were both practical and mythic, then the closing of the frontier represents a reciprocal, more final, opposing mastery on the colonist’s part. The disenchanted landscape, the feverishly known overcoming the unknown world, is the backlash of years of pioneer submission. But the disenchantment of which McClure writes is not merely the populating and subduing of a landscape, the hacking away of forests for farms; rather, it is the systematic demystification through scientific logic and bureaucratic organization developed to administer to America’s expanding domain, in combination with environmental loss, that constitutes a landscape of romantic or spiritual deficiency. Appropriately, the preceding timeline roughly approximates the end of the
age of exploration associated with imperialism globally as McClure outlines it; his antecedent for “late imperial romance,” the opening of the literature of the third phase, is Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*, which is based on Conrad’s own journey upriver on the Congo in 1890.

The state sanctioned work of disenchantment is discussed in terms of the creation of a “demographic topography” (169) in Benedict Anderson’s reading of the colonial administration of the imperial era in Southeast Asia, *Imagined Communities* (1983), by which the actual landscape was redefined by the colonial institutions of the census, map, and museum. In California, the aforementioned histories and scientific cataloguing had similar consequences: Whitney’s survey data and the official written accounts of California’s past combined to institutionalize the landscape of California; less a domain of mystery, it became a domain to be managed. Although Anderson’s interest is in the treatment of indigenous peoples, in context, the marginalized natural world suffered, as I argue, as physically and as metaphorically as much as the original cultures of the Orient have. The census, map, and museum, despite the fact that in combination the “demographic topography” they create is noted by Anderson to be an “imagined map,” nevertheless provide the dominant culture with justification for its policies. In the same way the census, map, and museum shaped “the way in which the colonial state imagined its dominion--- the nature of the human beings it ruled, the geography of its domain, and the legitimacy of its ancestry” (*Imagined* 164), so too was California’s topography transformed from frontier into a rationalized space by science and western thought.
As the State Geologic Survey’s director, Whitney was charged with “making an accurate and complete Geological Survey of the State, and to furnish, in his report of the same, proper maps and diagrams thereof, with a full and scientific description of its rocks, fossils, soils, and minerals, and of its botanical and zoological productions” (Farquhar, *History of the Sierra Nevada* 129). In essence, his charge was to remove the mystery of the “unexplored regions” and the “perpetual snows” of the Sierra from the maps, proffering instead a utilitarian landscape to potential enterprise. Edwin Tenney Brewster, author of *The Life and Letters of Josiah Dwight Whitney* (1909), indirectly couples Whitney’s survey with the driving forces of expansion: “From any point of view, scientific, commercial, or military, a trustworthy map was a necessity. To this, therefore, the survey applied itself from the beginning” (199). By 1868, just as Harte’s tenure at the *Overland* began, Whitney was forced to give a speech justifying the continuation of the Survey to California’s Legislature, which no longer wanted to foot the bill. His plea is characteristic of the age: “The exact stage of civilization of every country or State can at once be inferred from the character of its maps” (Whitney 7). Bolstered by this conceit and the work his Survey had completed during the years prior, Whitney envisioned that, “With the aid of our maps, each county can, by the help of the County Surveyor, and at a comparatively trifling expense, have a special county map of its own, on which such items may be inserted as are particularly desirable for county purposes” (11). Thus stated, based on his master data, Whitney presented the Legislature with a landscape that, less than twenty years after it had been capable of “memorializing a lost world and ancient heroes,” could now be accounted for in the mundane terms of “the elevations of towns, mining camps, valleys, mountains and passes, the distribution and character of animal
life, forest and plant vegetation, climatological data, circumstances bearing on agricultural capacity, and many other points of this kind” (12). His data, this reduction of the State to a demographic topography, in addition to the newly published social histories aforementioned, dragged California’s landscape from the age of myth and timelessness and reinserted it into the modern age for the stated purpose of “civilizing” it.

The first Geologic Survey produced two major works: foremost is William Brewer’s *Up and Down California* (1930), parts of which have direct relevance to the re-enchanted landscapes of Harte and Muir in the Feather and Yuba River region; second is Clarence King’s *Mountaineering in the Sierra Nevada* (1871), sections of which were published in the *Overland* contemporaneously to the work Harte and Muir produced.

William Brewer and Clarence King, referenced earlier in regards to Harte and Muir in remarks made by Stegner, represent that stasis between imperialism and romance in literature McClure says is indicative of this middle phase, in which “romance and expansion go hand in hand, and romance writers glory not only in the heroics of those who venture beyond the pale but also in the splendors of the court, the empire, Christendom” (80-1).

Whitney openly staged public battles with Harte and Muir in print, and Muir and King, at least subconsciously, fought for possession of the same turf in the southern Sierra. Muir’s influential first biographer Linnie Marsh Wolfe describes Muir’s first climb of the recently named Mount Whitney, at the top of which he found a note written by King claiming it, along with a message from Carl Rabe, at the time the only other person ever to have climbed the peak. Pointing out that Muir “went away without adding his own name” to the tin can where he’d found the names of the others (170), Wolfe
speaks volumes about the difference in agendas of the disenchanters, the continent namers, and a re-enchanter like Muir. Having climbed it by a route “the Survey people” said couldn’t be done, Muir just as casually descended it modestly and anonymously. Yet, for the level of excitement they induce, for their sense of adventure, and for their craftsmanship, King’s essays are often critically placed in counterpoint to Harte and Muir, while Brewer’s journal, the work of “a very keen and careful observer” (Up and Down xi), though not as purposely literary as King’s, is found to be notable for its “accuracy of observation, coupled with… devotion to truth,” because it “rarely goes beyond the limits of his own experience” (Up and Down xix-xx), making it an interesting critical alternative to Harte’s work especially.

Brewer and King are representative of several other scientists doing similar work in the Feather and Yuba country in the early 1870s that figure into my project of historicizing the re-placed landscape. W. H. Pettee, C. W. Hendel, Arthur Keddie, and F. H. Knowlton, among others, were engaged in geologic, botanical, and cartographic work either for the State, the County, or the Federal government. Based on the products of their research, such trappings of civilization, those foremost foes of enchantment, road building, rail building, and telegraph lines, were all made possible in the region.

Arguably synonymous with the American Dream (Starr Americans), by the 1870s California’s cities had been industrialized, its landscapes altered, and finally, its economy depressed. The spiritual center of California yet remained the Sierra Nevada, however, despite the fact that by this time it had likewise been mined, mapped, and was entering into the first heyday of industrial logging. This is the California that Harte, writing the Yuba and Feather River watersheds in 1870, and Muir rewriting them in 1874, inherited.
Emblematic of the third, re-enchanted phase in the literature of the American West is the ubiquitous grizzly-on-the-railroad track cover of the *Overland Monthly*. The transcontinental railroad would be completed just under a year after the *Overland*’s first issue, transforming the arduous, often life and death struggle of crossing the plains from a months’ long endeavor into a relatively comfortable week long trip and bringing “civilized” America so much closer to the West. It would have taken little foresight on behalf of Harte and his editorial staff to sense the symbolic end of California’s frontier days. The *Overland*’s charge, however, was not iconoclasm, but to be a mouthpiece for the spirit of boosterism related to “the development of the state” then prevalent among entrepreneurs. From the outset Harte’s editorship challenged the motivations of owner Anton Roman just as Harte’s re-enchantments vied for possession of the flavor of the region. Representative of the “civilizing” of the West, in the years immediately following the Central Pacific’s completion, rail lines would be extended throughout the state. Almost half of the world’s railroad track, by 1890, was located within the United States, resulting in a true national economy. Additionally, rail transportation, while compressing space, was also normalizing time. In *The Culture of Time and Space: 1880-1918*, Stephen Kern posits an exaggerated importance of the keeping of time in Europe and America precipitated by the practical necessity of devising consistent train schedules capable of servicing large areas. The result was a standardized railroad time, from which all other clocks were then set. The California variety of late imperial romance seems to presage the outcome of all such normalizations. Early California literary historian Franklin Walker conflates the bear-on-the-tracks with the advent of re-enchantment: “it symbolized the last stand for independence on the part of a pioneer society… Near the
end of its frontier days, the West, having passed from naïveté to satire, reached the stage in which its early days became romantic.”

In fact, the demographic topography created during the years of disenchantment had lead to an equally imagined community of industrialized nationhood. However, regionalism defined a divided post-bellum America and the railroad symbolized for many the invasive, growing web of control Gilded Age magnates wielded. So, while McClure’s version of late imperial romance dates from the 1890s, the era Kern focuses on, in California the literature of re-enchantment coincided with the work of disenchantment occupying the 1860s and beyond. Paul Lauter stresses that regional literature was written in response to the growth of national markets, highlighting the fact that the origins of disenchantment were not only scientific, but that economics played a significant role as well:

In the face of the increasing homogeneity and standardization of life attendant on mass production and mass distribution of goods and entertainment, interest in preserving local and regional folkways and traditions that were in immanent danger of being lost was widespread. (Heath 11)

It was not simply the loss of frontier culture that absorbed Americans, as Walker noted, but an unsympathetic reaction to the customs filling in its void.

Literally, the loss of open space, and figuratively the culture that was overcoming it, drove regional authors to re-insert native, natural elements specific to the traditions of their areas into their narratives, reinstating them directly in the path of empire in order to forestall its ultimate triumph over them. Thus, Harte placed the grizzly in a pose of defiance in front of the oncoming train; Muir on the other hand, appealing to pathos for his preservationist cause, used the giant sequoia as a symbol of the regional
toll and the overt ecological losses at stake in an industrial culture. In their spatial productions, Harte and Muir generally reconstruct a nonhuman landscape capable of dominating their characters, thus accentuating the tenuous foothold human life and action has in a frontier space. For Harte this is perhaps merely out of necessity for romantic narrative, but for Muir it is an essential component of his preservationist agenda. The spirit of Harte’s re-enchantment, the Overland logo of the California grizzly, which was outright incapable of coexisting with civilization and is now extinct, was manifested in succeeding issues by the peripeteaic California flood that washes through Roaring Camp to take the lives of Luck and Kentuck, and again by the early snow reminiscent of the one that sealed the Donnor Party’s fate and took the lives of the outcasts on the trail to Sandy Bar, and then by the driving rainstorm that brought Yuba Bill’s stage to Miggles’s home, and finally by the sheer remoteness that precipitates the frontier justice meted upon Tennessee. Roaring Camp’s flood was reprised later by Muir in his description of the flood of 1875 that destroyed Marysville, and his windstorm creates the same aura of danger that must be surmounted in the Sierra as Harte’s driving rain and piling snow. At least symbolically, what science and government had reorganized and industry had exploited was being challenged by a literary frontier that accentuated, if not celebrated, the violence, danger, and the epiphanies of a wilder time. The re-enchanted literary landscape is not entirely a product of the oft-disparaged local color movement, however, because at its best it transcends nostalgia and has the capability to insight action. In light of Lauter’s comments, regionalism can rise above provincialism, or justify its motives. Moretti, in fact, in discussing the relationship between high and low prose, ponders whether “The strength of each canon is directly proportional to the provincialism of its
culture” (149). Therefore, Harte’s and Muir’s spatial productions are not simply provincialisms, as charged by Buell previously, but rather are liberated by the comparison. Because the bear-on-the-tracks should be read as a posture of defiance against standardization, the landscapes of Harte and Muir should be read as sites of defiance, resistance, and hope.

Harte’s and Muir’s re-enchanted landscapes as sites of defiance, resistance, and hope are problematized, however, by their erasures and disorientations. Against the demographic topographies of the age of disenchantment, their exclusions and inclusions nevertheless replicate the Eurocentrism and / or class bias of the imperialism their landscapes work to undo. Harte’s re-mythified (Buell) landscape, though it has proponents who argue both sides, is largely a space of white defiance and hope; Muir, open to charges of misanthropy, by emptying his landscape of industry, erases the working people of the historical space. In Harte’s case, this perception has cost him his popularity and a prominent role in the contemporary canon, and in Muir’s case it has complicated the role of his work in the modern environmental movement. Later chapters in this study will analyze this knottier side of re-enchantment.

Lastly, and finally, regarding the production of space itself: I believe that setting is the cornerstone of narrative. Furthermore, I believe that setting is an outmoded literary term too often subordinated to character and plot. Setting refers to place; where narrative *happens*. I would add to this definition that place, the meaningful location, is best considered by literary scholars through the anthropological term, inscribed landscape, as defined by Bruno David and Meredith Wilson in *Inscribed Landscapes: Making and Marking Place*: an inscribed landscape has literally been “signed,” that is,
has been physically or metaphorically marked by those who inhabit, or have inhabited it (1 emphasis added). Scientific examinations ask what these marks represent, and what their sociocultural meanings are (David, Wilson 3), the same questions literary scholars ask of texts. David and Wilson identify the process of making a location meaningful as “dwelling” (vii), to which I suggest social geographer Tim Cresswell’s analysis extrapolates: “By taking space and place seriously… we can provide another tool to demystify and understand the forces that effect and manipulate our everyday lives” (27).

Literary scholars, using David and Wilson’s definition in conjunction with Cresswell’s analysis, should consider setting, the “place” of a text, as a meaningful location because it has been metaphorically inscribed by the author; they should recognize that narrative, when understood as the literature of a place, belongs to the metaphorically inscribed landscape. Although narrative is not physically present in place, it nonetheless assigns meaning to the spaces it describes because it combines site to text ideationally.

Much of the domain of place studies in literature falls under the theoretical disciplines of Marxism, Post-Colonialism, and Ecocriticism. Each of these approaches produces unique studies of how space is denied, maintained, and developed. The former two inevitably focus on personhood and are much more adaptable to free play than the latter, whose concentration is on the non- or posthuman landscapes which predate human invention. An increasing set of neologisms and phrases has been developed by practitioners from various fields to describe either the experience of a space, the production of a space, or the consciousness produced from the combination of both, that is, the perceived, conceived, and lived spatial encounter.9 The following list is a sampling, in chronological order, of terms developed from among geographical,
psychoanalytical, literary studies, and architectural argumentations: topophilia and topo-
analysis (Gaston Bachelard 1958), landscapes of the mind and dreampolitick (Joan
Didion 1968), topophilia (as reprised by Tuan 1974), imaginary landscape (Edward Said
1978), inner and outer landscape (Lopez 1988, Buell 1995), middle landscape (Leo Marx
1964, Peter Rowe 1991), invisible landscape (Kent Ryden 1993), terrain vague (Ignasi
Sola-Morales 1996), and first-, second-, and thirdspace (Edward Soja 1996), to name but
a few. In order, the above terminology commences with the poststructuralists’ belief that
self creates space, is followed by the regionalists’ response to such an hypothesis, and
then the post-colonialists’ affirmation and application of it; from there the list proceeds to
the ecocritics’ backlash against that premise, in which the succeeding terms forward their
belief that place creates self; what follows from Lopez and Buell are attempts to justify
the conceptual (fictional) and lived (historical) conundrum, with side trips into urban
studies and architecture, actual spatial productions. Each designation becomes
increasingly more difficult to explicate completely because of its rhetorical density: for
instance, before geographer Edward Soja envisioned a trialectics of space, all spaces were
predominantly considered dialectically; this, despite the fact that before him philosopher
Henri Lefebvre designated separate physical space, mental space, and social space, with
several sub-categories either related to practice or to production incorporated under each.
The emergence of the concept of the third, the hybrid, is intimately linked to this
evolution.

Author, text, and place represent perceived, conceived, and lived spaces. The
perceived space is a mental space nurtured by an author’s perspective, which in turn is
formulated from memory and experience. The conceived space is a social space,
constructed of the interactions, agreements and conclusions of mental spaces. This is the space of the text. The lived space is physical. It is the historical space, or place, experienced by all.

While a growing lexicon has emerged to describe the signifier / signified relationship between language and the physical spaces it describes, the central discussion remains whether “Expression creates being” (Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space* xxiii), or if “The land, in a certain, very real way, compels the minds of the people” (Lopez, *Arctic Dreams* 202). To return to the previous discussion regarding the reciprocity between site and text: the post-modern construct, including Marxist and Post-Colonial thought, seems to favor Bachelard’s claim: until the marginalized voice is heard, it has no space to declare as its own, and second, in the practice of everyday life, choice dictates space (de Certeau); but to the Ecocritic, Lopez makes the rightful claim: first, from an ecological perspective, landscapes prefigure all other expression, and second, it is affirmed by Franco Moretti’s adage, “without a certain kind of space, a certain kind of story is simply impossible” (100). The two perspectives are not exclusive of each other, however: whether or not self defines place or place defines self, real and imagined landscapes, historical and fictional spaces, react on and with each other. Suffice it to say that in discussions of inscription the differences in opinion seem to proceed based on whether the scholar is dealing with the built or the natural environment in their analysis. I assert that place produces self in spatial production (conceived space), and self produces place in spatial practice (lived space). Models that apprehend the role of conceived space such as Soja’s thirddspace, then, appear to be the most substantive, although the primary difference between the concept of outer and inner landscapes posited by Lopez and
forwarded by Buell is merely that they conflate the perceived / conceived, rather than parsing them out.

Therefore, at the risk of “explaining the flower by the fertilizer” (Bachelard xxx), that is, by veering too far from the texts themselves, I contend that my investigation into the spatial productions of Harte and Muir through an examination of the historical and the fictional spaces included in their work affirms the place-text-author connection and substantiates that place is formed of landscape and story. By approaching place in part through narrative scholarship, fieldwork in the metaphorically inscribed landscape reveals that the fertilizer from which the flower of literature grows is as vital and mysterious as the flower itself and the two should not be viewed separately, but as a fluid, symbiotic system.
CHAPTER II

REPLACING BRET HARTE; BRET
HARTE RE-PLACED

Introduction

Fritz Cohn’s translation of his Grandfather’s memoir “Saint Louis and Poker Flat in the 50s and 60s,” published in issue 4 of *California Historical Society Quarterly* 1940, advises the reader:

One should not try to identify the Poker Flat of Bret Harte with the mining camp in Sierra County, for Harte, in most instances, used names merely as ‘convenient counters,’ making little or no attempt to have his description of the place tally with reality. (297)

Cohn is referencing similar advice given to the reader by George R. Stewart in his quintessential 1931 Harte biography *Argonaut and Exile* (304). In like manner, in his *Geographical and Historical Dictionary of Camps, etc* (1975), Erwin Gudde stated: “Bret Harte’s ‘The Outcasts of Poker Flat’ has no connection with the camp [in Sierra County] except the name” (272), reprising his earlier, “The scene of Bret Harte’s ‘The Outcasts of Poker Flat’ is purely fictional and has nothing to do with the place” in *California Place Names* (1949; 297).

While it would appear that Stewart’s advice is largely sound, and that on the surface Gudde is correct in his assumption, they are simply the beneficiaries of a long critical history disassociating Harte’s work with the places and landscapes he described
that stretches back to his stories’ publication. Popularly, though, attempts to rediscover the sites of Harte’s work, or to capitalize commercially on them, have been practiced just as extensively. However, by 1994 Gary Scharnhorst asked, “Whatever Happened to Bret Harte?” in *American Realism and the Canon,* noting that Harte had disappeared from the most recent important anthologies and acknowledging that many felt he was of interest only to “San Franciscans and buffs of California memorabilia” (208). Besides Scharnhorst himself, few scholars of note have attempted to answer this query, the lone exception being Nicolas Witschi, who examined Harte’s influence on American realism in *Traces of Gold* in 2002. It may be fairly stated that the author whose landscapes did not “tally with reality” has himself become critically immaterial. Because of the apparent placelessness of his work, the critical, personal, and commercial reception of Harte’s mining towns is very closely linked with his canonical disappearance. A traditional literature review, historicized in the context of Harte’s spatial production, ironically reveals the reason for his present de-canonization and subsequent immateriality. Therefore, the first object of a re-placement of Harte’s landscapes is to identify the terms under which he has been replaced.

**Out of Place**

Beginning with the publication of “The Luck of Roaring Camp” in 1868 in the second volume of the *Overland,* the time Harte spent in the Sierra goldfields has become increasingly significant to his detractors, defenders, biographers, and to literary critics of the American West. On this point, Harte has been assumed an inauthentic “romancer.”10 The prescription among scholars and those others with a stake in his legacy has thus
tended either to overstate Harte’s role in the Mother Lode, or to overemphasize his fabrication of it.¹¹ Wallace Stegner says of Harte: “Whatever virtues he had, they were not the virtues of realism. His observation of the Gold Rush Country, character, and society was neither very accurate nor very penetrating; neither was much of it firsthand” (“Introduction” viii). Regardless, foremost biographer George Stewart himself ignores his own advice, falling prey to the urge to match Harte’s fiction to geographic reality even as he denies the probability of succeeding in such a venture. For example, Stewart, using the topographical descriptions in Harte’s fiction as clues, combines them with what he knows of Harte’s early, brief, experiences in the Southern Lode, and thus determines where he feels Harte’s drama, *M’liss*, is located. Gudde, also, absolutely certain that Poker Flat in Northern California is not Harte’s Poker Flat, appears comparatively confident that Sandy Bar in El Dorado County *most likely is* the site of Harte’s “Iliad of Sandy Bar,” claiming, “Bret Harte used this name (or that of another Sandy Bar) for his story ‘The Iliad of Sandy Bar’” (305). The conclusions Stewart and Gudde reach belie a predisposition towards believing that because Harte spent a short amount of time in the Southern Lode, his stories then, unfold there; the presumption being that Harte’s fictional ‘Angels,’ ‘Calaveras,’ ‘North Fork,’ etc are indeed the Angels Camp, Calaveras County, and North Fork of the southern Sierra in their estimations, but ‘Poker Flat’ in the northern lode is not Poker Flat because Harte had not spent any time there. Others have gone so far as to name the miners Harte’s most famous characters were modeled after: it had been commonly assumed that Jim Gillis was “Truthful James,” and Thomas Pemberton, Harte’s friend and first biographer, includes a photograph of “The home of Bret Harte’s ‘Truthful James’ on Jackass Flat, Tuolumne County, California” (111). Henry Childs
Merwin reproduces the photo in his biography, and Scharnhorst, discussing the origins of “Bret Harte Country” as an invention of the early 20th century tourism industry notes that in 1926, “a plaque had been hung on the wall of the rustic cabin in Second Garrote, California, where the originals of Tennessee and his Partner had lived” \textit{(Bret Harte 119)}.

It is important to note that what Stewart and O’Connor have downplayed in each of their biographies of Harte, and what the first official literary historian of California, Ella Sterling Cummins, in \textit{The Story of the Files} (1893) time and again tactfully sidestepped, is the broad resentment felt by other California writers and the reading public towards Harte that blossomed during the time of his success. These aspersions foreshadow the critical doubt lodged against Harte. Merwin notes that Harte was “accused of misrepresenting pioneer society” when he became famous (53), biographer Richard O’Connor reports that his fellow writers envied him (106), and Stewart points out that when Harte left San Francisco for the East the \textit{Chronicle} described him leaving behind “a few jealous ones, whose lesser flames” were overpowered by Harte’s genius (185). His first short story in the \textit{Overland}, “The Luck of Roaring Camp,” was, now famously, denounced as immoral in California upon publication. But the east coast loved him. Of this phenomenon, Wallace Stegner observed that, “Harte’s popularity… was always greatest in direct proportion to the reader’s distance from and ignorance of the mines” (“Introduction” x). Stegner is referring directly to Harte’s spatial productions; however, to say as much about Harte the person appears equally true, as demonstrated by the preceding claims of his biographers.

Indicative of Stegner’s statement as it is intended in context, though, is Harte’s greatest early champion, the influential editor William Dean Howells of Boston, who described
Harte’s journey east to write for the *Atlantic* as, “like the progress of a prince,” stating “Roaring,” “The Outcasts of Poker Flat,” and “Tennessee’s Partner” were “earnests of an American literature to come” (“A Belated Guest” 243). These are the very stories that Scharnhorst claims “appeared to lukewarm if not cool notices in San Francisco” (*Bret Harte* 23). Scharnhorst goes on to state: “When it ‘was not denounced as ‘improper’ and ‘corrupting’ [“The Luck of Roaring Camp”] was coldly received as being ‘singular’ and ‘strange’” though it was “universally praised in the East.” Finally, however, “Roaring” was hailed as “the best magazine story of the year” (qtd. in Scharnhorst *Opening the American Literary West* 41).

The success of “The Luck of Roaring Camp” made Harte famous, but, in O’Connor’s words, “popularity was something else. Beloved and adored in his small circle of friends, he was a bit too aloof, fastidious, and disdainful to attract a nimbus of well-wishers. Many resented his ostentation” (106). Intriguingly, Harte’s reputation had become suspect even before “Roaring Camp”: in 1865 Harte took sole credit as editor of a book of California poetry, *Outcroppings*, published by Anton Roman. Not only was Harte criticized for his editorial choices, but in San Francisco literary circles it quickly became common knowledge that the book’s genesis, the bulk of the compilation work, and the book’s title itself, were actually due to the efforts of a woman named Mary Tingley, who had presented Roman with the project some years earlier. Although Harte did bear the brunt of the repercussions for his selections, he didn’t properly acknowledge the impact of Mary Tingley’s work on his final product. In fact, he was “nearly sued” by Tingley for his actions (Scharnhorst, *Bret Harte* 13) Harte had just begun to make a name for himself at the time *Outcroppings* was released, and, according to George Stewart:
Those whom he dwarfed were ready to vent themselves against him, and *Outcroppings* gave them only too good an opportunity. While their enmity could not stop his growth, one cannot help thinking that some of the disrepute which marred his later life traced its origin to the time when he engaged in what should have been the innocent amusement of collecting a little volume of verses to catch the holiday trade. (138)

Stewart’s phrase, “the disrepute that marred his later life,” and the insinuation contained in this quote as a whole, are the closest Stewart gets to acknowledging the problem of Harte’s later “borrowing,” a phrase which later critics would construe to mean “inauthentic.” The informed reader can conclude that Harte’s use of Mary Tingley’s work is ultimately what opened the door for his later detractors when he reached the pinnacle of his fame, and formed the basis for the almost continuous reappraisal of his accomplishments once his reputation had faded.

Stegner’s comment about Harte’s popularity, therefore, underscores the overriding theme of Harte’s critics separate from immorality, that is, his counterfeit version of the Gold Rush. Stegner echoes the earlier professional animosity of his peers and fellow Californians if not their personal dislike of him. Harte as counterfeit is the more enduring complaint, and foretells his de-canonization. But it is essential to note that Harte’s character also played a significant role in his subsequent immateriality. In San Francisco, Harte had “earned a reputation, deserved or not, as aloof, supercilious, and extravagant” (Scharnhorst, *Opening* 42). John Carmany, the disgruntled second owner of the *Overland*, should be included among those who agreed with the preceding evaluation. He later made a statement that conflates his distaste for Harte with the overarching theme of Harte as imposter: Harte was, he claimed, “a dandy; a dainty man, too much a woman to rough it in the mines” (Scharnhorst, *Opening* 51). Carmany’s claim makes it clear that
a) Harte was unlikable, and b) that he did not have firsthand experience in the mines and his work was a forgery because of it. As an example, this conflation is critical to understanding Harte’s decline because had Harte been perceived as authentic, later charges of over sentimentalizing by prominent New Critics could not have resonated as they did. Worse for Harte, upon leaving for the East, he broke all ties with his San Francisco friends. Of them all, only Josephine Clifford McCracken ever received a letter from him (Stewart 200), Ina Coolbrith, to whom he had promised to show her poetry to eastern editors, never heard from him again (Rhodehamel 110); and Anton Roman, “on arriving in New York was snubbed so pointedly that he never forgave Harte” (Stewart 200). Biographer Richard O’Conner said of Harte, that while he was still in San Francisco, “after the success of “The Luck of Roaring Camp” [he] had fallen into the habit of ‘cutting’ acquaintances of lesser importance” (106); George Stewart states that this predilection continued, not only with Coolbrith and the rest, but that,

After his great reception in the East, Harte, who had never had much love for California, at once came to feel that it was a place in which he had, comparatively speaking, been fed on husks. He virtually abandoned all his California friends. (200)

Once in Boston and introduced to the literary giants of that city, Harte’s reputation glimmered briefly and then faded. Despite the fact that Harte’s reviews had initially been so favorable there, tepid response to his character and literary output likewise caused his downfall and his contract with the Atlantic was not renewed. Unfortunately for Harte, he had immediately alienated himself from new friends in the East, attacking the literary establishment, barely fulfilling his obligations to the Atlantic Monthly, missed engagements, and overextended himself financially, becoming a debtor.
Once in Boston and New York, Harte’s long-time friend Mark Twain began a campaign against him that never abated. Leaving the helm of the Overland for fortune at the Atlantic sealed Harte’s fate and an ensuing vogue of disparaging him among his fellow Californians and San Francisco authors blossomed.

After Harte had left California in infamy, and had his character quickly subjected to ignominy in the West and the East, the substance of his work began increasingly to be challenged. Popular, authoritative histories of California by Josiah Royce and Hubert Howe Bancroft, each with axes to grind against him, came out concurrently with Harte’s later stories, and the agendas of these two men directly conflicted with Harte’s fame and his treatment of morality and heroism in the west. Royce, Bancroft, and other critics in California began to imply that the germ of Harte’s stories came from Louise Clapp, known by the nom de plume “Dame Shirley,” rather than from his own limited experience. Clappe had published an influential series of letters from the California mines for Stephen Massett’s Marysville newspaper the Herald in 1851 and ‘52, and they were reissued in Ferdinand Ewer’s Pioneer magazine in 1854, to a much larger audience. Today known as the Shirley Letters, they are considered by many to be the foremost account of the mines extant. Clappe lived at Rich Bar, on the East Branch of the North Fork of the Feather River, which is at the extreme northern end of the Mother Lode. Harte was not only aware of the Shirley Letters, but had known Louise Clappe personally in San Francisco. In fact, Clappe was most likely introduced to him by the same Mary Tingley who had initially compiled and edited the controversial Outcroppings. Tingley, and Harte’s close friend at the Overland Charles Warren
Stoddard, had been students of Clappe’s when she had left the mines for the city and had become a school teacher.

The relationships between each of those persons involved in the *Outcroppings* controversy are further complicated by their individual relationships with, and their allegiances to, either Harte or Clappe, and from these loyalties, perhaps, as Stewart alludes, comes the origin of the allegations later leveled against Harte. In addition to Tingley, besides being a rival publisher of Anton Roman’s, Hubert Howe Bancroft, one of those outraged by *Outcroppings*, had lived for a short time at Rich Bar, working for his brother at the Empire Hotel when Shirley was there and writing her *Letters*, meaning Bancroft may have had a personal attachment to Shirley’s legacy. Shirley’s poetry was among those left out of the anthology by Harte, despite the fact that Mary Tingley said, years later, that Harte and Shirley had been friends, that Harte was “captivated by her charm” and had “enjoyed her brilliant wit and conversation” (Smith-Baranzini, “Introduction” *Shirley Letters* 260). Tingley is characterized as a “favorite pupil” of Shirley’s, and it is said that,

> Her affection and respect for her former teacher were so great that she managed always to keep in touch with Shirley, by visits and correspondence, throughout the forty or more years between school days and Shirley’s death. (Paul, “In Search of Dame Shirley” 129)

In 1922 Tingley wrote an essay for the preface of Thomas C. Russell’s important edition of the *Shirley Letters* in which she claimed outright that Harte had borrowed from Clappe’s work. While, according to Ella Cummins and others, Tingley had remained gracious about Harte’s treatment of her in regards to *Outcroppings*, it would seem that Tingley had bided her time and had done a more thorough job of
damaging Harte’s reputation on Shirley’s behalf. Stoddard, close to Harte, Clappe, and Tingley, but also writing after Harte had become infamous, in a letter to John H. Carmany, verified that Harte continued to snub Shirley during his tenure as editor of that magazine, blaming Harte’s motivation for treating her poorly on jealousy over Shirley’s skill. Stoddard, in his In the Footprints of the Padres (1912), also indicated that he shared the same longstanding friendship with Shirley as Mary Tingley did, and that Shirley had remained his “faithful friend and unfailing correspondent” long after his school days had passed (92). In The Story of the Files Cummins portrays the poetry anthology Outcroppings as either “Anton Roman’s Outcroppings” or “Mary Tingley’s Outcroppings,” as if wresting it entirely from the record as being Bret Harte’s.

Josiah Royce was born in the gold fields of the central Sierra, in Grass Valley, into the society Harte was presenting his own interpretation of to the rest of the world. Royce, a philosopher, taught at UC Berkeley from 1878 until 1882, and in 1886 published California, from the Conquest in 1846 to the Second Vigilance Committee in San Francisco: A Study in American Character. Royce’s subtitle underscores the perspective from which he wrote his history. An early review of Royce’s work found that it was not free from grave defects… The principle fault of this volume comes from the fact that he wrote as a philosopher and moralist rather than as a historian… events in California are treated as illustrating salient traits of American character, as seen through somewhat puritanical glasses. (Chapman 500 emphases added)

It is not surprising then that Royce was offended by Harte’s characters and the situations they found themselves in. The appeal of the Shirley Letters to Royce lay in the fact that Shirley’s reverence was for the landscape, and that she reported on the miners and their
actions rather than celebrated them. He approved of her because she came out of the romantic tradition, characterizing herself as a proper Victorian woman plucked from civilization and dropped directly into the wilderness, and she carried, therefore, a certain cache of virtue which balanced neatly with the vulgarity she witnessed. Yet, Royce is comparing the nostalgia of a travelogue to a fiction that was part of a movement which had begun to show signs of an early realism, and Harte is indicted by Royce simply because his work offends the sensibilities of Royce’s project as well as his personal sensibilities. That those later to indict Harte for “borrowing” from Shirley by citing Royce, but overlooking Royce’s acrimony towards “Mr. Harte’s perversions,” displays their willingness to accept his authority without examining Royce’s motive.

The next major contribution to the Harte-Shirley controversy was Bancroft’s History of California. Bancroft’s monumental Works, of which History of California is a part, carries with it its own stigma; apparently Bancroft’s methodology, like Royce’s motivation, was also questionable. Ella Cummins, writing her Story of the Files shortly after the History of California volumes came out, says of them:

A great deal of profitless discussion has arisen as to which part of these books belongs to... different assistants and what part to Mr. Bancroft. Those who are in a position to know prefer to keep silent, and those who, not knowing, yet venture opinions upon the subject, are very apt to misstate the items in every instance. (169)

Charles Warren Stoddard, in a letter to Ina Coolbrith, bemoans the sad state to which a woman who had worked on Bancroft’s project without recognition had been reduced. 13

By all appearances, Bancroft was guilty of the same sort of “borrowing” without citing of which he accused Harte. Harte, it would seem, became the victim of an unsubstantiated
trend; removed from San Francisco literary society, even twenty years later, he still found himself to be the subject of its in-fighting.

Bancroft and Royce, in addition to Tingley the two most often quoted sources in conjunction with Harte and Shirley, being the foundation in print for the allegations lodged against Harte, apparently base their contentions on their personal opinions and conjecture rather than in fact. Of Bancroft and his Works, Cummins actually asks, “Are they prejudiced, biased and without critical value? Are they the expression of one man’s mind, and that mind lacking the judicial instinct, or not?” (169). Cummins retained her notes and the sources she used when compiling the pieces for her two major works on California literature. The background information for much of The Story of the Files was collected under the auspices of The Wasp in 1891.14 On the Wasp form letter filled out by Bancroft, in response to the question “Most ambitious work?” Bancroft responds “History of the Pacific States,” to which History of California is related. Bancroft’s reply to “Author’s prevailing idea or motive of thought in writing?” is, tellingly, “self-gratification.”15 Compare Bancroft’s “self-gratification” to his contemporary Theodore Hittel’s response to the same question, “To instruct and entertain,” and a clearer picture of Bancroft’s self indulgence comes into focus. It’s fascinating that years afterward, George R. Stewart, whom Wallace Stegner described as a particularly thorough researcher (Stegner, Where the Bluebird Sings 156), could have been so close to the Harte-Shirley controversy as to mention the disdain of Harte’s fellow authors for him, and yet not mention her. Certainly he was aware of the controversy: each of the documents containing the allegations against Harte predates Stewart’s work.
Within a few years of the date Stewart published his biography of Harte, the topic was still of enough interest that Carl Wheat put out a new addition of the *Letters* and rehashed Russell’s introduction, which was the publication that represents perhaps the single most damaging corroboration of evidence against Harte in print concerning Louise Clappe. In the definitive 1922 edition of the *Shirley Letters*, Russell brings together the works of Royce and Bancroft to highlight his own close reading of Harte’s early stories and poems. Russell’s goal is to prove Shirley’s importance and to put her in a position of prominence in California literature, which she undoubtedly deserves. However, in so doing, by combining his own substantiations in regards to Harte with those of Bancroft and Royce, and by including a “first hand” account confirming their verity by Mary Tingley, whom I have already established as a person who bore some animosity towards Harte over *Outcroppings*, what Russell has accomplished in his attempt to cast light on the importance of Shirley’s work is an undoing of Harte’s literary output. The result of Russell’s scholarship is that today any modern scholar wishing to research the life and work of Shirley cannot do so without learning it in conjunction with the Harte controversy, right or wrong. These are the conditions under which Stewart found himself writing ten years after Russell’s edition and three decades after Harte’s death, and they explain the reason why he charged himself with the disentanglement of a misunderstood author from the amendments of his detractors, although it does not explain why he never mentions Clappe directly. Stewart’s preference towards the facts regarding the geography of Harte’s work, thus defined, returns his reader to the problem of the authentic spatiality of Harte’s Gold Rush.
Stewart’s *Names on the Land*, written six years after *Bret Harte: Argonaut and Exile* is definitely significant in the evolution of Stewart’s approach to the earlier work. Growing out of Stewart’s interest in place names, he and other colleagues, in 1951, established the American Name Society. Because of Stewart’s work in place name research, and his publications therein, he is remembered today as “the man who humanized onomastics” (American Name Society Web Site). Stegner said of him, “he had a constitutional inability to be emotional, partisan, or rabid. His impulse was precisely the other way: to be judicious, to examine the evidence, to hold his fire, to be wary of taking offense or sides” (*Bluebird* 164). However, because Stewart refused to even gloss the Dame Shirley controversy, he proves, at least in this instance, to have been decidedly partisan in his approach to Bret Harte. Stewart felt that myth and reality concerning Harte, and by extension, the American West, could be best mediated by explicating the realism of Harte’s places.

**Literary Footnote: Amendments to the Myth**

Stewart is not the only paradigm the history of Harte’s de-canonization must confront. To a lesser extent, Stewart’s colleague at the University of California and friend Erwin Gudde became a formidable, though minor opponent to the verity of Harte’s landscapes, as noted in the introduction to this chapter. Gudde’s publications represent the most accessible, albeit truncated, assessments of Harte’s places. Popularly, anyone interested in attempting to ascertain “Bret Harte Country,” in essence anyone in search of the myth using his widely read books as sources, would find that in most cases, Gudde disregards Harte’s link to the mining region. Of interest to the overlying theme of the
reliability of fictional spaces explored throughout the present work, is that the scholar must alternately rely on or counter Gudde’s claims regarding locales. Gudde, like Stewart, was also a founding member of the American Name Society, and he was chief editor of its publication *Names* for many years. Stewart reviewed Gudde’s *California Place Names* for *American Speech* in 1948, showing an intimate knowledge of Gudde’s research methods, and alluding to the fact that Gudde’s book would become an essential volume. Indeed, according to the American Name Society’s website, Gudde’s *California Place Names* has become “a model for state place name dictionaries, combining deep historical erudition with meticulous lexicographic acumen” (n pag). The *Dictionary of Gold Camps, etc* grew out of the earlier work and is currently held in equal esteem. Although I have found inconsistencies with each book, the fact remains that due to Stewart’s initial biographical study of Harte, and Gudde’s reiteration of Stewart’s analyses, a straightforward examination of Harte’s places is rarely seriously considered and its feasibility deemed suspect.

Following Stewart’s book, critical appraisals of Harte were few. Scharnhorst underlines that during the first decade of the 20th century Harte’s short stories were often anthologized, and were considered to be among the foremost of American literature (“Whatever Happened” 203); during the next decades the tourist industry got a hold of them and popularized the landscapes of the southern Sierra. In spite of his earliest detractors, Harte’s “convenient counters” had found their place in space, and Harte’s reputation itself seemed set. But after Stewart’s book, which “paid much attention to what may be called the biographical aspect of [Harte’s] writings… to the ways in which they grew out of his own experiences” (Stewart, *Bret Harte* viii), and thereby extracted
the facts from the myth, Harte’s writing became open to closer scrutiny. In 1940, another giant of western history, Bernard De Voto, edited *Mark Twain in Eruption* (1940), in which previously unpublished commentary by Twain vilified Harte’s character. Again, scrutiny of Harte the man reflected poorly on his reliability as an author. Like Carmany before him, Twain attacked his manhood, saying his manner of walking was “mincing,” that he was insincere, and that he lacked a conscience (Qtd in Scharnhorst “Whatever Happened” 206). Scharnhorst points out that additionally, De Voto dismissed Harte as “a literary charlatan whose tales have greatly pleased the second rate” (206), and later described them as “syrupy” (208). De Voto’s outright proclamation deriding Harte’s writing is portentous: in the years following, as Twain’s fame grew, Harte’s staggered in proportion. Finally, Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren, in their influential *Understanding Fiction* (1943), wrote derisively of Harte’s fiction, believing it to be “strained” and “over sentimental,” stating also that it had “credibility” problems (181, 184). Scharnhorst writes: “If Twain and De Voto impeached Harte’s character, Brooks and Warren administered the coup de grace to his critical reputation” (*Bret Harte* 120).

Protégé to both Stewart and De Voto and equally influential, Wallace Stegner edited the last major critical edition of Harte’s collected works in 1961. He begins by proclaiming that, “There are some writers who, no matter how great their living reputations, reveal themselves [as great] after their deaths… Bret Harte, it must be said at once, does not seem to be one of these writers” (“Introduction” vii). The critical appraisal that follows Stegner’s opening gambit focuses most closely on the authenticity of Harte’s landscapes. Of his geography, Stegner claims Harte did not possess the “virtues of realism,” that his geography, “swims and fades into the outlines of Never-Never Land,”
and that he had no “personal familiarity with the Sierra” (viii). This portrayal of his landscapes is broadly true; for instance, Howells recounted this anecdote: “When an azalea was shown to [Harte] as the sort of bush that Sandy drunkenly slept under in ‘The Idyll of Red Gulch,’ he asked, ‘Why, is that [sic] an azalea?’” (“Belated Guest” 247). But more significantly, Stegner’s critique moved the field of analysis concerning Harte away from an exploration of Harte the man and his personal experiences, into the realm of a proto-typical, place-based, historicized and extrinsic cultural studies; in essence, he introduced Harte scholarship into the study of “A Sense of Place.” Stegner bypasses the rote condemnations of the man, and proceeds directly to his spatial production; that Harte, “realized place” by making a world of “valid myths” (xv, xvi), but fails in his production because he lacks direct experience, assumes a new set of criteria to which the author of the American West is now measured. The western author, under this prescription must be the primary source of his work, and must write in a style recognizable as verifiable realism. Fictional and historical spaces assessed by these standards disqualify Harte’s romantic re-enchantments.

Related to this notable change in assessment to cultural studies, Scharnhorst additionally calls attention to the decline in interest in Harte due to the recovery of western women’s and minority writing. He finds fault with what he calls the “gatekeepers” of the canon, specifically the editorial board of the Heath Anthology, “antholo[gizing] by committee” (“Whatever Happened” 207). Gender studies, feminist literary criticism, and more recently, ecocriticism all find their separate faults with Harte, and, in Scharnhorst’s approximation, thus make room for authors who complete the portrait of an appropriately historicized West for the textbooks. In a less overtly
confrontational manner, it can be assumed that as the study of space and place, both geographic and cultural, having ascended in importance in literary studies, and branched into a growing number of interdisciplinary treatments, that it became progressively easier to discount Harte on the grounds of questionable realism.

So, lost finally to the admirable act of recovery Harte disappears, or at least becomes as immaterial as his landscapes, under critical scrutiny. Yet, for his enduring influence, Scharnhorst’s final plea is in favor of Harte’s substance: “By any reasonable criteria, Harte deserves to be resurrected from the footnote” (*Opening* 234). Critically and then popularly erased, Harte’s reinsertion into the canon will be predicated on understanding his spatial production, and the form and purpose of his myth-making.
CHAPTER III

“POKER FLAT” IS POKER FLAT:
RE-PLACING BRET HARTE’S
“DREAM WORLD OF
THE SIERRA”

Introduction

Re-placing the re-enchanted landscapes of Bret Harte’s foremost stories, “The Luck of Roaring Camp,” “The Outcasts of Poker Flat,” and “Tennessee’s Partner” within the watersheds of the Yuba and Feather Rivers has not been attempted before. At present, if Harte’s work is not assumed to be entirely un-placeable, then because his limited personal experience was in the Southern Lode, and because the southern Sierran counties have claimed it more vigorously, the body of his work, if at all, is located there. Yet, the paradox remains, why then do these first three tales appear to express instead a familiarity with the towns and terrain of the Northern Lode? In the general introduction to the present work I claim that the literary fieldworker asks two questions: The first is in regards to spatial practice: “How does Poker Flat the historical space change when we believe “The Outcasts of Poker Flat” transpired there?,,” and the second, its inverse, concerns spatial production in literature: “How is “The Outcasts of Poker Flat,” the fictional space, transformed when placed in Sierra County?” The former is the more generally asked question in literary studies; the latter, more radical, assumes that
places themselves are significant enough to influence or otherwise transform texts, and is the focus of this chapter.

Harte’s “Outcasts” needs Poker Flat in Sierra County more than Poker Flat in Sierra County needs “Outcasts.” In Harte’s case, because his Gold Rush tales are variously called “perverse romanticisms” (Royce 272), and because his landscapes are most often construed as unrealistic (Stegner “Introduction” viii), reclaiming their albeit imaginary spaces and re-placing them in the Yuba and Feather River country charges them with a true material antecedent, and anchors them with a fixity in reality heretofore assumed lacking. Such a re-placement revitalizes and recontextualizes the commonly employed comparisons to firsthand accounts recorded in the region prior to him, and from whom he is said to have “borrowed.” Placing Harte’s work in the same landscape as that of his predecessors, within the rubrics of enchantment and disenchantment, allows for a critical frame of reference as yet untried concerning “Roaring,” “Outcasts,” and “Tennessee”: does Harte’s re-enchantment, his inscribed landscape, match the inscriptions from the enchanted period?; additionally, do these fictions function as a re-enchanted landscape should, that is, in opposition to the demographic topography established by a range of government agencies and industries?. Proving the affirmative in each case reappropriates Harte’s image as an imposter and reveals his project at the outset of his fame to have been somewhat more complex than otherwise assumed.

Using what George R. Stewart calls the “convenient counters” (Bret Harte 304) of “Roaring,” “Outcasts,” and “Tennessee,” their place names, dispositions in the landscape, and the given distances from other known locations, and mapping them, they are returned to their rightful landscape in these watersheds. Founding Harte’s work on
geographical fact, that is, placing its phenomenon in a specific space (Moretti, *Atlas 7*), as well as understanding his deliberate disorientations as essential to his re-enchantment of the demographic topographies of the disenchanted landscape, gives critical clarity to Harte’s complete literary project. Placing these stories in the Yuba and Feather River country puts them in direct contact with their predecessors from the period of enchantment, Alonzo Delano’s *Life on the Plains and Among the Diggings* and Louise Clappe’s *The Shirley Letters*, and it underscores the complex standings of realism and romanticism in literature of the American West. Extending close readings from such a map deepens the connection to what Nicolas Witschi calls “a heretofore unrecognized commitment to realism” (*Traces of Gold* 10) in Harte’s work without diminishing its romantic force.

Harte’s Onomastics: “However Artificial, Indelible”

Franco Moretti tells his reader: “geography is not an inert container, is not a box where cultural history ‘happens,’ but an active force, that pervades the literary field and shapes its depth” (*Atlas 3*). In the same way geography informs literature, it informs other metaphoric inscriptions of its spaces. In his earlier study of American place naming, George R. Stewart outlined the role of geography:

Where jagged mountains reared up along the horizon, many names would describe shapes, but in flat country names of other meanings would be given. Where most streams were clear but one ran thick with reddish mud, a man coming to that stream would call it Red River…the thing and the name were almost one” (*Names on the Land* 5).

Naming is a fundamental act of settler culture because it transforms the unknown space into a known place, at least metaphorically. Because of geography’s part as an “active
force” behind inscription, the idea that in its earliest forms “the thing and the name [are] 
amost one” becomes increasingly significant to the study of literary fieldwork and spatial 
production in literature of the West. This sameness of signifier and signified in the case 
of place names of the West especially, whether a physical descriptor or not, by 
illuminating the depth and richness of the relationship between site and text allows the 
critic who studies space in literature to understand name as embodiment of historic space.

In Bret Harte’s “dream world of the Sierra” (O’Connor, Bret Harte 161) then, 
dependent on place names for its magic and its verisimilitude, sameness presents a 
conflict between historic and fictional space greater than their usual, endemic difficulties. 
Foremost, emigrants often trusted maps whose only connection to reality were their place 
names: in The World Rushed In J.S. Holliday cites a newspaper article published in Paris 
that was written from the mines:

On our poor little maps of California… the San Joaquin is shown as a river flowing 
between the California mountains and the sea, a short distance from San 
Francisco… one could, as it were, go to the mines in the morning and return home 
each evening to sleep. Alas, the same is true of the map as with almost everything 
that is said about California: one can find out the truth only in the place itself. (300)

William Swain, whose letters home from the Feather River watershed Holliday compiled 
for Rushed, reiterates the Frenchman’s sentiment: “I have yet to find the first man… who 
does not feel deceived and disappointed in the character and appearance of the country… 
every description of it has been shamefully and corruptly overwrought” (353). Moreover, 
Nicolas Witschi claims in Traces of Gold that by the time of Harte’s ascendance, 
“enough people had already, through their received impressions of California, imagined 
what the West should [sic] be like [so that their] frames of reference for the ‘facts’ were 
no more reliable than were [their] ‘fictions’” (Traces 2).
Beginning with misinformation and progressing only somewhat in the popular conscience in Harte’s era, the realism of the California landscape specifically was occluded by misrepresentation. This confusion of fact and fiction persisted despite the mapping by Whitney’s survey team so recently accomplished to counteract it. For many, western place remained known only by place name. In his biography of Harte, Gary Scharnhorst points out that Harte capitalized on this fact: “To the extent that his stories were distinctively western, Harte exploited in them a cultural moment of exotic milieu more fanciful than real. In effect, he wrote about the West to entertain readers unfamiliar with the region” (*Bret Harte* 47). Although biographer George Stewart notes that Harte, “expressed a preference for the liquidity of Indian and Spanish place names and commented on the unromantic ugliness of American monstrosities such as Poker Flat, Red Dog, and One Horse Flat” (*Bret Harte* 150-1) in an editorial in the *Californian* in 1866, it is obvious that by the following year, as a correspondent for the *Springfield Republican*, that he had learned the romantic value of the “American monstrosities” as currency among an eastern readership. When writing about the gold fields in the *Republican* for readers unfamiliar with the state, he employs these “monstrosities” to his advantage for their ironic, sardonic, or picturesque strengths. In 1867, Poker Flat and Jackass Gulch are portrayed to his readers outside of California as “Arcadian hamlets” peopled by “gentle villagers” (qtd. in Scharnhorst *Bret Harte’s California* 112) in the *Republican* article, their names invoked because they are provocative rather than off-putting. The shift is subtle but significant: first, as Witschi claims, fact and fiction had become inextricably bound, making realism and romanticism less certain as viable literary categories; second, Harte’s audience, no longer domestic, had transferred to one
that was more open to suggestion; and third, the change in the tenor of Harte’s usage orients Poker Flat, Red Dog, Jackass Gulch, etc in a certain time and place, fixing their “sameness” with region and era. It is with these names, along with the Spanish spellings of “canyon” and “madrone” for example, upon which he constructs his geography of the Mother Lode for his national and international readers in the ensuing years.

The inaccuracies of Harte’s deliberately disorienting, re-enchanted space, then, are a combination of the emblematic unreliability of Californian geography and iconography, coupled with his estimation of his audience; yet, to Californians during the period who felt they had proprietary rights to the image of their state, Harte’s exploitation of this uncertainty was a nagging trend. Harte’s was a landscape Ella Sterling Cummins called in *The Story of the Files* (1893), “queer, foreshortened [and] out-of-focus” (128). For example, thus re-enchanted, “Roaring Camp” as placed by Harte in the Sierra foothills rather than correctly in the Coast Range above Santa Cruz, is disqualified by the domestic reader for its faithlessness to the geography of the historic space. Additionally among Californians, as Mighels points out, Bret Harte the man lost credibility on this detail (*Files* 128-9). And yet, conversely, Wallace Stegner, in his introduction to *The Outcasts of Poker Flat and Other Tales* (1961), argues that through repetition Harte’s stories gained their own symmetry: “the little artificial world of Harte’s creation” became, “however artificial, indelible” (x). A transformation occurs in Harte’s recursive inscriptions which locates “Roaring Camp” in spite of itself. According to Erwin Gudde, in *California Gold Camps* (1975), “although [Roaring Camp] sounds like a typical name for a gold camp, no such place could be discovered… on the early maps which were checked” (293), yet through the process of repeated inscription outlined above, “Roaring
Camp” instead, in actuality represents a specific landscape of resistance, and has come to embody the era of enchantment, already past at the time of Harte’s telling, but oppositional to empire and to memory. Harte’s metaphoric inscription overwrites the historic space in a manner that puts place and name back into a relationship like that specified by Stewart; that is, because of Harte’s persistence, “Roaring Camp” and the Mother Lode became synonymous. And more importantly, both the epoch and the retelling of the epoch run contrary to the maps and histories, the demographic topographies, of the nation-state. Harte’s “Roaring Camp,” despite its inaccuracies, nonetheless attained an imaginative hold of equal permanence, less an erasure than a rewrite creating space for itself.

Elsewhere, of the phenomenon of indelibility through repetition, Joan Didion develops Stegner’s assertion: “Certain places seem to exist mainly because someone has written about them… A place belongs forever to whoever claims it hardest, remembers it most obsessively, wrenches it from itself, shapes it, renders it… remakes it in his image” (The White Album 146). Roaring Camp exists in the Gold Rush lexicon because Harte claimed it as a pioneer might, through naming; his Mother Lode is not as other pioneers remember it because he “wrenched it from itself” and “remade it in his own image.” In this wrenching and remaking, what I in my rubric refer to as his re-enchantment, the importance of place names to his geography is necessarily accentuated. As embodiments, they act as archetypes within the fictional space, redefining and reclaiming historical spaces.
Bret Harte’s camp names and physical descriptions provide his reader with what amounts to perhaps the best leads for identifying the watersheds of the Yuba and Feather as their rightful location. Many of the place names in Harte’s “The Luck of Roaring Camp,” “The Outcasts of Poker Flat,” and “Tennessee’s Partner” can be found closely associated with each other in actuality very near to the childhood camp in Gold Canyon of his friend Ina Coolbrith, stressing the probability of her influence on Harte’s work. In the historical space, Poker Flat, Red Dog (the peak), Tennessee Mountain and Tennessee Ravine, for example, as well as the nearly universal Rattlesnake and Grizzly Creeks, North Fork, and Table Mountain comprise the surrounding terrain. Although it must be conceded that Harte describes his mining camps generically, and that they are interchangeable with most river bars in the Mother Lode, his descriptions of Poker Flat and the trail leading out of it generally transcend the notion that they are stock-in-trade renderings. Their connection to Ina Coolbrith is as revealing as any evidence that suggests their placement elsewhere. Using the known locations of Poker Flat and Red Dog in historical space as a starting point, a map of the overlaid fictional space of all three stories can be established.

The current placard posted at Poker Flat on Canyon Creek in Sierra County reads: “Between 1852 and ‘55 the town was quite large… at least a dozen stores, five saloons, a Masonic Hall, two butcher shops, a blacksmith shop, a jewelers shop, and three hotels” comprised its commercial district. Through a close reading of Harte’s “Outcasts” we know that Poker Flat is a sizeable camp, because “Mr. John Oakhurst, gambler,
stepped out into the main street of Poker Flat” (112 emphasis added) as the story begins, implying that it is a larger settlement. Once the outcasts are on the trail and their rations are growing slim, looking back in the direction from which they came, Poker Flat is described, similar to the way it had been in his Springfield Republican article, ironically as a “pastoral village” (119). Temporally, the rendering of the town as an established site causes problems that affect its spatiality. First, although Poker Flat may have been a large community by 1852, in November of 1850 when “Outcasts” is set, only a small number of miners were very recently in the vicinity, and it had certainly not yet been developed. By 1869, when “Outcasts” was written, Poker Flat was still being mined, though in decline, and William Brewer in Up and Down California describes sleeping in a wretched hotel there with “ten white men and two Chinamen” (455) when the geological survey mapped the area. Henry Cohn’s translation of his grandfather Fritz’s memoir in California Historical Society Quarterly relates that Poker Flat in 1856 was a thriving community like the one the Forest Service placard depicts, and Cohn’s reminiscence more closely resembles the town Harte envisions. Cohn recounts, “This town, as its name indicates, was a gambling place. It consisted of our store, that of M. Armer and Bros., a butcher shop, a bakery, and about fifteen taverns and gambling houses” (292). Each of the above depictions of Poker Flat portrays spatial variants which are representative of temporal shifts. The temporal disruptions to the historical space in “Outcasts” are the result of Harte’s confusion of three distinct epochs in Poker Flat’s history: the time the story takes place (1850), the time at which it was written (1869), and the era of its heyday (mid-1850s). Therefore, it is colored by the fame of 1850, it is depicted at its most substantial, but it should be read through the lens of its underlying nostalgia for the
irretrievability of those earlier days. In essence, the three phases of the town’s development are present and actualized: enchanted, disenchanted, and re-enchanted.

Next, because John Oakhurst wipes away the red dust that can be found virtually anywhere up and down the Sierra from his “neat boots,” the asymmetry of the locale is extended. Furthermore, in equally general terms, the portentous lynching that had recently occurred in the “gulch” is executed from a sycamore tree, a species that does not grow at that elevation in Canyon Creek. From the outset, Harte’s “Poker Flat” (the fictional space) does not appear to be Poker Flat (the historical space). However, this “crisis of representation” (Witschi, *Traces* 8) does not undo the above ascribed sameness of place and name in the re-enchanted landscape; because of the adversarial relationship between disenchantment and re-enchantment, such inaccuracies are essential to the act of “unmapping” outlined in *Late Imperial Romance* by McClure and discussed at length in my general introduction.

Oakhurst is referred to as “a young man from Roaring Camp” (113) in “Outcasts.” The mention of Roaring Camp presents an opportunity to put place names together. According to Harte in “The Luck of Roaring Camp,” Roaring is forty miles from the town of “Red Dog” (105), in the “Sierra Foothills” (106), and is surrounded by “tall redwoods” (105), “wild honeysuckles, azaleas [and] the painted blossoms of Las Mariposas” (109). As the story of “Luck” proceeds, upon Luck’s birth, “certain articles were sent for in Sacramento” (106); elsewhere Harte says Luck’s rosewood cradle was “packed eighty miles by mule” (107). Although Roaring Camp is in reality near Felton, far from the Sierra Nevada in the Santa Cruz Mountains, where it is surrounded by tall redwoods, Sacramento and its stated distance from Roaring determine the camp’s
location in the re-enchanted landscape. The only listing for Red Dog in Gudde’s *California Gold Camps* is southeast of Nevada City in the Central Sierra, a site 40 miles from Sacramento. Because the given distance of the fictional Roaring Camp in Harte’s story is 80 miles from Sacramento, it follows that Roaring Camp is either 40 miles east of Red Dog, or 40 miles to the north of Red Dog. Assuming Gudde’s Red Dog is the actual site mentioned by Harte’s characters, Roaring Camp cannot be located to its south because it would be much closer to Sacramento than Harte suggests. Furthermore, east of Gudde’s Red Dog are the High Sierra, and Roaring Camp is in the foothills, distinctly separate from the high country. The fictional Roaring Camp, key to the early cycle of stories, is thus placed by Harte in the foothills of the Northern Lode, based on the symmetry of the historical spaces Poker Flat and Red Dog.

Roaring Camp is on the “North Fork” (111), situated “in a triangular valley between two hills” (102). Although Gudde’s book attests to the profusion of towns called North Fork, and every river in the Sierra generally has one, Harte’s description of the North Fork River overflowing into the fictional Roaring Camp is a neat geographical fit with the North Fork of the Yuba River, in Ina Coolbrith’s gold region. Of special interest, though, is that the Tahoe National Forest map shows a peak called Red Dog only a mile north of Downieville, a town which was, at the time Ina Coolbrith was in that region with her family, along with La Porte on the Feather River, the central hub for miners in the Southern Plumas and Northern Sierra County diggings. Red Dog, above Downieville, is approximately 80 miles from Sacramento. Harte’s choice of 80 miles is intriguing because in Coolbrith’s reminiscences that is the distance from Spanish Ranch in Plumas County to Marysville, the journey which Ina made on foot as a child with her family, a
trip that wore out her shoes, and that she said she would never forget (Rhodehamel, *Ina Coolbrith* 43).

In their biographies of Harte, Stewart and O’Conner both attribute Harte’s use of the name “Roaring Camp” to a trip he took with his family and that of his publisher, Anton Roman, to the Santa Cruz Mountains just prior to the story’s publication in Roman’s *Overland Monthly*. Of this trip Stewart says: “[Roman’s] own memories of gold digging and book pedaling had given him opportunity for conversation, and he had also supplied clippings and pictures [to Harte] to illustrate his point” (162). Stewart gives Roman credit as the source of “Luck” outright, stating that Harte’s story may have originated from an experience Roman had on a book selling trip between the North and Middle Forks of the American River in 1853. Harte, however, placed sole credit for his work on firsthand experience. It is possible that Harte had immediately taken a defensive stance such as this because his popularity in the East had caused a swift backlash against him in the West.²⁴ Harte also had said, in regards to the inaugural issue of the *Overland Monthly* lacking any distinctive Californian romance, that he had “averred… should no other contribution come in, he himself would supply the omission in the next number” (Scharnhorst, *Bret Harte* 22).

That being his stated project, Harte would most likely have had conversations similar to those Stewart describes him engaged in with Roman, with Ina Coolbrith, during this same time, about her experiences in the mines, in preparation for, if not “Roaring Camp,” then the ensuing “Outcasts,” written on the heels of “Roaring Camp’s” success. She certainly was there to console him when she found him despondent and angry over the allegations of immorality lodged against him due to those stories. In an
unpublished account of those early days of the *Overland*, she claims to have found Harte alone in his office:

> At the time of the famous controversy concerning the propriety of publishing such dreadful stories as “The Outcasts of Poker Flat,” “The Luck of Roaring Camp,” etc, he was heartily disgusted, indignant, and hurt, and expressed himself to me in terms I never before nor afterward heard him use. I tried first to comfort him, then to laugh him out of his mood. (Coolbirth Carton 1)

Coolbrith, in describing her role as confidant, clearly illustrates that she would have also been in a position to inform, if not directly influence, Harte’s writing.

The next place name the reader finds in “Outcasts” is Sandy Bar, the outcasts’ destination, which is “over a steep mountain range… distant a day’s severe travel” (114) from Poker Flat. Gudde has three entries for Sandy Bar, one in Calaveras County, one in El Dorado County, and one in Trinity County. Gudde mentions that the Sandy Bar in El Dorado County is the location of Bret Harte’s “Iliad of Sandy Bar.” His belief appears to indicate that he concurs with Stewart’s estimation that the origin of “Roaring Camp” came from Roman’s experience on the American River. However, the place name Sandy Bar was most likely in much wider use than Gudde suggests, like Rocky Bar or Grizzly Flat, for example. In light of this, Gudde’s certainty becomes pure speculation in regards to the “Iliad”; nowhere in that work does Harte mention a particular watershed in the Sierra on which his Sandy Bar sits. Nor does he mention in the “Iliad” the towns surrounding Sandy Bar that he had used in the earlier, aforementioned, stories. In fact, the only other reference to a location other than Sacramento or San Francisco in the “Iliad” is Poverty Flat, just as frequently used up and down the Sierra. Gudde mentions ten separate listings for Poverty Flat, among them one on the Middle Fork of the Feather River in Plumas County, and this does not include several Poverty Hills, Gulches and Points.
Sandy Bar and Poverty Flat can with certainty be considered “convenient counters,” deliberately disruptive of the demographic topographies maintained during the period of disenchantment.

An equally intriguing side note which adds to the hazy truths surrounding Harte’s use of place names is that biographer Richard O’Conner confuses the protagonists of “Iliad” and “Outcasts” and combines them with Harte’s biography of Luck, stating, “The outcasts driven from Poker Flat included Jack Hamlin, a part Indian gambler” (Bret Harte 109). Scharnhorst makes a similar mistake, noting that Hamlin, and not Oakhurst, was present at the birth of Tommy Luck (Bret Harte 22). In O’Conner’s case, first, John Oakhurst, not Jack Hamlin, is among those cast out of Poker Flat; second, Hamlin is the protagonist of the “Iliad,” and is a later imitation of the now mythical Oakhurst; and third, it is Luck, in “The Luck of Roaring Camp” who is part Indian, the son of the prostitute Cherokee Sal. Lastly, in “Outcasts” one evening, Tom Simson narrates the “principle incidents” of Pope’s translation of Homer’s Iliad to the strain of his sweetheart playing the accordion (120). Thus, “The Iliad of Sandy Bar,” Harte’s later story, it would appear, is so dripping with generalities and repetition, that he has confused two of his biographers. Likewise then, because it proves so difficult to give a definitive reckoning of place in Harte’s work, we must here conclude that Gudde, while being positive of Sandy Bar’s location in the “Iliad,” but giving the Sandy Bars in Harte’s other works no such definitive claim, is merely retelling a common supposition that was popular at the time he was writing, and that he has, in so doing, perpetuated an inaccuracy that the act of re-placing Poker Flat farther to the north overtly challenges.
Sandy Bar, as it is known to the reader in “Outcasts,” fleshes out a rudimentary sketch of Harte’s early “dream world.” Roaring Camp is forty miles north of Red Dog, the location of which can be qualified; Roaring Camp is near enough to Poker Flat that John Oakhurst regularly plies his trade there and in Sandy Bar, which we know is a day’s journey from Poker Flat. Oakhurst would have been able to travel between each of these settlements in a relatively short amount of time. A timeline for the action within these spaces can also be established: Luck is born in Roaring Camp in the summer; a month later Oakhurst gives him his moniker; on the trail between Poker Flat and Sandy Bar when Oakhurst is reacquainted with Tom Simson in “Outcasts,” the narrator comments that “some months before” he “won the entire fortune of that guileless youth” in Sandy Bar only to return it to him (115). If Oakhurst and Simson are reacquainted on November 23, “some months before” would mean it was August or July that he won Simson’s money in Sandy Bar, but that he was also in Roaring Camp in July to name Luck. Because Jim Wheeler referred to Oakhurst as, “this yer young man from Roaring Camp” (113), the reader should assume Roaring is the settlement Oakhurst was most recently “from.” By chance, besides indicating the proximity of these gold camps to each other, the timeline of events also suggests that Luck and John Oakhurst, in separate stories, are fated to die in the same winter of 1850-51. These events also indicate that contrary to O’Conner’s claim, Harte’s “dream world” clocks and calendars were, in these first tales, in actuality, startlingly accurate, even if they have a tendency to displace locales.

The central action of “Outcasts” takes place on the trail between Poker Flat and Sandy Bar. Although Sandy Bar is a generic place name, the trail itself bears
powerful similarities to two factual counterparts leading out of Poker Flat in Sierra County. The trail out of Poker Flat in Harte’s fiction requires a trek arduous enough to bring about the final action of his morality play. Although it is a difficult road, his description doesn’t match the northern route out of Canyon Creek towards Howland Flat where Ina Coolbrith had camped. Instead, although the outcasts would have had to cross Canyon Creek, which in Harte’s story they do not--- Harte merely says “gulch” (113) --- a persuasive argument in favor of one of the southern routes out of town as the trail the outcasts perish on can be made. As previously stated, Harte says the road to Sandy Bar “lay over a steep mountain range” and that it was “distant a day’s severe travel” (114).

Charles Hendel’s “Topographical Map of Sierra County” (1874) shows a primary road passing from Gibsonville in the north, to Howland Flat, through Gold Canyon and down into Poker Flat, through the town of Deadwood, and over Saddleback Mountain, and down the ridge to Excelsior, Cooper’s Ranch, and into Downieville. “Road” was a generous term in those days. William Brewer, working as part of the geological survey of California in 1863, coming into the country on this road from the south, writes in *Up and Down California* that this was, “a vile trail… very [sic] rough, across canyons and ridges, with high peaks with patches of snow. We at last sank into a very deep canyon, perhaps two thousand feet deep, to Poker Flat, a miserable hole” (455). Brewer was on horseback, which verifies that this trail was at least marginally suitable for riding at the time Harte wrote his story; in the “Outcasts,” with the exception of Oakhurst who was on a horse, all of the outcasts ride mules. Brewer’s account was not published in Harte’s lifetime. What this fact establishes is that however foreshortened and out of focus Harte’s landscapes
could be, his description of the terrain surrounding Poker Flat, like his clocks and calendars, was decidedly accurate.

The second southern route out of Poker Flat is not marked on Hendel’s map but is detailed in Scott Lawson’s *Trails of the Feather River and Yuba River Region*, and it shows up on the U.S.G.S. Mt. Fillmore quadrangle. It represents the single best possibility for the trail to Sandy Bar on which the outcasts perished because it meets all the narrative’s requirements for placement, topography, and distance. Called the Little Grizzly Creek Trail today, Lawson says it is also known as the “Old Downieville Trail.” Harte’s narrator tells us, “Only when the gulch which marked the outermost limit of Poker Flat was reached, the leader spoke briefly and to the point” (113). The outermost limit of Ina Coolbrith’s Poker Flat is the cemetery, an emotive feature Harte missed the opportunity of employing to enhance his story, but one which may not have existed as early as 1852 when Coolbrith was in the area. At the edge of town, though, is the ravine cut by Little Grizzly Creek, potentially the “gulch” in Harte’s narrative that Lawson’s Little Grizzly Trail climbs through. As it follows the creek, according to Lawson, “the trail becomes markedly steeper now as it approaches the saddle between Democrat Peak and Bunker Hill. There is a long sweeping switchback under Democrat Peak that will take you to the top” (60). Harte says, “The trail was narrow and difficult. At noon the Duchess, rolling out of her saddle upon the ground, declared her intention of going no farther, and the party halted” in a “wooded amphitheater” (114). Poker Flat the historic space is almost 4800 feet high and the “wooded amphitheater” in which the outcasts rest, matching the saddle below Democrat Peak in Sierra County, is at this point approximately 6400 feet, similar to Brewer’s 2000 foot deep vile hole. While Harte’s
Poker Flat is in the “moist, temperate regions of the foothills” and Poker Flat in Sierra County certainly is not, on their climb out the outcasts do reach the “dry, cold, bracing air of the Sierras” (114). The place they stop in is “singularly wild and impressive,” “surrounded on three sides by precipitous cliffs of naked granite, sloped gently toward the crest of another precipice that overlooked the valley” (114). Although there are large amounts of exposed granite throughout the Plumas and Tahoe Forests, the peaks in the vicinity of Coolbrith’s Poker Flat are mostly volcanic, sharp, and spindly. None of those on the Little Grizzly Trail are granite. But Lawson’s “saddle between Democrat Peak and Bunker Hill” compares satisfactorily to Harte’s “wooded amphitheater.” Democrat Peak, Bunker Hill, and Cloudsplitter all rise craggy and nearly vertical out of the green sea of timber below them at this point, and a view to the southwest down the canyon of the Downie River affords one a long view to the hazy distance of the Central Valley. Here, in Lawson’s guidebook, the Little Grizzly Trail becomes the Downie River Trail, and according to him, from this vantage point, “Extensive views of the Yuba River Canyon make this an enjoyable hike” for the modern traveler (51). It is in this amphitheater that “Mr. Oakhurst knew that scarcely half the journey to Sandy Bar was accomplished, and the party were not equipped or provisioned for delay” (14). The “gloomy walls” of the peaks that form Harte’s amphitheater rise “a thousand feet sheer above the circling pines” (115). In fact, Cloudsplitter, Democrat, and Bunker Hill are 300, 400, and 500 feet above the trail at this point. Lawson describes the Little Grizzly Trail connecting with the Downie River Trail at just somewhat less than halfway to Downieville. He says the Downie River Trail is “prominent from its past use as a packing trail” (51). According to Lawson’s mileage estimates, the combination Little Grizzly Trail/ Downie River Trail,
with the addition of the five mile road from Downieville, is 14 miles total from Poker Flat, or, in Harte’s words, “a day’s severe travel” “over a steep mountain range” on muleback. By this reckoning, the ubiquitous Sandy Bar could have been located somewhere on the Downie River, upstream from Downieville, perhaps between its confluences with Rattlesnake Creek and Lavezzola Creek, although at the time of this writing no such evidence to confirm its existence there has presented itself.

“Tennessee’s Partner,” the third of Harte’s primary stories pertinent to Ina Coolbrith’s influence on his “dream world” and their placement in the Yuba and Feather country, completes the sketch of Harte’s landscape begun with “Roaring Camp” and “Outcasts.” “Tennessee” begins to make the consistencies in topography of the first two stories unravel. The events that unfold in “Tennessee” take place in Sandy Bar four years after John Oakhurst’s demise. Tennessee’s Partner leaves Poker Flat in 1853 to “go to San Francisco, ostensibly to procure a wife,” but Harte’s narrator says Partner, “never got any farther than Stockton” (124). Marysville, Sacramento, and Stockton were the primary cities servicing the northern, central, and southern mines, respectively. For Partner to be waylaid in Stockton suggests that he had come out of the Southern Lode and had been on the road through Stockton on his way to San Francisco. This assumption lends itself to trends in current thought, pulling Poker Flat, etc, back to the southern Sierra again; but it ignores the fact that, after returning to Poker Flat with his bride, Partner has her stolen from him by Tennessee, and she and Tennessee “chastely retreated… as far as Marysville” (125) to set up house. There are two ways of reading this: either Harte has begun to “amplify, turn and twist” his California geography, as Ella Mighels suggested, which is likely, or, he is giving the reader ample reason to believe that Marysville is
much farther from Poker Flat than Stockton is, thereby confirming the Southern Lode theory. Harte would have been aware of his eastern audience’s appetite for things distinctly Californian, and equally aware that they would know the names of the important cities of the state through news reports and correspondence, so it is probable that the former conclusion is true, and that Harte’s mention of Stockton is a twist or an amplification. An off-hand reference to Stockton being on the way to San Francisco should be read as a manifestation of Harte’s re-enchantment, rather than a specific reference to a locale. In like manner, the redwoods that had earlier complicated the northern placement of “Roaring Camp,” and the granite cliffs that appear in “Outcasts,” when viewed as symbols of California iconography and as deliberate unmappings, support the assumption that Harte mentions them simply for their numinous effect. Such a reading reiterates that Stewart’s definition of “convenient counters” should also be expanded to include the stock, representative set of California imagery Harte used because a curious place name or an exotic image sparks the same imaginative recognition as the more banal but oft repeated places. In McClure’s terms, Harte’s transcendental topography (fictional; and its related inhabitants and characteristics) is substituted for the worldly topography (historical; and its related imagery) of the region (Late Imperial Romance 160). A case in point, “Miggles,” the fourth story Harte published in the same period in the Overland, refers to a tame grizzly bear, symbol of the state, discussed in the general introduction of this piece. A short list of Harte’s use of western vernacular and California symbols, gulch, for example, and redwood trees and grizzly bears, to name a few, would have captured the imagination of his eastern readers. Notably, this language tends to be included far less judiciously in his later work after he leaves California.
The completed sketch of Poker Flat and its vicinity in “Tennessee” shows a steady accretion of place names that, beyond confusing the larger geography of the state, confuses its mountain geography as well. Yet, though the terrain shifts, the place names remain consistent: name is synonymous with place. Although Roaring Camp is not mentioned in this story, the prominence of Red Dog as the primary settlement of the region is confirmed. In “Roaring,” Red Dog is an established town considered by some to have a more civilizing influence than Roaring Camp, and the miners contemplate sending The Luck there when he’s born. In “Tennessee,” Tennessee becomes a highwayman and overtakes “a stranger on his way to Red Dog” (125), and when he is captured, although tried in Sandy Bar, the Red Dog Clarion reports the proceedings. Tennessee and Partner’s claim is in Poker Flat, which means the road to Red Dog, the site of Tennessee’s heist, is nearby. The difficulty of the map this later story presents is that Poker Flat and Sandy Bar appear to be geographically much nearer than they were in “Outcasts.” Tennessee and his Partner’s claim is in Poker Flat, but, when aspersions begin to be cast against them, it is in Sandy Bar that “popular feeling against Tennessee” (125) grows. Sandy Bar is outraged by Tennessee’s behavior: “Red Dog and Sandy Bar made common cause against [him]” (126) after his robbery, and yet Poker Flat, the site of his claim, never involves itself. In fact, at this point Poker Flat disappears entirely from the narrative! In “Outcasts” it was Poker Flat that had become more vigilant, and Sandy Bar which had “not […] as yet experienced […] regenerating influences” (114), so the character of the two camps has also reversed.

Then there is the conundrum of Grizzly Canyon. What it lacks in topographical accuracy, it gains as a clue to the narrative’s difficult outcome. As it
concerns the narrative, seeking to escape justice, “as the toils closed around him, [Tennessee] made a desperate dash through the Bar, emptying his revolver at the crowd before the Arcade Saloon, and so on up Grizzly Canyon” (126). Based on Harte’s previous geography, Tennessee is racing back to his claim at Poker Flat on the other side of the mountain. But, “at [Grizzly Canyon’s] farther extremity” he is waylaid by a “stranger,” a “small man on a gray horse.” At this point narrative and topography conspire to illuminate an important moment in the problematic relationship Tennessee and Partner share: following the trial in Sandy Bar, where Partner does / doesn’t defend him, and after Tennessee is hanged for his crime, Partner comes for his body in a cart pulled by a mule and returns to their claim via the same trail in Grizzly Canyon up which Tennessee had attempted his desperate escape. During the trial we learn that the presiding judge was also Tennessee’s captor. Harte never tells his reader why the judge knew where to find Tennessee when others familiar with the location of his claim did not. But presumably the judge is very near to Tennessee and Partner’s claim on Poker Flat when he catches up with Tennessee. The portentous route of Tennessee’s foiled escape, reprised after his hanging, invites suspicion on Partner’s role in his capture. While Gary Scharnhorst has noted that the most common reading of this story is as “a perfectly straightforward tale of loyalty and friendship” (Bret Harte 29), he offers his own, more challenging reading that Harte’s suggestive topography supports. Scharnhorst reads “Tennessee” as the story of Partner’s plotted revenge against Tennessee for stealing his wife. Scharnhorst’s evidence lies in the narrator’s description of Partner during Tennessee’s trial and in the ongoing use of card playing metaphors. And yet Harte’s
terrain has already acted significantly as foreshadowing of Partner’s calculation prior even to these events.

Topographically though, Grizzly Canyon confounds its own logic. Remember that the Little Grizzly Creek Trail met the requirements of Harte’s description of the path out of town in “Outcasts.” At the top of the Little Grizzly Creek Trail was the “wooded amphitheater” where the outcasts stopped. They had almost made the crest of the ridge and this saddle where they rested is the terminus of Little Grizzly Creek canyon; the assumption being that once across this divide the site of Sandy Bar is below them, on a stream in the next watershed. Therefore, Grizzly Creek is on the opposite side of the mountain from Sandy Bar. But in “Tennessee,” Grizzly Canyon is adjacent to Sandy Bar, which in the above topographical construct is an impossibility. Even more problematic is that Harte describes Partner’s “solitary cabin” as being on the “outskirts of Sandy Bar” (131) at the end of the story, not in Poker Flat at all. So the end result is that here the precipitous trail the outcasts were forced to venture out of town on has not merely transformed into one a cart and several men at once could “stroll along beside” (131), but it now provides a direct link from Poker Flat to Sandy Bar, as if Grizzly Canyon were a lateral drainage between them without the heretofore deadly ridge intervening at all. Finally, after Partner has finished his eulogy, and the men who had followed him to his claim to witness Tennessee’s burial disperse, the logic of the terrain eludes comprehension again: Harte’s narrator says, “they crossed the little ridge that hid Sandy Bar from view” (42), implying that the once steep mountain range “distant a day’s severe travel” is at best a spur between river and summit separating the camps.
The problematic Grizzly Canyon, however, does not entirely undo itself geographically. The low hill hiding Sandy Bar from view at the end of “Tennessee” has a notable precedent on the Tahoe National Forest just upstream of Poker Flat on Canyon Creek. Even though Gudde has listings for Tennessee Bar, Gulch, Hill, and House, none of them in Sierra County, on the U. S. Forest Service map and on the U.S.G.S. Mt. Fillmore Quadrangle, directly south of Poker Flat across Canyon Creek, is Tennessee Mountain, and, just upstream of that, within a mile of Poker Flat, is Tennessee Ravine, at the top of which is the Tennessee mine. The problem with its placement, and the placement of Tennessee Ravine germane to the details of “Tennessee’s Partner,” is that the canyons formed by Big Grizzly Creek and Little Grizzly Creek, Harte’s Grizzly Canyon, through which the trail to Sandy Bar as I have established it travels, is that Tennessee Ravine is actually to the north of Tennessee Mountain and the Grizzly Creeks are to the south of it.

As previously established, place names in a largely unknown country embody their own meaning; representative of, but detached from, the places they signify. Even the official maps drawn in the period of California’s disenchantment based on the geologic survey’s work, because of their own inaccuracies, demonstrate this. It is upon this premise that Harte’s re-enchantment of known watersheds capitalizes. For example, Hendel’s “Official Map of Sierra County,” drawn short years after Harte’s stories were written, incorrectly places Grizzly Creek well to the north of Tennessee Mountain in roughly the same location the modern maps situate Tennessee Ravine, site of the Tennessee Mine. Likewise, Tennessee Mountain, Ravine, and Mine are all absent from his rendering. But Hendel does show a settlement called Little Grizzly on the divide
between Canyon Creek and what would become known as the Downie River, at approximately the same spot as the outcast’s wooded amphitheater. Oddly enough, because of his misplacement, one of the most intriguing and surreal moments of my attempt to map Harte’s stories was presented by Hendel’s location for Grizzly Creek: by Hendel’s map Partner’s claim is in Grizzly Canyon as Harte says, and it is in Tennessee Ravine! Although this coincidence works neatly in the confines of “Tennessee,” it does not fix the apparent difficulties regarding the trail to Sandy Bar from Poker Flat.

Ultimately, Harte’s recalcitrant map functions exactly like the first maps used by the emigrants referenced in the introduction to this chapter: “shamefully and corruptly overwrought.” Still, that allows for the perfection of his re-enchantment: he has achieved the sense of the grievous unknown and the unexpected, and in that sense his accuracy is admirable. Too many coincidences place the locale of “Roaring,” “Outcasts,” and “Tennessee” in the Yuba and Feather River country. Yet the region is remade in Harte’s image so persuasively that it thwarts practical mapping. The beauty of his re-enchantment is that it seals itself off from detection, both spatial and temporal, while adamantly preserving as fact the romance of its existence.

Enchantment and Re-Enchantment

The previous discussion of the concordance of place names and their sites and Harte’s exploitation of them, in combination with the above attempt at mapping Harte’s early works, returns the focus of the present discourse to the overriding object of literary fieldwork: How is “The Outcasts of Poker Flat” transformed when placed in Sierra County? Just as was the case during the Gold Rush when the maps failed, the critic must
apply the logic of the aforementioned Frenchman’s advice to the re-enchanted landscape: “one can find out the truth only in the place itself.” And yet Harte himself had never gone! Ultimately, starting with the hypothesis that “Outcasts” takes place in Sierra County gives the story what critics feel it needs most: an actual space that makes it “real.” But going to Poker Flat in Sierra County as a literary fieldworker means less in Harte’s case than it does to the re-enchantments of John Muir, as will be illustrated in later chapters; because Harte himself was not familiar with the terrain or people of Sierra County, but recreated them from previous metaphoric inscriptions, then it is the spaces of these earlier inscriptions against which Harte’s realism should be judged. “The place itself” in Harte’s case is the Yuba and Feather watersheds as recorded by his predecessors, when much of the region was unknown or confused but nonetheless real. Anchored thus, his landscape must adhere primarily to the conventions of the enchanted space for its realism: is it a space ruled by providence, are expectations foiled, is it exotic; in essence, is it as described by McClure in *Late Imperial Romance*, “a zone of magic, mystery, and disorder” (8)? Indeed it is.

Early California historians eager to discount the realism of Harte’s tales, Josiah Royce and Hubert Howe Bancroft most notable among them, as well as Harte’s early champions, his biographers Thomas Pemberton and Henry Childs Merwin, employ the same tactics for proving their opposite claims. Detractors and supporters alike seek precedent in the published accounts of mining life from the decade before, but without an understanding of them as documents from an enchanted time. In *California*, without mentioning Harte specifically, Royce indicts romancers such as him who have given the rest of the nation an imprecise picture of California in its halcyon days:
Violence leaves a deeper impression than peace; and that may explain very readily why some boasting pioneers and many professional story-tellers have combined to describe to us the mining camp as a place where blood was cheaper than gold, where the most disorderly lynchings was the only justice, and where, in short, disorder was supreme. Such scenes as this were of course never as a fact universal, and nowhere did they endure long. That we must once for all bear in mind. Yet when we turn away from the exaggerations and absurdities of the mere story-tellers and the boasters, and when we look at contemporary records, we find, never indeed so bad a general state of things throughout the mines as the one just described. (222)

Bearing in mind that it was Royce’s project to unknot fiction from fact and to present California’s history in light of its influence on the American character, it is not surprising that what amounts to his deliberate disenchantment is at odds with Harte’s literary efforts. Royce and Bancroft guide their readers to the paradox of discounting and displacing Harte’s stories: in the process of looking at contemporary records and undoing the myth of the Gold Rush they establish their basis in fact by suggesting the originals and inviting a comparison of Harte’s work to them. Only their purpose differs from that of Harte’s first biographers, who used the same methodology to establish the connection between fact and Harte’s fiction. Henry Childs Merwin wrote: “the diaries, letters, and narratives written by pioneers themselves, and… the daily newspapers published… from 1849-1855 fully corroborate” that Harte wrote the truth (Life of Bret Harte 53). Merwin cites several of the actual cases of the deaths and hardships the miners endured particular to the Feather and Yuba region. So too does Harte’s first biographer Thomas Pemberton, who wrote that, “most of [Harte’s stories were] founded on absolute fact” (The Life of Bret Harte 94). When Royce speculates on the origins of the “Outcasts” based on a similar incident in 1851 (262), he is underlining, albeit unintentionally, the direct correlation between the period of enchantment and Harte’s re-enchantment. From
whichever perspective, because of place names and the landscapes created, Harte’s romanticized version was immediately recognizable to his readers as “real,” its grotesque form an amplification of the character of the disordered zone.

In Royce’s and in Bancroft’s opinion Louise Clappe is the foremost originator of the germs of Harte’s tales, and Nicolas Witschi finds precedent in Delano. If Royce and Bancroft are correct, writing the *Shirley Letters* from her cabin on the East Branch of the North Fork of the Feather River in 1851 and 1852, she presents the immediate correlation to the Feather and Yuba region for “Roaring,” “Outcasts,” and “Tennessee.” Royce calls the *Shirley Letters* the “the best account of an early mining camp that is known to me” (272). For Royce, for their “real insight into the mining life as it was, they are… infinitely more helpful to us than the perverse romanticism of a thousand such tales as Mr. Bret Harte’s.” Incidentally, Hubert Howe Bancroft had lived for a short time at Rich Bar while working for his brother at the Empire Hotel when Shirley was there and writing her *Letters*, meaning he may have had a personal attachment to Shirley’s legacy. In his essay, “In Search of Dame Shirley,” Rodman Paul characterized Bancroft’s use of the *Letters* in his *History* as “a weapon with which [he] attack[ed] Bret Harte” (127).

Bancroft, in as many words, calls Harte an imposter:

> Almost every book produced in the golden era gave specimens more or less entertaining of the wit and humor developed by the struggle with homelessness, physical suffering, and mental gloom. And when, perchance, a writer had never heard original tales of the kind he felt himself expected to relate, he took them at second hand… Even the most powerful of Bret Harte’s stories borrowed their incidents from the letters of [Dame Shirley]” (qtd. in Russell ix).

Yet it is on this borrowing that Nicolas Witschi bases his discussion in favor of Harte’s realism. Witschi claims that western realism, “developed as a discourse… centered on the
representation of physical hardship,” and that this same struggle Bancroft identifies as the overarching theme of the Gold Rush memoir became, “A compelling mixture of brutally frank descriptions and exaggerated physical comedy, hoaxes, and satire [that] depended on a claim to realism that took the threat to the integrity of the human body as its key motivating component” (11) when reshaped as a literary trope. The natural disasters that threaten the characters of ‘Roaring Camp” and “Outcasts,” and the untimely deaths of their characters typify Witschi’s argument.

On the point of Harte’s realism as it pertains to his characterizations of miners, he writes first in “Roaring”: “Physically they exhibited no indication of their past lives and character” (102), and then proceeds into the well-known passage about the greatest scamp, the bravest man and the best shot; and then again in “Tennessee” he reiterates: “in 1854 most men were christened anew… a man’s real name in that day rested solely upon his own unsupported statement” (124). Of the “Roaring Camp” passage, Gary Scharnhorst believes it to be Harte’s caution to his reader not to trust appearances in the story (Bret Harte 24), and Wallace Stegner dismisses it as symbolic of Harte’s formulaic productions (“Introduction” ix-x). However, the same moment is to be found in Shirley and Across the Plains, where it is not read as an exaggeration:

We have no ministers, though fourteen miles from here there is a ‘Rancho,’ kept by a man of distinguished appearance, an accomplished monte-dealer and horse-jockey, who is said [sic] to have been--- in the States--- a preacher of the gospel. I know not if this be true; but at any rate, such things are not uncommon in California. (Clappe 114)

And:

California proved to be a leveler of pride, and everything like aristocracy of employment… It was a common thing to see a statesman, a lawyer, a physician, a merchant, or a clergyman, engaged in driving oxen and mules, cooking for his
mess, at work for wages by the day, making hay, hauling wood, or filling menial offices. (Delano 242)

Note in “Roaring” the influence of the preceding passage from Delano on the choice of Stumpy as midwife to Cherokee Sal when she goes into labor. Also note that while Clappe describes certain miners as being of “Falstaffean proportions and coloring” (32) and “Byronic and misanthropical” (33), Stegner takes no slight, calling hers, like Royce and Bancroft before him, “finest of all Gold Rush books” (“Introduction” viii). The intent of Harte’s passages is to employ this same idea of reinvention and uncertainty found in the above statements by Clappe and Delano to create a climate of possibility, not just an undoing of expectation, but a transformed space in which anything can happen. His characterizations, rather than formulaic, heralding the unexpected, function as imperfect erasures that blur the actual in favor of the re-enchanted. They identify for Harte’s reader that they are re-entering a time and place beyond the laws of reason.

John Oakhurst is the embodiment of the roaming gambler in the foothills. As such, he functions as an ambassador and guide to the disordered zone just described. His character runs contrary to expectations of morality, not unlike the manner in which the disordered zone contradicts expectations of domesticated spaces. In “Roaring” he possesses “the melancholy air and intellectual abstraction of a Hamlet” (102), a nuanced variant of Clappe’s earlier reference, and in “Outcasts” he is “a coolly desperate man” (113). Oakhurst is also a man of “easy good humor” in the face of adversity. As a type, he shows up in Swain’s letters in *The World Rushed In*: “Wherever rich diggings are heard of, gamblers are sure to go. They are always on the travel. They visit all the mining villages and set up their roulette and card tables… and in fact all kinds of games to suit
their dupes” (336). Even in their day gamblers meant to mislead people, so as a literary figure and guide to the enchanted landscape where anything can happen, Oakhurst is an inspired representative. But the ‘gambler with a heart of gold’ was not Harte’s creation. Clappe says of the mining population in general, “A more generous, hospitable, intelligent, and industrious people… never existed” (85), and, “But with all their failings, believe me, the miners, as a class, possess many truly admirable characteristics” (88). Of the noble gambler specifically, Delano writes of a situation nearly identical to the transaction that occurs between Oakhurst and Tom Simson behind the door of the gambling hall in Sandy Bar: A young man, heading home with $19,000 loses it all to a monte dealer in Sacramento City; he is followed by another who loses everything to a gambler, to whom he asks, “‘You have won all my money, give me an ounce to get back to the mines with.’ Without saying a word, the gambler handed him back 16 dollars, and the victim returned to his toil again” (290). In a separate instance, at Independence Bar on Nelson Creek in the upper Feather River watershed, Delano describes a gambler who won $3000 dollars in two nights, who nonetheless, “in his way was a gentleman, and honorable according to the notions of that class of men” (351).

As an ambassador of the disordered zone, Oakhurst is the key to understanding the troubled relationship between man and nature in a liminal space, and therefore plays a critical role in revealing Harte’s re-enchantment of the landscape. He is calm in his demeanor in general, almost in response to the unpredictability of the region in which he plies his trade. This calmness reverts to resignation in the face of adversity, human or natural. But the human challenges that face him and his fellow outcasts are relatively minor: the landscape and the elements are his primary challenge. Human
disruption can be mediated whereas the natural world cannot. Oakhurst comments to Simson, once they are snowbound on the ridge between Poker Flat and Sandy Bar, “Luck… is a mighty queer thing. All you know about it for certain is that it’s bound to change. And it’s finding out when it’s going to change that makes you” (119). Immediately following, Harte depicts the outcasts’ situation: although oddly kind, the sunlight on the mountains reveals “drift on drift of snow piled high around the hut---a hopeless, uncharted, trackless sea of white lying below the rocky shores to which the castaways still hung” (119). And then the outcasts perish one by one. Finally, after the last fury of the storm takes the lives of Piney and Duchess, “all human stain, all trace of earthly travail, was hidden beneath the spotless mantle mercifully flung from above” (122). Harte’s eradication of human influence by the elements, a fixture in the early works, is also the foremost feature of re-enchanted spaces. Because the narrator calls Oakhurst the “strongest and the weakest of the outcasts of Poker Flat” (123) for his suicide, Harte’s reader comprehends that nature in the space he has created is insurmountable, and that failure equals death. Oakhurst, resigned to it, reaffirms the re-enchanted region’s dominance and its driving force, unpredictability.

Conclusion

To comprehend Harte as a re-enchanter is not such a difficult critical undertaking, but to understand the rubrics of enchantment, disenchantment, and re-enchantment, and his position within those rubrics presents an evolution in the manner in which the literature of the American West is currently examined. The role of re-enchantment is particularly important to Harte’s work because it reframes his spatial
production and recontextualizes critical arguments against him. He is not merely a
eromancer, or “excessively sentimental” (Scharnhorst “Whatever Happened to Bret
Harte?” 207), but engaged in a project of deliberate disorientation meant to induce the
unfathomability of myth in reaction to the mapping and cataloguing of an increasingly
ordered California landscape. Harte’s biographer Richard O’Connor came closest to
realizing the context of Harte’s re-enchantment:

While the west was still being won, half a dozen years before the showdown at
Little Big Horn, the matrix of its legend was being hammered into final shape; the
Red Gulches and Sandy Bars of Bret harte’s imagined land--- as mythical as
Camelot or Cockaigne, as fabulous as Troy or Xanadu--- were being embedded
forever in the American conscious… The wonder of it was that the country, and the
world beyond, instantly recognized and seized upon Bret Harte’s vision of the myth
they needed to account for all that had transpired since the white men began
flooding across the Mississippi. (117)

Although the landscapes of “Roaring,” “Outcasts,” and “Tennessee,” finally, possess a
fixity that fieldwork can neither confirm nor deny, affirming their place names and
antecedents nevertheless fixes them in this inscribed landscape.

The re-enchanted landscape must bear the traits of the enchanted space, and
possess as few of the attributes of disenchantment as its narrative tolerates. Generally a
tool of disenchantment, knowing through naming, and thus controlling the frontier /
liminal / enchanted space, brings order to a landscape. It authorizes the administration of
people and resources within that space, and in so doing drains it of its mystical or
mythical qualities by reducing it to purely utilitarian terms. Yet, Harte was able to use
these same names evocatively, grasping that they themselves contained a certain magic
that was timeless and transcended maps. Whatever accuracy they may hold, the catalogue
and chart do not contain intimacy and therefore remain limited; conversely, however
inaccurate, Harte’s spatial productions act as points of departure, unrestricted and intimate in a way that cannot be quantified. Placing “The Outcasts of Poker Flat” in the Yuba and Feather watersheds amplifies the story’s force as myth because it includes them in the narrative of the historical space. In turn, the fictional space of “Roaring,” “Outcasts,” and “Tennessee” acknowledges that preservation of mystery and the sacred in a landscape is the first obligation of inhabiting.
CHAPTER IV

RECONSTRUCTING MUIR’S YUBA AND FEATHER RIVER EXCURSION

Introduction: “Muir Eyes” and the Role of Fieldwork

A slow dis-placement of the Brownsville region as the inscribed landscape of “A Windstorm in the Forests” and “A Flood-Storm in the Sierra” occurred over the course of Muir’s revision of the two texts, beginning with his journal of 1874-5 and ending with the publication of The Mountains of California in 1895. The names of the people he stayed with, his reasons for being in the area, and the places he traveled to while there are all erased from his final account. The result is a nonspecific landscape from which his universal message of a benign but masterful wilderness is delivered. In Muir’s production, the landscape, in order to be true to his message, had to be metaphorically emptied of its industry and its people to create room for the hierophantic treetop of “Windstorm” and the prophetic mountaintop of “Flood-storm.” This re-sacralized, re-enchanted space, while opened to the possibility of romance, adventure, and epiphany, is drained of its corporeality. For example, the tree-bending wind of “Windstorm,” the focal point of the essay, is nowhere even evident in Muir’s Brownsville journal, and yet vital characters like Thomas Dodson, a miner who most likely played a significant role in directing Muir’s excursion, is ultimately only a friend at whose home
he happened to be staying and whom Muir disparages for “crouching deprecatingly beneath a roof” (*Mountains* 249) in his text’s final incarnation. In this chapter I will limn the borders of Muir’s inscription with the historical landscape inscribed.

Very little is known with certainty about Muir’s time in Brownsville, and the facts as currently communicated are by and large repetitions of Linnie Marsh Wolfe’s and Frederic Bade’s accounts combined with the details Muir included in the published works. This chapter’s focus, the reconstruction of Muir’s Yuba and Feather River excursion, is the first attempt to elucidate Muir’s movements temporally and physically from the time he arrived by train in Marysville from Redding until his return to the Bay Area.

When John Muir came to California he was already a prodigious walker. With friends and fellow students from Wisconsin he had made geological and botanical walking tours of Indiana and Canada in the early 1860s, each covering several hundred miles, and in 1867 he famously took his 1,000 mile walk to the Gulf of Mexico after recovering his eyesight following an industrial accident. And Muir didn’t stop: his first walking trip took him from San Francisco to Yosemite, almost 200 miles, in 1868, and he spent much of the rest of his life exploring, mountaineering, and botanizing on four continents. The Sierra Club’s web site devotes a page linked to projects “Re-Tracing John Muir’s Famous Walks,” with separate pages specific to “Places Important to Muir,” and to the “Geography of John Muir,” which uses Google Earth to map his various travels. Combined, these pages accent the foremost importance of place in Muir’s legacy and in its causes, and they speak to the universality of the content of what is remarkably, essentially vicinal work.
Notably, the 1,000 mile trek and Muir’s walk to Yosemite are the subjects of major treatments, representing two obviously formative moments in his development. Most recently, Donna and Peter Thomas, who have written The Muir Ramble Route: San Francisco to Yosemite in the Footsteps of John Muir (2009), did so because they, like many, felt drawn to experience the landscape as Muir did. Donning what they refer to as their “Muir eyes” to encourage moments of acuity, they traverse not merely the highlands of Yosemite, but the entire transect of California leading to it, rightly or wrongly surmising that their personal experience adds a crucial element to encountering not only the landscape, but Muir’s texts. Photographer John Earl, in John Muir’s Longest Walk (1975), similarly claims: “One day I suddenly realized that the only way I could succeed [in seeing the unspoiled natural beauty of Florida 100 years after Muir’s walk] would be to … learn to see things through his eyes [and] in the same way he saw them” (emphasis added). Seeing through the eyes, and walking in the footsteps of John Muir, are critical to the Thomases’ and to Earl’s ventures. There is an implied necessary slowness and attention to detail, and a romantic precedent to the poetic ramble, in Muir’s time and in ours. It operates in opposition to the perceived problems of modernity in which nature, and its metonym the country ramble, acts as anodyne, and is itself an act of re-enchantment. The slowness of witnessing while self-propelled is conducive to revelatory “truth.” Still, this firsthand experience of place in the “following in the footsteps” model complicates the relationship between site and text because it conflates the two, overlooking the re-enchantment inherent to Muir’s work; nevertheless, “being there” and “seeing,” in this mode, as suggested by earlier discussions in the general introduction to
the present work, are perceived as tantamount to the fullest comprehension and realization of the author’s text.

Muir’s excursion in the Yuba and Feather River watersheds in late 1874 and early 1875 usually gets brief mention in histories and criticisms, but the details of the excursion itself remain largely unexamined. For example, early biographers Frederic Bade and Linnie Marsh Wolfe describe Muir’s waterlogged return to the Knox home after his walk in the flood-storm and his bombastic response to the Knoxes’ pity at his drenched condition but don’t comment on his texts. Although later biographer Michael P. Cohen and critic Nicolas Witschi each give exceptional critical treatments of “Windstorm” and “Flood-Storm,” and Donald Worster and Nicholas Witschi both provide significant discussions of Muir’s journalistic ascendance in 1874 due in large part to the articles he wrote during his extended journey to Shasta, the Modoc lava beds, and finally his culminating excursion through the watersheds of the Yuba and Feather that year, the influence of this final leg has thus far been undervalued by each of them.

Situated between Muir’s religious ecstasies during his first visit to Shasta and his subsequent return to the Bay Area and ultimately the Southern Sierra newly committed to a public role in preservation, the almost two month long excursion in the Yuba and Feather region is viewed as a critical minor note. This, combined with the relative dearth of primary material related to the period, relegates Muir’s excursion to the lesser role because it has only been examined in part, rather than as a whole. The entire complex picture of his stay in the home of Martin and Sena Knox, as the guest of his old friend Emily Pelton, and a clear picture of the places he went and the people he met there, has only been available piecemeal. Yet, when the parts are fit together a compelling
narrative coheres: Muir is writing the articles that transform him from amateur naturalist and journalist to professional writer and scientist of note (Worster, *A Passion for Nature* 218-19), most likely learning language, tone, and device from his readings in Thoreau (Cohen, *The Pathless Way* 140-2); his mentor, Jeanne Carr, is hounding him to write “the Yosemite book” even as he dreads returning to Oakland and another period of “town dark” while composing it (Muir, *Correspondence* 1874:7); Emily Pelton represents to him a memory of an earlier self and the threat of domesticity he’d had to escape from before (Holmes, *The Young John Muir* 126; O’Grady, *Pilgrims to the Wild* 73-85); and finally, there is the story of the landscape itself, and its inhabitants, suffering the erasures of Muir’s revision process even as he is celebrated as a champion of wilderness and place-based literature (Witschi “John of the Mountains”). By the time he had reached Brownsville, Muir had traversed fully two-thirds of the state, and for the first time he had a clear, firsthand picture of the widespread transformation and degradation extractive industry had meted upon California’s mountains in the intervening 25 years since the Gold Rush. The timeline on the webpage of the Holt-Atherton Library at the University of the Pacific, curators of the largest collection of Muiriana extant, simply states: “1874 December: Completes Shasta trip; crossed the divide between Yuba and Feather Rivers,” and in her seminal biography, Linnie Marsh Wolfe provides only two flimsy paragraphs of commentary on the event. I contend that while on this excursion Muir did more than come in from a rainstorm to scold his hosts and cross the divide between rivers: he likewise crossed a figurative, personal divide, entering the true watershed of his life’s work.
The primary act of re-placing this region will be to produce the first complete account of Muir’s forgotten excursion in it. Such an undertaking has, until now, been untried. This document, to be read beside close readings of “A Windstorm in the Forests” and “A Flood-Storm in the Sierra,” is meant to reveal how Muir metaphorically inscribed this landscape and the motivations behind his spatial productions. By compiling extant letters, pertinent journals, and drafts of essays relevant to this period, mapping them, and informing them with my own fieldwork, this project attempts to reconstitute the original corporeality of Muir’s texts. Refigured thus, the watersheds of the Yuba and Feather rightly ascend in the lexicon of Muir’s geography and this forgotten excursion is revealed to be as personally decisive as his more vaunted treks.

In October, November, and most of December 1874 Muir made his first ascents of Mount Shasta and explored the plateaus of the extreme northeastern corner of California. Just before Christmas, he traveled south from Shasta to the home of his old friend Emily Pelton and her relatives, the Knoxes, in Brownsville, in Yuba County. He stayed with them through the holidays until sometime near the end of January 1875, when he returned to the San Francisco Bay Area. Muir used the Knox home as a base for what he describes in *The Mountains of California* (1895) as “a hasty survey of the region” (260). His path took him on a circumnavigation through parts of four counties, the lower portions of the watersheds of both rivers, and it encompassed over two hundred square miles in the Feather River region alone. By my estimate, Muir traversed approximately 120 miles across the Feather River watershed in roughly two weeks, averaging almost 9 miles per day through terrain that varies from difficult to nearly impassable. Progress such as this substantiates contemporary impressions of Muir’s
mountaineering prowess and almost superhuman wilderness skill that is the cornerstone of the Muir mythos.

Project Description: The Vicissitudes of Approximate Accuracy

Muir’s journal entries from his Yuba and Feather sojourn have gone largely unexamined until now. This is because they are buried at the end of his first Mount Shasta journal, and are only identifiable by their smattering of place names, which are meaningful only to scholars conversant with the region. In John of the Mountains: The Unpublished Journals of John Muir (1938), which is specifically related to the events on either side of his stay in Brownsville, Linnie Marsh Wolfe bypasses the Yuba and Feather entries entirely. However, the knowledge she gleaned from her experiences editing the journals proves invaluable to all those following her practice:

[Muir] apparently took with him on his longer excursions two or more notebooks, and when starting off on each day’s trip, tied to his belt whichever one he happened to pick up. Into this he wrote his notes, sometimes in the front, sometimes in the back, often not dating entries…Needless to say, only an approximate accuracy can be attained… moreover, place names used by Muir are not always to be found on maps. He frequently gave his own names to features of the landscape that he described. (xv)

Marsh’s insight explains why the Brownsville entries are so hard to come to terms with. It accounts for the “hidden” location of the Brownsville entries inside the Shasta journal, their “scrambled” chronology, and, interestingly, Muir’s use of “Knoxville” instead of Brownsville in “Flood-Storm,” quite possibly a deliberate literary attempt at disorienting his reader and undoing the human imprint on the region, but just as likely a manifestation of habit.
The footsteps model of place-based textual interaction is not new, and such accounts, as Melvyn Bragg notes in his forward to Alan Hankinson’s *Coleridge Walks the Fells* (1991), which retraces Coleridge’s nine-day “circumcision” (18) of the Lake District, function on several levels: first, the “footsteps” model acts as a “plain resume,” as faithfully as possible recounting the original trip made by the author, visiting and cataloguing the sites of his text; second, the re-tracing serves to compare between the landscape as it was then and as it is now (9), a problem which also occupied and confounded the Thomases and Earl pursuant to Muir’s trail in present-day California and Florida, and which has become the preoccupation of much of contemporary ecocriticism. It served a greater, more compelling function for Richard Sieburth, editor of Ezra Pound’s *A Walking Tour of Southern France* (1992), who, because they were in such tremendous disarray, describes the editing work necessary to compile Pound’s 1912 notebooks as, “enough to make the most patient paleographer blanch” (ix). Fieldwork proved imperative to the decipherability of Pound’s text:

[I]t became rapidly clear that faced with a text this recalcitrant to philology, the only path of interpretation lay through the roads of France… [I] retraced the itinerary of that summer of 1912, discovering in the process that in almost every case the actual details of observed geography clarified the most puzzling cruxes of the manuscript. This ‘pedestrian’ method of scholarship… which involves shuttling back and forth between the realm of real topographical referents and the domain of written signifiers, confutes most modern theories of textuality. But in the case of Pound’s *Walking Tour*, the text only began to take on a legible face when correlated with the close inspection of place. What this peripatetic editing process eventually… revealed was a remarkably readable account of a journey in search of the vanished voices of Provence that at the same time chronicled Pound’s gradual discovery of himself. (ix)

In most instances, my ability to justify the chronological order of Muir’s Brownsville journal was contingent, similar to Sieburth’s experience, on “peripatetic editing” and
“observed geography clarifying its most puzzling cruxes.” The ability to correlate Muir’s notes with place was necessary to achieve at least the “approximate accuracy” of the present interpretation of the Brownsville journal as I see it. Interestingly, Sieburth’s account, as Hankinson’s, introduces the duality of his project: to illuminate the country and the author of its inscription, just as Pound and Coleridge themselves had set out to chronicle their exterior and interior quests. The incorporation of fieldwork illustrates that the inscribed landscape is composed of author, land, and text.

The seemingly simple task of plotting Muir’s location on the map once his topographical referents had been identified and his confused naming was accounted for still proved difficult, and the creation of a timeline based on his movements between sites was challenging as well. This is because of the additional complication of place naming in the Sierra. Especially in the historic gold regions, place names repeat, change, are misspelled or have multiple spellings, or they disappear entirely from inaccurate maps drawn 100 years apart. For instance, the town of Cherokee is near to Dry Creek in the watershed of the Feather River; another Cherokee is also near to a second Dry Creek in the Yuba watershed, and Brownsville lies in the foothills almost equidistant from them both. According to Erwin Gudde’s California Gold Camps: A Geographical and Historical Dictionary of Camps, etc, Cherokee is “the most frequently used Indian place name in the United States,” and it is also “the most popular Indian name used for gold towns and mines in California” (68). In the case of Dry Creek, an editor’s footnote to Bayard Taylor’s Eldorado comments: “There were about a hundred Dry Creeks in California” (211). In the story of Brownsville’s re-placement both Cherokees and both Dry Creeks are of importance to the narrative.
More significantly, in the Yuba and Feather watersheds there were several locations known by some variant appellative of “Mountain House.” Mountain House, Mount Cottage, Mountain House Creek, Mountain Spring House and Mountain Spring House Ridge are all found within five miles of each other, on opposite sides of the canyon of the Middle Fork of the Feather River. There was also a Mountain House in the North Yuba drainage near Goodyear’s Bar and one on the divide between the South Fork of the Feather and the North Yuba near Strawberry Valley, neither of which are shown on contemporary maps. Of those on the Middle Fork Feather, Mount Cottage appears on the Bidwell Quadrangle (1885), and so does Mountain House Creek; but Mountain House, Mountain Spring House, and Mountain Spring House Ridge do not. The locations of Mountain House, Mount Cottage, and Mountain House Creek suggest Muir followed a trail on the north side of the canyon of the Middle Fork to Hartman Bar where he stayed with and was guided by a miner named Jack Delap, while the locations of Mountain Spring House and Ridge suggest he used a southern one. Moreover, Mount Cottage disappears from current Plumas National Forest maps, while the others are only present on modern maps depending on the map’s scale. When a critical distinction is necessary, Muir’s journal states only: “Joe White’s uphill to Mountain H[ou]se” (Muir, Journals 15: 160).

Interestingly, this terse, enigmatic first entry for the location of Joe White’s place, where Muir stayed at least two nights with the miner, tells his reader just enough: the above entry on page 160 of the journal, combined with a later entry on 172, which states, “Madrona at Joe White’s elevation 1600 ft… All the way from Hartmann’s Bar [sic] to White’s (7hrs),” provides enough information to locate White’s on the Middle
Fork of the Feather between American Bar and Milsap Bar, disqualifying the Mountain Houses in the Yuba drainage entirely. White’s cabin, situated thus, is near to what is denoted as a primary trail on the Bidwell Quadrangle, and so it supports Muir’s use of the southern route to Hartman Bar, via Mountain Spring House Ridge. The placement of White’s cabin likewise suggests, following his return from Hartman Bar, the logical route to the Feather Falls area and the Frey Ranch, Muir’s next stopover downstream. Furthermore, the reference to White on 160, blocked off from the rest of the text on the page describing a mine operated by “Dodson” on Mooreville Ridge well to the south, suggests that Muir learned about White’s as a destination of interest while at “Dodson’s,” probably from Dodson himself. Such an assumption uncovers a network of miners heretofore invisible in Muir’s published texts, comprised of Dodson, White, and Delap, indicating Muir’s movements depended on local knowledge and hospitality to a much greater extent than present scholarship and his essays from the period aver.

With such fleeting references to places, spaced several pages apart in Muir’s sprawling (sometimes) shorthand, the additional problem, the chronology of Muir’s movements, grows exponentially. My analysis became dependent on an understanding of the topography of the lower watershed. I also relied on the trail systems drawn on historic maps of the region to gauge probable routes and approximate distances that would indicate his travel times. However, the temporal scheme of Muir’s excursion is essentially framed by two letters he wrote to Jeanne Carr, his long-time friend and mentor. The first was written on December 21, 1874, and the second on January 19, 1875. There is also a letter written from Oakland to his sister Sarah that is essentially a postscript to his Shasta-Modoc-Yuba-Feather journey, although it is apparently misdated.
Only one journal entry from this period does have a date, noting Muir’s arrival in Brownsville, December 24, 1874, and both “A Wind-Storm in the Forests” and “The River Floods” in *Mountains* establish approximate dates, if not durations, of the time he spent in each watershed (). Early versions of the above book chapters, “Wind Storm in the Forests of the Yuba” and “Flood-Storm in the Sierra,” include additional place names left out of *Mountains* that enhance the timeline, and beginning in 1877 and ending in 1902, Muir sent Emily Pelton (*nee* Wilson) a semi-annual letter in which, among other things, he would ask to be remembered to those she’d introduced him to during his stay with her, and in so doing naming places that don’t appear in the journal and reiterating some that do, thereby enriching the probable sequence of events further.

I had to visit the pertinent sites to test my various hypotheses: is it in fact possible to cross the terrain in question in the time I’d allotted? Does Muir’s description tally with the present terrain and flora, and did it tally with his reality? By going to Muir’s places and following his path, I had only my own condition with which to gauge their veracity. These practical concerns evolved into a plausible route and timeline, which then underwent multiple revisions and several incarnations, each better informed and more nuanced than its predecessor, if ultimately no more certain in its claims. Beyond Pelton and the Knoxes, and a few additional names in correspondence referring to this period, Muir in fact left scant information regarding people he encountered or traveled with, places he visited or stayed, routes he took, or his modes of transportation. My trips to the sites Muir mentions answered the less practical but no less important questions: *What does the country actually look like?* and *How does it feel to walk where Muir walked, stand where Muir stood, and see what he saw?* Turning back on a bright
September afternoon on a treacherously steep, dramatically remote slope above the Middle Fork of the Feather while attempting Muir’s return down canyon to White’s, in the largest, most spectacular way, the watershed itself made it evident to me that place matters, then, and now; it established for me just how incredible, how notable, Muir’s “hasty survey” actually was, and it indelibly underscored the vast difference between textual and experiential contact with the same landscape.

The Prelude: “John’s Girl”

The prelude to Muir’s 1874 Brownsville excursion commenced in 1870 when his old friend Emily Pelton arrived in California. Although theirs has been described as not unlike the relationship shared by Dorothy and William Wordsworth when Muir lived in the Pelton’s boarding house in the early 1860s, Pelton had, during their time together in Wisconsin, been considered by many to be “John’s girl” (Holmes 88; Wolfe 63) and an engagement had been expected. Muir had come to consider the Peltons themselves like family, and a “subtle blurring of the boundaries of his emotional relationship with each [female] member of the Pelton family” ensued (Holmes 81-2). Soon, he was “strongly attracted to Emily, and… the two became quite close… the relationship surly involved some element that we would describe as erotic” (Holmes 88). Most often the conflicted Muir presented his emotional attachments to her as more Christian love than eros, though, and it is uncertain exactly how Emily felt towards him (Holmes 89, 125). Biographer Steven Holmes portrays Pelton’s and Muir’s association during the 1860s as an unequal partnership, and he demonstrates a pattern of passion and detachment that is left unresolved, sadly for Pelton, until Muir’s marriage to Louie Strentzel in 1880.
Holmes’s claim is that “Muir… had the most power to move in and out of the relationship as he wished, as was most convenient for his emotional state and life path” (88). Noting Muir’s pattern of intimacy and retreat regarding their bond, Holmes alludes to what he characterizes as an “escape” from Emily Muir made by returning to Madison for school and work and thereby evading any threat of an engagement to her. In the consequent year Muir returned once to see her but avoided the issue of an engagement again, and was snubbed when he came back, only weeks later, to see her once more (Wolfe 85, 87). In classic Victorian style, Pelton’s and Muir’s non-specific romantic relationship became an epistolary one, at intervals letters arriving from Muir professing his “confusion” over her long “silences,” sheepishly wondering if she was “mad” at him. In the meantime, while Muir’s earlier move had allowed him to evade Pelton in the short term, his relocation to California had permitted him to initiate a long distance relationship with her indefinitely. So, when Pelton wrote to Muir of her arrival in California, ostensibly for her health, his surprised reply is notably at odds with itself. She had come to Yuba County, to live with her Aunt Sena and Uncle Martin who had been operating a hotel and lumber mill there since the mid-1850s. She would be a teacher at the new school Martin Knox built, the Knoxdale Institute for Women, just opened there.

Receiving her letter telling him she was in California, Muir responded from Yosemite on May 15:

I would gladly climb to the top of our highest rocks to find out whether you are on this or the other side of the Rocky Mountains. Can it be that you are indeed in California? If this be fact it has some rare unbelievable prophesies that make it hard to comprehend. But with faith like a grain of mustard seed I will go on to believe that you are verily in Yuba… I cannot leave the valley, though I would be so happy to meet you; but I will now be here all summer and you must of course see Yosemite. I will undertake to guide you to all the most holy nooks in rock and
grove and to stand point where you will hear the waters in their most divine harmonies. This is a costly trip as most people make it but if you can come I will send you directions etc that will make your expenses quite bearable. (Muir, *Correspondence* 1870: 32)

In this letter, Muir’s initial excitement expressed in the heraldic imagery of “climbing to the highest rocks,” gets tinged by the disbelief of “can it be,” which grows into the odd foreboding of “some rare unbelievable prophecies.” His faith is mystical: “like a grain of mustard seed”; yet, it induces the impulse to present obstacles to their meeting: “I cannot leave the valley”; “This is a costly trip.” The heraldic imagery is easily explained by the combination of his actual joy and the usual diction his letters had adopted. His perhaps feigned disbelief seems more of an unconscious device, giving him time to register the real implications of Emily’s presence and his feelings regarding it, while his foreboding is perhaps tied up in some “comprehension” of them. Crucial to note is that Muir, once he has told Emily he cannot go to meet her, doesn’t expressly invite her to come see him, but to come see Yosemite and its wonders, as if “bearable expenses” were her primary concern. It is at this point that he explains that he has become unrecognizable to her, like John the Baptist, in essence less the figure of a hermit prophet than an isolate, a confirmed bachelor and wanderer; Muir presents himself as unavailable.

1870 is also the year biographer Michael P. Cohen identifies as the one Muir “entered the timeless season in the soul that one might call the Harvest” (124). Months after he told Emily he would be unrecognizable to her, he used the John the Baptist moniker again in a letter to his mentor Jeanne Carr. Employing the term differently this time, he told her that he wanted to be a prophet “descending from the wilderness like a John [the] Baptist” called to spread its good news (Muir, *Correspondence* 1870: 7). Muir
the naturalist was ready for a public vocation. Compared to one another, these two letters represent the complicated, divided Muir of this period, the public one who wanted to be recognized as the prophet John, and the private one who wanted to be forgotten like John the hermit. Curiously, he feels compelled to mention Mrs. Carr to Emily in the May 15 letter, whereas in a letter written to Carr two days later, he makes no such mention of Emily’s monumental presence to her. Muir does not want to go backward; however, nor is he able to forestall the possibility of a renewed friendship with Emily.

Apparently there was an extended period following these exchanges in which Muir and Pelton lost contact again. On February 19, 1872, Muir writes, “I began to fear that I had lost you altogether” (Muir, *Correspondence* 1872: 8), yet says he’s happy that she is planning on visiting Yosemite during the upcoming summer. In the same letter he describes himself thus:

I am in every way independent and will be most happy to see you and help you to see Yosemite. You will require no photograph to know me. The most sun tanned and round shouldered and bashful man of the crowd…that’s me. I will be here for some years… (Muir, *Correspondence* 1872 8)

This letter exhibits a marked change over the previous one of 1870, less cautious, as if Muir is more assured of the security of his bachelorhood in part because of the time which has elapsed. Yet, in a second letter from April of the same year, Muir admonishes her: “You mentioned the refining influences of society. Compared with the intense purity and cordiality and beauty of Nature, the most delicate refinements and cultures of civilization are gross barbarisms” (Muir, *Correspondence* 1872:5). When discussing the particulars of Pelton’s trip to Yosemite in the April letter, Muir is careful
to explain that there will be many people in the valley that summer with whom he will have to meet, and although he hopes to have “a week of naked, unoccupied time to spend with [her]” (Muir, Correspondence 1872: 5), he reiterates the demands of others equally important to him on his time. That Pelton has had to finally seek him out if they are to be reunited in California must have been significant to them both. That she is of no greater or lesser importance to him than many people have become must also have been. A handwritten note on the typescript version presumably made by Wolfe states: “Mrs. Wilson [Pelton] went in by Gentry’s. Mr. Muir placed a horse at her disposal for the nine days the party remained in the Valley. The party consisted of Dr. Kellogg of the Academy of Sciences in S.F., Keith the artist, Mrs. Carr and her son, Mrs. Wilson, her cousin, Mrs. Knox and nephew, and Mr. Muir. They camped in Tenaya Canyon.” It was the first time Muir and Pelton had been together since 1864. One can guess that throughout their stay that summer that there was talk of a reciprocal visit to Emily’s home at some later date.

John P. O’Grady’s essay “John Muir’s Parables of Desire” in Pilgrims to the Wild (1993) focuses on what would become Pelton’s and Muir’s final period of intimacy during his stay in Brownsville. Indicative of the shifting bouts of effusion and reticence in his correspondence, and identifying them as the result of stifled desire, O’Grady describes this period for Muir as one “characterized less by ‘uncurable ecstasy’ [sic] than by agitated loneliness” (73). O’Grady views the rich outpouring of writing Muir produced in this period as the direct result of the sublimated, unresolved desires of his private self rather than the nonspecific glad harvest that Cohen presents. O’Grady suggests that, “Perhaps Muir’s love of storms was all a reflection of his own storm of
emotions, apparently ongoing until the end of his pilgrim years, when he finally established his own family” (76). And so, from this perspective, their meeting in Brownsville, spent so much like the old days in Prairie du Chein, and the wind storm and flood storm he witnesses in the foothills, grow particularly significant as metaphors for the storm of conflicted feelings he experiences while there, and explains why it took Muir four years to finally see Emily in her own home in California.

The Excursion

Marysville to Brownsville: 33 miles;
December 21- December 25, 1874;
“By Stage and Rail to Brownsville”

In October 1874 Muir is planning to leave Yosemite for studies of Mount Shasta, but he also expects to see Emily Pelton during his time in the north state. He wrote to Jeanne Carr: “I think I may be at Brownsville, Yuba, Co, where I may get a letter from you. I promised to call on Emily Pelton there” (Muir, Correspondence 1874: 36). Muir would have bypassed Brownsville on his way north to Shasta and may have felt obligated to finally see Emily’s California home upon his return. In fact, he had little interest in revisiting his life the Bay Area. His biographers all characterize this period as one in which he intended to write to support himself, yet dreaded living in the city each winter while doing so. He is likewise described as being a lugubrious author, productive but unfocused (Worster 218-220; Cohen 91). He’d spent the winter prior in Oakland, living with J. B. McChesney, writing his first articles for the San Francisco Call, and although he wanted to make his living as a writer instead of as a laborer, he had trouble with city life and the cloistered existence of the writer of the period. In the letter
mentioned above, as Muir expects to settle into Shasta, he made the clearest statement of purpose, and among the most illuminating, of his early career: “I am hopelessly and forever a mountaineer… I care to live only to entice people to look at nature’s loveliness.” These separate, opposing forces, that of the free man versus the activist, displayed together here, characterize the mood of his extended northern experience. Pronouncements such as this, given his recent sense of professional resolve in addition to his usual enthusiasms, indicate that as his literary purpose became clear to him, dawning too was the mature aspect of his fervor for nature.

A series of missives to Carr are written through November and December, and despite his intention to entice people to nature’s loveliness, written in postscript he asks her, “Don’t forward any letters from the Oakland office. I want only mountains until my return [to] civil[ization]” (Muir, Correspondence 1874: 35). Instances of his actualized but conflicted self are subtly but persistently apparent in this and his December posts. They exhibit a combination of scientific detail, effusion, and the specifics of his plans, combined with moments of frankness. Enthralled with Mount Shasta and writing of his adventures and discoveries, he is nonetheless conscious of the responsibilities his future vocation entails. He tells Carr, “I’ll be down in gray Oakland sometime” (Muir, Correspondence 1874: 34). This letter contains the note, “Emily’s [letter] I will get bye and bye.” An observable pattern in Muir’s thinking has begun to develop: first, he is living exultantly in the moment, enjoying Shasta’s wonders, and at the same time undertaking serious scientific observations of the kind he’d made in the southern Sierra; second, he is living with the foreboding that, in order for the outcomes of his studies to be productive and seriously received, he is required to publish his findings, which means a
return to the city, home to “the commonplace plotters” (Muir, *Correspondence* 1874:34); and lastly, procrastinating against this inevitability, the details of his trip to Brownsville begin to preoccupy him as a way to forestall his return. On December 21, 1874, Muir writes Carr: “I go by stage and rail to Brownsville to see Emily and the rocks there and the Yuba,” adding, “I feel a sort of nervous fear of another period of town dark but I don’t want to be silly about it” (Muir, *Correspondence* 1874:7). In his journal, horizontally over two pages, with all the colors labeled, Muir drew a sketch of, to the modern reader, the portentous sunrise he described in that letter (Muir, *Journals* 1874:3.151). The simultaneity of his effusions and his trepidation gives one the feeling that Muir has begun to sense the weight of his decisions, and that his sublimated patience with his anticipatory self has reached its climax, making it hard to discern just how much he wanted to see Emily versus how badly he did not want to go back to the city, knowing the possible ramifications of each.

On Christmas Eve 1874, Muir claims to be in two places at once. In his journal he writes: “Dec[ember] 24 Walked in rain from Marysville to Brownsville elevation 2200ft” (Muir, *Journals* 15:155), while a letter Muir wrote to his young friend Alice McChesney dated December 24, 1874 is marked “Strawberry Valley, Yuba County,” placing him there (Muir, *Correspondence* 1874: 40). Having taken the stage from Sisson’s Station to Redding on the morning of the 21st, and the train from Redding to Marysville, he would have then walked the historic route between the valley and the foothill community. It can be approximated today by taking Highway 20 east, turning north on the Spring Valley Road to the Marysville-Willow Glen Road, and from there, east on the storied La Porte Road just below Brownsville. Thompson and West’s *History*
of Yuba County (1879) alternately refers to this road as “the Central Turnpike” (91) or “the Knox Road” (89). The map of North East Township in *History* labels the stretch of road between Brownsville and Strawberry Valley the Knox Road at or about the time Muir traveled it (*History of Yuba County* 19). It was built in 1860 by Martin Knox, Emily’s uncle, with whom Muir stayed while in Brownsville (96). It had been in existence since 1850 as a heavily trafficked packing and stage route pioneered by, among others, Alonzo “Old Block” Delano to access the upper mines newly discovered that year. Delano, and Edward McIlhany, who ran the first stage line between Marysville and the upper mines in 1851, both write about the lower watershed between the Yuba and Middle Fork Feather during the gold rush era. Still in use today, within five years of Muir’s excursion, the Marysville road and the surrounding region would also be the site of several of the robber-poet Black Bart’s stage heists.

With considerable attention paid to the roadside flora, especially on the Willow Glen stretch, Muir’s journal substantiates that he took this route, and he estimates that “here [the] Yuba and Feather [are] 15 miles apart (Muir, *Journals* 1874:3.155). However, the distance between Marysville and Brownsville is 33 miles, and would be at the very least an eleven hour walk under the best of circumstances, all manner of botanizing beside. Except that much has been made of his endurance, it is doubtful that Muir walked the entire way, at least not in a single day. Throughout this trip it is unclear as to his modes of transportation, though he used main-traveled roads, some of which, including the Knox Road, were toll to all except the man on foot. While it seems blasphemous to suggest, in this case it’s highly probable that he didn’t “walk” the entire way to Brownsville; considering the amount of use the road had in this period, he may
just as easily have gotten a ride part of the way or spent the night midway in one of several hostels operating in the region at this time.

Concerning Strawberry Valley, while it figures prominently in this narrative, it lies 13 miles beyond Brownsville on the Knox Road / Marysville- La Porte Road. The letter to Jeanne Carr that establishes Muir had left Shasta for Brownsville on December 21, and the time and distance involved in this leg of his trip, in addition to at least an eleven hour “walk” into the foothills on the 24th, means it is unlikely that Muir could have found himself in Strawberry Valley as early as Christmas Eve. The letter to Alice McChesney, however, does suggest Muir’s first movements in the foothills. Quite possibly he came late to Brownsville on the 24th and then joined some contingent of the Knox household during the succeeding days in a holiday visit to their friends in Strawberry Valley, and from there dashing off the note to Alice. Seven years later, in a letter dated March 28, 1881, he wrote Emily: “Remember me also to our friends in Strawberry Valley at whose house I spent so pleasant a time years ago” (Muir, Correspondence 1881:53). At the very least, the above establishes that he had arrived in Marysville, went immediately to Brownsville, stayed there in the Knox house during the holiday, and sometime between December 25, 1874 and January 1, 1875 went from Brownsville up the La Porte Road, traveling with Emily and perhaps others from the Knox house, to stay in the home of a friend of the Knoxes in Strawberry Valley, thus officially beginning his “hasty survey.” The journal makes no mention of Christmas, which is not surprising in Muir’s case, but on the back of the otherwise blank, torn page succeeding the Brownsville entry, he notes: “Strawberry Valley Yuba Co Alt 3800” (Muir, Journals 1874:3.1551/2); when he does write about this holiday it is brief, in a
letter to his sister Sarah, saying only, “I spent my holidays on the Yuba and Feather Rivers exploring” (Muir, Correspondence 1875:9). This letter, because he tells Sarah he has returned from his extended trip, is mislabeled by Muir “January 16th, Oakland” and was probably written February 16th; he was in fact still in Brownsville at the earlier date.

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Strawberry Valley +/- 13 miles;  
December 25, 1874~ January 1, 1875;  
“One of the Tributary Valleys of the Yuba”

The above hypothetical order of events is strongly corroborated by the January 19 letter to Jeanne Carr that provides the parameter for his entire trip: “I have studied a big fruitful week among the can[y]ons and ridges of the Feather and another among the Yuba rivers, living and dead,” continuing, “I have been spending a few fine social days with Emily, but now work” (Muir, Correspondence 1875: 6). His syntax confuses the order in which he explored each watershed somewhat, but it establishes that he spent approximately a week in each. The chronology is settled by the essay chronicling his famous account of climbing the 100 foot Douglas Spruce in “A Windstorm in the Forests”: “One of the most beautiful and exhilarating storms I ever enjoyed in the Sierra occurred in December, 1874, when I happened to be exploring one of the tributary valleys of the Yuba River” (Mountains 248). The date of his arrival, the letter to Alice McChesney, and the above passage expand on the description he gave to Carr: his first week was spent in the Yuba, the second in the Feather, and an unspecified time was spent with Emily, much as they had passed their days in Wisconsin. His journals divulge far less about the time he spent in the Yuba than they do of his time in the drainages of the Feather, but certain scenes of note, the above mentioned in particular, occurred while Muir was exploring it.
Undistinguished prior to this history, Muir’s, “one of the tributary valleys of the Yuba,” his letter to Alice marked “Strawberry Valley, Yuba Co.,” and the journal entry following his arrival in the area, establish Strawberry Valley as the place he memorably “clung with muscles firm braced, like a bobolink on a reed,” his “ear close to the Aeolian music of [the] topmost needles” of the young tree that legend says he climbed (Mountains 252, 251). Being able to establish Strawberry Valley as the location of this scene transforms Muir’s non-specific “setting” of the well-known “Windstorm” essay. It “re-places” it, and constructs in its stead the first piece of a vicinage of what phenomenologist David Abrams describes as “sites [of] expressive potency”, or sacred space (The Spell of the Sensuous 182), which can in turn then be actively participated in by Muir’s readers. Additionally, Yi-fu Tuan claims that, “Generally speaking, sacred places are the locations of hierophany. A grove, a spring, a rock, or a mountain acquires sacred character whenever it is identified with some form of divine manifestation or with an event of overpowering significance” (146). Hence, Muir’s hierophantic climbing of the tree and receiving mystical insight transforms the locale and becomes an invitation to follow him. Yet, as Nicolas Witschi has shown in Traces, Muir’s revisions often erased circumstance in favor of his universal message of the importance of pristine wilderness, the literary extension of his “entice people to look at nature’s loveliness.” In his attempt at universality, at least in the case of the Yuba and Feather region, on one level he is a re-enchanter of wild space, while on a second, such erasure casts a pall of anonymity on the local, on the actual, working against itself rather than instilling a sense of place in the place described.
Donald Worster discusses another motivating factor driving Muir the author; referring to the windstorm episode, he astutely notes:

The headlines affixed to those articles [just prior to and stemming from this era] tell what the newspaper wanted from his pen... The paper wanted stories of physical adventure told with the author situated prominently in the foreground; it wanted him to explain the practicalities of nature travel to office-bound readers and to conjure up a vision of beauty that would relieve all the cares of urban life. (224)

Worster continues:

A fear of danger, however, haunted the urbanite whenever he or she contemplated going into the wilder parts of the country. If the city was seething with violence and crime, and people were dying there from overwork as well as gunshots, nature was even more likely a place where one might get killed... Muir went to extreme lengths to assure himself and his readers that the violence nature seemed to threaten was in truth rather harmless. Any careful, observant person might easily survive the most dreadful events, he promised, and even find them thrilling. (225-6)

As Muir revises this draft of what eventually became the chapter in *Mountains*, his erasures get increasingly unfortunate: Muir calls Brownsville Knoxville, and I have found no other instance where Brownsville is so called; Strawberry Valley is merely “a tributary valley”; and finally, his “friends in Strawberry Valley at whose house I spent so pleasant a time years ago” in the 1881 letter to Emily becomes, “I then chanced to be stopping at the house of a friend,” whom, it can be assumed, Muir insinuates crouches “deprecatingly beneath a roof” when the storm begins (*Mountains* 249). Muir’s final draft of “Windstorm,” his expression of a “divine manifestation,” in spite of its intent of universal truth, instead falls prey in part to its re-enchantment and undermines the actual places and working persons of the region. Whether Muir was enticing people to see nature as Wistchi claims, or entertaining them, as Worster claims, with his exploits in it, the critical act of re-placing his writing reinvigorates the anonymous space just as identifying them reifies his vilified hosts.
Entries in his journal indicate Muir stayed in the Strawberry Valley area several days, exploring locally first. I believe notes in Muir’s journal reclaim the identity of the unnamed “friend” in “Windstorm.” He writes: “Dodson’s claim Mooreville Ridge elev 4300 ft” (Muir, Journals 1874:3.158), then describes the composition of the gravels being mined at the site. Pettee comments in the U.S. Geological Survey Bidwell Bar Folio #43, “The Dodson gravel mine lies about 3 ¼ miles northeasterly from Strawberry Valley, at the south border of the basalt flow that caps Mooreville Ridge” (n pag). Comparisons of the geologic map included in Folio #43 designating the edge of the basalt flow, the Bidwell Bar quadrangle of 1885, and the present USGS Clipper Mills topographic map situates the claim, but determines Muir’s estimate of its elevation was slightly high; the mine’s elevation is approximately 4000 feet. Likewise, Pettee is off in his bearings for the mine: it is North-northwest, not northeast of Strawberry Valley. Regardless, “Dodson” is Thomas Hilton Dodson. The headline of an article in the San Francisco Call dated Tuesday, October 8, 1895 reads: “Sudden Death in Oroville,” and states that on October 7, “Thomas H. Dodson, a prominent mining man, arrived here today from Strawberry Valley, en route to the Grand Lodge of Masons. Shortly after his arrival he was suddenly taken ill, dying within an hour.” Also, the 1890 Great Register of Voters Index indicates that “Thomas Hilton Dodson age 45 of Clipper Mills,” which lies between Brownsville and Strawberry Valley on the Knox Road / Marysville-La Porte Road, registered to vote on “July 9, 1884.” Dodson was 35 years old at the time of Muir’s stay, approximately four years Muir’s senior.
The mine location, the newspaper article, and the voter registration indicate that Dodson lived in Strawberry Valley, although registered in Clipper Mills, and worked his mine on Mooreville Ridge, which marks the divide between Pinkard Creek and the South Fork, the southernmost drainages of the Feather. Consistent with the above information, my theory is that Muir was introduced to Dodson by the Knoxes when they traveled to Strawberry Valley for the holiday, and then he stayed on to be shown Dodson’s mine and the surrounding countryside. His journal includes a description of Dodson’s claim, the gravels being worked, and mentions the dense growth and size of the forest adjacent. As a “prominent mining man,” Dodson would have been able to introduce Muir to the geology of the area and to make recommendations for further locations to study, as well as name people Muir could stay with while studying.27 The only other name relating to Muir’s time in Strawberry Valley is a “Mrs. Drake,” whose congratulations Pelton sends Muir upon his wedding in 1880 (Muir, Correspondence 1880:5).28 Muir would have been a popular figure in Strawberry Valley in general: Thompson and West report that it had at this time a lending library of over a hundred volumes, and an active literary group which met monthly until the winter Muir arrived (97). Although Muir must have met others there, evidence supports Dodson as the “friend” in Mountains most conclusively. Curiously, Muir’s tree-climbing scene and the windstorm which precipitated it are entirely, conspicuously absent from his journal, appearing only in drafts written appreciably after the fact.
Strawberry Valley to North San Juan
Cherokee and Badger Hill
+/- 40 miles;
January 1–5, 1875;
“Magnificent Problems”

In the journal, there are obvious differences between Muir’s field notes, hastily scrawled on the trail, and his more thoughtful attempts at compiling those notes. Several pages before his final impressions of Shasta, one such sustained attempt at a description of the Yuba and Feather Rivers begins, epitomizing Wolfe’s claim that Muir made use of whatever journal was nearest at hand, disregarding chronology, filling in blank pages between entries as he found them. The details given in this particular piece could have only been written after he had surveyed both watersheds, at least a month after he had left Shasta. Immediately preceding his journal notes from Dodson’s, and taken from his extended description of both basins, his portrait of the forks of the Yuba functions well as a narrative of his entry into the country south of Strawberry Valley. It suggests which direction Dodson first sent him:

The N[orth] Fork of [the] Yuba the largest, is about the size of the Tuolumne in H[etch H[etchy]. The Mid[dle] and S[outh] Forks are about the size of [the] Merced in Yo[semite]. The can[y]ons of [the] Yuba are mostly open and show but little hard precipitous rock. Some gray granite bluffs crop out here and there wh[jich] answer as monuments to the ice age well preserved amid the general cutting down and crumbling of all the surfaces. On the N[orth] side of the N[orth] Fork there appears to be no gravel deposits. Those of San Juan and Cherokee are about 100ft in depth, though in many places it reaches a depth of 160 or even 200 feet. (Muir, Journals 1874:3.149-50)

Muir traveled southward from Strawberry Valley as far as the Badger Hill Diggings, just south of the Middle Fork of the Yuba. Though the above passage suggests he was familiar with the South Fork, too, no further corroborating evidence supports his having spent any time there. On this, and ensuing legs, it is unclear whether or not he
traveled alone or in company. The North Yuba landscape in *History* is depicted thus: “numerous creeks wind their devious courses among the hills. Cold springs well up on every hand, and send their little rivulets trickling to the creeks. The hills are covered with a dense growth of lofty pines, firs, and brush” (96). Leaving Strawberry Valley on what the *History* calls the Camptonville-Strawberry Valley Road (96), Muir would have entered into the canyon of the North Yuba, and crossed it immediately above the terminus of Slate Creek in the vicinity of Race Track Point and Slate Range Bar, just below the Yuba’s confluence with Canyon Creek. At Slate Range Bar there was a store, there were fifteen men still mining the site, and a bridge spanning the stream (*History* 96). From there he would have taken a section of the route Brewer’s party had ridden on horseback eleven years earlier between Galena Hill and North San Juan. Additional notes towards the back of the journal make it clear that Muir spent some time examining the geology near North San Juan as well as Badger Hill. This region is near the heart of the most extensive hydraulic mining undertaken in the Sierra, and is two days’ foot travel away from Strawberry Valley, approximately 15-20 miles. Muir makes no mention of persons associated with this leg, but a hand-drawn map (Muir, *Journals* 1874:3.160) and the notes in his journal detail his interest in the “ancient river” transecting the region.

In a side note, “old” or “ancient” river designates the same phenomenon Muir refers to as a “dead river” in his January 19 letter to Jeanne Carr. The “dead” river reference in that letter applies to the gravel beds of the gold bearing “Neocene Channel” (Lindgren, Knowlton, *Tertiary Gravels of the Sierra Nevada*) that mining activity had unearthed and exploited in the region. The legend on Hendel’s map states: “Several far-famed ancient river channels covering hundreds of square miles run across this County in
a general North and South course, parallel to the present creeks and rivers.” Josiah Whitney credits Hendel’s work as a geologist in this region as providing “valuable materials” to the overall scientific picture of the northern lode (*Auriferous Gravels* 209). That Muir was aware of these “ancient rivers,” or that he was quickly made aware, is certain. He had mentioned an earlier interest in such flows to the south near the Tuolumne in his letter of December 21 to Carr; in fact, Muir’s journal shows his real interest in these rivers in relation to his glacial theory.\(^\text{29}\) In the letter mentioned above he says, “I have seen a dead river— a sight worth going round the world to see. The dead rivers and dead gravels wherein lie the gold form magnificent problems, and I feel wild and unmanageable with the intense interest they excite, but I will choke myself off and finish my glacial work and that little book of studies” (Muir, *Correspondence* 1875:6). Incidentally, his journal indicates he didn’t “choke himself off” entirely; coinciding with its first references to the Yuba and Feather regions is an early draft of the essay “Ancient Rivers” that he must have begun in Brownsville (Muir, *Journals* 1874:3.149). This is the language most recent Muir biographer Donald Worster misinterpreted as the language of an activist speaking against the environmental devastation incurred by hydraulic mining, incorrectly assuming “dead rivers” to mean those “killed” by the practice. Just as Hendel notes, Muir shows the north-south direction of the “old river” in his journal sketch, but here he depicts it crossing the Middle Yuba, with the town of San Juan to the east. But most certainly, although they were “dead,” it was not because they had been despoiled. To Muir they were geologic artifacts filled with wonder.

In the days succeeding, Muir would have returned either to Strawberry Valley or Brownsville, though his next movements northwest into the Feather River watershed
make Strawberry Valley the more likely choice. As earlier mentioned, “Joe White’s uphill to Mountain House,” is blocked off on the same page as his entry for Dodson’s claim. This note suggests the most plausible route Muir would have taken northward. Hypothetically, returned from his journey to the forks of the Yuba, Muir would now have been redirected by Dodson to White’s claim on the Middle Fork of the Feather for further study. With relative certainty, Muir’s counterclockwise route through the Feather River watershed began in Strawberry Valley and ended in Brownsville.

**Strawberry Valley to Milsap Bar**

+/- 20 miles
January 6–7, 1875
“Joe White’s”

In the introduction to this chapter I briefly discussed the relevance of Joe White’s mining claim to the path of Muir’s excursion. Muir’s notes place White’s claim in the tremendously deep canyon country just downstream of the confluences of the Little North Fork of the Middle Fork Feather, the South Branch of the Middle Fork Feather, and the Middle Fork itself, in the vicinity of Milsap and American Bars. The front country of the lower Feather River watershed is topographically similar to that of the Yuba, and here Pettee’s description of the dramatic terrain is particularly apt. In his journal Muir records that, “No other river I have seen is so widely and regularly branched” (1874:3.149). Absent high peaks, it nonetheless presents some of the most rugged, inhospitable country in this part of the state because of the depth and steepness of the gorges cut by its various streams. However, it is also among the most sublime. It is a tremendously verdant region, and in his journal Muir notes the remarkable size of its trees and the beauty and diversity of the mosses and ferns he encounters, which were
always dear to his heart, intently botanizing as he travels in addition to his geological observations. The historic trails he would have taken followed the ridge tops, dropping down to cross the streams at the bottom only when necessary. Comparisons between the Bidwell Bar Quadrangle and the associated contemporary topographic maps show that the modern logging road system is overlaid onto those historic routes, making Muir’s excursion easily followed by the less intrepid today.

First, the journal indicates he spent some amount of time at Dodson’s claim, on Mooreville Ridge above Pinkard Creek, which flows into Lost Creek downstream from the confluence of Lost and Sly Creeks. Lost Creek forms a steep, narrow canyon north of Strawberry Valley; this section is today submerged beneath the Lost Creek and Sly Creek dams. Officially entering the Feather River watershed, the historic road accessing this area, which would have been the route between town and Dodson’s claim, went down Eagle Gulch, crossed Lost Creek a quarter mile upstream of the modern dam, and followed the ridge between Lost and Pinkard Creeks. Finally, it crossed the upper end of Pinkard and climbed Mooreville Ridge to the claim, all of which amounts to Pettee’s “3 1/4 miles.” A rudimentary map sketched in the journal listing each of the watersheds Muir crossed in succession as he headed north includes a notation regarding the composition of Mooreville Ridge: “Ridge 4000 feet high containing heavy deposits of gold drift 100ft deep at Dodson’s mostly ancient lava boulders.” A second notation reads: “Can[yon] of S[outh] Fork near mouth of Rock Creek about 1200 feet deep” (Muir, Journals 1874:3.166). It is unclear whether Muir actually saw the mouth of Rock Creek. His “near” suggests perhaps one of three possibilities: either he walked upstream from what is today known as Golden Trout Crossing to view Rock Creek, or he consulted
maps of the region before striking out or he carried them with him, or he had a companion / guide discussing the topography and its features with him as they traveled. The John Muir Papers at Holt-Atherton don’t contain any maps from among Muir’s possessions associated with this part of the state, so it is impossible to be sure.

North of the South Fork, Muir would have followed an established trail to the town of Cascade, approximately eight miles from the Golden Trout Crossing and the halfway point between Strawberry Valley and Milsap Bar. The trail briefly sticks to the top of Lumpkin Ridge before traversing the upper reaches of the Fall River. From there it bypasses the headwaters of Boomer Creek, thus that stream’s absence from Muir’s sketch, and parallels Cascade Creek where it enters town. Muir’s sketch cites a second Pinkard Creek, corresponding with the Bidwell Quad, meaning he used the northbound trail from Cascade, crossing what today is known instead as Pinchard Creek. Then he would have crossed an upper section of the South Branch of the Middle Fork, reaching the gap between Hartman Bar Ridge and Mountain Spring House Ridge near Whiskey Hill. From there, possibly without a primary trail, he would have walked Mountain Spring House Ridge west, dropping down to Milsap Bar, and found Joe White’s somewhere nearby. On this leg of the excursion he would have climbed as high as 4600 feet, remarkable for the time of year despite Muir’s comments on the unseasonable mildness of that winter and a valuable moment to note in the broader hydrological history of the north state, and dropped as low as 1600 feet, a testament to the disposition of the terrain.

Joe White remains a mystery. Muir makes no further reference to him beyond those already mentioned and his name has not yet materialized in any related documents.
That Muir stayed at least one night with him upon arriving, and most likely spent a day reconnoitering this section of river, is clear. Demonstrating his familiarity with White’s surroundings, his journal reads: “The N[orth] Fork of the Mid[dle] Fork and the S[outh] [Branch] of the Mid[dle] Fork are both considerable streams 30 feet wide 3 or 4 deep. The latter descends in a series of picturesque cascades some of them 100 feet or more over a range of hard granite” (Muir, *Journals* 1874:3.149). The mouths of these two watercourses empty into the Middle Fork of the Feather within a quarter of a mile of each other, upstream and downstream of Milsap Bar. That Muir returned to White’s after his days-long foray upriver on the Middle Fork to Hartman Bar, his journal corroborates. After that, White’s presence is absorbed into time and the mountain.

**Milsap Bar to Hartman Bar**

+/- 30 miles Round trip

January 8–12, 1875

*Meeting the “Contrary Cuss.”* The next leg of the excursion is possibly the most well-documented of the trip and shows Muir’s real fascination with the geological picture of the Feather River watershed. On the advice of White he would have avoided going upstream along the riverbed, through what is today known as “Devil Canyon” for its precipitousness, and instead would have climbed the Mountain Spring House Ridge and met an existing trail on Hartman Bar Ridge on the south side of the Middle Fork at an elevation of 5000 feet, dropping in to Hartman Bar at approximately 2300 feet, although Muir’s reading for it was significantly lower at 1750 feet. Muir’s journal entries relating to his time in this area begin: “Jack Delap… contrary cuss knows habits of boulders 45 years old Pike Missouri” (Muir, *Journals* 1874:3.161). In addition to this information there is a brief description of the scope of Delap’s mining operation. As with
the first mention of Joe White in the journal, this brief depiction of Delap is similarly
blocked off from the rest of the text on the page. It hints that most likely White had
suggested Delap, and his claim upstream, as being of potential interest to Muir and his
studies. White’s advice exhibits guidance comparable to that which Dodson had given
Muir in directing him to Milsap Bar.

I have ascertained that Jack Delap is Samuel Jackson Delapp. He is listed in
the 1890 Great Register of Voters as having registered at Bucks Ranch on the historic
Quincy-Oroville Highway, which had been the route “Dame Shirley” entered the region
on her way to Rich Bar in 1851, and which had been used by Ina Coolbrith, first poet
laureate of California, when traveling as a child with her family between her stepfather’s
claim and Marysville the same year, mere weeks apart. Buck’s Ranch was the closest
substantial settlement to Delap’s claim on Hartman Bar, and is today submerged under
Buck’s Lake. The Register states that Delapp was 58 when he registered in April 1888,
making him 45 years old when Muir met him, consistent with statements in the journal,
and it states that Delapp’s birthplace was Missouri, making him an authentic Piker by
birth, if not countenance.

Hartman Bar, Willow Creek, Mount Ararat
+/- 10 miles round trip
“Exceedingly Rough
and Deep”

A map of Muir’s excursion seems to illustrate that his side-trip to Hartman
Bar was at least a partial attempt at following the Middle Fork to its fountain.
Demonstrating this propensity, the Hartman Bar leg appears, when drawn on a map, as a
northeasterly digression up river from the main, counter-clockwise, downstream flow of
the rest of his trip. Having crossed near to the headwaters of many of its tributaries, he had struck a course up one of the watershed’s main stems, later positing that he was within sight of a peak near its “head.”

The notes and diagrams in the journal indicate Muir spent a significant amount of time studying the geology of Hartman Bar, as well as documenting its flora. Hartman Bar is on the south side of the river, and the first glimpses Muir records in his journal, I have physically ascertained, are from this aspect. He begins with a description of what he witnesses during his descent:

Southside canyon wall 3000 feet high lava capped on top few feet thick then granite to river. Wall sloped 25 degrees somewhat nearly uniform few vertical faced headland[s] of granite. Many ava[lanche] slopes and ravines sug[ar] and yel[ow] pines maple in gulches. Chapparal live oak chinquapin ceanothus dense on s[outh] wall sparse on n[orth]. Large portions of n[orth] wall nearly timberless where sunbeaten. Pines on both sides occur in hollows and ravine slopes producing a barred and dotted appearance. Whole physiognomy of the canyon similar to that of Merced and Tuol[umne] at same elevation. (Muir, *Journals* 1874:3. 163-4)

The above is followed by an entry from the perspective of one who is now situated near the bottom of the canyon, looking upstream and to the northwest: M[oun]t Ararat is up river from here a few miles on the n[orth] side alt[itude] about 6000 feet. Bald and featureless and with scarce any individuality. Chaparral with few pine groves near top. (Muir, *Journals* 1874:3. 164-5)

Muir comments on the apparent glacial implications of the geology of tributary streams nearby, and then ascends the north side of the canyon, I suspect the following day, in the company of Jack Delap. Interestingly, his description of the flora of the canyon walls has largely reversed over the past 134 years, despite a recent wildfire which burned the understory on the north canyon wall. I found the south canyon wall,
although well shaded, to be somewhat more open overall, while the north side is covered in stands of giant sugar pines at the top, groves of black oak mid slope, and moss-covered live oak and maple along the river. When hiking the Hartman Bar trail from the north, one is rarely in full sunlight. Near mid slope on the north wall, just off of the trail, is the world’s tallest ponderosa pine: 334 feet tall, and 71/2 feet in diameter (Lawson *Trails* 137). However, with the exception of the yew tree and the California bay laurel, which are notably absent from Muir’s notes, his lists of the flora remain contemporarily accurate. Though I did not notice it at the time, my photos do reveal the “barred” and “dotted” appearance the differing tree species produce that Muir comments on. That he remarked on this phenomenon amounts to further evidence of the unseasonable lack of snow in this region; had snow fallen, the variegation of the leaves and needles would not have been hidden in snow. Today, neither slope shows the avalanche activity Muir documented.

Based on the vistas Muir records, he and Delap climbed out of the canyon to the top of Mount Ararat. It is uncertain whether they used the established trail from the river, which appears on the Bidwell Bar Quadrangle in roughly the same location as the contemporary trail on the U.S.G.S. Haskins Valley topographical map, or if they ascended via the Willow Creek drainage. Muir notes a falls on Willow Creek, and discusses a marble vein in the vicinity of the mouth of Willow Creek in his depiction of their ascent, but he is not clear whether this was the path of their climb or a detour. Muir sketched a cross-section of the canyon, from the river bottom to the peak of Ararat, and made a second longitudinal sketch, each showing the steepness of the slope, the materials composing it, and reiterating the elevations. Here, his personal observations are
catalogued along with quotes from Delap: “N[orth] Fork 3 times more water than
Mid[dle] Fork and rises mostly in large springs in Big Meadows,” “One fork of Mid[dle]
Fork heads around American Riv[er] within a few miles of Donner Lake Region,” Muir
attributes the above quotes specifically to “Jack Delap” (Muir, *Journals* 1874:3.166).
That he does this is conspicuous. While the first statement is primarily true, the North
Fork historically gaining significant volume from springs in Big Meadows, it actually
begins on the Southern slope of Mount Lassen; and the Middle Fork *does* wind a
tremendously long course, traversing the entire width of the Sierra Nevada at this point,
but Muir knew the impossibility of Delap’s claim as to its origin. To Muir, Delap’s
statement would belie his ignorance.31 Diminishing the credibility of all but his most
localized claims, the “contrary cuss” who “knows the habits of boulders,” regardless
seemed to merit the credulity of Muir’s first impression. One imagines Muir and Delap
standing on top of Ararat in a classical western pose, with Delap, the dutiful guide,
naming landmarks for Muir and in his enthusiasm overstating his knowledge. On the one
hand, Muir lists the landmarks as they are shown to him, commenting on their general
appearance and apparent formation, while on the other he, quite possibly for his own
private pleasure, records the ill-informed geography lesson of the Piker. They stood
together and scanned due north, observing Spanish Peak, Muir writing “Spanish Pk, mtn
on head of mid Feather timbered to top, about 8000 feet ?” (Muir, *Journals* 1874:3.165);
then they swung their gaze due East, up the Onion Valley Creek drainage, Delap pointing
to Pilot Peak, Washington Hill, Richmond Hill, Onion Valley and Saw Pit Flat (Muir,
*Journals* 1874:3. 171).32 Even at this elevation Muir makes no note of snow on any of
these peaks, indicating an extremely snowless season.
Muir’s elevational readings are generally accurate throughout his excursion, with the exception of those pertaining to the Hartman Bar area. Placing Hartman Bar at 1750 feet, he is roughly 600-650 feet under in his calculation. On the Yuba leg and in the Strawberry Valley area he was no more than 300 feet off, always erring on the low side. Interestingly, his estimation for Mount Ararat was remarkably precise: the Haskins Valley Quad puts Ararat at exactly 6000 feet; Muir estimates it at “alt about 6000 feet” (Muir, *Journals* 1874:3.164), though he adjusts his official reading to the far less accurate: “Mt Ararat alt 5160” (Muir, *Journals* 1874:3.168,169). Furthermore, Muir’s numbers are inconsistent with his estimates of the heights of both canyon walls. Regarding the north canyon wall, Muir estimates it at “about 3500 deep shallower higher” (Muir, *Journals* 1874:3.171). The difference between Ararat and the river, using the above number, sets the river elevation at 1660 feet, significantly lower than the already low estimate of 1750. Of the southern ridge he says: “Southside can[y]on wall 3000 f[ee]t high” (Muir, *Journals* 1874:3.163), remarking, “elevation of ridge about from 4000 to 4700 for 3 miles of length (Muir, *Journals* 1874:3.165), meaning he was relatively accurate regarding the heights of Mountain Spring House Ridge and Hartman Bar Ridge despite his inconsistencies, and his “3000” feet jibes with his estimation of the river at 1750. Andrew Harris’s *Plumas National Forest Trout Fishing Guide* claims the actual vertical drops from the north rim to be 2800 feet, and from the south rim 2600 (66). Scott Lawson’s *Trails of the Feather River and Yuba River Region* verifies Harris’s numbers (109, 135). What the above illustrates is that, although inaccurate in his elevations and despite his math, Muir was proportionately correct in his approximation of the watershed, if not a little overawed by its rises and falls. The Hartman Bar elevations
show that Muir possessed the inherent ability to read terrain even if his instruments were flawed.

Incidentally, it is difficult to set a time frame for Muir’s movements in this territory because estimates for travel times through it vary so widely. Lawson’s *Trails* calls the north and south canyon routes moderate to difficult, and suggests one allow 2-3 hours descent time from both directions, cautioning hikers to double times for the hike out (109, 135,16), making the climb to the ridge a 4-6 hour trek, or the better part of a day. Harris’s *Guide* sets the time in at 1-2 hours and the time out at 2-4 (66), still a considerable amount of time for a day trip in rugged terrain. Keeping what I felt was a moderate pace, and walking without stops, I descended the north canyon wall in 1 hour and 15 minutes, and ascended it in the late afternoon after a day on the river in 1 hour 45 minutes, extending the opportunity for, and in Muir’s case the possibility of, wider explorations. I would guess Muir, more fit and daring than I, and Delap, accustomed to the route, would have made their climb in at least that time, thereby enabling them to cover more ground throughout the day. The Plumas National Forest gives a distance of 4.4 miles from the river to the trailhead,33 which is still a considerable distance from Mount Ararat. If Muir and Delap climbed Mount Ararat by the Willow Creek route it would have been much more difficult, though approximately the same mileage. Either way, their efforts would have been significant, and they would have covered at least ten arduous miles just to gain a panorama for Muir and possibly get him closer to the river’s source. Anyway, the final impression this topography left on Muir is that “the general character of the ca[n]y[on] is exceedingly rough and deep” (Muir, *Journals* 1874:3.175), to which I absolutely can attest.
Hartman Bar to Milsap Bar
(Mileage included in round trip estimate)
“Delightfully Ferned and Mossed”

Returning from their round trip ascent of Mount Ararat, Muir would have spent one more night at Delap’s claim. Most likely against Delap’s better judgment, Muir returned to White’s the following morning along the river rather than taking to the ridge. His return to Milsap Bar, which Muir notes took him 7 hours, would have been through the most difficult terrain he encountered over the course of the entire excursion. This is the section of the Middle Fork known as Devil Canyon that Muir avoided on the upriver trek. It is sheer in many places and it made its impact on him. Harris’s Guide describes this stretch of river as comprised of “several box canyon stretches which cannot be [traversed] without extreme difficulty” (65). I myself turned quickly back from my attempt to re-trace Muir’s path when I ran into cliffs just a half-mile downstream. My notes from the day I spent at Hartman Bar describe this length of the river as “enormous country.” Yet Muir’s overriding impression is of its beauty rather than its difficulty. He writes:

All the way from Hartman Bar to White’s (7hrs). The can[y]on is delightfully ferned and mossed and watered with silvery leaping brooks. Stone and tree mosses and splendid woodwardias and maide n hairs besides the usual rock ferns. These woodwardia dells are perfectly enchanting with their rich plumes imbricated gracefully over and down [?] with running water beneath and no end of plush moss and the shadows of rock and tree. (Muir, Journals 1874:3.172, 174)

He continues by describing his amazement at the size of the woodwardias here, comparing them to large specimens he witnessed on the New York House road closer to Brownsville34 and those he’d seen while on the North Yuba.
His progress down river can be gauged by the points of interest he notes as he picks his way. The journal takes note of, although not by name, Little Marble Cone above Rhineharts Bar, then Kellog Ravine, at the head of Devil Canyon:

A large stream, Kelloggs Creek [sic], descends to river in fine cascades. Opposite this stream, another fine creek enters the river from the southeast whose waters are drawn from a very beautiful hollow in front of which an isolated mountain mass 1200 feet high occurs as if forgotten in some way by either the ice or water. This middle fork canyon is remarkable for the number and sharply pronounced character of the ribs which thrust themselves out into the middle of canyon into the way of the stream. (Muir, *Journals* 1874:3.176)

Muir’s description of the stream opposite Kellog Ravine is of the unnamed drainage that meets the river at Hanson’s Bar, and the “mountain mass” is the knoll across from it. At this point Muir could have climbed to the ridge before entering the harshest portion of the canyon, although from this point onward his path to White’s is uncertain.

**Milsap Bar to Feather Falls**

`+/- 5 ½ miles`

`~ January 13, 1875`

“A Delta of Blazing Light”

Little needs to be said of this leg of the excursion, yet it is notable because Muir can again be precisely placed by his journal entry, and because he devotes two pages to his appreciation of the landscape and sunset he witnesses. It is almost entirely effusion. He would have climbed out of Milsap Bar downstream from Joe White’s near American Bar and Pompys Point on a trail marked on the Bidwell Bar Quadrangle that is no longer in existence, upstream from the incredibly dramatic Bald Rock Canyon. This would have put Muir on Watson Ridge on the divide between the South Branch and the Fall River walking in a southwesterly direction, affording him down canyon panoramas at various points, framing the view between canyon walls like a “V.” Describing his vista
thus, he takes in the sunset and the horizon, letting his eye then fall on the nearer
distance, and the play of the trees upon it, and the graceful spreading of the river:

    Cool blue above barred and feathered with white plumes and fairy touches and
    heavy black beneath with a ground of yellow green barred with straight, clearly
    measured crimson then the coast range dark purple the plain all one mass ocean of
    purple. Spires of pine cutting the golden and orange and crimson bars feathered
    with oak their leafless sprays outlined on purple plain a long fan shaped road a delta
    of blazing light mirrored from pools ridges folded and braided. (Muir, Journals
    1874:3.177)

Following this depiction, Muir mentions Table Mountain, Kanaka Peak, and Island Peak,
actually called Island Bar Peak. These would have been the primary features in view; the
latter two side by side on the ridge dividing the Middle and South Forks of the Feather,
the former due west of them beyond the North Fork and the town of Oroville, which Muir
does not mention, as it is hidden by the low hills surrounding what is today Lake
Oroville. He is now in the area celebrated in J. S. Holliday’s gold rush account of
William Swain’s letters home, The World Rushed In. He is just miles upstream from
Stringtown and Swain’s cabin on the South Fork, where Swain first arrived in the
goldfields in January, almost twenty-five years to the day prior to Muir’s trek. Swain had
this to say to his brother about the country Muir now found himself traveling through: “A
man has to make a jackass of himself packing loads over mountains that God never
designed man to climb” (317). This estimation is dramatically different from Muir’s
impression of the country in the Overland version of “Flood-Storm”: “The adjacent
mountains, though not lofty, command an endless series of charming landscapes” (495),
or Muir’s description in the earliest draft of this essay: “The upper foot hills of the
western slope of the Sierra is one of the most delightful and accessible regions on the face
of the globe” (“Floods” JMCol Series IIIa Reel 6). Interestingly, Swain wrote about the
devastating flood he experienced in this region in 1850, as would Alonzo “Old Block” Delano, who was also in the area. Of note is that, although farther down the mountain than Muir, standing on the same Table Mountain Muir references in his own panorama, Delano describes the flooded devastation and destruction of property he witnesses, strikingly similar to the way Muir would later in “Flood-Storm,” but with considerably more empathy for its victims.

At the end of this entry Muir writes “Frey Ranch Fall River House” (Muir, *Journals* 1874:178), suggesting where he intended to spend the night before viewing the falls, probably on White’s recommendation. These two locations nearly elude detection. The only site noted on the Bidwell Bar Quadrangle in this vicinity is a place called Wagners, on the head of Frey Creek, at the end of a main road coming from the east. Wagners is at the crossroads of a multitude of north / south foot trails, including the one Muir’s panorama places him on. The trail to Wagners, after climbing Watson Ridge, drops into the Fall River drainage approximately a mile above Feather Falls, then climbs directly out to the ridge above Frey Creek. The contemporary Plumas National Forest map produced by the U.S. Forest Service places a Jackson Ranch at nearly this same location, as does the current USGS Cascade topographical map. From this point, these maps show what Lawson’s *Trails* calls “the unmaintained Jackson Ranch Trail” (103), leading west to today’s Feather Falls overlook through what is designated as Wagners Valley, and calling the main falls trail from the south the Wagners Valley Loop.

Complicating the above conflict of place names is that even the current maps don’t agree: the California State Automobile Association’s “Feather and Yuba River Regions” map shows a “Frey Ranch Road,” similar to the one terminating at Wagners on the Bidwell
Bar Quad, ending approximately at the location of Jackson Ranch, yet it does not show Jackson Ranch at all. It is reasonable to suspect that Wagners, Jackson Ranch, and Frey Ranch are the same place. Whether or not the Fall River House was also here is not certain.

Muir spent at least a day at Feather Falls, hiking upstream of the falls and down close to the main stem of the Middle Fork. He sat near where the lookout is today and noted the structure of the falls, and then he drew a sketch of the downstream view of the river. After an extended, seemingly unfinished depiction of what he witnessed there, the entry ends abruptly. On the following page his journal jumps back in time to the town of North San Juan, on the Yuba River, and is interrupted again by a further discourse on ancient rivers, eventually jumping all the way back to notes from his Shasta trip. There are no other known entries related to the Yuba and Feather excursion. Muir was back in the foothills and returning to Emily.

Feather Falls to Brownsville
+/- 20 miles
January 15~ 16, 1875
“Our Friends in Forbestown”

In the days preceding his letter to Jeanne Carr on January 19, Muir claims to have spent “a few fine social days with Emily” in Brownsville (Muir, *Correspondence* 1875: 6). Because there are no more journal entries to guide this reconstruction, only the above letter and the Bidwell Bar Quadrangle suggest the date of Muir’s return and his course to the Knox home. Because of the assemblage of the country in this region, there are no direct routes from the Feather Falls area to Brownsville. He would have traveled through Mooretown, the former name of the modern town of Feather Falls, and down the
ridge to Enterprise and Stringtown very near to where Holliday locates William Swain’s cabin, and from there upstream to Sunset Hill and Forbestown. As late as 1902 Muir had written Emily asking, among other news, to be remembered to their “Forbestown friends” (Muir, Correspondence 1902: 1), indicating that he may have at least been to that place. If he traveled this way, his path is best approximated today by heading west on the Lumpkin Road from Frey Ranch / Jackson Ranch / Wagners near Feather Falls, which was a main route then and now, and then turning due south on Ponderosa Way and following that to the Ponderosa Diversion Dam above Lake Oroville. The road crosses the South Fork nearly exactly where the historic trail did, and climbs out of the canyon to connect with what is now called the Lower Forbestown Road, also in the path of the old trail. He could have stayed the night in Forbestown, perhaps with “friends,” and continued down the New York Flat Road into Brownsville.

Brownsville
January 17~ February 1875

Muir would have found himself back down among the small, thriving foothill communities of the New York Township of Yuba County. Calling Brownsville “Knoxville” in the Mountains version of “The River Floods,” he writes of its desirability as a resort, perhaps in deference to the Knoxes. The final, expurgated section of the “Flood-storm” version in the Overland is primarily a list of Brownsville’s pastoral and picturesque qualities, tempering and disguising what Michael Cohen remarks is Muir’s “more radical argument… confronting the prevailing narrow civilized view of Nature” (Pathless 138) in that essay.
Having “pushed down into comfortable winter quarters” (“Flood-Storm” 489), and as yet unwilling to return to the Bay Area, Muir spends mostly idle days in Brownsville, intending to begin writing again. He sends a letter to Carr:

How gloriously it storms, the pines are in ecstasy and I feel it and must go out to them. I must borrow a big coat and mingle in the storm and make some studies… I have gained a thousand fold more [during these Feather River days] than I hoped… how the rains plash and roar, and how the pines wave and pray. (Muir, Correspondence 1875:6)

Muir’s next moves and impressions are chronicled in “Flood-Storm.”

On the morning of the flood (January 19th of this year) all the Knoxville landscapes were covered with running water, muddy torrents descended every gulch and ravine, and the sky was thick with rain. The pines had long slept in sunshine; they were now awake, and with one accord waved time to the beatings of the storm… Never have I beheld water falling from the sky in denser or more passionate streams… Go where I would, on ridges or in hollows, water still flashed and gurgled around my ankles. (490)

Muir says he “drifts for an hour or two” and then climbs the highest peak in the neighborhood, which lies immediately south of town and across Dry creek. Based on this description, it can be ascertained that the peak he climbs is Ruff Hill, noted on the USGS Rackerby Quadrangle, elevation 2951. By midday Muir claims to have reached the top, just as the storm reached its peak. From here he says he witnessed “one of the most glorious views I ever beheld” (Mountains 264).

A page in his journal from this period, unrelated to the pages before and after it, I believe can be attributed to his experiences on Ruff Hill. He uses particular language to describe what he sees, specific colorations, and makes his only reference to the Marysville Buttes, today known as the Sutter Buttes. The journal says, “scenery
massively sublime,” and he appears to be observing the interplay of the ferns against the lichen covered rocks they grow among, and to compare them to the trees waving above, much as he does in his essay when he describes gaining an almost second sight, seeing for the first time the behavior of single raindrops and the storm’s interaction with the topography it passes over. A brief moment following the above passage in the journal bears a striking resemblance to the published account: “Foreground a huge stormrise live oak and lichened rock silvery pine thrilling with light Background Marysville Buttes and Coast Range blue [sic] unedged with yellow plumes between sky best of all yellow bands mountains icy blue (Muir, Journals 1874:3.173); consider that in “The River Floods” Muir writes, “the Sacramento Valley… brilliantly sun-lighted and glistening with rain-sheets as if paved with silver” revealed “a jagged bluff-like cloud with a sheer face over the valley of the Yuba,” and “The blue coast range was seen stretching along the sky like a beveled wall, and the somber and craggy Marysville Buttes rose impossibly out of the flooded plain like an island out of the sea” (268). There are no other journal entries easily associated with the one cited above; for all the impact the storm had on his mindset, Muir’s response must have been nearly entirely visceral until he re-envisioned it, probably upon returning to “gray Oakland” sometime late in January or early February.

Although the letter is misdated, he sends word to his sister Sarah that he has “just returned from a long train of excursions in the Sierra” (Muir, Correspondence 1875: 9). It was possibly written on February 16th. However, he writes his niece and nephew from Oakland on January 26th that “this is my first day back in town” (Muir, Correspondence: 1875: 21), so the 26th is a pivotal day, potentially marking the end of his excursion.
Conclusion

“A One-sided Chat”

Muir’s Yuba and Feather River excursion had ended and he parted with Emily and the Knoxes without further comment on his visit. For the rest of the decade he published the most direct fruits of his preservationist labors, speaking out against the destruction of the Sierra, north and south, but curiously, he never returned to Brownsville nor saw Emily in her own home again, despite the fact that he’d found himself in the region on a number of occasions during the next several years. In April 1875 Muir would have passed through Marysville on his way back to Shasta; in September 1877 he toured the northern Sierra in the company of Asa Gray, Sir Joseph Hooker, and John Bidwell, placing him as close as Chico to Yuba County; and in February 1880 he revisited the Bidwell ranch in Chico. It is unclear what had transpired between Muir and Pelton in this period, but a prolonged silence seems to have followed the excursion of 1874-5 in which she returned east for a time to stay with family there. One might guess that her foray to California was in fact specifically to reconnect with Muir, and, short of that, she had to decide what to do with herself.

Muir sent a letter to Emily on December 30, 1877 that speaks of their separation. He chastises her for disappearing on him, despite all his own prior disappearances from her life:

I have just chanced to learn of your return to the Yuba hills from McChesney. Since you left here on your visit to the old East you have not sent me a single word, at least I have not received one from you. What has your poor mountaineer brother done to deserve such blank desertion? Come now. What is my shortcoming or overcoming that you leave me this silently to the bears and snow-storms and wild sheep? What kind of sisterness is this?... I would have written to Mrs. Knox for information but I did not care to let her know how naughty you have been. And on
going east you did not give me any address… I wish you a happy New Year notwithstanding your unsisterly silence… I will forgive you your long mysterious naughtiness. (Muir, Correspondence 1877:6)

Muir’s language suggests he feels a certain level of guilt and culpability for Pelton’s return home, but also a real desire to remain friends in spite of their separation and the unspoken status of their friendship. There is a vital two year break in known correspondence between them, making it impossible to understand what kind of agreement, if any, they had reached. However, in the interim, Pelton had moved across the Golden Gate to Bolinas while Muir lived in San Francisco.

Although Muir announced his engagement to Louie Strentzel, Jeanne Carr’s choice for his wife, in April 1879, while Pelton was living in Bolinas, Pelton must not have been among those he informed, nor was she invited to the wedding despite her proximity to Muir. She apparently had never even met Strentzel. Muir’s marriage on April 14, 1880 came as a shock to Pelton. Two weeks after his wedding, after receiving a letter Muir had written to her, she replied: “I am going to have a one-sided chat with you… You quite surprised me in the dispatch made in making yourself a married man” (Muir, Correspondence 1880:5). She alludes to a missed meeting between the two of them in San Francisco earlier that month, just before Muir would have been married, as if he’d purposely avoided seeing her. Pelton tells him: “But I have not quite forgiven you for not letting me see nor hear from you in all that time and I don’t believe I shall till that picture of yours comes with one of Mrs. J Muir.” One can’t help but notice Pelton’s curiosity surrounding the new Mrs. Muir, possibly after so long considering herself to have been the one woman closest to the confirmed bachelor’s heart. Interestingly, she also blames him for a silence between them. Too many recriminations seem to have built
up to be contained in correspondence. She tells Muir she would like to make his new bride’s acquaintance and then signs the letter “your sister,” as if in ironic response to Muir’s “mountaineer brother” letter of 1877. In a post-script she also tells him, “I haven’t heard from Aunt Sena [Knox] since writing her you were to be married. It will be quite a surprise to her.” After Muir’s wedding, letters of this kind cease, replaced by amicable, if not superficial correspondence.

The upshot of Muir’s Brownsville visit reconstructed is that the generalized spaces and vague suppositions of biographers and scholars can be exchanged for specific persons and locations. The landscapes of “Windstorm” and “Flood-Storm” can instead be experienced not as Brownsville, formerly Knoxville, but as the Knox Hotel and Knoxdale Institute, Strawberry Valley, and Ruff Hill; Muir doesn’t just cross the divide between the Yuba and the Feather anymore, but spends the climax of a watershed season extricating himself from his past and committing himself to the future. The “unexplored country” re-enchanted by Muir gets re-peopled by friends and acquaintances who showed him considerable generosity, making his explorations possible, thus recovering them from his oft-repeated, published admonitions. The reconstruction of John Muir’s Yuba and Feather River excursion reinstates the region as a site of numinous encounter, opening it again to interaction and the possibility of new epiphany and inscription.
CHAPTER V

LANDSCAPE OF DESIRE: “KNOXVILLE”

AND MUIR’S “ECOAESTHETIC”

Introduction

John Muir’s “Knoxville” does not exist. “Knoxville” is Brownsville, California, in Yuba County, in the foothills of the northern Sierra. Records show that Emily Pelton’s uncle Martin Knox founded the town, maps show that the road leading into and out of town was named the Knox Road or sometimes the Central Turnpike, and history reports that Martin and his wife Sena ran the Knoxdale Institute and the Brownsville Hotel (Muir’s “Knox House” in “Flood-Storm” 494) from their ranch, but nowhere, except in Muir’s account, was Brownsville ever officially known as Knoxville.36 Not one Muir scholar has ever made this connection; instead, Muir’s “Knoxville… sometimes called Brownsville” (495) in the Overland version of “Flood-Storm in the Sierra” is taken at face value and variously recycled in their analyses of that text. Except possibly as a colloquialism he may have heard while he was there, Knoxville is strictly Muir’s literary substitute for the actual town. It is the name he gave to Emily Pelton’s home in his re-enchanted version of the watersheds of the Yuba and Feather Rivers in The Mountains of California: so that with the role of the miners downplayed, the loggers ignored, the roads and mills and hotels and ranches overlooked, the Knoxes anonymous, and finally even Emily unnamed, all that endures in Muir’s accounts of the
region are an indeterminate hill from which he watched the Marysville flood, an indistinguishable tree he climbed in the wind while “stopping at the house of a friend” \((Mountains 249)\), and an imprecisely located, misnamed town that is not now nor ever was on any map. My reconstruction of Muir’s Yuba and Feather River excursion in the preceding chapter has accounted for each of these places and persons.

Brownsville, alternately, is Emily Pelton’s home in the disenchanted landscape, partly modernized and lapserian, and encumbered by those elements necessarily erased from Muir’s wilderness epiphanies. Despite the fact that Erwin Gudde’s substantial \(California Gold Camps\) notes that “in 1867 the deposits were nearly exhausted” in Brownsville’s immediate vicinity and by Muir’s time “it was known for its orchards,” mining activity just 20 miles to the north near the town of Cherokee was at the forefront of the ongoing hydraulic mining controversy the year Muir came to the region \((Mansfield, History of Butte County 268)\). John Ross Browne’s \(Resources of the Pacific Slope\) (1869) says of the mines between Brownsville and Table Mountain, those nearest the final, Butte County leg of Muir’s excursion through the watershed, that they “are among the most enduring placer mines in California” (159), even though Browne also notes the towns supporting them had dwindled in size since the 1850s. Of Forbestown, likely Muir’s final stop on his return to Brownsville from his “hasty survey” \((Mountains 260)\), Browne records that it possessed “quartz and placer mines, lumbering and turpentine-making among its resources,” and a population of “about 100” (161). In the verdant New York Flat area just north of Brownsville, mentioned by Muir in his journal, Thompson and West’s \(History of Yuba County\) states that “at least five mills [were] in operation… including one claiming to have harvested an eight and a half foot monster”
yellow pine (90), while Resources states that “New York Flat is the principle mining
district near Forbestown. Three hydraulic claims are at work there now [1869],
employing in all about 20 men” (162). The History likewise tells of several lumber mills
that had been in operation for more than a decade, some of which were producing forty
thousand board feet of lumber per day at the time of Muir’s visit, and of others, notably,
recently closed because their timber had “failed” (96).

The disenchanted landscape is a demographic topography, mapped,
categorized and classified so that it can be utilized. The human relationship to it is one of
exploitation and dominion based upon yield. It is a landscape of literal inscription in that,
built on resource extraction and harvest, its buildings, modifications, and its traces are
visible. The re-enchanted landscape, metaphorically inscribed by an author, is produced
in response to the known, the used, and the desecrated spaces of the lived experience. In
that sense Knoxville, the metaphoric inscription, and Brownsville, the literal inscription,
technically the same town, are opposites. And yet, to use Franco Moretti’s term, they
make each other “legible” (Atlas 79) in compelling ways. Maps themselves have a dual
nature: As a tool of disenchantment, the map makes land available to industry; but, “the
measure of mapping is not restricted to the mathematical… it includes the remembered,
the imagined, the contemplated. The world figured through mapping may thus be
material or immaterial, actual or desired, whole or part” (qtd. in David and Wilson 85),
and so despite its deliberate disorientations the map of the re-enchanted landscape
possesses its particular validity as well. John O’Grady in fact calls Muir’s writings from
this time “parables of desire” (Pilgrims 48), and describes Muir himself as a “liminar
“[sic],” traversing “that frontier between civilization and the wild,” alluding to the calculated spatiality of his work.

The process of justifying Knoxville with Brownsville increases its legibility: by uncovering the details of Muir’s production, the meaning and consequences of his re-enchantment can be apprehended. Muir’s re-enchanted landscape, because it excludes the working class and the effects of their industries, and because it replaces them with a non- or posthuman landscape, nevertheless replicates the proclivities and class biases of the demographic topographies he is resisting. His map of hope, in that sense, is closed, with access limited to only a few, determined by his aesthetic valuation. Understanding this conflicted map of Muir’s fictional space and re-placing it with the historical space, addresses the difficulties and tensions inherent to re-enchantment.

Fictional space is a cultural production, as are historical spaces. The most persistent complaint against John Muir’s work is its uncomfortable relationship with realism. Broadly recognized as the father of environmentalism, his work still registers a palpable aesthetic righteousness that reflects poorly on his aims. In these moments when Muir’s moral superiority overcomes his idealism, his sympathies as an individual render his cause unsympathetic to the modern collective his advocates would have it instruct. Nowhere is this more evident than in Muir’s “Flood-Storm in the Sierra” (1875), later published in abridged form in The Mountains of California (1894) as “The River Floods,” and to a lesser degree “Windstorm in the Forests of the Yuba” (1876), also published in Mountains as “A Windstorm in the Forests.” Environmentalism and ecocriticism still, just as Muir’s preservationism, are haunted by their Eurocentrism and are faced with
the quandary of how to reconcile often sentimental, subjective impulses with practical application, a broad relevancy, and ethical appeal.39

A pillar of the spirit of activism but possessed of such a worldview, *Mountains* represents an “aesthetics of relinquishment” (*Imagination* 143-89), which Lawrence Buell defines as “environmental writing devoted to resisting anthropocentrism” (*Future* 100), a type of leavening meant to affirm an equality between human and nonhuman. Yet *Mountains*, in its own immediacy, does less to arbitrate between human and nonhuman in “The River Floods” and “Windstorm” than to show an *inhumanity* and a tendency away from inclusiveness.40 A contentious othering of the humans living and working in the environments Muir describes occurs in these chapters.41 This is the heart of the irony of many of Muir’s texts and the source of polemics within ecocriticism and environmentalism: while Muir inspires activism in some, his pastoral and / or picturesque aesthetics, flawed by prejudice and exclusions, regardless form the basis of a movement whose ethic has been extrapolated from an initial position of individual impulse and Eurocentric wonder to one expected to guide practice and policy relevant to all. By examining Muir’s “Knoxville” beside the historical Brownsville this essay will take into account the effect of spatial production on the less generous didactic choices in the two versions of “River” and “Windstorm.” When read in this manner, the incidents in question in both chapters are understood to be the result of a predictable spatial phenomenology and so too are their failures. While post-colonial readings of Muir are indeed apt, to overlook the role of the spaces he creates in such a reading is to miss a vital first step. An analysis of the causal relationship of fictional and historical spaces in these particular chapters isolates the defining role spatial production plays in determining
Muir’s exclusions, and by extension, highlights the failure of aestheticism as the impetus for ecological principle. Muir fails as an activist-guide for multi-cultural America because his productions of space create too-dearly-imagined non- or posthuman landscapes rather than accessible places with transferable ethical appeal.

Simon Estok claims, “Ecocriticism fashions itself activist” (205) and David Mazel that the political component of ecocriticism and environmental literature is “necessary to and constitutive of the environment itself” (137 original emphasis). Additionally, Lawrence Buell points out that, “nature and culture must be seen as a mutuality rather than as separable domains” (Future 67) and, “the bioregional horizon must extend beyond a merely local horizon: the locale cannot shut itself off from translocal forces even if it wanted to” (Future 88). The sum of what Estok, Mazel, and Buell here suggest is that based on the interconnectivity of people, places and processes (natural and political), regardless of scale, the needs of humans and nature are not exclusive and are in fact, of necessity, inclusive. Together they demonstrate activism is the key to communicating the need for a healthy interaction between human and nonhuman.42 However, writing of contemporary environmentalism in “Imagining Nature and Erasing Class and Race” Kevin De Luca and Anne Demo, citing activist Pat Bryant’s “the Achilles Heel of the environmental movement is its whiteness” which makes it “very difficult to build a mass-based movement that has the power to change the conditions of our poisoning” (541), contend: the “narrow, class- and race-based perspective of what counts as nature leads the environmental movement to neglect people and places they inhabit, thus isolating the movement from labor and civil rights concerns and rendering it vulnerable to charges of elitism and misanthropism” (542).43 If, as Estok states,
ecocriticism can be said to founder on two points: “(1) its failures to theorize itself adequately and (2) its failures to live up to its initial activist promises” (206), then Muir’s angry pity towards the people of Knoxville in “River” symbolizes the difficult fact that Estok’s claims against ecocriticism and De Luca and Demo’s approximation of environmentalism are foundational shortcomings endemic to the activist intentions of both movements and to place-based writing in general. The re-enchanted map fails to unify just as the disenchanted map fails in its homogeneity. More importantly, Muir’s popularly conceived tirade at the end of “River” symbolizes the gulf between theorizing and engagement.

**Mapping, Unmappable, Unmapping**

It is first necessary to understand how nature is represented by Muir and then to ascertain how to read his representations. Michael J. McDowell suggested that ecocriticism apply a Bakhtinian reading to landscape writing but acknowledged that the “problem in applying dialogics to landscape writing is the marked absence of human society in much of the writing” (373). He also rightly points out: “most of the early European “discoverers” and later explorers of the American landscape found what they expected to find” (386). That Muir is a part of this tradition will be established. De Luca and Demo grant that “white wilderness certainly forbids inhabitants” and “that within the context of whiteness [in landscape writing], those not part of white civilization are, at best, seen as part of nature” (554). Finding what one expects to find, seeing a landscape without people, marginalizing those who are seen: absence of dialogue makes
attention to the details of the point of view of the author synonymous with the environment they create.

Concepts found in Franco Moretti’s *Atlas of the European Novel*, parts of which evolved from his reading of Bakhtin’s “Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel,” that, “specific stories are the product of specific spaces” (Moretti 100), corroborate the influence of spatial production in “River.” In his introduction to *Atlas*, Moretti is clear: “geography is not an inert container, is not a box where cultural history ‘happens’, but an active force, that pervades the literary field and shapes its depth” (3). This sentiment is strikingly similar to, and mutually enriches the first edict of Buell’s “rough checklist” of the primary facets of an environmentally oriented work in his *The Environmental Imagination*, specifically: “The nonhuman environment is present not merely as a framing device but as a presence that begins to suggest that human history is implicated in natural history” (7). Read together, each of these statements mutually underscores the importance of comprehending the bond and causal relationship between person and place and perhaps accepting the primacy of neither. Although their aims are the same, to make place matter, Moretti’s project is explicitly tied to the direct mapping of literature, whereas Buell recognizes the difficulties and outright implausibility of such an undertaking in environmental writing. In fact, he is ardently opposed to it in writers like Muir, whom he finds outright unmappable (*Imagination* 134; 268-279). The logic of unmappability was modeled by Raymond Williams in *The Country and the City*, in which landscape writing at best is shown most often to be a construction of pastoral, political, and / or class-based representations instead of a substantial approximation of a region. Such landscapes are full of gaps where labor and infrastructure have been left out, are
emotive rather than particular, and therefore unmappable (Williams 12, 120-6); pastoralism of this kind is described by Buell as being only “vaguely localized” (*Imagination* 54) rather than attached to actual places, and though he does not put Muir in this category he does stress that he is nonetheless an inheritor of its tradition. It might be said that as a creator of spaces of hope and resistance Muir is *affirmatively* unmappable; in recognizing the difficulties of topographical accuracy, realism, mimesis, and attention to scientific detail, Buell sees the more useful venture for scholars not in proving or disproving the “reality of these fictional realities,” but to recognize in them the “recuperation of natural objects” and “the relation between outer and inner landscapes as primary projects” (*Imagination* 88).

Still, to consider Moretti’s goal of literary mapping is more useful than it might appear; Moretti qualifies the difference between studying space in literature and studying literature in space, essentially making him conversant with Buell’s “outer and inner landscapes” while supplying readers of Muir with a valuable qualification, especially for these texts, which are regarded as nonfictions. In *Atlas*, studying space in literature accepts the subjective and ideological aspects of a text, and assumes these places to be fictional, analogous to what Buell calls a text’s “fictional realities.” The study of literature in space examines only those spaces of literal, historical fact (Moretti 3), the outer landscape. In this way it is possible to discern between a mappable Sierra Nevada (outer, historical) and Muir’s “Range of Light” (inner, fictional), the mappable Brownsville (outer, historical) and Muir’s “Knoxville” (inner, fictional). As a study of space in literature, this understanding promotes a tangible explication of the spaces he *does* present in the same way Moretti posits that knowing the historical Paris of *Old
“Goriot” gives meaning to our reading of Balzac’s fictional Paris, or comparing a mappable England to Austen’s England expands our understanding of the intrigues in her novels.

If the goal is to understand the force and power of place rather than regard it merely as setting as prescribed by Moretti and Buell, then Moretti shows the real worth of exploring the relationship between outer and inner landscapes to be its ability to reveal “patterns… of exclusion” (13). If, for example, in indigenous writings Buell points out, “official cartographic coordinates and boundary lines are opposed to sacred space” (63), then any such exclusions as Moretti’s practice exposes can and does underscore forms of ideological preference, imperialism, or racial privilege and othering; “literary geography may tell us two things at once: what could be in a novel- and what actually is” (Moretti 13 original emphasis). Examining Muir’s erasure of the scars of extractive industries in the Sierra foothills, his callousness toward the flood victims of Marysville, and his indignation towards his hosts is to recognize in them an extension of the selective tendencies of the eye-witness account and epistolary forms in literature of the encounter. The “asymmetry of the real and the imaginary” (Moretti 18) need not be proved, though because romantic palimpsests cannot be wholly erased, an investigation of the effects of the production of inner landscapes becomes increasingly intriguing in environmental nonfictions. Considering the tradition of the primacy of sight in literature of the encounter in the New World that informed the Victorian tradition, which is sometimes undone by ambiguous distances and sometimes reaffirmed by them in Muir’s work, what mapping the unmappable reveals are his patterns of exclusion specifically when the post- or nonhuman reverie is interrupted by human imposition or contact.
Understanding the specific mechanics of the production of these inner landscapes is essential to fully determining the impact of the human interruption to them. Buell describes the process of creating nonhuman spaces as “remythifying.” This, he suggests, is on the whole a pastoral project, and is accomplished through a series of rhetorical moves, a successive authorial “emptying and filling” (*Imagination* 71) of the outer landscape. This production equates to John McClure’s “re-enchantment,” ascribed to an author’s “desire to be reinserted [into] sacred spaces” (*Late Imperial Romance* 3). For McClure this is accomplished by “unmapping” the landscape; it is the author’s attempt to “‘open up’ again spaces of otherness and mystery ostensibly mapped by empire, or to protect the few spaces still unmapped” (4). However, there is a critical difference between the sacred spaces, place,\(^5\) of Muir, and the exotic “sacred” necessary to the narrative of McClure’s Victorian Imperialism, despite the fact that they share similar methods and aims. McClure focuses on human needs and narrative; although Muir in general satisfies his personal aesthetic,\(^5\) his aesthetics of relinquishment prescribe attending to the needs of the nonhuman.

Bill Devall noted that Muir used “the words God, Nature, and Beauty almost interchangeably” (66). Biographer Michael P. Cohen, and historian and most recent Muir biographer Donald Worster, likewise noted this trend.\(^5\) De Luca and Demo observe that “Muir’s use of religious imagery is crucial in distinguishing Yosemite [in Muir’s book *The Yosemite*] as a sacred place that deserves comparison not to the exotic spaces of Africa or South America but to the sacred places of white civilization” (551). While the re-enchanted space McClure identifies is othered and mysterious, it is more appropriately considered as a powerful secular site rather than sacred because in the late imperial
romances he studies non-European space is profane. The remythified spaces of Muir are reconstituted as sacred because they are familiar. McClure’s unmapped landscapes are elsewhere, while Muir transforms elsewhere into local. The type of space Buell describes Muir creating is complimentary to De Luca and Demo’s approximation of Muir, more closely resembling Bryant’s ‘the forests were God’s first temples’ motif. The critical difference between unmapping and remythifying is in definitions of sacred and exotic: they are two distinct forms of elsewhere: elsewhere / there (unmapping, exotic: the late imperial romance) and elsewhere / here (remythifying, sacred: American pastoralism).

It should be noted that the re-enchanted space McClure describes is the profane landscape of Conrad’s Congo. It is much more transparent because it is re-enchanted for purposes of adventure. Marlow, the erstwhile imperialist, can expect to encounter the non-white, savage other. Muir, on the contrary, by remythifying the Sierra Nevada according to the aesthetics of classical or religious traditions, in producing his inner landscape, simultaneously creates and negates the presence of an Other. The savage is not meant for church; Eurocentric constructions are interrupted by the heathen at the sacristy. Therefore, the miners, the loggers, and those unfit or unwilling to walk into the storms of Knoxville are largely absented from Muir’s narrative. The production of the inner landscapes of representative nature writers, Buell claims, is inherited from, and is a reaction to, early American settlers who brought with them, “old world frames of reference- the Exodus narrative, pastoral convention [and] a basketful of English place-names” which “became defenses against the heart of darkness” (Imagination 70); these colonizers, facing a very real wilderness, named and mapped this “emptiness,” essentially
“filling” and subduing it with the trappings of their own culture. The landscape was thus transformed from enchanted to disenchanted, therefore making a writer such as Muir’s re-enchanted landscape, “the provincial’s defense against dullness” (Buell *Imagination* 70), a response to colonial dominion, undoing the literal and metaphorical work of his predecessors, “emptying” what they “filled.” Nicholas Witschi shows Muir’s reaction to the foothill mining region of the Northern Sierra, a region ravaged by decades of abuse since the Gold Rush by the time Muir saw it:

as a consequence of the ecoaesthetic that Muir develops along the way, the human figure, as well as the material economics imbricated with the person, is dropped out of the scene altogether. Muir’s eventual erasure of the evidence of an entire industry from the face of the land is thus achieved. (320)

and he gives primacy in his narrative to a nearly empty landscape.  

In the imaginary literary geographies of the late imperial romance, opposing poles of sacred and profane space are subtly and consistently confused and contested based on political, ethical, aesthetic, and personal prejudice. Although Muir is not attempting to re-envision a dangerous or profaned space, but rather a pastoral one, by invoking the othered space, that of the heart of darkness, Buell does underscore the correlation to imperialism. Likewise, by referring to Muir’s emptying as an ecoaesthetic, Witschi unintentionally adds this term to the lexicon of imperialism. The labors of men are more easily ignored than man himself, and insofar as the re-enchanted geographies Muir produces are inner landscapes, he controls them as spaces; any human interruption of his reveries is deemed a violation. Despite McClure’s claim to the contrary, elsewheres in the latter days of imperialism worldwide and western expansionism nationally by their very nature become politically charged, particularly those spaces *within* the frontiers
because they are analogous to those spaces *within* the author: their *inner* landscapes. The stubborn persistence of the relic space, re-enchanted, forms the basis for what, in essence, is a spiritual resiliency and an aesthetic decidedly contrary to and out of step with the overwhelming and unavoidable press of the course of empire right up to this day. They are spaces of hope. At issue are access to and the exclusivity of such redemptive spaces, particularly as they relate to inner landscapes, which by their conflicted nature imply neo-imperialism and ownership.

Those who inhabit the margins of his elsewheres complicate Muir’s inner landscapes in this conflicted sense and frustrate the support of wilderness as an oppositional space, a space of activism. This is the foremost difficulty arising from spatial productions in both versions of “River” and somewhat in “Wind”: they originate an ecoaesthetic that establishes a viable sense of place and resistance, yet still require othering and still rely on figurative and literal distance from humanity for completeness. The unmappable surmounts the mapped, but must likewise overlook the unmapping it has done. The work of Moretti, Buell, and McClure, when shown in conjunction with select others, allows for a post-colonial interpretation of these texts based purely on the merits of Muir’s spatial productions alone. As works of literature with difficult relationships to realism, the particulars of their “asymmetry” can be brought into focus; Muir’s inclusions, exclusions and depictions are predominantly spatial, and so it can be said that his social commentary, by Moretti’s estimation, is in fact the product of his revised spaces. Regarding the works in question, Muir’s experiences within the landscape are unmistakably derivative of the romanticized colonial precepts of civilized and savage
space and his ecoaesthetic draws its ethical stance from the shaky ground of that tradition.

“Knoxville” and “Baker Farm”

Muir’s biographer Michael Cohen wrote in *The Pathless Way* that he suspected that “Muir was reading Thoreau even while visiting Emily Pelton,” noting that Muir “used the language and strategy of Thoreau’s late and most radical essays” (140). Specifically discussing the first published version of “River,” Muir’s “Flood-Storm in the Sierra,” Cohen argues persuasively that it is thematically derivative of Thoreau’s “Walking” or “Wild Apples.” However, in form, the literary construct of “River” is nearly identical to Thoreau’s problematic “Baker Farm” chapter in *Walden* (1854): a country walk, a rainstorm, an epiphany lost on the locals. Muir’s “Wind-Storm” is also framed this way. In his narrative Muir alone ventures into the dramatic wind storm blowing through the region, learns valuable lessons about the land and its manifestations, and returns incredulous that the people of the region misinterpret its message of peace and renewal. By their very essence these encounters illustrate the breakdown between theory and widespread appeal. In “Baker Farm,” Thoreau seeks shelter from the deluge and attempts to impart his philosophy to John Field and his family, while Muir seeks the power of the storm, making the same attempt to reach the people of Knoxville after the deluge has passed. Furthermore, in “River,” Muir feels the equivalent redemptive force in the soaking rainfall he sees manifested in the foothill forest; Thoreau is redeemed by the rainbow following, though next time he vows he will “Take shelter under the cloud, while [his neighbors] flee to carts and sheds” (488).
Rhetorically, Muir’s and Thoreau’s constructions re-enchant by mingling outer and inner landscapes, with single paragraphs shifting from romantic language to scientific. Beginning “Baker Farm” discursively, Thoreau invokes temples, Druids, Valhalla, swamp gods, and the eyes of imps before discussing the existence of only remnant stands of certain species of large trees, connecting their loss directly to human activity and invoking the destruction of the passenger pigeon. Then he uses the Latin name of the false elm before describing a “perfect hemlock” “standing like a pagoda in the midst of the woods.” The trees become “shrines” again (483). The alternating imagery Thoreau uses supplants the historical landscape with the fictional and the fictional landscape with the historical; his spatial production is predicated on desire for sacred space, but is tempered by a valuable lesson on the nature of inhabiting: escapism, place-faithfulness, and sanctity are not separable and are to be found locally if one is right-minded. Muir’s moves are similar though his language is more purely reportage, more generally scientific. The early and late versions of “River” blend science with religion and anthropocentrism.60 Like Thoreau, he identifies the several species of trees and brush in the region of his walk; he also exhibits a comprehension of the region’s geography, geology, hydrology, and weather patterns;61 he knows the temperature and snow level at the time of the storm nearly exactly; yet simultaneously, he notes “several large sugar pines” “bowing solemnly and tossing their long arms,” “evidently accepting the benefactions of the storm in the same whole-souled manner” as sunflowers do sunlight. Among the violets and ferns he sees, “the same divine methods of giving and taking” the sugar pines show (“Flood-Storm” 492; “River” 266). For Muir science has a
deeper, divine source; conversely, God is not undone by geology. Muir’s reader witnesses escapism and spirituality in a local context like that seen in “Baker Farm.”

As “Baker Farm” and “River” proceed, however, knowing the historic space (outer landscape) but writing the re-enchanted space (inner landscape) becomes problematic because it equates ethic to aesthetic. The result is that the concept of the elsewhere / here, the local / sacred so intriguing to the contemporary environmentalist and ecocritic because it forms the cornerstone of re-inhabiting and environmental activism, is also the basis of Thoreau’s and Muir’s philosophic complaints against their neighbors. Is contemporary activism based on the practical knowledge of place or on the inspiration believed to be inherent to it? Would we be inspired by the identification of trees without knowing Druids live among them? What if inspiration and fantasy come with a human cost? Muir and Thoreau model the “transcendent possibilities of place” (142) in their writing, as Don Scheese claims, yet they likewise display the solipsism Philip Abbott notes (183). Because of the “overwhelming evidence” of his solipsism, Abbott views “Thoreau’s political works [as] distractions from his own lifelong spiritual pilgrimage.” Furthermore, Abbott states: “In Walden, society is left behind so that [Thoreau] might have ‘a little world all to [himself]’” (183-4). Transcendence found by entering the inner, enchanted landscape resolves its epiphanies at the expense of society, yet the outer, historical landscape, authorizing Thoreau’s and Muir’s visions, in turn receives a simultaneous political and social charge from them. The inner landscape is the place of enlightenment and othering; the outer landscape is the space of potential inclusion vital to any movement. The static charge created by author, text, and place is formed by these frictions.
John Muir’s re-enchanted, unmapped landscape is the result of the dichotomies of romantic impulse. The “picturesque rewrite” Nicholas Witschi describes in “John of the Mines” exposes deliberate ecoaesthetic selectivity during Muir’s revision process. The Sierra Nevada of Muir’s era were significantly more rugged and less tame than Thoreau’s New England farms, but even so they were no less raw from years of various forms of extraction; additionally, they were considerably more important to the collective imagination of California’s, and America’s, largely urban population as unassailable sacred space.

In his record of Muir’s editing process, Witschi follows certain journal entries as they develop into essays and finally are adapted as chapters in The Mountains of California. He notes the influence of popular conceptions of landscape, of literature, and the emphasis on scenery that guided Muir’s choices. Witschi’s premise is that Muir’s is a tenuous claim to realism because of his “particular version of the picturesque” (320). Witschi points out that although Muir is critical of the mining industry still decimating the Mother Lode by hydraulic mining, he does include an entirely literary version of an aging miner as naturalist, a version of what Henry Nash Smith calls “the popular notion of the noble anarch of the forest” (52) in Virgin Land (1950), and in Witschi’s words, By writing favorably about the individual but vilifying his activity, Muir separates the person from the industry, thereby reconceptualizing […] the historical and the figurative landscape of California’s mountains […] Muir evicts the miner from the textual landscape. (321 emphasis original)

Insofar as Muir reconceived his space, Knoxville is a pastoral wilderness, and his “noble anarch” is an incarnation of the noble savage; inasmuch as unspoiled scenery was an essential component of promoting preservationism as an anodyne for an unhealthy
urban existence, mining activity, and infrastructure in general, had to be edited out to keep the space sacred. McClure draws such a parallel between Conrad’s program and the actual Congo at the time *Heart of Darkness* was written. By no means pastoral, Conrad’s landscape, regardless, had been significantly reconceived. Using Mary Kingsley’s *Travels in West Africa*, written contemporaneously to Conrad’s work, McClure cites substantial reports to the contrary of Conrad’s expression of the land as savage space. This is information, McClure points out, which “Conrad had to erase, or avoid acquiring, in order to produce his dramatically unchanged and unreadable Africa” (16). McClure claims Conrad has done so, just as I here suggest Muir has, with the intent of re-enchanting his landscape and thereby preserving the land’s redemptive potential. The nonhuman (posthuman) is the salvation of the human.

Witschi then outlines the way Muir goes on to further erase all but the briefest reference to the miner himself in addition to his negative impact in later revisions of particular essays. Muir’s landscape is devoid of the effects of civilization, emptied of people, and only sporadically contains “cottages covered with climbing roses” (Witschi 331). In his rewrite Muir has done Thoreau one better by leaving the hut in the wilderness deserted and picturesque. When the miner / noble savage remains in Muir’s picture, albeit in a subordinated, marginalized state, he is a subject of some ridicule and a signal of the ethical conclusions Muir would have his reader reach in regards to the intrinsic value of the Sierra Nevada, a region, through Muir’s unmapping, that has been transformed from an outer to an inner landscape.68

As if on Thoreau’s recommendation in “Baker Farm,” in “River,” Muir proceeds deliberately into hostile weather. His correspondence shows that he was in his
room in the Brownsville Hotel writing a letter to Jeanne Carr when “one of the grandest flood-storms that [he] ever saw broke on the mountains” (*Mountains* 260; JMC 1875: 6). Muir, unlike the people of Brownsville, feels he has the capacity to comprehend the lesson of simplicity in the storm’s beauty, just as Thoreau felt better suited than John Field to appreciate the rainstorm that brought them together. Muir writes: “It is a pity that but few people meet and enjoy storms so noble as this in their homes in the mountains” (262) in the chapter version of “River,” but in essay form this thought has not been amended. There, Muir goes on to state: “The impressions which storms excite in the minds of different individuals vary with the degree of development to which they have attained, and with the ever-changing accidents of health, business position, and so on” (“Flood-Storm” 490, emphases added). The difficulty with considering both versions of this passage as exemplary of the same kind of interpersonal antipathy in Muir as found in Thoreau, and to return to his conception of space as the cause for it, is in Muir’s muddled handling of subject and object in his phrasing. His meaning in the chapter version appears to be that Muir pities the people, whose homes are in the mountains, their inability to enjoy noble storms; but, in the same line in “Flood-Storm” Muir states clearly that he pities anyone who “misses the noble storm in *its own* home among the mountains” (490 emphases added). By comparing the two versions, one sees that what appears to be an indictment of people is not one. But in the second line, the one cut from the book chapter but found in the essay, Muir’s phrasing again brings the issue of his masked sense of superiority into question: Is “the degree of excitement one gets from storms predicated on the degree of development to which [the person experiencing them] has attained,” or is it based on “the degree of development to which [the storm] has attained”? In other words,
is it a matter of how stratified or powerful the storm has become, or is he calling into question the aesthetic capabilities of its witness, as the first sense denotes? Muir occludes his meaning.

Notably, passive-aggressive confrontation like that of his return to the “Knox House” (Brownsville Hotel) was part of a pattern for Muir, and the expurgated last section of the “Flood-Storm” essay not included in the book chapter “The River Floods” is its manifestation. His time in Brownsville with Emily must have given them both déjà vu, if not an uncomfortable sense of unfinished business, as John P. O’Grady posits in Pilgrims to the Wild (1993), in which he describes Muir’s time with Emily both as productive and as “a period of dithering desire” (73). Steven Holmes describes Muir’s earlier experience with the Peltons in Prairie Du Chein in the 1860s as a kind of surrogacy, where, as a young man, he became closer to them in warmth and intimacy than he was with his own family, though he was often uncomfortable with what he felt were the Pelton household’s more liberal behaviors (81). When writing to her from California in 1870, just prior to Pelton’s arrival in the state, Muir told her:

. . . something or other jostled a bunch of old Mondell memories. I thought of the days when I came in fresh from the Wisconsin woods and when I used to launch very orthodox denunciations at all things morally or religiously amiss in old or young. It appears strange to me that you should have all been so patient with me. (JMC 1870:31)

The above, reminiscent of the scene upon his return to the Brownsville Hotel many years later, proves Muir’s behavior in this incident to be less an isolated, epiphanic moment than a predictable behavior for him. His history was repeating itself. Although much has been made of this return, and its counterpart in “Wind Storm,” it has only been perceived as an isolated occurrence, and so perhaps is given greater import than it should.
Muir’s return in “Flood-Storm” also finds precedent in the time he spent in the Trout home on Lake Huron, where he “kept up his habit of lecturing his friends,” giving rise to “a good deal of spirited but congenial exchange” (qtd. in Holmes 122). Read as a part of this pattern, his arrival after the flood storm becomes far less significant. Although Muir writes:

> Arriving at the Knox House, the good people bestirred themselves, pitying my bedraggled condition as if I were some benumbed castaway snatched from the sea; while I, in turn, pitied them, and for pity proclaimed but half the exalted beauty and riches of the storm. A fire, dry clothing, and special food were provided, all of which attentions were, I suppose, sufficiently commonplace to many, but truly novel to me, (494)

His response to those present in the hotel, their reaction to him, and the comforts they provided were far more commonplace than he indicates. If, as I claim in the introduction to this piece, the angry pity Muir displayed reveals foundational shortcomings endemic to environmentalism, then the unfortunate truth is that Muir’s entirely personal, outright predictable response turned as it is into a climactic parable, is unfortunately at the heart of environmentalism’s importune construct. Muir’s primary biographer Linnie Marsh Wolfe recreates the scene in *Son of the Wilderness* (1945) emphatically: “But with face glowing as if he had just come down from Mount Sinai, he exclaimed: ‘Don’t pity me. Pity yourselves. You stay here dry and defrauded of all the glory I have seen. Your souls starve in the midst of abundance!’” (179).

Wolfe expands on the divisive tenor of the “conflict,” transforming Muir into an heraldic, enlightened self, and those of the “village” (*Mountains* 270) into heathen Others. Even if Wolfe’s account is accurate, it would appear that Emily in particular must have witnessed similar cases many times during her association with Muir, thus softening
his condescending blow. Ultimately, she and Muir must have finally found humor in his indignation, just as his letter of 1870 in reference to Prairie du Chein registers his embarrassment. In fact, following Muir’s diatribe about “a few drowned rats and people” in Marysville in “Flood-Storm,” he goes on to portray Knoxville as “a desirable place of resort… diversified with storms of the most gentle and picturesque species” (495). The above slant retraction of his pity and condescension seems to be the parallel literary equivalent of Muir’s shame-faced admission that “all of them had been so patient with him” back in Wisconsin. The final chapter version in *Mountains*, lacking Muir’s “rats and people” diatribe, becomes even more apologetic, despite the fact that biographer Michael Cohen, basing his assumption on Wolfe’s depiction, remarked that Muir had “no patience for” “these people” (139), especially in light of the fact that he was probably thankful that the inverse was not true.

The days Muir spent with Emily in Brownsville, including his most likely solitary excursion through the higher mountains, must have very closely replicated those earlier days they had spent together. Muir had taken longer hikes on his own, returned, and then botanized with Emily closer to home while in Wisconsin. And though his climactic return to “Knox House” loses prominence as a teaching moment when read in its broader context, recognizing it as part of a pattern of behavior nevertheless recovers the interpersonal relationships that were playing themselves out in the Brownsville Hotel, and it provides a clearer, less problematic version of Muir’s interactions with the people and landscape of Brownsville. Still young and unattached, spending clear days walking the nearby forests botanizing with Emily, staying at a school for young women and a hotel for mountain travelers, Muir enjoyed “these people” very much. The Knox home
proved to be similarly composed to those of Mondell and the Trout’s home, and it is important to stress that “these people” would have provided Muir with the comfort and companionability he needed to assuage the apprehension he felt about his impending return to the city. This alternate perspective of the inhabitants of the “village” of “Knoxville” reveals that the important texts of ecocriticism and environmentalism need to be historicized as well as properly theorized if their calls to activism are to increase their cultural relevancy.

Witschi draws the reader’s attention to the section missing from the *Mountains* version of “Flood-Storm.” He contends that this is Muir’s way of creating an inner landscape of “posthuman nature,” pointing out that the chapter version in *Mountains* “omits fully one third of the *[Overland]* article, a detailed description of the town of Knoxville, leaving only the account of mountain rivers and streams” (330). This is perhaps the most important moment in Muir’s erasure, because it is primarily this omission that transforms the historical space of Brownsville, the outer landscape, into the fictional space of Knoxville. As written, every place mentioned in “Flood-Storm in the Sierra” is traceable on historic and contemporary maps, whereas in “The River Floods” only the rivers and Marysville can be placed. Muir’s landscape, first by his penchant for re-enchantment, and second through his editing process, is twice-removed from its real context, that of environmental degradation, entrenched infrastructure, and tenancy: in other words, the world of work and land use. Yet Frederic Bade, Muir’s friend and the original conservator of Muir’s literary estate, writes in *The Life and Letters of John Muir* about this period in Muir’s development:
There was a new note in his discourses, written and spoken, when he emerged from the forests of the Yuba. Fear and utilitarianism, he was convinced, are a crippling equipment for one who wishes to understand and appreciate the beauty of the world about him. (45)

The lapserian landscape of the Brownsville region, those elements Muir left out of his re-enchantment, made a tremendous impression on his thought. They codified his retaliation against disenchantment.

Brownsville

Climate

Re-enchantment in Muir’s case, then, is simply an unmaking of a historical space resulting in a fictional space informed by a Eurocentric ecoaesthetic that marginalizes all but a core culture. Founded on this, environmentalism is held to a limited appeal. Although this may be an unfair oversimplification, the way to extend the appeal of Muir’s message must be to remake his landscape. If Brownsville is the outer, historic space, filling in the parts Muir emptied invites those excluded to be integrated back into the scope of his message. It is important to note that the re-enchanted Knoxville and the disenchanted Brownsville both vie for the same ideological turf; that is, the correct way for humans to interact with their environment. Without Muir’s message that the “land [is] still alive” (Cohen 141), the foothill region surrounding Brownsville continues down its path of environmental degradation; without the inhabited space of Brownsville, the meaning of Knoxville is too narrowly transmitted.

Brownsville is present beside Muir’s Knoxville, especially in the final third of the essay that did not make it into Mountains, but careful reading uncovers it throughout both published versions. The most fascinating aspect of re-placing Knoxville is that
weather, its most ephemeral aspect, and not its physical spaces, forms the most durable link between Muir’s inscription and Brownsville. Both “Wind-Storm” and “Flood-Storm” revolve around meteorological phenomenon, and in terms of “recuperation of natural objects,” it is upon these that Muir’s descriptions are the most legible. As represented in the Overland version of “Flood-Storm,” Brownsville is an attractive spot “for tired town dwellers seeking health and rest” (495). In fact, Browne, in his Resources says that Brownsville’s “climate is mild and healthful” (159), and Hendel’s “Official Map of Sierra County” (1874), which lies just to the east, parts of which Muir traversed on his excursion, claims, “the climate is very salubrious.” Doyle’s “Official Map of Yuba County” lists the average mean temperature of Marysville, the county seat, at 64.2 degrees, with a high of 112 and a low of 28, not quite the “Florida” that Muir depicts in the first draft of this essay, but definitely comfortable.

Muir is also accurate in his representation of the natural array of circumstances that lead to the flooding of Marysville, as he witnessed from Ruff Hill, just across Dry Creek from Brownsville. Muir writes: “While the storm under consideration was in progress, the thermometer at Knoxville ranged between 44 and 50 degrees” (“Flood-Storm” 490). Doyle’s map gives an average winter temperature of 50 degrees in Marysville. Muir’s depictions of the tremendous amount of rain that fell also appear realistic: for the winter of 1874-75 Doyle’s map reports almost 27 inches of rainfall, essentially doubling the amount of rain recorded for the seasons directly prior to and following the winter of Muir’s account. For the 15 year totals reported by Doyle, Muir’s storm was the highest on record in a region whose seasonal average was only 16 ½ inches
of rain. So Muir’s, “The rain was of itself sufficient to produce a vigorous flood” (“Flood-Storm” 489) is reliable.

On the whole, however, Muir calls the winter of 1874-5 one of “extraordinary sunfulness” (“Flood-Storm” 489), and in “The River Floods” he calls it “warm and calm” (Mountains 260). He describes the day of the windstorm he witnessed, which followed a rain that “thoroughly washed” the ground and the trees in the area, “intensely pure… warm and balmy and full of white sparkling sunshine, redolent of all the purest influences of the spring” (“Wind-Storm” 248). While this “sunfulness,” comparatively, seems to conflict with the above-average rain totals of this particular season, by his account in “Wind-Storm” the sunny days between torrid outbursts seem to have accentuated the alternating, successive temperate days. This “warm and calm” weather also brings up the problem of snow accumulations in his rendering. While the single rainstorm can account for the tremendous outflow of water from the mountains onto the plains in an otherwise unseasonably sunny winter, substantial snow accumulations in the higher elevations would contradict claims of mildness and “sunfulness” across the region. Yet in “Flood-Storm” Muir states that, “the basins of the Yuba and Feather rivers… contained a considerable quantity of snow” (489) and that by rapidly melting it substantially augmented the floodwaters debauching onto the valley floor. And James Sinnott, in his History of Sierra City and Goodyears Bar (1973), two towns east of Brownsville and higher in the mountains but near to Muir’s Yuba route, reprints an article from the Mountain Messenger from December 10, 1874, just weeks before the flood Muir witnessed, which says: “Snows of such depth on the Mountain House hill70 that it is necessary for the horses to wear snowshoes” (208). These two accounts describe the often
typical, but unpredictable mixture of sun and precipitation during the winter season in the northern Sierra. Muir’s observations, actually, perfectly describe a phenomenon that today is popularly known as a “pineapple express,” properly called an “El Nino.”

Customarily, snow falls at the higher elevations down to between 4000 and 5000 feet. In an El Nino weather pattern, warm storms are drawn into California from farther south in the Pacific than is normal, hence the “pineapple express,” and instead of snow, rain falls at elevations of 8000 feet or more, filling the rivers with rain and snowmelt. In “The River Floods” Muir states:

> The rain was so heavy and long-sustained that it was, of itself, sufficient to make a good wild flood, while the snow which the warm wind and rain melted on the upper and middle regions of the basins was sufficient to make another flood equal to that of the rain. Now these two distinct harvests of floodwaters were gathered simultaneously and poured out on the plain in one magnificent avalanche. (261)

The fact that Muir so perfectly describes this phenomenon is a testament to his realism. However, complicating Muir’s portrayal of the days leading up to the January 19th flood, Thompson and West’s account states: “For a week, heavy and incessant rain and snow storms prevailed, accompanied in some instances by thunder and lightening” (68), perhaps changing our opinion of Muir’s portrait of the conditions somewhat.

Likewise confusing, as mentioned in the previous chapter reconstructing Muir’s Yuba and Feather River excursion, is the fact that Muir mentions climbing the 6000 foot Mount Ararat above Hartman Bar on the Middle Fork of the Feather River in his journal, and from there he surveys the region, and not once, in this instance or throughout, does he mention encountering snow or experiencing difficulties with mobility resulting from it. Accounts such as Edward McIlhany’s *Recollections of a 49er* (1908), that cover the same ground as Muir 25 years earlier, depict a mining population
that was highly mobile, even in winter, and navigating in the fallen snow figures in much of his narrative. As a scientist Muir should have at least commented on its quality and depth, yet from Ararat he observed several peaks over 7000 feet, and although he notes other features prominent on them, again, he makes no note of their snowlines. In fact, much of the geologic and botanic detail Muir records having seen in his journal would have been hidden had there been any amount of snow pack. Furthermore, Muir entered the Yuba watershed within 5 miles of Sinnott’s Mountain House, where the horses had been forced to wear snowshoes,\textsuperscript{71} crossing the ridges between the various forks of the Yuba and then the Feather that range between 4000 and 5000 feet. That places him substantially in the “upper and middle regions” of both basins and contradicts the published account. In his journal, additionally, instead of snowbound scenery, Muir noted the “barred and dotted appearance” of the canyon walls of the Middle Fork of the Feather, created by the varying types and colors of their vegetation. This sight would only be possible if there was no snow on the trees, otherwise, Muir would have observed a uniformly white, unvaried hillside. The actual amount of snow in the mountains behind Brownsville, and its influence on the Marysville flood, unfortunately remains a mystery, making Muir’s otherwise precise description dubious.

Topography, Built Environment, and Population

Without the final third he left out of “The River Floods,” Muir’s landscape is almost unidentifiable. In the previous chapter, however, I located Ruff Hill as the point from which he gained the panorama of the Central Valley in flood, and Strawberry Valley 13 miles beyond Brownsville as the site of the wind storm and tree climbing
episode. But once Muir moves outside of the meteorological aspects of the Brownsville region and into discussions of the built environment, in either published version, his realism becomes problematic.

Thompson and West in *History* depict an area comprised of several communities with hotels, amenities, toll roads, and industries of their own, adding: “Large bands of sheep and cattle are kept on nearly every ranch. Orchards and vineyards have become numerous… and a great deal of fine fruit and grapes are raised annually” (92). This report is in accord with Browne’s account in *Resources* and with Muir’s overall description of the foothill communities he’d experienced in the opening pages of *Mountains*, although notably, Muir places the “living” mining towns with “bright bits of cultivation about them” at “long intervals” across the range, and claims because “they are mostly far apart [they] make scarce any mark in general views” (*Mountains* 9), when in reality Brownsville, Forbestown and Strawberry Valley, all within a day’s walk of each other, had populations of close to 100 people and were substantially developed. In 1879 Thompson and West describe Brownsville as a “promising little town,” consisting of, . . . one store, one hotel, blacksmith shop, carpenter shop, shoemaker shop, two millenary establishments, post office, Wells, Fargo and Co’s express office, church, schoolhouse, Knoxdale Institute, fifteen dwelling houses, and a population of about one hundred. It is a temperance town, and no liquor is sold within the limits. (91-2)

Alternately, Muir downplays its prominence. Calling it a “village” in “The River Floods,” in “Flood-Storm” “Knoxville” doesn’t contain “above a dozen houses” and is “said to be known for its ministers. (“Flood-storm” 495), which may explain its temperate attitude, but neglects the fact that in the region Muir had so recently passed on his excursion,
Brownsville may have been “promising” more as an island of refuge among a harsher human influence. According to Mansfield’s *History of Butte County* (1918):

The decade from 1870 to 1880 was one filled with varied interest. Periods of vast activity and enterprise alternated with periods of great depression. Crime was rampant. The intemperate use of liquor by the men of the period, coupled with the custom of carrying guns, resulted in a perfect orgy of murder. Stages were robbed so frequently and so successfully that at one time Wells, Fargo and Co. withdrew their service from the Oroville-Quincy route. (Mansfield 263)

The *Butte History* may be alluding in part to the exploits of Black Bart, responsible for 6 stagecoach robberies in Yuba, Butte, and Plumas counties very near to Brownsville beginning almost exactly a year after Muir was there in 1875 and ending in 1882. Emily Pelton, in a letter from 1882 to Muir inviting him and his wife and baby to visit warns against using the stage, ostensibly for their comfort, but extends the offer to bring them from Marysville to Brownsville in the Knox’s private rig (JMC 1882: 6).

Nor was the landscape itself as utterly pastoral as Muir describes. It was in the midst of the wave of industrialism sweeping across the state and could hardly be considered unspoiled. The Central Pacific railroad Muir had ridden to Marysville from Redding had just been completed in 1870 (*History of Butte County* 266), with a spur to Oroville built the following year. Doyle’s “Map of Yuba County” lists 52 miles of track in that county alone. Through the highest passes of the Yuba and Feather River watersheds, just a month before Muir came to Brownsville, the Western Union Telegraph Company had completed its line to Quincy from Sierra City (Farris and Smith, *History of Plumas County* 240). In addition to improvements in transportation and communication to this formerly remote region, the issue of hydraulic mining was coming to a head. Less than thirty miles to the north of Brownsville, in 1872, “a suit was brought against the
Spring Valley Mining Company. The outlet of the Cherokee mines was Dry Creek. It was charged that the extensive mining operations there had deposited vast layers of sand over the ranches and farms of the valley. “In November 1873 a complaint appears in the papers that the river is being filled with debris from mining operations.” And in January 1874, while Muir is in Brownsville, “a meeting of the farmers and residents of Biggs was called to consider the debris question” (Mansfield, History 268). In “Floods” Muir states the destructiveness of the floodwaters “was augmented somewhat by mining detritus that occupies a considerable portion of the lowland channels,” and although he crosses most of this sentence out in revision, he notes that Dry Creek in Brownsville was running “brown with mining mud washed down from many ‘a claim’” when the torrential rains began falling (“Floods”); he changes “augmented somewhat” to, “These exaggerating conditions did not, however, greatly influence the general result [of the flood]” in “Flood-storm” (490). In light of the above newspaper articles from the period Muir was in the region, it is conspicuous that he amends his comment to read that the mining debris did not impact the flood. Resources reports that, “The denudation at Cherokee is 300-500 feet deep” (158), and that the Cherokee Claim, 50 acres in size, had already “piped away” about 6 acres by 1869. It appears to have been clear to all parties involved that hydraulic mining activity on this scale, in addition to its visible scars, had serious repercussions. Yet it was more important to Muir to portray nature’s supremacy dwarfing the affects of humankind than to accurately report what must have been more than circumstantial, divisive evidence to the contrary.

Remarkably, Muir lists these various mining operations among the other destinations of picturesque interest to the tourist in “Flood-storm,” stating that they may
be “witnessed in the neighborhood within short walks, or drives” (495). Thus grouping them with other such sublime “ruins” as the “Fox Den,” a naturally occurring pile of boulders “north-west of the village” resembling “some old feudal stronghold” (495), situates the very real, very present ongoing environmental damage, the ‘debris question,’” blighting everyday lives in the area, as something instead almost literary and post-human, and oddly, provocatively, inspirational.

Muir does not erase the human elements of the Marysville flood from “Flood-Storm” entirely, and although he underestimated the volatility of the hydraulic mining situation, his portrait of Dry Creek near Brownsville compares well to other flood accounts of the Feather River. Alonzo Delano, in *Life on the Plains and Among the Diggings*, writing of the flood of 1849-50, almost 25 years to the day prior to Muir’s experience and from the same Table Mountain previously mentioned and noted by Muir in his journal, depicts a flood tide strikingly similar to Muir’s picture:

> From the top of a high hill on the left bank of Feather River, not far from the Table Mountain, where I could command an extensive view of the valley, I estimated that one-third of the land was overflowed. Hundreds of cattle, horses and mules were drowned, being carried down by the rapidity of the current in their attempt to reach higher ground… A vast amount of property was destroyed, and many of its lighter buildings washed away. (290-1)

In Muir’s “Flood-Storm” he drifts “compliantly around for an hour or two [before setting] out for the summit of a hill some 900 feet high, with a view to getting as far up into the storm as possible” (490). After which he reports: “The creek was now a booming river… its current… mottled with sluiceboxes, fence-rails, and many a ponderous log that had long lain above its reach” (490-1), and finally that, “True, some goods were destroyed, and a few rats and people were drowned, and some took cold on
the housetops and died, but the total loss was less than the gain” (495). Because, as Cohen points out, Muir is attempting the radical strategy of shocking his reader into acknowledging the “beating heart of Nature” (*Pathless* 139,138), whereas Delano’s account from the age of enchantment sympathizes with human and economic losses, Muir’s re-enchantment derides them.

All we know from Muir about his residence in the region is that the Brownsville Hotel, what he calls “Knox House” in “Flood-Storm,” is “about as fresh as the woods after rain, and full of home-like sunshine” (495). He elides this passage from “The River Floods” and even the Knox House becomes simply “the village” (*Mountains* 270) when he recounts his arrival after the storm. But Thompson and West’s *History of Yuba County* includes an illustration of the place Muir spent much of his time with Emily Pelton. It shows two large two-and-a-half-storey buildings, the hotel, comprised of two wings connected by a long gallery, and the I.O.O.F. hall, as well as smaller buildings away from the road. The entire property is fenced by pickets, a wooden sidewalk runs the length of the front of it, and the grounds are artfully landscaped and include two croquet fields. The gate outside the I.O.O.F. hall reads “Knoxdale Institute.” The scene depicted is hardly the one Muir portrays, despite the fact that in “Flood-Storm” he makes a surreptitious reference to Pelton herself: “one of the guides attached to the hotel is wise in plants, more especially in ferns, and knows well the hollows where Woodwardias are tallest, and the rocks most rosetted with Pellaea and Cheilanthes” (495). Far from a sleepy vale, Thompson and West’s illustration shows an active community with the Knox home at the center. No fewer than 35 men, women, and children appear in their portrait, as well as dogs, carriages, and the daily stage.
Martin Knox, Emily Pelton’s uncle, and a prominent man in the area, raised stock on 460 acres in addition to running the hotel and the Knoxdale Institute. Besides being responsible for the building of the toll road from Marysville, he also built a tollhouse and hotel in Willow Glen 24 miles from Marysville on the Brownsville road (History 92) through which Muir passed when he came from the train. A year later the Willow Glen House was built. Muir’s report of this place states it “contains a thousand objects of interest, picturesque rocks, cascades, ferny nooks… wild gardens charmingly laid out… among which the appreciative tourist might revel for weeks” (“Flood-Storm” 495). In the midst of this verdure, in order according to the numbers of those employed, lived miners, lumbermen, and farmers (History of Yuba County 143). While Knox was a representative man, these others represent the type that Muir needed to erase.

As a case in point, the miner Jack Delap, whom Muir records in his journal as his guide on the Hartman Bar leg of his Feather River excursion, exemplifies the tough customer of the region recalled in the above excerpt from the History of Butte County. Delap also typifies the classic western figure of the “Piker.” Muir’s journal entry from Hartman Bar is of interest because it speaks to the character of Delap, and is thus an intriguing moment in an otherwise spotty, largely non-human narrative. Muir’s depiction of the persona of the miner figures prominently in Witschi’s examination of Muir’s revision process in Traces of Gold, but Muir’s “Pike Missouri” reference in the journal carries certain endemic implications as well because his experiences with Delap possess the flavor of satire. Erwin G. Gudde, in California Place Names, says of the term “Pike”: “The expression “Pike” or “Pike Countyan” was used in California in the 1860s or earlier, for a person who had supposedly come from Pike Co., Missouri, but actually it
was applied to anyone of migratory habits” (289). And yet, the appellative also carried the connotations of an epithet. Kevin Starr, in Americans and the California Dream, likens the Piker to “poor white trash.” He says that “California’s rural population---called Pikes or Pikers, after Pike County, Missouri, where most of them were supposed to have originated---seemed degenerate.” Starr cites Bayard Taylor: “[The Pike Countyan] is the Anglo-Saxon relapsed into semi-barbarism… he is long, lathy, and sallow; he expectorates vehemently; he takes naturally to whiskey” (192). Based on Clarence King’s southern Sierra narrative, “The Newtys of Pike,” in Mountaineering in the Sierra Nevada (1871), Starr expands on this notion: “For Clarence King the Piker represented the degenerating effect of the whole frontier experience, its ‘conspicuous retrograde’” (192-3). King portrays the Newtys as one step removed from the swine they keep, as having become a “race of perpetual emigrants” given to “weak-minded restlessness” (Mountaineering 131). Pikers are narrow-minded tobacco chewers skeptical of his scientific work and his interest in mountaineering. Although he did not name them as such, in a letter written from Yosemite to Emily Pelton in 1872, Muir shared a similarly low opinion of the locals: “As for the rough animals called men, who occur in and on these mountains like sticks of condensed filth, I am not in contact with them; I do not live with them” (JMC 1872: 67). Rick Van Noy relates an interesting historiography of King’s Mount Whitney climb that might explain his derision in Surveying the Interior (2003; 92-94), as does Francis Farquhar in History of the Sierra Nevada (145-153), and while Taylor’s approximation may relate to the common bias, and King’s may reflect bias of a more personal nature, King nonetheless used this general prejudice as a recognizable trope in his account. Contemporaneous with King, that Muir completes his
own miniature portrait in his journal of the “contrary cuss” by giving Delap’s place of origin, combined with the sentiments he expressed to Pelton in 1872, also has to be construed as an application of the popular local idiom. Muir’s entry concerning Delap, “knows habits of boulders” is suggestive of a degree of skepticism, with condescension at its core.

Nicolas Witschi maintains that in The Mountains of California Muir “begins his efforts to collapse the human figure into the landscape” (Traces 53) in order to produce a post-human wilderness space. In successive drafts and published renditions, Muir first shows the miner as a ragged naturalist cut from much the same cloth as himself, then as a “slowly wasting specter of death” (50), and finally the forlorn miner disappears entirely from the scene; thus, Muir has first rewritten, and then edited out, the working population of the Sierra Nevada. Sans industry, the Sierra can be reconceived as “god’s temple,” and as such, supports his preservationist agenda. Elsewhere, Billy the shepherd in My First Summer in the Sierra, although present, is as degenerate as Muir’s “sticks of condensed filth” or King’s Pikers. Yet, Muir’s Billy and King’s Newtys are nonetheless still pleasingly amusing to their authors. If they don’t feel compassion for them, they are at least entertained by them. Although in general they disappear eventually in print, I surmise that Muir’s portrait of Billy accurately portrays Muir’s typical approach to the working people of the mountains, the miners of his excursion journal in particular, who were most likely viewed with a similar combination of satiric derision and condescending amusement. This, when his journal proves Muir regardless relied on their knowledge and hospitality. While the contrary cuss may “know the habits of boulders,” Muir’s personal approach suggests his tacit belief that any expertise assumed
by the local miners remained to be seen. A town called Pike, the Pike Hotel, and Pike County Peak, in Muir’s time, could all be found in the vicinity of Brownsville.

The Upshot

Erasure of infrastructure means erasure of people, though not all people, only certain kinds. As a form of decolonization, inner landscapes in New World pastoral constructed of erasure and re-enchantment nonetheless re-colonize the outer landscape with old exclusions. But the legibility of the metaphoric inscription is dependent upon the decipherability of the literal inscription. If Muir’s summons to action and preservation of the natural world are the cornerstone of a movement defined by action, and “ecocriticism is more compelling as a call to fellow humans” (Buell, *Future* 102), then dialogue centered on the outer landscape, particularly in the age of toxic bodies and landscapes, is crucial. Jody A. Roberts and Nancy Langston view “land and bodies [as] united” and note that it is often the bodies of the poor, the working class, and those most closely associated with the land which are the most deeply effected by their environs (631). This troubles the exclusive non- or posthuman inner landscape, because the absence of humanity means the absence of dialogue. Effectively, humans get stratified, separated from each other, and the majority of the population is left outside the garden. In the absence of dialogue, and with nature expunged of human inconvenience, authority to administer to and maintain and / or preserve it reverts to a select few of a certain class and race, remarkably like a new age demographic topography. Nature becomes an estate with limited appeal. Furthermore, to read Karl Kroeber’s “realizing that anything cultural must be understood as part of a natural ecosystem” (310) in conjunction with Roberts and
Langston, who state: “Chemicals occupy a position along the border between ‘natural’ and ‘cultural’ worlds” (629), is to recognize that environmental studies and ecocriticism are rapidly outgrowing the scopes of their canonical literary texts. Science has done more for environmental law in recent years than literature has, but its activists are yet moved by literature to make science hold law accountable. Class, race, gender, and resistance enrich nature as a dynamic space, which is why Muir’s aesthetics are remembered and cherished by many, but it is also why contemporary society struggles to absorb them as ethics wholesale.

The unmapped landscape, whether native or the spatially produced elsewhere of the poet-naturalist, is as much an unreality as it is an impossible dream. This is true of Muir’s “Knoxville.” Likewise, beyond the visible presence of industry and infrastructure is the dissemination and invisible toxic presence of their chemical byproducts, perhaps unknown to Muir, traces of which are found in the most remote ecosystems. Because of this, De Luca and Demo call for a deconstruction of pristine wilderness as traditionally conceived but note: “what makes sense theoretically can be harmful politically” (555), recognizing that in the absence of the traditional conception the movement loses a vital link to its spiritual core and a valuable political foothold. For this reason ecocriticism tends to resist deconstruction despite the fact that, as De Luca and Demo point out, in deconstructing wilderness you widen your appeal; instead, in an attempt to keep nature paramount, the common opening move in even the most recent ecocritical approaches is to downplay the lasting impact of poststructuralism within the discipline. Lost are the direct relations between humans and their environment and a truly realistic systemic understanding of inhabiting.
Still, to map is not to know, nor is knowing inhabiting, and there are cultural and social openings between inner and outer landscapes conducive to reform. The focus, however, becomes how we inhabit rather than the spaces inhabited. Space is popularly construed as place because of one’s emotional attachment to it. But whose place is the foothill region of the Feather and Yuba River drainages? Is Dry Creek the realm of the brief sojourner to it? Or do these landscapes belong to the conflicted steward or laborer whose livelihood depends on the economy of extractive industries? Are Muir’s miners and loggers savages because of the livelihoods they engage in? Without a doubt the Range of Light is unquestionably eponymous with Muir, but a closer inspection of his treatments of its spaces reveals that what is his is intangible and ephemeral. Roberts and Langston argue in favor of considering the environment in terms of “landscapes of exposure,”76 for better or worse subjected to- and at the least external components of- the machinations of the built environment.

Conclusion

The present exploration began with a description of Franco Moretti’s classifications of the study of literature in space and the study of space in literature. Employing both of these orders of inquiry in an attempt to make place matter, I have shown the tremendous complexity and/or potential of the relationship between historical and fictional landscapes. In so doing, I meant to expose promising critical perspectives regarding the relationship of place, text, and author, as well as possible theoretical approaches for their explication. What I have achieved is the forwarding of a valuable rubric of enchantment, disenchantment, and re-enchantment with which literary critics
can frame and evaluate the spatial productions--- the inclusions, exclusions, and erasures-- of a given text. To the critics’ toolkit I have added the ethnographic approach of literary fieldwork, a component of literary criticism whose utility I feel is essential to discussions of place-based writing in particular, but to a number of genres generally.

But how does such a rubric, and such an approach, make place matter? Understanding the spaces--- the landscapes, the built environments, and their interior spaces--- within the above context, guides the critic towards a clearer appraisal of an author’s fictional spaces: recognizing how the space is produced is to inquire why the author has assembled it that way; to then designate this production as enchanted, disenchanted, or re-enchanted is to create the foundation for a new taxonomy, a new way of reading the implications of these spaces. This opportunity to prove the significance of the inscribed landscape in turn confirms what a narrative is capable of. The author is the arbiter of his or her spaces, yet the kind of space he or she includes in their narrative asserts its own demands to which the author must conform.

Regarding the exact role of the historical space, the incorporation of fieldwork enhances the connection between site and text, site and author, and site, critic and reader. Although the historical space matters because the author must additionally mediate their production based on the demands of the actual, verifiable location, the site / text relationship is a reciprocal one: narratives are what transform undifferentiated spaces into places; the Gold Rush is Roaring Camp and Poker Flat in many ways because Bret Harte wrote about Luck and John Oakhurst, and the Sierra Nevada is the Range of Light because John Muir described it so.
In Chapter 2 I considered the implications of Harte’s spatial productions on his de-canonization and found that because his landscapes have not been considered “authentic,” he has lost his standing as an author. Yet, I likewise established that his failed authenticity, based on his lack of firsthand experience with the landscapes he describes, is itself assailable as a criterion for his import to the canon. The eyewitness account in literature of the encounter, of which I read literature of the American West as a latter-day strain, has consistently been shown to be contradictory. Furthermore, understood as re-enchantments, Harte’s landscapes are intended to disorient, are intended to approximate this earlier literature of enchantment, and are predicated on the experience of the unknown, the irrational, and the mythical. With this in mind, in Chapter 3 I nonetheless attempted to confront Harte’s detractors directly by mapping his first short stories and offering further insight into how to position his work within the above rubric. The act of re-placing these stories, authorizing their fictional spaces with historical space, validates them as re-enchanted landscapes and explains their disorientations as necessary traits of a significant trope. Past criticism of Harte has either attempted to defend or denounce him; mine is the first to classify him in a way that makes his work relevant to a number of approaches.

Chapter 4, “Reconstructing Muir’s Yuba and Feather River Excursion,” draws on the popular convention of following in Muir’s footsteps, but makes use of journal entries, correspondence, and early drafts of pertinent texts to establish, for the first time, a complete picture of the period Muir spent in the northern Sierra. My work is the first to ascertain the probable route Muir took through the region. It is the first to hypothesize the identities of those whom Muir stayed with while in the region. And it is among the most
comprehensive investigations into his motivation for sojourning in the watershed. The examination of Muir’s spatial production in Chapter 5 grows out of this research. Appropriately historicized, the essays associated with this landscape assume richer connotations. For example, in the context of enchantment, disenchantment, and re-enchantment, productive analyses of inclusion and exclusion in a post-colonial sense can be made; but on the basis of purely local, botanical or hydrological usefulness, further claims can be extrapolated from observations recorded by Muir regarding the distribution of certain flora he encountered as well as the historic rain and snow totals of the winter of 1874-5.

Finally, in an ever widening field of place studies, including interdisciplinary approaches from as broad a range as architecture and urban planning, to anthropology, to linguistics, scholars are exploring new ways to categorize space and its implications. I foresee my project revitalizing literary biography, particularly as it pertains to environmental biography. As a framing mechanism I envision it as an important addition to the study of literature of the American West, and I hope to use it as the foundation for a complete literary history of California literature that can in turn act as a model for the explication of any regional literature.
ENDNOTES

1 Harte met Coolbrith in 1862 after a pro-Union rally lead by the influential Unitarian minister Thomas Starr King, and they grew close after King’s untimely death in 1864. Harte and Coolbrith were steadfast friends until he left California in 1871 (Rhodehamel, Ina Coolbrith 83-85). Muir and Coolbrith were first introduced by their mutual friend, the artist William Keith, within a year of Harte’s departure, and spent a considerable amount of time together in Oakland in 1874. They remained friends until the end of Muir’s life (Rhodehamel, Ina Coolbrith 112, 134-5).

2 Claims regarding Harte’s most important works are repeatedly made: (Rhodehamel Ina Coolbrith; Scharnhorst Opening, Stegner “Introduction”).

3 The project of literary geography I outline is the direct result of Franco Moretti’s plan for creating “a Historical Atlas of Literature.”

4 See Scharnhorst’s essay “Whatever Happened to Bret Harte?” in American Realism and the Canon.

5 See Harte’s “Pleistocene Skull” and Whitney’s response to Muir’s glacial theory of Yosemite.

6 See Stewart’s Names on the Land for a discussion of naming as imperial pursuit.

7 Taken from the Overland’s motto, Cohen also points out Muir’s opposition to such a project (138).

8 Heath Anthology of American Literature Volume C (5).

9 Henri Lefebvre The Production of Space (40).

10 Everyone from Cummins to Beasley to Scharnhorst has made or responded to this claim about Harte.

11 This includes Harte himself, who, in several instances, described his personal experience in the Mother Lode.


13 Letter to IC from Stoddard dated September 24, 1907: “Did you hear that Mrs. Francis Fuller [Victors?] after all her words in “Bancroft’s” history was finally reduced to […] peddling cosmetics for a living?”

14 See Ella Cummins Mighels Collection, California State Library.

15 Ella Cummins Mighels Collection, California State Library, Box 495. Letter dated June 4, 1891.

16 Scharnhorst writes of this edition in 1994: “The Signet paperback edition of The Outcasts of Poker Flat and Other Tales, the collection… best suited for classroom adoption, has recently lapsed from print” (American Realism 201).
In fact, it has consistently been warned against. It is, however, not uncommon to locate approximate settings and characters. Henry Childs Merwin assumes that Poker Flat in Sierra County is “Poker Flat” (103, 164), but his are random stabs rather than attempts at understanding a viable geography of the related early tales; Roy F. Hudson in “From Poker Flat to Sandy Bar” and “Roaring Camp Revisited,” both articles from the Pacific Historian place these stories in the southern lode.

For a complete discussion of the reception of Harte’s geography see Chapter 2 of this work.

See Witschi’s Traces for a concise description of the situation (2-5).

Stegner makes a similar assertion in “Introduction”: “Harte’s popularity… was always greatest in direct proportion to the reader’s distance from and ignorance of the mines” (x).

O’Conner: “Famous he undoubtedly was, but popularity was something else” (106).

As evidenced, for example, by Susan Lee Johnson’s popularly and critically acclaimed Roaring Camp: The Social World of the California Gold Rush (2001).

See Moretti Atlas (17-20) for a discussion of landscapes of resistance. I read this as the essential link between his work and McClure’s in Late Imperial Romance. For the Americanization of such landscapes see Lauter’s essay in Heath Anthology of American Literature Volume C (31).

O’Connor: “The envy of many of his fellow writers was also evident. [His success] did not endear him to the members of a notoriously ill-paid profession” (106-7).

Though John Oakhurst is later resurrected to act as protagonist in several other stories.

In “Flood-storm in the Sierra,” the first published version of the chapter in Mountains called “The River Floods,” Muir says Knoxville (Brownsville) is “some twenty miles back from the edge of the plains” (489); later in the same piece he says it “lies some thirty miles to the east of Marysville, and is easily reached from this point by stage (495).

Dodson’s name is absent from the list of businesses in Thompson and West’s History, including other miners’, operating out of Strawberry Valley at this time. This is explained by the location of his diggings: Mooreville Ridge is in Plumas County, and therefore did not apply.

In Muir, Correspondence 1881:24 Emily Pelton writes Muir telling him she will be spending the summer with her “old friends the Drakes”; Thompson and West list Drake as a merchant from New York, arrived in the area in 1851.

Chapter XV in Mountains, “In the Sierra Foothills” discusses these same “dead fire-rivers and dead water-rivers” (325).
The stated elevation is based on the USGS Haskins Valley Topographic Quadrangle; Lawson’s *Trails* gives the elevation of Hartman Bar Ridge at the upper trailhead as 5000 feet and the bar’s elevation as 2400, and the trailhead on the north side of the canyon below Arrarat as 5200; Harris’s *Guide* states: “vertical drop: 2800 feet north side; 2600 feet south side,” which jibes exactly with Lawson’s numbers.

This, despite the fact that Muir incorrectly suggests that Spanish Peak is near the headwaters of the Middle Fork; it is in fact associated with the watershed of the North Fork of the Feather moreso than its minor contributions to the Middle Fork.

The latter three were the names of communities during the goldrush corresponding to the geographic features closest to them; it is unlikely that Muir would have seen any structures from this vantage because Fariss and Smith describe them as largely abandoned by this time. He would have seen the tremendous devastation of the mining in the region, however.

Harris and Lawson both claim to be skeptical of this distance, believing it to be over long.

See journal. Also, In March 1875 Muir wrote to fellow botanist David Watt and included ferns from Yosemite. He asked that Watt “reciprocate by sending specimens of other Canadian or European ferns to Emily O. Pelton, Brownsville, Yuba Co., Cal. She can furnish you with ferns of her special region” (Muir, Correspondence 1875: 22).

I have located the head of this trail on the north side of the river from the present day Milsap Bar road, but I have not yet ventured to find it on the south side, below Pompys point. The USGS Brush Creek topo shows an old skid road at the top of the south ridge which I feel approximates the location of the historic trail.

Doyle’s “Official Map of Yuba County” (1887); Thompson and West’s *History of Yuba County* (1879).

Even this notion is open to debate: see Glen A. Love’s introduction to *Practical Ecocriticism* (1).

See DeLuca and Demo (541, 544). Deluca and Demo urge the movement to look beyond the preservation of wilderness as a primary goal and to acknowledge the environments people inhabit.

For a concise example of the current discussion on the practical application of ecocriticism see Scott Slovic’s “Editor’s Note” in ISLE 16.3 (2009): 425-7; see also Glen A. Love’s *Practical Ecocriticism* (2003) for a complete discussion.
Regarding this lack of inclusiveness: Muir is popularly construed as a hermit or rustic, yet Muir was also known to be gregarious, albeit conflicted about urban life: see Worster (216-218, 222).

DeLuca and Demo (552-3). Muir’s unpublished Journals, despite DeLuca and Demo’s claims, indicate that regardless of his literary productions of them, Muir often relied on guides and their local knowledge while on his travels. For glimpses of Muir’s magnanimity, although romanticized, towards the locals, see “In the Sierra Foothills” in Mountains.

“Ecocentrism is more compelling as a call to fellow humans to recognize the intractable, like-it-or-not interdependence that subsists between the human and the nonhuman and to tread more lightly on the earth than it is as a practical program” (Buell Future 102).

Donald Worster, in “John Muir and the Modern Passion for Nature” argues the opposite: “A passion for nature can still draw people together across lines of race, class and gender […] Despite their differences, nature provides a common topic of conversation for those people- a world that they did not create but are hungry to experience, a flash of primeval wildness that stirs common passions and dissolves social categories” (8); for the misanthrope perspective, see O’Grady 76 and Cohen 131; it is the fascinating conundrum of Muir’s work that it can register as both anthropocentric and misanthropic at the same time.

For a discussion of this phenomenon see Richard Waswo’s The Founding Legend of Western Civilization (88); also see Scheese, note 12, and the opening pages of Walden.

Bakhtin’s chronotope, contrary to Moretti’s Atlas, focuses on the human presence more than on places and the nonhuman, and on incidences more than spaces: time is “the dominant principle in the chronotope” (Bakhtin 86); furthermore, Bakhtin states the adventure chronotope, to which Muir must be linked, is characterized by, “the reversibility of moments in a temporal sequence, and by their interchangeability in space” (100 emphases original).

Moretti’s work has considerable relevance to nineteenth century American realism in addition to its European application, particularly in regards to apprehending the significance of the built environments of an author like William Dean Howells in his Boston and New York novels for example, as well as in Dreiser and Norris. Howells reconceived the boundaries of the American city reminiscent of Balzac’s reaction to Paris years earlier. However, the scope of Moretti’s claim can encompass the realists’ nonhuman and posthuman environments as well, including the competing pastoralisms of that era.

Buell derives these terms from Barry Lopez’s “Landscape and Narrative” in Crossing Open Ground; See Buell’s Imagination 84-94 and Future 39.

See also Benedict Anderson’s “Census, Map, Museum” (Imagined Communities 170-8) for additional description of the indigenous perspective of map-making.

Jerry M. Williams, in “Challenging Conventional Historiography,” states: “The fundamental question for the historian remains the transition from spectator to writer, in order to name and describe” (541); in addition, Mary C. Fuller also considers the eyewitness account in terms of authenticity: “What is
privileged here is physically seeing, being in the presence of the thing: the memory of that experience becomes authoritative writing” (223). See also Phillip H. Round “Neither Here nor There,” in which he cites Vaz de Caminha’s New World account, “We interpreted it thus because we wished it to be so” (432).

Michael J. McDowell’s work suggests this is the crux of the spatial argument: point of view and its limitations, to recognize but not to condemn: “We’ve recognized, though, that objective perception and description are impossible. Every human attempt to know the phenomenal world is filtered through a human value system. What we can do is analyze the values that a particular writer has allowed to adhere to his or her descriptions and narrations” (386).

For the definition of place used throughout see Yi-Fu Tuan *Space and Place* (3-7) and Timothy Creswell (1-12).

Abbott (183).

Cohen: “Despite the picturesque language, despite the significant substitution of ‘Nature’ or ‘Beauty’ for ‘God’ and ‘the Lord,’ Muir’s pantheism flowed” (The Pathless Way 285); Worster: “[Muir’s] thesaurus offered many synonyms. Beauty, however, was the most common word he substituted for God” (208); “A fair description of key beliefs that had emerged by [Muir’s] mid to late thirties would include the following: behind the beautiful material face of nature breathes a world-controlling power called ‘God,’ ‘Beauty,’ or ‘Love.’” (214).

For a discussion of the elsewhere / local see Worster (225) and DeLuca and Demo (551).

This motif is common in Muir’s writings. See note 20.

Of Muir’s career as a journalist, Worster also points out that his editors had expectations for the type of writing he was to produce: “The paper wanted stories of physical adventure told with the author situated prominently in the foreground” (224).

Witschi’s argument is not diminished by the fact that elsewhere in *Mountains* (7, 327) Muir does recognize the damage that had occurred during the Gold Rush; in fact, Witschi’s premise is augmented by Muir’s accounts of Sierran population and landscape at the time of his excursions (*Mountains* 9, 327-8). Although Muir’s claims to the emptiness of the mining regions are substantiated by Twain in *Roughing It*, published only 2 years prior to Muir’s travels in the Yuba River and Feather River watersheds, neither author mentions the scale of the corporate and hydraulic mining entrenched in the region.

See Mazel’s discussion of activism as it relates to spatial production: “Any politically actionable environmentalist discourse thus requires two creations of difference […] First is the discrimination of an outside from an inside […] Such a selection requires a prior determination of what shall count as environment. This is the source of the second layer of politics, for not everyone will agree on what matters [The ecocritic needs to ask what] matters to whom? And to test whether in fact what comes to count as the
environment is that which matters to the culturally dominant, and finally to explore whether the
construction of the environment is itself an exercise of cultural power” (142).

59 Raymond Williams’s *The Country and the City* outlines the long pastoral tradition of a giving,
pre-lapserian land that requires little or no work beyond rudimentary husbandry.

60 In an essay from the same excursion as “Flood-storm,” of nearly identical construction, “A
Wind Storm in the Forests of the Yuba” (1878), published as “A Wind-storm in the Forests” in *Mountains*,
Muir is even more heavy-handed with his moralizing, is even more direct in his proselytizing: The setting
sun in the amber woods speaks “My peace I give unto you” (257), as if this message is only for him.

61 Muir’s journals from his Feather and Yuba River excursion, in fact, generally reflect a purely
scientific interest in the landscape, punctuated only rarely with effusion: “scenery massively sublime”
(*Journal* 175 emphasis original); they are the journals of a lay-scientist about to codify his conclusions
concerning glaciation and ancient river beds in the Sierra Nevada.

62 See Donald Worster’s interpretation of Muir’s metaphysics: “That species were the product of
natural evolution, not direct supernatural creation, was a science he could live with, and even found
uplifting, for it bonded him to all other creatures. What he could not accept was a gloom interpretation of
nature or nature’s laws. Evolution need not undermine faith or hope” (Passion for Nature 208).

63 See Scheese’s description of the inhabitation literature strain of nature writing, which considers
Tuan’s “topophilia” and Heidegger’s “dwelling”. Scheese claims Tuan and Heidegger both suggest, “So
intensely do inhabitants frequent a place that they come to cherish it. This feeling then promotes in them a
desire to save, to preserve, it” (140-1); See Buell’s discussion of Wendell Berry et al. in *Imagination* (209,
252).

64 Abbott discusses the balance between personal vision and political message (183-5). William
private retreat involved him in a series of very public debates over the cultivation of not only the individual
self but also the “self” of the nation” (674).

65 It is also worth mentioning that twenty years had elapsed between Muir’s excursion into the
watersheds of the Yuba and the Feather Rivers and the publication of *Mountains*. When he traveled through
this country he was a relatively unknown naturalist, only recently having gathered and published in the
*Overland* the scientific data that would gain him his reputation; when he wrote the newspaper and
magazine articles which later became the book chapters, he was a novice journalist eager to make his living
as a writer instead of as a laborer. See also Cohen’s discussion of Muir’s writing style during this period,
and of the purpose and evolution of the articles into book chapters. (138-144; 284-6).

66 Additionally, Muir made ample use of guides and local knowledge that is not always fairly
reflected in his writing. During his time on the Feather and Yuba, although he claims, “Instead of camping
out, as I usually do, I then chanced to be stopping at the house of a friend” in “Wind-Storm,” he had, his
journal suggests, stayed in the homes of several local miners on different legs of his excursion, and had
used his friend Emily Pelton’s house in Brownsville as a base for his fieldwork just as he had Norman
Sisson’s hotel during his first Shasta ascents. The “friend” in “Wind-Storm” is most likely a man named
Thomas Dobson whose mining operation was on the Mooreville Ridge above the South Fork of the
Feather, and who lived in Strawberry Valley, on the divide between the South Fork Feather and the North
Fork of the Yuba, 13 miles northeast of Pelton’s Brownsville home (*Journal* 158).

67 See also Thoreau’s “We need the tonic of wildness” and “In Wildness is the preservation of the
World” (qtd in Scheese 144).

68 See also “Wind-Storm” and “In the Sierra Foothills” in *Mountains*. When Muir does
acknowledge infrastructure, as in the essay “The Yosemite,” it is as “the ravages of man” and includes
“logging, farming, and grazing” (De Luca and Demo 552); Muir indicts labor just as Thoreau had because
it interferes with the pastoral project.

69 Muir similarly criticizes the shepherd Billy in *My First Summer in the Sierra* for being “blind to
the sublime beauty of the wilderness,” stating, “I pressed Yosemite on him like a missionary offering a
gospel” (qtd. in De Luca and Demo). Muir the missionary represents the colonial influence, Billy the
savage.

70 As noted in the previous chapter, this Mountain House is not the one that figures into the course
of Muir’s excursion.

71 This is not a western “tall tale” but an actual fact of life in this region.

72 These are not the same Cherokee and Dry Creek mentioned elsewhere in this narrative. There is
a Dry Creek and a Cherokee in the Yuba watershed and these, in the Feather River watershed, mentioned
here to complete a portrait of the region and its issues as it was when Muir entered it.

73 De Luca and Demo (542); see also Lawrence Buell’s *The Future of Environmental Criticism*
(103) for the perils of taking this position too far.

74 See Jenny Price, “Remaking American Environmentalism: On the Banks of the LA River”
(538); for a fascinating and entertaining look into this dilemma, also see ASLE Digest 4.263 for the
difficulties of defining what texts are canonical; Glen A. Love warns against “the ‘gotcha’ manner of an
eco-policeman, dragging past writers to the dock for violations of today’s sense of environmental
incorrectness, ” his goal is to add biological sciences to ecocrit to bolster its capabilities (*Practical
Ecocriticism* 11).

75 See also Price “Remaking American Environmentalism” (542-49) for an important discussion of
the relocation of environmental symbols.

76 They take their term from the title of the edited volume *Landscapes of Exposure: Knowledge
and Illness in Modern Environments* (Mitman, Murphy and Sellers, Eds.)


---. State Library Collection. Box 495. Print.


Muir Papers, University of the Pacific:


*Western American Literature* 34.3 (1999): 316-343. Print.


APPENDIX A
ABBREVIATIONS USED IN
IN-TEXT CITATIONS

(Muir, Correspondence 1874: 19)
The above example refers to “John Muir Correspondence.” The first number is the year of the correspondence, and the number following the colon represents the number given the letter by the John Muir Papers in the Special Collections department of the Holt Atherton Library at the University of the Pacific. This number is specific to their online database.

(Muir, Journals 1874: 3.175)
The above example refers to the unpublished “John Muir Journals.” The first number is the year of the journal, the number following the colon represents the number given to the journal by the John Muir Papers in the Special Collections department of the Holt Atherton Library at the University of the Pacific, and the third number indicates the page number of the journal entry. These numbers are specific to their online database.

(Muir, Collection Series IIIa Reel 6)
The above example refers to “John Muir Collection.” The Series and Reel numbers indicate the location of the source in the physical holdings of the John Muir Papers in the Special Collections department of the Holt Atherton Library at the University of the Pacific.