Crossing Open Ground Study Guide

Crossing Open Ground by Barry Lopez

BOOKRAGS

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Plot Summary

In this collection of essays, noted writer, traveler, and environmental activist Barry Lopez travels to remote regions of North America to explore the interaction between humanity and nature. Common themes in these essays include the humanity's relationship with nature and the relationship between landscape and the human experience.

In the collection's first essay, Lopez travels to the remote, Southern California location of the portrait of a horse, shaped in stone. In the changing early morning light, Lopez sees different lifelike aspects of the horse, and begins a collection-long contemplation of what evidence of human effect on nature means about the relationship between humanity and nature in general, and about the ancient peoples of an area in particular.

In the essays that follow, the author visits the wintering ground of shrinking flocks of migrating snow geese and travels the Grand Canyon in the company of a group of musicians. In both cases, the thematic focus of the essays is on the relationship between humanity in nature. In the case of the former, Barry examines the destructive effect of both hunting and industry and in the case of the latter, he considers the effect of human connection with landscape on creativity. In the essay "Landscape and Narrative," the author explores this theme further, specifically in terms of how landscape shapes and defines storytelling and narrative.

In the next two essays, the author comments on his experiences traveling into the northern wilderness (Alaska and the Yukon) of North America, where he examines the concept and practice of creating borders, both natural and defined by humanity. Then in the subsequent two essays, the author portrays several aspects of the relationship between humanity and animals. In one, he explores the somewhat exploitive relationship between humanity and rodeo animals, while in another, exploring the variety of relationships (sympathetic, exploitive, and scientific) that develop with both brevity and intensity when a large pod of sperm whales becomes stranded on a beach in Oregon. Considerations of the moral value of scientific research on animals continues in "The Lives of Seals," in which the author accompanies a team of research scientists on an investigation of the possible effects of oil exploration on seals on the west coast of North America.

In the final three essays of the collection, the author explores historical aspects of the relationship between humanity and nature. In one essay, he makes his exploration personal, as he reflects on how three youthful relationships with older mentor figures gave him an increased appreciation of nature, while in another, he narrates and explores the ways in which humanity has destroyed and manipulated nature to serve its own need for power, control and status. In this particular essay, also the final one of the collection, however, he turns the destructiveness of the central image around, and uses it as the basis of commentary on how nature has survived, and will continue to survive, in the face of human encroachment and destruction.

Part 1, The Stone Horse (1986)

Part 1, The Stone Horse (1986) Summary and Analysis

In this collection of essays, noted writer, traveler and environmental activist Barry Lopez travels to remote regions of North America to explore the interaction between humanity and nature. Common themes in these essays include the humanity's relationship with nature and the relationship between landscape and the human experience.

The essay begins with a summary of the geological and human history of the Mojave and Sonoran deserts in southern California, and how, in the 20th Century, that history has been neglected, ignored, abused, explored, and unfortunately often vandalized.

Following the reluctantly offered directions of an archaeologist (who wants to prevent the object of the author's quest from being exploited), the author finds his early-morning way to the remote, barely visited location of an intaglio of a horse. As he looks down at the eighteen-by-eight foot portrait, created through the careful placement of a particular kind of stone, the author becomes aware of the generally remarkable accuracy of the horse's proportions, and the way different angles of light and viewing give it different aspects of seeming life. As he considers what he sees, he reflects on how it and other intaglios were meant to be viewed.

After leaving the horse, the author takes some time to make note of its physical details, and of his own experiences - to do so while at the site itself, the author comments, would have felt somehow disrespectful. He writes of his fears of what might happen to the horse if it was discovered, worrying that the curious or the careless would damage it. Finally, he writes of how the fact of the horse's very existence reminds him of the length of time humanity has been around, and of the variety of experiences humanity has encountered. "This great, imperfect stretch of human expression is the clarification and encouragement, the urging and the reminder, we call history. And it is inscribed everywhere in the face of the land"

The writing of this essay is, in many places, quite reverent in tone. This is partly because the writer adeptly describes the silence and stillness of his early morning visit to the horse in ways that evoke places in which spiritual experiences take place and/or felt. This sense of reverence can be seen as a manifestation of the author's apparent thematic intent with both this story and many of the essays in this collection - the idea that nature, and respectful manifestations of humanity's relationship with nature, must themselves be treated with respect. His concern about what might happen to the horse, for example, foreshadows similar concerns expressed throughout the collection about what might happen, and indeed what IS happening, to nature, to history, and to traces of human existence in both, as the result of un-cautious exploration and insensitive exploitation. Meanwhile, his comments at the essays conclusion offer foreshadowing of their own - specifically, of similar comments made throughout the narrative about the centuries old relationship between humanity and landscape.

Part 2, A Reflection on White Geese (1982)

Part 2, A Reflection on White Geese (1982) Summary and Analysis

The author arrives, after what he describes as a long hard day of driving accompanied by a recording of cello music, at the Southern California wintering ground (Tule Lake National Wildlife Refuge) of a giant flock of snow geese. In the company of a friend and colleague, he watches watch the ebb and flow of the flock's settling in. He then reflects upon how the natural habitats of the geese (the arctic regions where they summer, the areas in California where they winter) are under attack from environmental and economic concerns.

That night, when he makes his way to a hotel room, the author finds himself struck by the sudden silence away from the geese, and resolves to find out how noisy they are in the morning. Rising at three, again listening to music, he drives out to the refuge, and when he stops, he becomes aware that the sound of the geese is continuing. After the sun comes up, he drives back into town for breakfast in a diner where the other customers are hunters. This leads the author into discussion of how economic and political circumstances have made less and less land available to populations of wildfowl like the snow geese, and on how what land IS being preserved is preserved so the geese can be hunted.

The author then describes his conversation with Bob Fields, the man charged with overseeing the Tule Lake Refuge. He describes how Fields came to a new respect for the birds and a new distaste for how hunters treated them following an encounter with a group of Eskimos from the north. They, Fields says, came south to find out where the birds they relied upon for food went, and became both amazed at how many there were and aghast at how hunters in the area treated both the birds and the land. After their conversation, the author comments, he had developed considerable respect for Fields. He concludes the essay with a call for attitudes towards nature to change.

In this essay, the author adds more facets to his exploration of the relationship between humanity and nature through the portrayal of the hunters, whose casual conversations about the number of geese they've killed juxtapose vividly(and violently) with the comments of the Eskimos, relayed to the author by Bob Fields. The author also adds a layer of metaphoric meaning to his contemplations by repeatedly injecting descriptions of music into his writing, those juxtapositions (as the author himself suggests) creating a sense that the seemingly natural and organic structure (i.e. melody and harmony) of music is simultaneously a representation of, and guide to, how humanity and nature can/should interact. It might not be going too far to suggest that when he juxtaposes comments about music with contemplations of the sounds made by the geese, he is in

fact suggesting that the latter can, in fact, be seen as a kind of nature music. This point, in turn, is explored further in the following essay, "Gone Back into the Earth."

A final point to consider is this essay's title. Since white (the color of the geese) is a reflective color, there is the sense that, in the same way as the white geese reflect the light in a particular, unique way, seeing the geese in these circumstances is causing a different kind of light, a different kind of reflection in both the author and in Bob Fields.

Gone Back into the Earth (1981)

Gone Back into the Earth (1981) Summary and Analysis

In this essay, the author describes a several day trip he and forty other travelers made through the Grand Canyon, a trip organized by musician Paul Winter (again, see "Important People"), who wanted, the author says, to explore the relationship between music and landscape. Each day, the author writes, he and his companions are somehow changed by what they see, hear, and otherwise experience.

Over time, the travelers become close in the way that groups on a shared journey do - developing a common language, common jokes, and a sense of camaraderie in the face of difficult obstacles. There is also an emerging sense of perspective, and of humility, part of which is triggered by a growing awareness of the lives lived in the Canyon by a now extinct indigenous community, the Anasazi. Along the way, the author writes, there is also music. Attempts at recording are sometimes more successful than others, but there seems, the author suggests, to have been a growing sense of connection between the art of the musicians and the land through which they travel.

In the evening of one of the last days, one of the musicians is encouraged to improvise some music. He takes some encouragement, but eventually starts, joined by a couple of the others. After they've finished, there is a long silence, and a feeling of reverence and transformation (see "Quotes", p. 50). Finally, when it is time to leave, the author and the other travelers go their separate ways, the author commenting in narration on the various ways each of them carries with them, and manifests, the change they've encountered.

The motif (recurring image) of the relationship between music, humanity and nature is explored even further in this essay, having been introduced previously in "A Reflection on White Geese". Here, the connection goes even further, as the author portrays the manifestation of the relationship between music and landscape moving through and therefore transforming, human beings. In other words, where "...White Geese" portrayed the connection between music and nature as affecting a particular human being (i.e. the author), here the narrative portrays the connection as manifesting in and through human beings (i.e. the musicians). Another repeated motif is the sense of reverence and/or spirituality, first introduced in "The Stone Horse" and appearing several times throughout the collection. Yet another repeated motif (awareness of the connection between indigenous people and nature) manifests here in the author's contemplation of the traces of presence left behind by the Anasazi, a community referred to again in Part 9). This particular motif, in turn, can be seen as a manifestation and/or aspect of the author's thematic interest in both commenting on and altering contemporary humanity's relationship with nature - specifically, as an example of how humanity respected nature in the past and ought to respect and/or interact with nature today.

Part 4

Part 4 Summary and Analysis

In Trying the Land (1979), the author describes how, in the company of his friend Richard, he travels a familiar and yet always changing path through a forest. As he describes his examinations of leaves, trees, and beaver dams, he experiences memories of similar travelers he's both known and only read about, inventors and setters of traps, and centuries-ago chroniclers of flora (plant life) and fauna (animal life). Meanwhile, he also interjects comments on how he and Richard are both well-read and, in some ways, intellectual, juxtaposing these comments with further references to other explorers and their searches for elusive, secretive wildlife.

In Landscape and Narrative (1984), the author narrates the circumstances of his being told stories about wolverines by a group of northern hunters, both circumstances and story triggering, in him, contemplations of what a story is and how it functions. He then offers his analysis of these two elements of story, contending that both narrative and meaning emerge from the convergence of the outer landscape with the inner - specifically, the sense of order inherent in the outer landscape giving meaning and clarity to the chaos of the inner (emotional, psychological) landscape of the individual. "One learns a landscape," he contends, "finally not by knowing the name or identity of everything in it but by perceiving the relationships in it..." This aspect of the outer landscape, he contends, lends coherence to the inner landscape, a situation which, he further contends, is both apparent in and the reason for rituals celebrating nature such as those practiced by a number of North American indigenous communities. The author then comments on the nature of truth, and on the primary values of a story being grounded in trustworthiness, respect for its source, and its connection with the outer landscape. He reinforces this point by commenting on how one indigenous tribe accepted the realities of the wolverine stories even though they themselves had never observed the behaviors described - they trusted that the storytellers HAD. Without that trust, the author says, without the dignity afforded the teller by the listener, "there are only failures of imagination: reductionism in science; fundamentalism in religion; fascism in politics."

It could be argued that in "Trying the Land," the author essentially practices what he preaches in "Landscape and Narrative", connecting a journey through / contemplation of outer landscape with a similar journey through the inner landscape and in the case of "Trying the Land," the internal landscape of memory. The reader, as the result of this juxtaposition of the theory and practice of storytelling, is then him/herself called upon to react to both narratives in the way the author suggests -with a trust that the author is revealing a particular truth based in experience.

It could also be argued, however, that there is a significant irony in the concluding comments of "Landscape and Narrative". This irony rests in the premise that the truths portrayed by those telling stories from the perspective of science, religion and politics

are also based in a particular experience, a particular observed truth, but one with which the author seems to automatically disagree. The author's comments seem to suggest that because the author is arguing his point from a position of reverence for nature, any truth that contradicts that is automatically and by its very nature (excuse the pun) invalid, even though the latter truth might itself be the result of observation, experience, and/or a desire to achieve a greater good.

Finally, other noteworthy elements in this section include another appearance of the "indigenous peoples" motif and the development of the author's thematic interest in the relationship between landscape and meaning - specifically, his interest in the interaction between the outer and inner lives of humanity.

Yukon Charley: The Shape of Wilderness

Yukon Charley: The Shape of Wilderness Summary and Analysis

This essay chronicles the author's expedition up the Yukon River into a wildlife preserve established around the point of conjunction between the Yukon and Charley Rivers. As he narrates his journey, the author uses what he sees there (mountains, animals both living and dead, waterways) as triggers for contemplations on the relationship between humanity and the landscape. More specifically, he considers how governmental, political and economic concerns have over the years become dominant over other considerations, including the preservation of the natural life of the land and its potential as a source/trigger for spiritual/psychological transformation.

At one point on his journey, the author walks along the banks of the river, collecting handfuls of pretty stones. At another, he encounters the members of the Moore family (see "Important People") who, the author comments, are going to be forced off the land (like the few hunters and trappers who make a similar subsistence living off the land) by government regulation intended to preserve the land's integrity. He comments that ultimately, the Moores and those like them are not the people that the regulations are intended to keep away, commenting that "it is the sort of ordinary place that shaped many people in rural America" - natural, unspoiled, safe, and beautiful.

As he brings the essay to its close, the author briefly describes some of the other wonders he found in the region , and comments that "the dreams of preservation" he has for the natural world there must be similar to dreams held by those who lived around, and discovered the values of, other similar areas of nature. Finally, he reveals that, as he prepared to leave, he returned the stones he collected to the river.

The Moore family (and the briefly referred to hunters and trappers who have carved out a similar life with the land) are portrayed as being the contemporary, ideological descendants of the several indigenous peoples referred to throughout the narrative - specifically, communities of human beings who understand, respect, and live in harmony with, the land and the natural life that inhabits it. In this context, the author's anecdotal bookending of their story with the story of his finding and returning of the rocks can be seen as a representation of not only what he learned as the result of his encounter with the Moores but also of what he learns as the result of each of the experiences described in the collection. This is his deepening, broadening respect for nature.

A second important point to note is his almost passing comment about ordinary places that "shaped many people in rural America". The particular sense here is of life on the great plains, but it must be remembered that throughout the continent of North America, and indeed throughout the world, communities ancient and contemporary, indigenous and colonizing, have developed harmonious and respectful relationships with nature.

This sense of parallel can arguably be extended to the threats, from government and industry, faced by the Moores and which, the author seems to be implying, are being faced and will continue to be faced by other harmoniously-living rural communities.

Part 6

Part 6 Summary and Analysis

In the Borders (1981), as he describes an expedition into barely visited land that crosses the border between Alaska and Canada, the author contemplates the nature and value of borders, particularly those that seem as arbitrary as the one he crosses on the journey. There is no difference, he says, in the land on either side of the arbitrary line between the two countries. He also, however, contemplates the idea of bioregionalism (see "Quotes", p. 95). As he contemplates a couple of abandoned, run-down dwellings, the author also describes an encounter with two apparently orphaned swans, beauty in their eyes, animals which he says are unlikely to be alive in two weeks. He then switches focus, describing how, after being back home for two weeks, he receives politically-oriented literature in the mail asking him to consider, and vote on, a redistribution of borders. Moved and seemingly close to tears, he goes for a walk. "It is going to take weeks," he suggests, "to get home."

In the Bull Rider (1978), unlike the other essays in this collection, "The Bull Rider" is written as a series of monologues, stories told by characters other than the author. Each of the speakers is involved, in some way, with the rodeo circuit. There's The Cowboy (who talks of perseverance but, at the same time, of knowing when it's time to move on) and The Comer (a young man not even of legal drinking age who has a lot of ambition and drive but not a lot of perspective). There's The Champ (who talks, with the wisdom of years, of the need for determination and guts - what he calls "try" - to realize victory) and The Contractor (who talks about the various means he employs to shape the nature of the bulls he trains into the best, angriest, best bucking bulls). Then there's The Clown (who speaks with admiration of how cowboys embody the spirit of the Old West, accepting challenges and facing danger with courage). Finally there's The Wreck, a rider who's been injured more than two dozen times and who, unlike the other commentators, speaks in dialogue with the author, who can't believe The Wreck continues to ride. The Wreck explains that he and most of the other people in the rodeo business keep doing what they're doing because they want to live free and according to what they want and believe in, as opposed to the "boot-licking, ass-wiping individuals" who work in regular jobs. He also speaks of cowboys learning humility, which leads into a comment by The Comer on how no-one in rodeo has anyone to rely on but themselves.

The essay concludes with a comment, in the author's voice, on how "young boys in the grandstands hurl water balloons that burst across the shoulders of bulls in the pens below."

Each of these two essays explore the relationship between humanity and nature from a couple of similar perspectives. The first is the idea of artificial boundaries created between humanity and nature - specifically, the map-borders in "Borders", the status borders between man and beast in "The Bull Rider". Both these sorts of boundaries are

defined by a sense that humanity is striving to claim power over nature, a striving that, again in both stories, is ultimately unwinnable. Here is the second perspective common to both stories. Even the best and most experienced riders are unable to shape and/or control the unpredictable nature of the bull (although The Contractor seems to be fooling himself into thinking he can) in the same way as the author realizes he's unable to shape and/or control the unpredictable nature of what will happen to the two swans. In other words, the lesson of these two essays is the same - nature will ultimately win out, a sentiment echoed and/or reiterated in the following section, "A Presentation of Whales." Meanwhile, the final image of "The Bull Rider" (the boys throwing the balloons) can be seen as a representative reiteration of that theme , the actions of the boys being portrayed as simultaneously disrespectful of nature (as represented by the bulls) and futile (in their efforts to humiliate, i.e. dominate, nature).

Another interesting aspect to this section is the individualistic spirit revealed in the comments of The Wreck, a defiant, slightly edgy portrayal of an important part of the "nature" of being a human being, a free spirited, independence that seems to echo the free spiritedness of the bulls and, indeed of many of the other animals portrayed in the collection. There is the sense here that the author, at least to some degree, is suggesting that on some level humanity, in spite of its efforts at corporate and/or industrial self-civilization, still craves and/or searches for a kind of freedom practiced by animals in nature.

A Presentation of Whales (1980)

A Presentation of Whales (1980) Summary and Analysis

The author describes the events surrounding the stranding of forty one sperm whales on an Oregon beach in 1979 (see "Quotes", p. 121). He describes how the animals were probably stranded by a too-quickly retreating high tide, how their physical condition began to deteriorate (because of heat, dehydration, and inability to breathe) almost immediately, and how just as immediately, crowds of spectators formed (see "Quotes", p. 129). These crowds included scientists (desperate for information about the mostly un-researched whales), members of environmental groups (determined to do what they could to save the whales) and members of the public, some of whom reacted with sensitivity and reverence , others of whom reacted as though they were at a circus sideshow.

The author briefly describes a meeting held in a small town (Florence) near to where the whales became stranded, at which local citizens demanded to know how the stranding happened and presented their own theories. No scientists, the author comments, attended that meeting - but one scientist, he goes on to say, was exemplary in his efforts to address the needs of the scientific community as well as the gravity of the situation and the curiosity of nearby citizens. This was Bruce Mate (see "Important People") who, like many other scientists (according to the author), realized the multiple levels of importance the stranding had.

Eventually, the author writes, most of the press, the tourists, and the scientists departed, leaving dismembered carcasses of dead whales, questions (about what to do with the carcasses), and quarrels (over who was going to pay for however the carcasses were disposed of). After some debate, it was decided that the carcasses were going to be burned, and that the state of Oregon would foot most of the bill. The author writes that as the fire consuming the carcasses burned, he reflected on how "no novelist, no historian, no moral philosopher...no rabbi, no painter, no theologian had been on the beach" and that "the whales made a sound ... like the sound a big fir makes breaking off the stump just as the saw is being pulled away. A thin screech."

This essay, one of the longest in the collection, is also one of the most moving (the final image, evoking the idea of living beings literally torn out of environments that nourished and nurtured them, is heartbreaking). There are echoes, in the situation of the whales, of the situation with the swans in the previous section - specifically, the author's sense that there was nothing any of the human beings present at either time could do to stop, halt or change the process of nature. In short, both stories on some level reiterate the motif, recurring throughout the collection, that ultimately, the natural course of life, death and growth cannot be interfered with.

It can, however, be observed and examined, and perhaps should. At t least, that's another thing the essay seems to be suggesting, although here and in other situations in which nature is being subjected to scientific inquiry (such as in "The Lives of Seals") in the following section), there is some sense when investigation is, in fact, exploitation and mutilation. Ironically, the author specifically makes a point of indicating that there was no philosophical and/or spiritual inquiry into what happened. This aspect of the situation with clear echoes of the author's comment in "Yukon-Charley...", in which the author discusses how nature is often the subject of scientific and/or exploratory inquiry but rarely, if ever the subject of spiritual, psychological, or emotional inquiry.

Part 8

Part 8 Summary and Analysis

In the Children in the Woods (1982), in this short essay, the author discusses how much pleasure he gets from walking with children through nature, and how he realized the best way to be with them was to guide / teach them into answering their questions themselves. He uses the example of how he led some children he was with into understanding that a small jawbone they found was that of a raccoon, and further comments on how grateful many of the children he has traveled with have been for the sense and spirit he has shown them. He also speaks of the value of teaching them reverence and respect in the face of nature. "If one speaks," he says, "it should only be to say, as well as one can, how wonderfully all this fits together, to indicate what a long, fierce peace can derive from this knowledge."

In the The Lives of Seals (1982), the author writes of accompanying a group of scientists on a research mission (to kill seals in an effort to research the potential impact of a fossil fuel reclamation project), and how he became aware of rumor-driven resentment among the crew of The Oceanographer, the ship on which he and the scientists were sailing. That resentment, he says, came from the belief that the scientists were insensitive to the value of the seals' lives. He describes how, over the course of time and as the result of an invitation from the lead scientists to observe the team's investigations, the somewhat uneasy crew became increasingly open to the work of the scientists, respectful of that work, and more comfortable with the scientists' presence. The author further comments on his realization, experienced while contemplating this situation, that he, the scientists, and the crew were all dealing with some fundamental aspects of human existence and, indeed, of natural relationship. He describes how, after the killing of the seals and the recording of data accumulated from studying their corpses, he and the scientific team made sure to return to the boat without any evidence of the killing having taken place - not out of a desire to hide, but out of respect for the sensitivities of the crew. He then extends his beliefs about the possibilities of broader understanding between scientists and others, concerned about nature, into the belief that because perspectives changed on The Oceanographer, for the people on both sides, it's possible for things to change in larger conflicts between those who care about nature and those pursuing scientific investigation. All, he says, are pondering the same difficult questions, and that "in the end it is madness to answer them as though everyone lived alone, to answer them as if there were no seals."

The value of education in building, defining, and sustaining the relationship between humanity and nature is the prime focus of both these narratives. The first narrative, in fact, could be seen as embodying the fundamental intent of the book - to lead the reader into a broader, deeper understanding of nature by enabling greater understanding of, and insight into, various aspects of nature. There is a clear development in this essay of an idea first explored in "Trying the Land" (Part 4) - specifically, the idea of drawing connections between aspects of nature through a

journey through the parallel physical, spiritual, emotional environments in which information necessary for making such connections exists.

Meanwhile, the last lines of "The Lives of Seals" can be seen as a defense, albeit somewhat reluctant (at least that's how it feels) of the value of research. This is the idea (first introduced in "A Presentation of Whales") that a greater good (i.e. eventual preservation and knowledge) comes from a degree of sacrifice (i.e. the study of the dying whales.

Part 9

Part 9 Summary and Analysis

In the Searching for Ancestors (1983), the author describes the beginnings of his search (through Northern Arizona in the company of a couple of noted scientists, including noted anthropologist Robert Euler) through the history of a prehistoric tribe of indigenous peoples known as the Anasazi, ancestors to (among others) the Hopi and Zuni. As he describes the commitment to thought, consideration and analysis practiced by Euler and other researchers, the author relates how he came to (realize? recall?) that the evidence the searchers are looking for and examining relates not only to what a people did, but who they were and what they believed, indicating a people with "an obvious and pervasive spiritual and aesthetic life."

The author then describes the process of walking through the area in which Anasazi settlements have been found and excavated, looking at things like the foraged corpses of animals for evidence how the Anasazi might have thought, felt and lived. "Such wandering," he says, "is like an interrogation of the landscape." He reflects on how the discoveries he and the others make, both formally and informally, are again reminders of the lives led by the long-lost peoples, "to find the Anasazi neither remote nor primitive, but transcendent." Finally, he also reflects on how research into the past is ultimately a reflection of humanity's "long and endless struggle to find ourselves in the world."

In the Grown Men (1979), in the first part of this essay, the author recalls his relationship with Odey Cassell, a relationship begun when he (the author) was a young man and which continued over several years. Odey, he writes, was a hard-working farmer who, along with his wife, ran what would now be called a "bed and breakfast" business off his farm, which he continued to take care of and run into his mid-seventies. Odey, the author writes, was a great storyteller, a compassionate listener, a wise confidante, and a generous but secretive philanthropist. The author comments that many of the lessons he learned from Odey didn't make sense to him (the author) until years after he heard them.

The author also writes about a man named Bill Daniels (who, the author says, taught him more about indigenous culture than any book), and a third man named Dave Wallace (a wandering, odd-jobber of a western drifter eventually crippled by accidents but generous and full of knowledge). All three men, the author says, had stories he wanted to hear, but all three died (within weeks of each other) before he could hear them all. He concludes the essay with a description of how he let the letter informing him of Odey's death drift into a river flowing into the sea where, he adds, there are whales - living peacefully, undisturbed, at home.

The first point to note about this section of the book is the return to narrative focus of the Anasazi, first mentioned in Part 3 ("Gone to the Earth") and the deepening of the book's

portrayal of them as a civilization of considerable accomplishment and value. The author uses his documentation and contemplation of the Anasazi's impact/legacy as a springboard for contemplations of how aspects of being human and of the human exploration of relationship with nature transcend time and place. Meanwhile, his point about relics indicating more about the people who left them behind than just their physical lives reiterates the point made several times throughout the narrative (Parts 1, 3, 7 and 8) that there is spiritual/philosophical/emotional value to contemplations of humanity's past relationship with nature. This idea is reiterated, albeit more metaphorically, in the image that concludes "Grown Men". The implication here is that knowledge of both past and present (the river) flows into, and contributes to, the entire body of historical/human/ knowledge and/or experience (the sea) in which there are hidden secrets and truths yet to be discovered and explored (the whales). The image also contains a clear echo of "A Presentation of Whales" (Part 7) and the secrets about both the whales and about humanity's reaction to nature that that story contains. Another echo in this section is awakened when the reader realizes that the impact of the three influential men in the past (Cassell, Daniels, Wallace) is in some ways similar to the impact of the three particular men influential in the author's present (Fields, Mate, Euler).

The Passing Wisdom of Birds (1985)

The Passing Wisdom of Birds (1985) Summary and Analysis

In the first part of this essay, the author describes the violent military actions of Spanish explorer / conqueror Cortes against the advanced Mexican civilization of the early 1500's, focusing particularly on the conqueror's destruction of the civilization's cherished bird sanctuaries. He then uses the incident as a trigger to explore the exploitive actions humanity has taken against nature, and to comment on the necessity for humanity to somehow find its way to a new, evolved relationship. He suggests that this need is first and foremost practical (in that the world's natural resources are finite, and being used up at an increasing pace), but also philosophical (in that humanity's ultimate and overall well-being depends on doing so). He suggests that one way into developing this new relationship is to study the actions and behaviors of wild animals, but adds that while scientific observation and data collection is useful, conclusions gleaned from those practices are both limited and flawed. Even the most observant scientists, he says, can never fully or thoroughly understand what an animal is doing or intending. He goes on to suggest, however, that scientists, environmentalists, and people in general develop "a sense of mystery" - the sense that we cannot, and will not, know everything about animals and nature, and that that's ultimately all right.

The author then suggests that there are several ways to go about developing that sense of mystery and, in doing so, reinforce humanity's relationship with land and landscape. These include protecting untouched ecosystems and environments, supporting (morally and politically) study of biological diversity, and preserving cultural resources (i.e. the memories and lore of indigenous peoples). Doing all these things, he contends, will broaden "our sense of the intrinsic worth of life..."

In the final section of this essay, the author returns to the image of Cortes burning the bird sanctuaries, arguing that the same kind of greed and desire for power that motivated that action motivates similar actions today. He develops this argument further by saying that observation and contemplation of wild animals and how their actions provide "the central metaphors by which we have taken satisfaction in our ways and explained ourselves to strangers", can lead us in the necessary directions. He provides an example of such a metaphor by returning once again to the image of Cortes burning the birds, commenting that in a moment of contemplating a flock of birds in flight, it becomes "possible to move beyond a moment in the Valley of Mexico when we behaved as though we were insane."

The final essay of the collection essentially sums up and dramatizes (for lack of a better term) the basic thematic and narrative premises of the book - specifically, the consideration of and reaction to both the challenges and the solutions inherent in the relationship between inquisitive, acquisitive humanity and vulnerable, inevitable nature. The tension between the two is vividly portrayed by the story of Cortes and the birds,

the entire history of humanity's unfortunate relationship with nature distilled into a single event that can be seen as evocative of similar contemporary circumstances.

Meanwhile, the book's suggestion that in order to both survive and thrive, humanity must observe (rather than obliterate) animals and nature can be seen as, again, a summing up or distillation of the book's central thematic and narrative contentions. Humanity, the author and his collection are saying, has a lot to learn, adding that it's simultaneously valuable to know and all right to not know, but simply trust. This sentiment awakens echoes of, as examples, the author's contemplation of the meaning of the stone horse (Part 1), the instinctual patterns of behavior of the geese (Part2), and the beaching of the whales (Part 7). Ultimately, it seems the author is advocating the striking of a balance between inquiry and faith, between curiosity and trust, between use of resources and letting things be, that humanity (according to the darker side of both his stories and his implications) hasn't always been good at striking, but needs to, more desperately with each passing year.

Characters

The Author

Travel author and essayist Barry Lopez is the winner of several awards for his considerations of, and commentary on, the relationship between humanity and the natural world. The essays in this particular collection are evidence of his ongoing concern with nature itself and the various ways in which humanity has interacted with it in the past, and continues to interact with it in the present. He is particularly interested in how indigenous peoples (see below), in both the distant past and more immediate present, seem to have established and maintained relationships with nature that have been grounded in respect, while explorers and industrialists of both past and present have viewed nature as an aspect of existence more to be exploited than harmonized with. A particularly interesting aspect of the collection is the sense of discovery, communicated and experienced by the author, associated with several of his experiences. There is the sense that he is on both a personal and professional journey of exploration, drawing connections between what he observes as a writer and chronicler of the nature/human relationships and what he comes to understand about his own experience of that relationship.

It's important to note that the author published this particular collection was published in 1988, a period in North American history (i.e. the administration of US President Ronald Reagan) in which corporate exploration of and utilization of the natural world began a course of expansion unprecedented in both range and scope. It's also important to note, though, that the author's work has continued in the decades since, and that many of the concerns he raises in relation to events of that time continue in contemporary society.

Bob Fields

Fields is portrayed in the essay "A Reflection on White Geese". He watches over the nature preserve (see "Objects/Places - The Tule Lake National Wildlife Refuge") where the author observes and records the behavior of snow geese in their wintering habitat. He, like several of the other secondary "characters" in this collection of essays, is portrayed as having similar perspectives on nature, and humanity's relationship to nature, as the author. The portrayal of Fields, however, is particularly intriguing, in that he is described as coming to that understanding not so much by direct encounters with nature, but by encounters with other human beings who, in the eyes of the author, have a more innate, intimate relationship with nature to start with - see "Indigenous Human Populations" below.

Bruce Mate

Like Bob Fields (see above), Bruce Mate appears in only one narrative ("A Presentation of Whales"), but has considerable impact on the story and its thematic content, and

indeed on the thematic perspective of the collection as a whole. Mate displaces a balanced, compassionate human sensitivity to animals and to nature to which the author seems to aspire and furthermore seems to think is an example to which ALL humanity should aspire. Mate, like Fields above and Euler below, is portrayed as something of a heroic character, fueled by compassion and perspective as he faces down those who would exploit and/or damage nature.

Robert Euler

Anthropologist Robert Euler is portrayed (in Part 9, "Searching for Ancestors") as another influential figure in the author's present life - specifically, one who triggers in him further contemplation and/or action on the implications of archaeological research. It is through working with Euler that the author seems to come to an important realization - that research into the past lives of ancient civilizations isn't just about learning what they did, or even about who they are. It's about discovering connection between past and present humanity that can, in turn, give us clues about how humanity can, in the present, more effectively and respectfully connect with nature in the way humanity did in the past.

Indigenous Human Populations

Throughout the collection, indigenous (native) communities are often portrayed as having a closer, more intuitive understanding about nature and its relationship to humanity than those whose relationships are defined more by purpose and intention than by proximity (i.e. explorers, colonizers, industrialists). Examples of this portrayal can be found in the Eskimos (Part 2, "A Reflection on White Geese"), the Anasazi (Part 3, "Gone to the Earth" and Part 9, "Searching for Ancestors"), the Navajo (Part 4, "Landscape and Narrative") ,

The Group of Travelers

In "Gone Back to the Earth", the author takes a guided tour through the Grand Canyon (see "Objects/Places" in the company of more than three dozen other people. The tour, he comments, was organized by a musician interested in exploring the relationship between music and landscape. Among the musicians in the company, the author says, are an oboist, a cellist, and a man who plays the euphonium. Other travelers include an actor, a mechanic, a student and his wife, and a father and son from New York. The author comments that musician or not, everyone on the tour was affected by the explorations and connections discovered and/or manifested in the juxtaposition between the music (composed and /or improvised) and the eons-old rock formations of the Canyon, the life forms that exist there, and the humans that USED to exist there.

Paul Winter

Winter is one of the musicians on the Grand Canyon tour in "Gone Back to the Earth", the leader and inspiration for both the tour itself and the connections between music and nature the tour is designed to explore. He, like Bob Fields above and several other important individuals who appear throughout the collection, serve as inspiration to the author in his ongoing relationship between humanity and nature.

The Anasazi

This pre-historic community of indigenous people is portrayed twice in the collection - in "Gone Back into the Earth" and "Searching for Ancestors". They, like many other indigenous communities portrayed by the author, are represented as having constructed and inhabited a culture of both considerable sophistication (particularly artistic and agricultural), and (perhaps paradoxically?) a considerable respect for nature.

Richard

In Part 4 ("Trying the Land"), Richard is the author's companion as he travels through a forest on a day-long hike, exploring the meaning and values of landscape.

The Moore Family

The Moore family (father George, mother Kelly, infant son Zachariah), make their home on a subsistence-level natural farm in the northern Yukon. In the author`s perspective, the family's way of life and that of others like them (hunters and trappers who live mostly off the land) is an example of how humanity ought to interact respectfully and harmoniously with nature.

The Cowboys

In the essay titled "The Bull Rider" (Part 6), the author portrays several different characters involved in the sport of rodeo - specifically, the bull riding event. Each offers a different perspective on rodeo as a whole and on the event in particular. Their views can be seen as representative and/or evocative of the various views on nature held by various types of humanity - see "Topics for Discussion - Describe the ways in which ..."

Odey Cassell, Bill Daniels, Dave Wallace

These three men are portrayed in Part 9 ("Grown Men") as key figures in the development of the author's nature/humanity sensibilities. Through them, he suggests, he learned about some of the important aspects of being a responsible, respectful

human being, and of how to carry those aspects of human /human relationship into the human/nature relationship.

Objects/Places

Nature

The natural world, and humanity's relationship with it, is the primary focus of the collection as a whole, with each essay exploring a different aspect of that relationship.

History

Several of the essays are concerned with not so much the big events of human history, but of the evolving relationship between humanity, nature and the landscape over time.

Wild Animals

Throughout the collection, the author portrays different aspects of the relationship between humanity and wild animals, all essentially grounded in the contention he makes in "The Passing Wisdom of Birds" (Part 10), where he suggests that in spite of humanity's (best? worst?) efforts, nature will survive and ultimately thrive.

Intaglio

An intaglio is a two-dimensional representation of an animal or human created on a canvas of land. The representation can be created by carving out trenches on the land, by painting, by the placement of stones in the shape of a figure (as is the case in "The Stone Horse") or by another means. The purpose, meaning, and /or value of such markings can in some cases be understood, but in other cases remains mysterious.

The Stone Horse

In the collection's first essay, the author visits an intaglio of a stone horse, the realism of which he finds particularly striking.

The Tule Lake National Wildlife Refuge

In Part 2 of the collection, the author visits this wintering ground of a population of increasingly endangered white geese.

Snow Geese

These are the wild animals whose patterns of behavior are studied and commented upon by the author in "A Reflection on Wild Geese" (Part 2).

The Grand Canyon

In the company of a diverse group of fellow travelers, including several musicians, the author tours through the Grand Canyon in search of connection between nature and artistic inspiration.

The Yukon-Charley Rivers National Preserve

In Part 5, the author describes his explorations of a wildlife/nature preserve at the conjunction of the Yukon and Charley rivers.

Story

Several times throughout the collection, the author explores the ways in which nature and its many aspects affect and shape the ways in which stories are told - stories of the land, stories of the people who live there, and stories of how the two interact. "The intent of the story, then" the author contends, "must be to evoke, honestly, some single aspect of all that the land contains."

The Sperm Whales

In "A Presentation of Whales" (Part 7), the author tells the story of a large pod (group) of whales stranded on a beach on the West Coast of the US, and of the wide range of human reactions to their situation.

Birds

In the final essay of the collection, the author describes the destruction of a bird refuge (aviary) by Spanish invaders of Mexico, and then uses the eventual triumph of both the birds and nature in general as a springboard to discuss / explore the ways that nature has transcended humanity's determination to control and/or exploit it.

Themes

Humanity's Relationship with Nature

Each of the essays in this collection explores and documents different ways in which humanity, as individuals and as a community, interacts with nature. The author writes about interactions based on science ("The Lives of Seals"), respectful exploration and contemplation ("Gone Back into the Earth"), and domination and control ("The Bull Rider"). On occasion he writes of how interactions defined by each of these perspectives sometimes come into conflict with one another ("A Presentation of Whales"). He also writes about interactions in the past ("Searching for Ancestors" and others) and the present ("Yukon Charley ..." and others), finding parallels across history in how human beings have behaved with respect and/or a determination to exploit. Throughout all these contemplations, the author's central thematic contention is that the more humanity can live in harmony with nature, the more likely both nature and humanity are to not just survive, but thrive. He tends to view exploitative and / or arbitrary choices based in human efforts to control nature (i.e. the drawing of "Borders") as perhaps necessary but not as important or defining as much of humanity seems to view them. The collection suggests that because there is so much about nature that humanity cannot know, or will never know, that approaching nature with an attitude of peaceful respect and/or cooperation is, and will be, the most productive way for both nature and humanity to coexist. Ultimately, the collection suggests that no matter how destructive humanity becomes, nature and its innate, transcendent wisdom will endure, survive, and perhaps even triumph ("The Lives of Birds").

The Relationship between Humanity and Landscape

A key component of the author's exploration of humanity's relationship with nature is his exploration of how human beings interact with, and are defined by, a particular aspect of nature - specifically, the landscape. This thematic concern is touched in several of the collection's essays, most notably in "The Stone Horse", "Gone Back Into the Earth" and "Yukon Charley ...", all of which describe the author's contemplations of how both the outer and inner lives of human beings are shaped by their relationships with the land and environment around them. This theme is primarily explored, however, in "Landscape and Narrative", in which he discusses the relationship between storytelling and the landscape from which stories emerge. The author's thematic contention is that not only does landscape have a profound, defining effect on how human society evolves and on how individuals themselves evolve (again, this particular idea is touched on throughout the collection). He further contends that the way humanity (as a society or as an individual) treats and/or views landscape is emblematic of how humanity views its relationship with nature as a whole - as something to be passed through and/or exploited, or as something to be harmonized with and respected. As noted in "Important People", the author portrays himself as discovering the importance and/or value of this latter perspective, while the collection as a whole repeatedly suggests that it's important

for humanity as a whole to come to a similar realization, before both the history and the present-day innate integrity of the landscape are exploited beyond recognition or value.

The Danger to Nature Posed by Humanity

At the same time as he's describing and/or commenting on various positive aspects of humanity's relationship with nature (including the creative inspiration portrayed in "Gone Back into the Earth"), the author also repeatedly, and pointedly, comments on how humanity has exploited, and continues to exploit, nature in insensitive, ultimately destructive ways. Here it's important to note that the author makes this point not only in terms of his contemporary experiences of such exploitation (such as those documented in "A Reflection on White Geese" and "The Bull Rider") , but also refers to particularly vivid historical examples of such attitudes and practices ("The Passing Wisdom of Birds.")

Here, however, it's also important to note that the author is himself not always sure what constitutes a destructive attitude when it comes to nature - specifically, where science crosses a line between acquiring important information and exploiting natural occurences for gain. The tension between these two views of science is portrayed with particular effectiveness in a couple of essays. The first is "A Presentation of Whales", in which scientists (given the rare opportunity to study the biology and physiology of reclusive sperm whales) come into moral and ethical conflict with environmental activists determined to ease, if not end, the suffering of the beached whales. The second essay in exploring the conflict between naturalist and science is "The Lives of Seals", in which scientists researching possible effects of industrialization on a community of seals are viewed with hostility by the crew of the research vessel carrying them to their destination. In this particular essay, the author describes the means by which the scientists and the crew came to a mutual respect of each other. He goes on to suggests that communication and understanding, as practiced by the two sides on this particular conflict, are the means by which humanity can evolve a lasting, consistent theory and practice of interacting with nature in a way that benefits the former without destroying the latter.

Style

Perspective

The author has an established career as a respected writer on environmental and naturalist concerns. This collection, therefore, can be seen as falling squarely within his personal, creative, and professional mandates. These can be seen, in this collection and throughout his body of work, as having two facets. The first is to chronicle his own experiences in search of connections, both historical and contemporary, between humanity and nature. The second is to relate his experiences, both researched and felt, to the broader and more universal societal relationship between humanity (individuals, communities, and organizations) and the natural world.

In terms of the author's intended audience, and the intended impact on that audience, it's important to note that each of these essays was published in other formats before being collected into this particular publication. In most cases, these previous publications were in mass market print publications, meaning that they were intended for a broad, wide ranging audience who, in all likelihood, were (somewhat? extremely?) unaware of both the past and present of humanity's relationship with nature. With that in mind, then, it could be argued that the author seems, in this context, to be working towards an awakening of that audience to the exploitations and the collaborations of the past, and the developing dangers of present day exploitations and the potential benefits of present day collaborations. This also leads to the work's intriguing, engaging, and tonal qualities.

Tone

As discussed several times throughout this analysis, there is an engaging sense of discovery about this collection, of the author being awakened to feelings and perspectives associated with what he observes, considers, and writes about. This aspect of the work invites the reader in, putting him/her in the position of the author himself, drawing connections and making realizations about the same things in the same way at the same time as the author. The tonal quality here is both watchful and contemplative, the frequent references to nature's visual beauty coming across as the sort of thoughts anyone might have upon seeing, for example, a huge flock of geese rising up en masse from the lake where it has been feeding.

This is one aspect of how the collection's overall tone manifests primarily as subjective - the author is, in many ways, IN the material he is writing about. Another aspect of the book's subjectivity is how the author seems to clearly be sounding a warning about the potential dangers of exploiting nature and the environment. It's clearly an important part of why the essays, and therefore the collection, exist. It's interesting to note, however, that the warning is not shrill or insistent, but rather implied and suggested. His warning is clear but careful, and when combined with the sense of discovery discussed above,

seems to be more of an invitation to awareness of potential dangers, rather than an outright, statistic-based diatribe. It could be argued that this approach might well be more effective, in terms of reaching an intended audience and achieving an intended goal, than a more strident attempt at either engaging reader sympathy or warning of potential dangers.

Structure

On first glance, the order in which the essays are presented here seems somewhat random. They are not in chronological order, and they are not presented in any kind of apparent geographical order (i.e. moving from south to north, or east to west). Neither do they seem to be presented in a way that might suggest any sort of journey, or a build to a particularly important revelation. Upon further consideration, however, and in paying particular attention to the thematic and philosophical implications of the final essay ("The Passing Wisdom of Birds"), one can see that there is a broad-strokes shape and /or structure to the work. This is the idea that, to use the author's own imagery and language, that he is traveling through a succession of landscapes in search of a unifying truth, but that at the end of the journey (i.e. the final essay) he finds out that an important part of that truth is, in fact, mystery. This is not to say that he finds NO truths. On the contrary, and as mentioned above, one of the more engaging aspects of the collection as a whole is that the author seems, with each new journey, to discover and be changed (at least to some degree) by a particular aspect of the relationship between humanity and nature, either contemporary or historical. But by the time the collection at arrives at the final essay, the author and the reader both discover that no matter how much humanity contemplates and examines (and exploits?) nature, there is too much about it that cannot be known, and cannot ever be known. This, it could be argued, makes it simultaneously, and perhaps paradoxically, worthy of greater respect, and ultimately the recipient of increasingly frustrated exploration and exploitation, both aspects of the relationship between humanity and nature portrayed in the final essay.

Quotes

"The vandalism was of three sorts: the general disturbance usually caused by souvenir hunters and by the curious and the oblivious; the wholesale stripping of a place by professional thieves for black-market sale and trade; and outright destruction, in which vehicles were actually used to ram and trench an area" (The Stone Horse, p. 4-5).

"A human being, a four footed animal, the open land. That was all that was present - and a 'thoughtless' understanding of the very old desires bearing on this particular animal: to hunt it, to render it, to fathom it, to subjugate it, to honor it, to take it as a companion" (Ibid, p. 9).

"It is always difficult, especially with something so portable, to rechannel the desire to steal" (Ibid, p. 9-10).

"Intaglios, I thought, were never meant to be see by gods in the sky above. They were meant to be seen by people on the ground, over a long period of shifting light. This could even be true of the huge figures on the Plain of Nazca in Peru, where people could walk for the length of a day beside them. It is our own impatience that leads us to think otherwise" (Ibid, p. 14).

"Their self-centered scorn, their disrespect for ideas and images beyond their ken, create the awful atmosphere of loose ends in which totalitarianism thrives, in which the past is merely curious or wrong" (Ibid, p. 16).

"I sat there for three hours, studying the birds' landings and takeoffs, how they behaved toward each other on the water, how they shot the skies overhead. I tried to unravel and to parse the dazzling synchronicity of their movements. I am always struck anew in these moments, in observing such detail, by the way in which an animal slowly reveals itself" (A Reflection on White Geese, p. 26).

"...I find myself wanting to thank him for the depth with which he cares for the birds, and for the intelligence that allows him to disparage not hunting itself but the lethal acts of irresponsible and thoughtless people" (Ibid, p. 36).

"We grasp what is beautiful in a flight of snow geese rising against an overcast sky as easily as we grasp the beauty in a cello suite; and intuit, I believe, that if we allow these things to be destroyed or degraded for economic or frivolous reasons we will become deeply and strangely impoverished" (Ibid, p. 38).

"Each day we are upended, if not by some element of the landscape itself then by what the landscape does, visibly, to each of us. It has snapped us like fresh-laundered sheets" (Gone Back into the Earth, p. 43).

"No other animal but the human would bring to bear so many activities, from so many different cultures and levels of society, with so much energy, so suddenly in a new

place. And no other animal, the individuals so entirely unknown to each other, would chance together something so unknown as this river journey...we are not the first down this river, but in the...swan-like notes of an oboe, the occasional hugs among those most afraid of the rapids, there IS exploration" (Ibid, p. 46).

"From the rims the canyon seems oceanic; at the surface of the river the feeling is intimate...it is this known dimension of distance and time and the perplexing question posed by the canyon itself - what is consequential? (in one's life, in the life of human beings, in the life of a planet) - that reverberate constantly, and make the human inclination to judge (another person, another kind of thought) seem so eerie"(Ibid, p. 47).

"I feel, sitting in the wet dark in bathing suit and sneakers and T-shirt, that my fingers have brushed one of life's deep, coursing threads. Like so much else in the canyon, it is left alone. Speak, even notice it, and it would disappear" (Ibid, p. 50).

"The living of life, any life, involves great and private pain ,much of which we share with no one. In such places as the Inner Gorge the pain trails away from us. It is not so quiet there or so removed that you can hear yourself think, that you would even wish to; that comes later. You can hear your heart beat. That comes first" (Ibid, p. 53).

"This feeling, an inexplicable renewal of enthusiasm after storytelling, is familiar to many people. It does not seem to matter greatly what the subject is, as long as the context is intimate and the story is told for its own sake, not forced to serve merely as the vehicle for an idea... I think intimacy is indispensable - a feeling that derives from the listener's trust and a storytellers certain knowledge of his subject and regard for his audience" (Landscape and Narrative, p. 64).

"The purpose of storytelling is to achieve harmony between the two landscapes, to use all the elements of story ... in a harmonious way to reproduce the harmony of the land in the individual's interior. Inherent in story is the power to reorder a state of psychological confusion through contact with the pervasive truth of those relationships we call 'the land'" (Ibid, p. 68).

"We are more accustomed now to thinking of 'the truth' as something that can be explicitly stated, rather than as something that can be evoked in a metaphorical way outside science and Occidental culture...it is something alive and unpronounceable. Story creates an atmosphere in which it becomes discernible as a pattern" (Ibid, p. 69).

"The administration's attitude reveals an impoverished understanding of the place and history of the physical landscape in human affairs - of its effect, for example, on the evolution and structure of language, or on the development of particular regional literatures, even on the ontogeny of human personalities ... as vital as any single rationale for the preservation of undisturbed landscapes is regard for the profound effect they can have on the direction of human life" (Yukon-Charley, p. 81).

"[Bioregionalism] would decentralize residents of an area into smaller, more self-sufficient, environmentally responsible units, occupying lands the borders of which

would be identical with the borders of natural regions...[such] borders are noticeable. Even the birds find them" (Borders, p. 95).

"They lay on the western shore of North America like forty-one derailed boxcars at dawn on a Sunday morning, and in the days that followed, the worst and the best of human behavior was shown among them" (A Presentation of Whales, p. 121).

"The temptation to possess - a Polaroid of oneself standing over a whale, a plug of flesh removed with a penknife, a souvenir squid beak plucked deftly from an exposed intestine by a scientist - was almost palpable in the air" (Ibid, p. 129).

"One of the things about being human ... is learning to see beyond the vulgar. Along with the jocose in the crowd...there were hundreds who whispered to each other, as if in a grove of enormous trees. And faces that looked as though they were awaiting word of relatives presumed dead in an air crash" (Ibid, p. 130).

"What takes a lifetime to learn, they comprehend, is the existence and substance of myriad relationships: it is these relationships, not the things themselves, that ultimately hold the human imagination" (Children in the Woods, p. 149).

"...the desires that some scientists have - that their work be appreciated, that they be understood simply as other human beings trying to grasp the meaning of some part of the universe - those desires were also met in the laboratory each evening" (The Lives of Seals, p. 159).

"The hope of each human being to have a sense of value in his or her life is squarely before you. The desire to carry out fatal work honorably. The dream of fathoming the biology of seals. The notion of a rational and humane development of energy in the Arctic. The wordless euphoria in a person touched by the fecundity and resoluteness of the natural world, the vague belief that one is, or could be, a part of this. Such hopes are too deeply wished to be expressed; we convey them obliquely in our gestures, in our cultivation of an atmosphere of tolerance" (Ibid, p. 160-1).

"One of the great dreams of man must be to find some place between the extremes of nature and civilization where it is possible to live without regret" (Searching for Ancestors, p. 178).

"It is the birds' independence from predictable patterns of human design that draws us to them. In the birds' separate but related universe we are able to sense hope for ourselves. Against a background of the familiar, we recognize with astonishment a new pattern" (The Passing Wisdom of Birds, p. 208).

Topics for Discussion

Consider and discuss your experiences of landscape. What types of landscape do you find particularly striking or moving? What is it about those landscapes that affects you? Is there a specific type of landscape that feels like "home" to you?

Describe the ways in which the views on rodeos and riding bulls, espoused by the various cowboys in "The Bull Rider" are reflective of humanity's various archetypal and/or universal views of nature.

Do you agree with the contention, expressed in at least two of the essays in this collection ("A Presentation of Whales" and "The Lives of Seals") that some degree of sacrifice is necessary and valuable when it comes to the long term goal of understanding and preservation of nature? Why or why not?

Research and discuss contemporary instances of humanity's destruction and exploitation of nature that follow the same pattern as Cortes' destruction of the bird sanctuaries as portrayed in Part 10. What does the fact that such circumstances still take place say about the evolution of humanity's relationship with nature? Or, for that matter, the NEED for evolution?

How do you view the relationship between humanity and nature? What is the role of the former in terms of the latter? What responsibility does humanity have for preserving nature? What do you think is the line between making respectful use of what nature has to offer and exploitation?

Tell a story, either verbally or in written form, of a particularly important or vivid experience of nature. Make sure to consider and/or incorporate details of landscape and /or natural life into your narrative. How does consideration of nature affect your perception and/or description of your story's events?

Have you ever had an experience like that described in "Children in the Woods" (i.e. of walking through and/or exploring nature)? Describe that experience, the questions you had and the answers you were offered. How did that and other similar experiences, shape your views of/perspectives on nature?

How would you react in a situation like that described in "A Presentation of Whales"? Would you want to help the animals, study the animals and/or protest against the study of animals? Why, do you think, would you react in that way?

In "Grown Men," the author writes about important people in his life who influenced his views on nature. Who has influenced your experience of nature, either directly or indirectly? Describe specific ways in which you've felt and experienced that influence.