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Page # 1

### Nature's Instructive Power

Have you ever been walking in the woods or along a deserted beach when you suddenly receive some sort of enlightening epiphany? Where does this inspiration come from? It comes from nature, my friend. Nature has the power to reveal to us the mysteries of the universe, helping us to better understand our relationships with the environment, its creatures and even ourselves. Scott Sanders's "Settling Down," William Cronon's "Getting Back to the Wrong Nature," Ursula LeGuin's "May's Lion," and Aldo Leopold's "Thinking Like a Mountain" explore the other-worldly benefits humans reap from nature, proving nature to be a source of enlightenment and revelation. Thus, nature, as a center for learning and enlightenment, must be protected from human exploitation out of respect for its abilities to instruct and guide us.

Sanders's "Settling Down" reflects the instructive capabilities of nature as the narrator gives an account of his enlightening experience watching a hurricane from his front porch, describing its spiritual, human and ecological implications. Sitting on his porch, Sanders "dissolve[s]" (34) into the wind, feeling as if he has become part of the wind and satisfying his curiosity. So incredible is this hurricane to him that he refers to it as a "tremendous power.... a god" (34). Hence, he believes in the superior abilities of nature to overpower us and humble us, illustrating just how powerless and insignificant humans really are, despite how supreme we boast ourselves to be. Sanders then backflashes to the story of the Miller family, a family he knew as a boy; despite all the natural disasters and misfortunes that befell their farm, the Millers refused to

Christina Bosilkovski

Page # 2

abandon their home. We can receive inspiration from this story about the value (not just monetary value) of a place in which someone has invested so much time, love and effort; it becomes the place to which one is rooted, or attached to by more than just legal or financial concerns. Sanders, furthermore, suggests that this rootedness of place in a sort of “reveren[t]...deep attentiveness to forces much greater than our own” (35) may bring the miracles of salvation (35). This language is loaded with spiritual or religious diction, giving us hope that we can attain the spiritual paradise of heaven by learning from nature, further emphasized by the image relating God as a circle to a respect for your own sacred, rooted place (37). This image depicts God as a circle whose center is everywhere, since God is everywhere at all times; thus, one can reach enlightenment anywhere, as long as he is rooted to the spot.

Moreover, Sanders points out the instructive capacity of nature in helping us learn about human values and ecological awareness. After expressing his admiration of the determination and perseverance of the Millers, Sanders notes, “...most human achievements worth admiring are the result of such devotion” (35). This sound advice expresses the value of determination and perseverance and the fruitful benefits they may produce, given due time; for instance, we believe in putting forth effort, time and money into obtaining a complete education in hopes that we will reap sizable benefits in the future (i.e. high-paying job, nice cars, etc.). Sanders also correlates the value of rootedness and commitment to a place to human recklessness in our relationships with both other humans and with the environment. Expressing concern in our tendency as a

Christina Bosilkovski

Page # 3

nation to relinquish responsibility and ignore our failures by simply moving on to something or somewhere else, Sanders underscores the importance of sticking to one place and working through our problems as the solution to several seemingly unconnected problems of our society. For example, our alarmingly high divorce rate can be in part attributed to the impatient “quick-fix” attitude of our nation. If a solution is not close and within plain sight, we tend to abandon the effort completely. Such is our attitude towards nature also. As soon as we’ve exhausted the utility or resources of a certain area, we irresponsibly move on to destroy a new area instead of restoring vitality to the one we have leached. Hence, we can learn to accept responsibility for our actions, which may remedy many of our society’s problems.

Likewise, Cronon’s “Getting Back to the Wrong Nature” demonstrates the instructive role of nature as a source of revelations to humans. Although Cronon argues that the nature we have today is just a creation of human society, he claims there is much we can still learn from wilderness. Cronon believes that humans must accept a sense of belonging to the wilderness, and, in so doing, humans can receive a notion of what an “ethical, sustainable, *honorable*” human role in the environment is. We must view ourselves as part of the wilderness to encourage a responsible attitude towards the environment and to remind ourselves that the whole world does not revolve around the needs and wants of humans (78). Hence, by renouncing the “set of bipolar moral scales” (78) of anthropocentrism we have established and by perceiving ourselves as part of wilderness, we can receive a sense of responsibility and duty towards that of which we

Christina Bosilkovski

Page # 4

are a part, similar to Sanders' concept of the acceptance of responsibility as the solution to many of our society's problems. Once we accept the wilderness as part of our "home" (78), we can recognize the impact of our actions on all that surrounds us; further, it can help us appreciate the wildness of that which we do not term "wild," such as a tree on a street corner. Since wilderness can, therefore, be found anywhere, much like the meaning behind Sanders' image of God as a circle, we can experience it everywhere, inspiring a "critical self-consciousness in all of our action" (79) as we realize that all of our actions as humans have their impact on something somewhere.

Like Sanders, Cronon extends his conception of nature's revelations to a spiritual and moral level. Cronon's call for the union of the human world with the world of wilderness will not only foster environmental awareness, but also help us succeed at "the unending task of struggling to live rightly in the world" (79). Thus, it offers hope of salvation, while lighting the correct moral path or attitude that must be followed in order to attain it. Moreover, LeGuin's "May's Lion" narrates a farmwoman's encounter with a lion both on a realistic level and a fictional level, demonstrating similar revelations nature has made to the human world. While the fictional account seems perhaps somewhat too embellished or idealistic, it helps convey across the significance of a closeness to nature and the benefits we may receive from this union. In the fictional account, when the sick lion comes so near Rains End's house, the narrator speculates that the sick lion may have come so near them because he is "spiritually moved to act strangely" (311). Hence, he implies that humans are not the only ones with emotions and souls, but that animals too

Christina Bosilkovski

Page # 5

can act beyond the primitive level; furthermore, the narrator wonders that perhaps the lion is a messenger sent to deliver revelations from some greater force (311). Thus, the narrator perceives the lion, sent by an other-worldly power, as a possible source of enlightening information yet unknown to humans. Heaven-sent angels, for instance, are most closely associated with the idea of other-worldly messengers, delivering messages of hope and inspirational guidance. The narrator depicts the lion's death as a gift brought to May in order that she may be enlightened by it, but that despite man's interference with this gift when the police came and shot the lion, May still benefited from this encounter when she "followed the lion where he went, years ago now" (313), implicating that May was reunited with the lion in heaven when she died. Thus, LeGuin even breaks new ground in suggesting that not only do animals have souls, but that they may also go to heaven too.

Leopold's "Thinking Like a Mountain" also delves into the revelations nature imparts unto us, teaching us the importance of ecological awareness and the foolishness of our anthropocentric attitude. The narrator describes how after watching a wolf that he shoots die, his perceptions of his place in the world and how he thinks of nature change. He contrasts the anthropocentric human mode of thinking with the mountain's nature-centered mode of thinking. He relates how he ambitiously rushes forward to kill the wolf, believing that the fewer wolves in the world, the better off humans would be. Yet, after seeing the "fierce green fire d[ie] in her eyes" (138), he realizes the error in his system of beliefs. He learns that what may seem better for humans in the short-term may have

harmful effects on the environment (i.e. populations that are typically preyed on by wolves may increase dramatically if wolves are extirpated, causing other problems by disturbing the ecological balance), which is why the mountain disagrees with the narrator's former human-centered views (139). Leopold concludes by suggesting that there is hidden meaning in the wolf's howl: salvation may lie in wildness (141). Hence, as in the other three narratives, nature offers us hope of salvation if only we can learn the lessons it can teach us.

Thus, nature has much to offer us in terms of guidance and salvation, if only we are open-minded and perceptive enough to receive this instruction. So, is there indeed a balance that is beneficial to both humans and to nature that can allow both to coexist without ruining the other? If humans can learn from nature's lessons, not only would our relationship with the environment improve but so would our social problems overall. There is a balance- however delicate it may be- that allows humans to obtain what they need of nature's resources while encouraging environmental prosperity and responsibility. Whether we pick up on and follow nature's hints is up to us.