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# Through Her Own Eyes: Environmental Rhetoric in Women's Autobiographical Frontier Writing

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THROUGH HER OWN EYES: ENVIRONMENTAL RHETORIC IN WOMEN'S  
AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL FRONTIER WRITING

by

CRYSTAL TODD WRIGHT

Under the Direction of Lynee Lewis Gaillet

ABSTRACT

*Through Her Own Eyes: Environmental Rhetoric in Women's Autobiographical Frontier Writing* identifies frontier women, those who traveled overland to the West and those who homesteaded, as historical ecofeminists. The purpose of this study is to analyze frontier women's environmental rhetoric in their journals and letters, which encouraged readers to become closer to nature and get to know it while encountering new land in the West. Promoting a close relationship with nature, frontier women's writing also implied conserving and protecting nature for future generations, which demonstrates how they can be retroactively labeled ecofeminists. Frontier women's environmental rhetoric reveals their alignment with Carolyn Merchant's theory for harmony between humankind and nature: partnership ethics. Although many historians have mentioned frontier women's emphasis on nature in their narratives, few have explored frontier women's nature writing at length. Glenda Riley has completed a book-length study of early

American women environmentalists, but she mentions only women whose environmental work led to documented activism or membership in conservation organizations. Annette Kolodny's work focused on frontier women's fantasies about the west, rather than their environmental rhetoric as a way of persuading readers, whereas my work uses frontier women's daily writing to demonstrate an evolving environmental ethic that helps to categorize them as historical ecofeminists. An archival project, this study relies upon the archived overland journals of Sarah Sutton and Nancy Sherwin, both housed at UC Berkeley's Bancroft Library as well as the letters of female homesteader Elinore Pruitt Stewart, archived at the Sweetwater County Museum. A visit to the archives at the Sweetwater County Museum yielded the treasure of Elinore Pruitt Stewart's numerous unpublished letters. Frontier women's philosophical alignment with ecofeminism made it possible for ecological philosophies to begin taking root in the American West. As historical ecofeminists, frontier women's writing laid the foundation for the modern-day ecological conscience that makes individuals work to conserve nature for future generations.

INDEX WORDS: Environment, Rhetoric, Frontier, Ecofeminism, Environmental ethic, Environmental history

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CRYSTAL TODD WRIGHT

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### **Dedication**

This text is dedicated to my family. To my parents, Mike and Lori Todd, who told me that I could be anything I wanted and who raised me surrounded with unconditional love and acceptance. To my in-laws, Larry and Celia Wright, who made me a part of a much bigger family. To my husband, Richard, who pushed me when I didn't think I could keep going. And to my daughter, Avery, to have you is to be complete.

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## Introduction: Frontier Women

The three women in my study were chosen because of their unique relationships with nature as related in their autobiographical writing. I examine Sarah Sutton's overland trail diary, which is housed at the University of California at Berkeley's Bancroft Library. Sutton's journal has also been anthologized in Kenneth Holmes' series, *Covered Wagon Women*. My second source is Nancy Sherwin's overland trail diary, which is also archived at the Bancroft Library. My final subject is Elinore Pruitt Stewart, who published two books, *The Letters of a Woman Homesteader* and *Letters on an Elk Hunt*. While I refer to Stewart's published work and cite a few letters from those publications, I primarily utilize letters published in her biography by Susanne George, or unpublished letters collected by George during her research for the biography and archived at the Sweetwater County Historical Museum.

Sarah Sutton's overland trail diary reflects her acknowledgement that the best example of civilization can be found in nature itself. Sutton's journal suggests that she believes that man does not civilize nature, nature civilizes man. Her unique relationship with nature is expressed in her diary and her environmental rhetoric meant to show her reader that all humankind needs to know about civilization and balance between humankind and nature is present on the frontier. The balance that Sutton explores in her journal expresses is a key concept of ecofeminist philosophy.

Nancy Sherwin's journal describes her spiritual journey as she travels the overland trail to California. Her relationship with nature begins to transform as she makes her way west. Slowly her understanding of nature begins to shift from the position that nature is God's way of expressing his grandeur, to the realization that nature itself is alive. As Sherwin's journey progress-

es, nature becomes the main character in the journal, eclipsing Sherwin herself as the central focus of the travel narrative. More subtle than Sutton's journal, Sherwin is showing her reader how nature can change people and that it has a will of its own and is more than an instrument for humankind, suggesting that humankind and nature must relate to one another. It is this relationship between humankind and nature that demonstrates the ecofeminist principle of cooperating with nature in non-dominating ways.

Elinore Pruitt Stewart is the most famous woman homesteader in American Literature. As a published author in 1914, Stewart had a wide readership. However, apart from Stewart's lively stories of life on the Wyoming frontier, her letters expose a woman with deep connections to her homestead and the land that she worked so hard to call her own. In letters written to valued confidants and pen pals, Stewart explores her relationship with nature in thought-provoking detail, revealing a woman who valued nature highly as a part of her persona and wanted her reader to connect with the land of the west as she did. Stewart's attention to nature and her depiction of both her love of nature and her individual relationship with it, offers an example of how Stewart is an historical ecofeminist, whose words show other women how to follow in her footsteps.

A crucial piece of my analysis is the historical milieu in which these documents were created. I believe that it is impossible to analyze autobiographical writing of the kind done on the Overland trail without first piecing together the world the writers inhabited. This historical background provides the necessary context for understanding each of the frontier women I analyze, their potential audience(s), their reactions to nature along the trail, and their writing. Chapter one explores the history and context of the Overland trail and frontier experience for women.

I also build on the scholarship of others. Annette Kolodny's texts on women and men's reaction to nature during the settlement of new lands is an essential piece of my work that I ex-

plore mostly in chapters one and two. I utilize the ecofeminist philosophy scholarship of Karen Warren and others to describe philosophically the way that my subjects related to nature and as a way of offering a modern-day interpretation of their relationships with nature. I also rely heavily on Carolyn Merchant's partnership ethic, as described in *Earthcare*, as a way to piece together how each of my subjects is living in an active partnership with nature and how she does so. Aldo Leopold's land ethic is also an essential piece of my work. I relate Warren, Merchant, and Leopold to each other and then apply their work to my subjects. I build on the work of these scholars and many others to demonstrate how frontier women are historical ecofeminists whose writing depicts an awareness of nature as a living creature worthy of collaboration. Because the term ecofeminism wasn't coined until after my subjects lived, I am applying the term retroactively as a way to show how even though frontier women might not have thought of themselves as environmentalists and conservators of nature, their words express a care and consideration for non-human nature that represents the philosophical undertones of ecofeminist philosophy and its application in everyday life. To signify the anachronistic use of ecofeminism, I am labeling my subjects as historical ecofeminists to represent the application of contemporary terminology to describe historical figures.

### ***Chapter Overview***

I document much of the history of western migration and living conditions on the Overland trail and frontier in chapter one to contextualize the daily living conditions as well as the social conditions that prompted women and their families to participate in the westward migration. In order to understand why nature played such an important role in the daily lives of frontier women, I had to acknowledge how their lives would affect their interpretation of nature, and the way they depicted it in their journals and letters.

In chapter two I explore ecofeminist philosophy and how it relates retroactively to the frontier and frontier women. I build on the work of Karen Warren, Carolyn Merchant, and Aldo Leopold particularly in order to describe ecofeminist philosophy, and also to demonstrate how ecofeminist philosophy can be extended and applied to historical subjects. Using this philosophical background allows me to explore how and why frontier women related to nature. The way that they express their relationship to nature in their writing is itself environmental rhetoric created in an historical context, which grounds modern American environmental rhetoric.

Chapter three is an analysis of Sarah Sutton's overland trail journal. I explore her extensive use of biblical reference, as well as the Bible's connection to Sutton's own environmental ethic. Sutton's journal explores frontier Garden-of-Eden fantasies, and in a self-exploratory way, Sutton begins to understand how God and nature are intimately and immediately connected to her as well as where she views God and nature as separate entities. Her Journal is frontier promotionalism, but more thorough analysis suggests a much deeper purpose to her writing than merely promoting the settlement of the new frontier.

Chapter four analyzes the Overland journal of Nancy Sherwin. Sherwin's journal, unlike Sutton's reveals an environmental transformation that suggests that Sherwin began to see outside of herself while traveling west. This relation to the world outside awakens her and encourages her to get to know herself while she gets to know nature. Sherwin's transformation suggests that she begins to see nature as a valuable being, not just an impassive thing that God reveals his glory through. This awareness broadens the scope of Sherwin's care for nature and her promotion of environmental protection.

Chapter five analyzes the letters of Elinore Pruitt Stewart. Self-styled as the woman homesteader, Stewart is the most well-known of my subjects. However, I analyze little-known or

unpublished letters here to tell the story of Stewart's environmental agenda. As a homesteader rather than an overland traveler, Stewart's letters are different and their description of nature and her relationship with it are more descriptive and in-depth since her relationship with her land is established after years of homesteading on it. Stewart's environmental ethic is also more developed and offers a more thoughtful view into her world and why she encouraged other women to take up homesteading and protect nature.

As a woman born and raised in the American West, I identify with my three subjects in a very personal way. I was raised in Southwest Wyoming near where Elinore Pruitt Stewart homesteaded. Frontier women are lauded in my home state for their many contributions to western history and the settling of the West. Proud of my western heritage, I found in each of my subjects shared common ground: a profound connection to nature and specifically to western land. In each of their texts I connected with the ways they described their lengthy journey to the west and the way they described the natural phenomena they encountered along the way. Of all the texts, I am most emotionally attached to Elinore Pruitt Stewart's letters. Her love for Wyoming land speaks to me personally. Of course Stewart mentions Wyoming and nature in almost every single letter. Her descriptions of the land are visual and rhetorical, offering her reader a chance to "see" Wyoming as she sees it and Stewart promotes it as a land that offered women freedom and prosperity. Many of the sights the women described in their journals or letters are familiar to me. Reading of their first glimpses of Independence Rock brings back memories of climbing the rock as a child and looking at the thousands of inscriptions still visible upon it. My intention with this research is to show how frontier women's environmental rhetoric reveals their ecofeminist philosophies and their status as historical ecofeminists. This project and the women I have analyzed here have forever reminded me that though I no longer reside in the West, it resides in me.

## **Chapter One: The Frontier Experience**

In *Writing the Trail: Five Women's Frontier Narratives*, Deborah Lawrence points out the distinct value frontier women's journals, letters, and travel narratives bring to western and environmental history scholars:

Narratives by westering women depict day-to-day existence in the frontier West. They include details about the living conditions seldom found in the more formal, public writings by men, which is precisely why women's diaries, letters, memoirs, and autobiographies are continuing to be ignored by those of us in English departments. Despite recent studies on western history, women's diaries, journals, and letters are considered by literary scholars as subliterate – pieces of local color, at best. This attitude needs to change because the new western scholarship is rewriting the literary history of the United States. (2-3)

I would argue that new western scholarship is rewriting history on a much broader scale than simply rewriting literary history. Western scholarship offers insights into cultural history, environmental history, geological history, etc. My work uses frontier women's autobiographical writing and environmental rhetoric to describe frontier environmental history and how frontier women's writing aligns itself with ecofeminist philosophy to promote conservation and protection of nature in the West.

The westward migration is so much more than the settling of the West and the extraordinary achievements of everyday men and women. It is the story of a land transformed by mass migration and seen through the eyes of weary travelers. Fundamentally, the settlement of the West is about the land. Every man, woman, and child who ventured west did so with the promise of land and what it could offer them. Scholars have written the story of westward expansion from the viewpoint of many groups: male explorers, trappers, Mormons, wagon trains, and more recently, women. My study uses women's autobiographical frontier narratives to interpret the frontier experience for women. I focus on frontier women's relationships with their changing environment and their reactions to nature. The inclusion of nature in their narratives suggests that



frontier women connected with nature in such a way as to lay the foundation for an ecologically aware population of women who would advocate for the protection of natural resources.

Many scholars including Dee Brown, whose book *The Gentle Tamers* has been influential for scholars who study frontier women, have described frontier women as “reluctant” or suffering on the trail. These descriptions narrowly describe the frontier experience for women and ignore the vast diversity of experience depicted in the frontier narratives of women. Even historian Lillian Schlissel, whose *Women’s Diaries of the Westward Journey* is considered a foundational text of women’s journals and experiences on the frontier describes frontier women’s participation in westward expansion in terms that suggest reluctance, “Women were part of the journey because their fathers, husbands, and brothers had determined to go. They went west because there was no way for them not to go” (9). Schlissel’s observation is certainly true, it suggests that all women went west without enthusiasm, that they merely followed the men in their lives. However, historical documents such as diaries and letters prove this claim is not true.

Marcia Meredith Hensely’s book, *Staking Her Claim* is a collection of writing by single women homesteaders who came west of their own accord. Frontier women’s responses to the journey and its outcome were much more varied than simply as a group of women who followed the men in their lives, as the diaries and letters explored in chapters three, four, and five demonstrate. The journals I analyze here are a way of looking at frontier women three-dimensionally and seeing the western migration for its contributions to modern-day environmental concerns.

### ***Why They Came***

Most settlers came west to take advantage of land, whether they bought land or claimed it through the Homestead Act. Although they came for the land, their intentions for their land varied. Like other historians, Frederick Jackson Turner breaks down the western frontier(s) into

waves of settlers who pushed the boundary of the frontier further west. However, rather than distinguishing those groups by time period as others have done, Turner separates them by occupation,

The unequal rate of advance compels us to distinguish the frontier into the trader's frontier, the rancher's frontier, or the miner's frontier, and the farmer's frontier. When the mines and the cow pens were still near the fall line the traders' pack trains were tinkling across the Alleghenies, and the French on the Great Lakes were fortifying their posts, alarmed by the British trader's birch canoe. When the trappers scaled the Rockies, the farmer was still at the mouth of the Missouri. (24)

This distinction between pioneers is important because it defines the differences between not only men and women traveling overland, but their reasons for traveling and how they interacted with the land of the west. Each of these occupations altered the landscape differently. Generally speaking, the trader helped carve out trails that led to the west, the rancher's livestock grazed the lands of the west unchecked, the miner carved away pieces of rock and sand to find his treasures, and the farmer planted and irrigated stubborn, arid land. My three subjects fit into Turner's categories. Sarah Sutton was going toward the farmer's frontier; Nancy Sherwin toward the trader's frontier; and Elinore Pruitt Stewart toward the rancher's frontier. All three of these women came to the frontier looking for something. That something was the promise of a better, more prosperous life in the West and to do that they all had to come to terms with their environment.

Determining which frontier she was headed toward (trader, farmer, or rancher) also helps to contextualize how a frontier woman would interact with nature. The trader might come into

contact with people on the frontier and set up a business in a settlement. The farmer was headed to land that she would interact with directly as needed for survival and prosperity. The rancher interacted with his land through planting and irrigating, but also through interaction with a large number of livestock. These frontiers contained different scopes of alteration of or interaction with nature.

### ***How They Got There: Routes West***

Part of any frontier woman's story is how she got to the west. The route she traveled is an essential part of not only her story, but her relationship with nature. Key to understanding the importance of nature in the life of the frontier woman is familiarity with the routes settlers took to the west. These routes were marked by peculiar natural phenomena that many women encountered for the first time as they traveled or settled in the west. Their responses to Chimney Rock, Independence Rock, or Scott's Bluff helps to ground the journals in some shared experiences and understand how each woman related to her new and ever changing surroundings. Each woman's reaction to her new environment helps readers to understand how she viewed nature in her everyday life and its importance. For example, how frontier women viewed arid lands that had fewer trees, or more open spaces alerts her reader to which aspects of nature she felt were most valuable to her whether that value came in the form of pure aesthetic quality or resources for her family.

There were several trails settlers took to the West. One was through Panama by way of sea and land over Mexico and into California. Of the trails to the West Myres writes in her book, *HO! For California!*, "One of the best publicized and most popular routes to the Golden West was the great overland trail along the Platte and across the Rockies to Utah. There the road split. The Oregon Trail turned north toward the Columbia River and the Cascade Range while the Cal-

ifornia Trail turned south along the Humboldt and across the Sierra Nevada” (Myres 35). Two of my subjects, Sarah Sutton and Nancy Sherwin, followed the overland trail by way of the Platte River. My third subject, Elinore Pruitt Stewart, traveled west on the railroad. The overland trail, with its thousands of travelers forever marked and changed the land it covered. Women who wrote of their time on the overland trail and the role of nature in their everyday lives suggest an intimacy with nature that supports the ethos of modern-day conservation and preservation organizations and points to the early origins of the American environmental movement.

There were other trails, like the Gila Trail that brought travelers to California through the southwest. Myres describes each route as well as the pros and cons of travel along the route. She also includes a journal written from each trail, which offers scholars a way to compare and contrast not only the different ways of traveling westward, but also the shared experiences along the trail and the different landmarks passed along the way. Myres’ book contextualizes the western migration and its impact on landscape in a greater scope by showing how different routes impacted settlers differently and how settlers reacted to diverse climates. Most often the story of western migration is told from the perspective of the overland traveler, and Myres explores it from more than one angle offering a more complete picture of western migration including its impact on nature.

### ***The Westward Migration as a Shared Experience***

Despite the myriad differences between each woman’s overland journey and the trail on which they traveled, frontier women did experience many of the same things as they traveled west. Many of those similarities are present in their writing. Sandra Myres asserts that the journals of women traveling overland followed a pattern. First the writer describes prepping for the

journey, sadness over leaving family and friends, and excitement at departure. The journals then go on to describe the first time camping out, Indians encountered, etc. Next the writers document the scenic wonders they encountered such as Chimney Rock, Independence Rock, etc. (*How to California* 36-7). The significance of the pattern followed in the journals reflects the ways in which the journey west was a shared experience, and yet each journal allows for the individuality of the writer and his/her unique experiences to stand apart from the other journals. My study will utilize the writing of three women whose overland trail/homestead narratives explore shared experiences and common ground while also revealing their individuality in their story telling to promote early strand of ecofeminism and explore women's interactions with nature.

The three women of my study — Sarah Sutton, Nancy Sherwin, and Elinore Pruitt Stewart — left extensive written documentation of their time on the frontier. All three of my subjects detail their relationship with nature in their journals or letters and all three of them promote a close connection with nature on the Overland trail or the lands of the west. Their narratives depict women's environmental rhetoric that reveals the growing attachment frontier women had to their environment(s) as well as their attempts to encourage readers to enrich their own relationships with nature.

While scholars such as Annette Kolodny, Deborah Lawrence, Lillian Schlissel, Sandra Myres, and Glenda Riley have often acknowledged the attention women gave to their environment and nature in their frontier narratives, none of them take overland trail journals and analyze them for environmental rhetoric, their contribution to environmental history, or view them as historical ecofeminists whose writing suggests that women were beginning to think about relating to nature as though it were another living being. Despite the difference in our approach to frontier women and their relationships with nature and writing, my analysis of the three women I include

here would not be complete without their work. In this chapter and chapter two, I build on their historical analyses of frontier women and their writing.

By using the historical work of Schlissel, Myres, and Riley, I am able to contextualize the environment of my subjects, which helps me to elaborate on frontier women's relationships with nature and how they express these relationships in their narratives as well as show where they fall in line with western mythology and where their writing shows them to be unique. Glenda Riley asserts that frontier women's "written and visual images offered a new view of nature, one that welcomed women. Frequently, women's interpretations of western landscapes even appeared soft and sensual rather than harsh and threatening" (*Women and Nature* xiii). In her April 30, entry, Sarah Sutton describes the land as, "Here is a high rich rolling land as was ever seen with a strip of timber along the creek" (3). Sutton's use of the phrase "high rich rolling land" depicts the sensuality Riley describes and it also makes the land seem inviting for women by describing scenes that imply fertility and beauty in romantic terms. The differences that Riley describes between men's and women's interpretations of nature suggest that gender differences affect how women not only relate to nature, but how they share those interpretations with their readers. This distinction points out that women and men used different rhetorical devices to encourage their readers to travel west and they offered different advice for weathering the difficult journey to the west. These gender differences relate to ecofeminist philosophy and are the foundation of my analysis.

### ***Gender Differences on the Trail***

Annette Kolodny and Sandra Myres have explored gender roles on the frontier at length. Myres asserts that, "Different women experienced different conditions, reacted in different ways to the westward journey. Westering, as revealed in the diaries of both men and women, was nei-

ther a male adventure nor a female endurance test. It was a human experience in which all – men, women, and children – participated as individuals. Women’s perceptions of themselves and their companions are as varied as those of male writers” (*Ho for California!* x). The western migration included all members of the family who experienced the west in ways unique to them however, women’s autobiographical frontier writing sets them apart from men by exploring a more personal and intimate connection to nature and a relationship with nature that explores co-operation between the two agents. The cooperative relationship between women and nature as presented by the three women I analyze here depicts the importance of gender on the frontier and how gender impacts environmental ethics, environmental rhetoric, and the future of environmental conservation. In chapter two I will explore closely the relationship between gender and the environment and what this relationship means for the environmental rhetoric of frontier women.

### ***Western Mythology***

The setting of the American West has its own mythology. Western mythology traps frontier women into stereotypical categories, which limits not only how they are portrayed in scholarship, but how their writing is interpreted. I cannot analyze the writing of frontier women without acknowledging the limited ways they have been represented in both scholarship and popular culture, in order to show how analyzing their environmental rhetoric brings them outside of the historical box they’ve been placed in.

The mythology of the west is shaped by stereotypes of men and women and their roles in camp life along the trail. The stereotypes ascribed to men and women pigeon-holed individuals making it difficult to really interpret the full scope of their influence on the frontier. Myres de-

scribes the roles ascribed to women, in particular to highlight how these views of women on the frontier have become commonplace in both literature and scholarship:

Thus westering women became the protagonists of a stereotyped version of the west as false as that of the Hollywood Indian. The redman rides into the sunset, tall, bronzed, stoic, crowned with an eagle feather warbonnet. The white woman strides westward with grim-faced determination, clad in gingham, wreathed in a sunbonnet, baby at breast, bravely awaiting unknown dangers while she yearns for home and hearth. And, in recent years, a new picture of the westering woman has emerged from the writings of feminist historians. She is the trail drudge, reluctant companion, and overworked helpmate following wearily after the wagons.

(ix-x)

Frontier women's diaries both challenge and support these stereotypes. As each woman creates herself in her journal, she is either supporting or rejecting what have become the stereotypes associated with the frontier experience. Understanding how each woman creates her persona in her journal and her reasons for doing so helps me to interpret her writing and her reasons for relating to nature and promoting an ecofeminist philosophy. The diaries and letters also offer scholars a chance to explore the differences between each woman's experiences on the frontier so that women's roles on the frontier can be more broadly defined and interpreted, and so that scholars can better understand gender and social roles on the frontier. Expanding scholars' knowledge of western settlement and the way that men and women contributed to frontier life adds new dimension to western history, giving scholars a more complete view of western settlement. Understanding how each woman's experience on the frontier was different from her peers' grounds how she interacted with her surroundings and others, broadening the historical picture



painted by history. For example, those who had an easier time on the trail or frontier might have looked at the land romantically as the frontier of their fantasies, but women who struggled and encountered hardship after hardship might have interpreted nature along the trail as an adversary and represented it thus in their writings. Deborah Lawrence's analysis of Sarah Royce's journals in *Writing the Trail* asserts that, "Often the landscape echoes her physical state. Her complaints of thirst and hunger become a refrain. Threatened by physical hardships she turns to God, and it is this image that becomes the predominant undercurrent of her text" (37). Lawrence's analysis shows how frontier narratives and environmental interpretation were intertwined for some women and how they support stereotypes but also offer up sites of new inquiry such as how women used their environment as a rhetorical device to demonstrate trail life for their reader.

Joan M. Jensen and Darliss A. Miller's essay, "The Gentle Tamers Revisited: New Approaches to the History of Women in the American West" explores western mythology and the gender roles assigned to frontier women and the limitations of those gender roles in scholarship. They list the stereotypes used to label frontier women as, "gentle tamers, sunbonneted helpmates, hell-raisers, and bad women" (12). Jensen and Miller acknowledge the myriad limitations that these categories offer in terms of understanding not only frontier women, but their experiences in the West as well as their contributions to western settlement. Jensen and Miller suggest a few categories worth studying to expand the existing history of women in the west, "migration west; demography on both the rural and urban frontier; relations among women of different cultures; politics; and occupations as examples of the possibilities for reevaluating the history of women in the West" (16). Not listed in Jensen and Miller's list is women's relationship with nature, which is my focus, but I, too, seek to explore a more diverse understanding of women's lives on

the frontier in order to better understand the history of the American West. Jensen and Miller's call for new scholarship on western women has largely gone unanswered.

In order to explore new and different angles of women's frontier experiences, I have to understand and relate to the established stereotypes. The categories listed by Jensen and Miller offer a flattened view of frontier women and their experiences. Frontier women's journals and letters depict their writers as three-dimensional women who shaped frontier life in diverse ways, which is why they're a good model for understanding how women influenced the settlement of the West and the environment of the West. Applying ecofeminist philosophy to their writing can help us to see how they shaped the modern-day environmental movement.

Of all the female stereotypes listed by Jensen and Miller, the sunbonnetted helpmate and the gentle tamer are the two most common stereotypes applied to frontier women in scholarship and they are the two stereotypes most prominent in frontier diaries. Each represents an extreme view of frontier women and the roles they played on the frontier. Myres sarcastically describes the sunbonnetted helpmate's limitless abilities and her undeniable physical strength:

The sturdy helpmate could fight Indians, kill the bear in the barn, make two pots of lye soap, and do a week's wash before dinnertime and still have the cabin neat, the children clean, and a good meal on the table when her husband came in from the fields – all without a word of complaint or even a hint of an ache or pain. She was the Madonna of the Prairies, the Brave Pioneer Mother, the Gentle Tamer so familiar in Western Literature. (*Westering Women* 3)

Myres lumps the helpmate and the gentle tamer together and characterizes them as the same woman to further illustrate the absurdity of the representation of frontier women in American Literature. Like Jensen and Miller, I assert that they are two distinct categories of frontier

women. The sunbonnetted helpmate and her sister, the gentle tamer, were created with great literary license. The gentle tamer is also used to depict the frontier woman as a civilizer along the trail. However, despite the narrow confines of the stereotypes, both of these women are present in the journals I analyze here. Sarah Sutton presents herself as a civilizing force on the frontier whose knowledge of her faith and the Bible brings God to the frontier. Nancy Sherwin is proud to classify herself in her journal as a gentle tamer, which she does by creating a persona in her journal. Discussed in detail in chapter four, Sherwin presents herself as a faithful, gentle, and steadfast woman whose presence alone brings good to the frontier. On the other end of the spectrum, Elinore Pruitt Stewart presents herself as the sunbonnetted helpmate, which she certainly creates with great literary license. Her presentation of herself matches Myres' tongue-in-cheek description of the helpmate. While these two categories of women are vastly different from one another, they did exist in frontier women's autobiographical narratives. The gentle tamer and the sunbonnetted helpmate also represent women whose experiences on the frontier varied widely. And while these stereotypes support historical depictions of the frontier and women's place on it, they also eliminate space in which to discuss women whose experiences place them outside of the two categories or in between and the categories leave an incomplete picture of history despite the volume of first-person accounts of the time. Frontier women's stories share with readers the everyday details of life that men often left out, but the way that each woman relates her story helps her stand out from the others. While the diaries have many similarities, none of the voices sound the same. For example, while both Sutton and Sherwin rely upon their faith as a rhetorical device in their journals to persuade their reader to go west, they each use religion in a unique way. Sutton quotes biblical passages and relates them directly to her journey and members in her party, while Sherwin uses her faith and religious rhetoric to contextualize an awakening charac-

terized by her increasing environmental awareness. Stewart does use some religious rhetoric in her letters, but relies much more on romantic descriptions with transcendental undertones of her environment to relate her individual story to her reader. Although each of the three women studied here have strong ties to their environment, they all write about nature with similar themes, but in very different ways. Their individuality is what makes frontier women not only interesting, but an essential part of western and environmental history.

Frontier myths create a narrow scope from which the frontier experience cannot accurately be depicted since the myths restrict the way that scholars and readers of western history understand and interpret the realities of the westering family. Western mythology, unlike other mythologies, is often taken as historical truth because so much of it is repeatedly spread by historians and in popular culture. For me, recognizing western myths is the first step toward interpreting western settlement more accurately. Reading and analyzing the diaries and letters of travelers and homesteaders offers a more complete view of western history and the westering experience that both supports and denies established western mythology. My analysis acknowledges where frontier women fall in line with frontier mythology, but also where the women reveal themselves to be individuals who contribute to scholarship in areas where they've not been included before.

Historian Frederick Jackson Turner's frontier thesis, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," also perpetuated the myth that the west was made up of "free" land when he stated that what made the American frontier so different was "that it lies at the hither edge of free land" (20). Acknowledging the unusual way that the American government encouraged western settlement (The Homestead Act of 1862) is a key piece of understanding characteristics that have been used to define not only the American Dream, but also the myth of the American West. Turner's appreciation for the appeal of free land, which seemed to offer limitless possibilities

and prosperity, shapes his interpretation of American history. Turner's American frontier is still present in popular culture and scholarship of the American West. In 1894, Turner didn't have the benefit of hindsight to see that most settlers were not homesteaders, which meant that most settlers did not take advantage of the free land (Faragher 134-5). The fact that free land features at all in Turner's thesis, allows him to imply that America was a place that wanted settlers to succeed and that America was so vast and big it had land to give away. The myth that America was so vast it had land to spare ignores the reality that not all land in the west was fertile. Much of western land was arid and there were large expanses of desert between the fertile far west and the east. Land was a central character in western settlement and historians have been ignoring its story by further creating myths to define its presence in American western history. In the journals and letters of women, the story of western land can be pieced together.

The mythology surrounding the expansion of the American western frontier was supported by the government and the "Jeffersonian promise that ordinary citizens – armed only with courage, stamina, and self-reliance – could move west, stake modest claims to the land, and make a success of it. The promise depended on the availability of boundless, fertile and cheap western land – and in post-Civil War America, this land was underwritten by the Homestead Act of 1862" (Hine and Faragher 138).

### ***Nature Myths in the New World***

The western American frontier has changed as new waves of western migration pushed its boundary further to the west. The first American western frontier was the American East Coast. When British explorers landed on the Virginia coast to persuade others to join them in the "west," they wrote home of a fertile land that produced abundantly. *The Lay of the Land: Meta-*

*phor as Experience and History in American Life and Letters* by Annette Kolodny explores the writing of male explorers who employed environmental rhetoric to encourage more settlers to travel to the New World to establish settlements. In their letters back home, explorers promised fertile lands that produced with little effort on the part of the farmer. Kolodny quotes a letter from men in Raleigh's expedition,

Master Ralph Lane, the first governor of Raleigh's colonial enterprise in Virginia, averred that his own personal experience in the new colony proved it to have "the goodliest soil under the cope of heaven, "with a "climate so wholesome, that we had not one sick since we touched land here." "So abounding with sweet trees," "so many sorts of apothecary drugs, such several kinds of flax," wheat, corn, and sugar cane was it, in fact that he "dar[d] assure [himself], being inhabited with the English, no realm in Christendom were comparable to it." (11)

In *The Lay of the Land*, Kolodny's focus is the way that men established the land as a virgin, female frontier in their writing. The above description made by male explorers, despite being attributed to the American East Coast, was applied by future settlers to lands in the west, which suggests, in part, how the mythological foundation that surrounds lands of the ever-expanding western frontier was established. These environmental enticements helped to establish myths about the far west (wherever the newest boundary for the far west might be). Men were not the only ones who promoted western settlement with promises of fertile and bounteous land. Frontier women's diaries and letters during the western migration reveal that women also sought to encourage others to travel west, but they also express a desire to relate to the land of the West and promote a respectful relationship with nature built on partnership.

Kolodny further demonstrates how male explorers of the New World told of a land that would be plentiful for humankind with very little effort. Separating an American pastoral from a European pastoral, Kolodny compares the two by pointing out the primary difference between the two pastoral ideals, “Eden, Paradise, the Golden Age, and the idyllic garden, in short, all the backdrops for European literary pastoral, were subsumed in the image of an America promising material ease without labor or hardship, as opposed to the grinding poverty of previous European existence” (6). Of course the promises made by male explorers contradict history, “For only if we acknowledge the power of the pastoral impulse to shape and structure experience can we reconcile the images of abundance in the early texts with the historical evidence of starvation, poor harvests, and inclement weather” (6). According to Kolodny, by believing in the promises made by early explorers, the first wave of settlers came to the New World to establish themselves and own land. Kolodny argues that the words of those explorers also established another set of myths; these are about nature and its ability to give to and provide for humankind, “they implied that here [the New World], at last, men might prosper with only minimum effort” (*The Lay of the Land* 11). Kolodny calls this the American Pastoral, which suggests that the land always gives back, requires little from humankind to be productive. The American pastoral promises a paradise full of fertile lands, and that nature rebounds from the abuses of humankind, “American pastoral, unlike European, holds at its very core the promise of fantasy as daily reality. Implicit in the call to emigrate, then, was the tantalizing proximity to a happiness that had heretofore been the repressed promise of a better future, a call to act out what was at once a psychological and political revolt against a culture based on toil, domination, and self-denial” (*The Lay of the Land* 7). Kolodny’s interpretation provides a context for understanding the mythology that surrounds nature in journals and letters. My analysis relies upon Kolodny’s interpretation to support wide-

spread mythology that is so ingrained in American folklore we take it for truth. Kolodny's analysis of men's reactions to nature also offers me a way to compare and contrast the environmental rhetoric of frontier women against that of frontier men, even if they were writing in two different time periods. The distinction between men and women in my study is that while frontier women didn't often write of nature as so plentiful and forgiving, they used the promise of nature to encourage more settlers to travel west, as did their male counterparts.

The American pastoral as Kolodny describes it is an underlying part of western mythology and the American dream. Explored in closer detail in chapter three, Sarah Sutton's journal offers an example of American pastoral. Sutton describes the American West as a mythical land of milk and honey. Sutton relies on biblical images in her June 12 journal entry to promote western settlement and help shape a myth that the west was a land that provided abundantly, "They went up into the mountains and came into the valleys and they saw we must go up and possess the good land of Egypt. –but it is a land of hills and valleys and watered with springs from the mountains and flows with milk and butter and an abundance of green grass for our cattle" (10). The images Sutton and others used to promote western settlement are mythological but they also hint at what people needed and wanted: the opportunity to own land and have a hand in their own destiny. The American dream promises that everyone can have a home (maybe land), family, and economic prosperity (that is greater than that of their parents) with hard work and determination. Americans pride themselves on the capitalist promise that hard work will bring about prosperity.

Kolodny continued the work she began in *The Lay of the Land* in her next book, *The Land Before Her*. In her follow-up, she writes of the fantasies that shaped women's interpretations of the frontier. Fantasies are the internal absorption of western mythology in such as the individual takes the myth and applies it to his or her life and imagines their future in the west.



Unlike male fantasies of conquering and transforming the virginal land of the west in an exploitative manner, women were tasked with creating homes on unfamiliar land and,

After initial reluctance at finding themselves on the wooded frontiers of the northeast and the Ohio valley, women quite literally set about planting gardens in these wilderness places. Later, they eagerly embraced the open and rolling prairies of places like Illinois and Texas as a garden ready-made. Avoiding for a time male assertions of a rediscovered Eden, women claimed the frontiers as a potential sanctuary for an idealized domesticity. Massive exploitation and alteration of the continent do not seem to have been part of women's fantasies. They dreamed, more modestly, of locating a home and a familial human community within a cultivated garden. (*The Land Before Her* xiii)

Kolodny suggests that men and women had different fantasies about westward expansion and that those fantasies influenced their relationships with their environment and the way they internalized those relationships (*The Land Before Her* xiii). Their fantasies about the west are just one way I separate men's and women's relationships with the environment and see evidence of ways in which gender might affect environmental activism. These fantasies also speak volumes about frontier women's hopes for their new homes, for their new lives, and why they forged such rich relationships with their environment.

Sutton, Sherwin, and Stewart's environmental rhetoric supports Kolodny's claim that women's frontier fantasies were of a cultivated garden (*The Land Before Her* xiii). Sutton's fantasies were largely of cultivated gardens. Sutton writes extensively of land that she views to be fertile or good for planting a garden or lands that she identifies as unsuitable for sustaining vegetative life. In this way Sutton uses the land as a way to locate herself on the frontier and her eval-

uations of garden space suggest that gardens are a significant part of establishing a home for her. Sherwin's frontier fantasy mostly included the way she fantasized about bringing civilization and faith to the frontier. She uses her persona in her journal to civilize the wide open spaces. Stewart fantasized about being independent on her land and working cooperatively with her land. For Stewart independence was related to her ability to grow a garden and feed her family. Stewart also fantasized about using her garden to position herself in her environment and mark her own individuality.

Part of western mythology was shaped and cultivated by literature of all kinds. The mythology present in novels, guidebooks, and magazines influenced women whose families journeyed west. Whether they read frontier literature to prepare them for the journey out West or simply to immerse themselves in western fantasy, these pieces of literature forever sculpted the way the West was viewed by women and they influenced frontier women and their interpretations of frontier landscape, which shaped how women depicted the frontier experience in their own journals and letters, and reinforced stereotypes. For me, it is important to explore where my subjects accept or reject mythology and stereotypes as well as how they explore mythology in their writing since frontier myths shaped and influenced frontier women's reactions to nature.

While some literature about the west was written to simply entertain the reader, such as novels, other publications promoted western settlement and travel by describing the opportunities out West. Kolodny calls this literature "promotionalist." Much of the promotional literature depicted western settlement in romantic terms and those that did not attempted a balance between realism and fantasy. Kolodny recounts passages in Eliza Farnham's *Life in Prairie Land* where she contrasts the extreme difficulties of the first winter on the frontier with "the portrait of a well-constructed log cabin, securely protecting its occupants even 'against the greatest cold'"

(99). The inclusion of this passage reveals how women writers attempted to balance the realistic frontier with the mythic, and it suggests that these myths prevailed rather than the realistic frontier image:

For roughly thirty years, then – from about 1830 through 1860 – women’s public writings about the west purposefully and self-consciously rejected (or refined) male fantasies, replacing them with figures from the female imagination. In place of intimate woodland embraces, women hailed open rolling expanses broken here and there, by a clump of green trees...Private writings, the historical record, and even some firsthand observers, however, point to large discrepancies between the fantasy and the daily experience. (*The Land Before Her* 8-9)

Sarah Sutton and Elinore Pruitt Stewart were absolutely promoting the West in their writing. Both relied heavily upon their exposure to literature to connect with their readers. For Sutton that literature was the Bible, for Stewart, it was her devotion to popular novels including *Enchanted April* by Elizabeth Von Arnim. Both the Bible and popular literature influenced how Sutton and Stewart explored and promoted the settlement of the American West. The way that they both used literature as a tool also points directly to their fantasies and how they each internalized literature to refine their own fantasies and expectations for the West.

Kolodny connects popular literature with promotional writing by pointing out that Mary Austin Holley and Eliza Farnham’s work functioned as “promotional tracts, to be sure, *Texas* and *Life in Prairie Land* were consequential in attracting settlement to the prairies. But a no less enduring legacy may have been the spate of women’s fictions set on western landscapes that became so popular in the 1850s. For what the promotional writers had made available to the novelists of their day was a new backdrop for domestic fantasies...” (111). As a backdrop for domestic

fantasies, Holley and Farnham also created myths about the west that endure in scholarship today and generalize not only the frontier experience, but also frontier history and its influence on American history as a whole. However it is the application of Kolodny's connection between popular literature and promotional literature to individual frontier women's journals and letters that suggests just how influential these pieces of literature were to the settling of the West and its depiction in frontier women's writing. The application of literary techniques in frontier women's autobiographical writing helps to create a context for better understanding their rhetorical choices when describing nature.

While not obviously promotional literature, many settlers read and relied upon guidebooks as a way of preparing for such a lengthy journey. The use of guidebooks and their influence upon the reader and future traveler is significant since their interpretations of the landscape in their journals or letters may have been affected by reading about western lands in the guidebooks:

Most guidebook writers tried to prepare their readers for the extraordinary scenes which they would experience and included detailed descriptions of the plants, animals, climate, and topography, often in lyrical terms...Even the shorter, more terse guidebooks entries provided short descriptions of the curiosities such as Chimney Rock, Scott's Bluff, Devil's Gate, and the Sink of the Humboldt, which undoubtedly influenced later immigrants' descriptions. (*Westering Women* 27)

Although readers of guidebooks were undoubtedly influenced by the descriptions of nature in the guidebooks, the way that each woman adapted the language of the guidebook in her own journal, or created her own environmental rhetoric is worthy of exploration. What her individual rhetorical choices tell her reader is why she cared about nature and how she saw herself

relating to and protecting nature. These observations or interpretations reveal individual values related to nature and its role in each woman's life and suggest that she would protect nature, just as Roger King asserts when he describes a plurality of natures (80).

To further explore inconsistencies with frontier literature and frontier reality, Kolodny turns to Margaret Fuller whose time in Wisconsin prompted her to fantasize that, "To protect both features of her vision – the beauty of the landscape and the unbroken, prospering family – Fuller insisted that, on the expansive prairies, 'a man...may have water and wood and land enough' and yet still 'afford to leave some of it wild, and to carry out his own plans without obliterating those of nature'" (115). The balance of civilization with nature that Fuller fantasizes about suggests that families could travel west and merge their desire for prosperity and security in the land with their desire to allow nature room to grow wild and unchecked. This analysis supports preservation as well as living off the land in a transcendental balance, which reinforces some of the ideals presented by the frontier women whose journals I analyze. By exploring not only their garden fantasies in their writing, but their personal relationships with nature, Sutton, Sherwin, and Stewart all depict their interpretation of the balance between living off of the land and allowing it to thrive without intervention.

Although there are many problems with Western mythology such as its very loose characterizations of women on the frontier and their roles in frontier life, many women's diaries supported those myths. To contextualize the narratives of Sarah Sutton, Nancy Sherwin, and Elinore Pruitt Stewart, I look to their writings for evidence of the ways they fell into the frontier stereotypes that are so much a part of western mythology and I looked for evidence of the ways that they transcended the stereotypes. Examining frontier women's autobiographies within the scope of frontier mythology allows me to demonstrate how my subjects contributed to life on the fron-

tier, and also how they appealed to the sensibilities of their readers. Frontier women often characterized themselves as gentle tamers or sunbonnetted helpmates, which helped them rhetorically, toe the line for their audience. In keeping with societal expectations, frontier women couldn't always be too independent or too outspoken depending on who might read their journal. Despite the tone each woman used in her diary and the way she characterized herself, the way she writes about nature, and her interaction with nature that reveal the frontier woman's true character. Her inclusion of nature as a character in her journal and its inclusion in her everyday life suggest that she is an individual and that she's pushing away from societal boundaries despite playing into established stereotypes.

### ***Women and Nature***

What my analysis of the texts here has shown me is that women have a unique relationship with nature. Not only do they relate to nature differently than men, they write about nature differently. As Kolodny demonstrated in *The Lay of the Land* and *The Land Before Her*, male and female fantasies about nature offer distinctly different points of view that underscore how and why women have relationships with nature that are unique to their genders. Relating to their fantasies about working with nature rather than utilizing virgin land for abundant gain, women promote, even in their fantasies, partnering and cooperating with their land.

Glenda Riley asserts that gender influenced how women related to nature and depicted it, "Rather than avoiding the western 'wilderness,' American women 'conquered' it in their own way – by feminizing it. Especially through written and visual images, women put the West into an accessible, nonthreatening format" (*Women and Nature* 191). Women's overland journals and letters support Riley's assertion. These autobiographical texts depict the complexity of frontier women's lives, and their intimate connections with their surroundings. In these overland narra-

tives women explore their lives and how they intersect with their immediate environment. What this does is allow each woman to slowly begin to understand how nature affects her life immediately, and over the long term. These diaries and letters reveal an active correspondence between the frontier woman and nature. In getting to know nature, she is getting to know herself. Writing about nature appears to be self-reflexive for the frontier women I examine here. The journals and letters written by frontier women correct some of the established myths of the west by detailing not only how frontier women spent their days and the ways they contributed to frontier and trail life, but also how women got to know nature and how nature featured into their daily lives. Frontier women's use of environmental rhetoric in their journals offers a glimpse into women's interactions with nature, which sheds light on gender influence on nature relationships by showing how and why some individual women cared about nature.

A frontier woman's environmental writing in her journals or letters depict a woman whose connection to the land is not fixed or solidified, it is evolving. In Sarah Sutton's overland journal, her responses to the land are short and simple at the beginning, but as she travels on, she begins to write more and more of her surroundings. Her descriptions reveal that she sees what the natural world has to teach humankind. Sarah Sutton's journal describes the land as a traveling partner leading her to her new home in the west. In Nancy Sherwin's journal, the environment is a central character of her overland narrative. Sherwin's environmental rhetoric depicts a transformation in her environmental ethic that suggests that traveling overland changes how women view nature. Elinore Pruitt Stewart's letters written to some of her friends in the East are almost entirely environmental rhetoric. Most of the discussion in Stewart's letters is about nature and her work on her homestead as well as why working on the land is good and important for wom-

en. The letters reveal a writer who is connected to her land in such a way that the natural world is not far from her thoughts at any given time.

### ***Environmentalists on the Frontier***

In *Women and Nature: Saving the "Wild" West*, Glenda Riley criticizes historians for "women's near invisibility in the American conservation movement. Historians of women and other researchers have spent far too much time on the nineteenth-century concept of domesticity and not enough on opposition to that philosophy" (15). Trying to fill in the historical gap, Riley tracks down dozens of women who were instrumental in western environmental movements including botanists, birders, writers, and club women.

Riley mentions Elizabeth Gertrude Knight Britton, a New York botanist who "helped to establish the Wild Flower Preservation Society of America" (17) and helped establish "conservation activities for schools and garden clubs" (17) in the state of New York. Botanist Alice Eastwood also advocated for conservation. Working throughout the west, Eastwood published *A Popular Flora of Denver, Colorado* (1893), *A Handbook of the Trees of California* (1905) as well as "over three hundred leaflets, articles, and books, including essays on gardens that gained her a reputation as the 'gardener's botanist'" (43-4). Eastwood joined the Sierra Club in 1903 and wrote of her concerns about environmental abuse,

On her way to the academy [California Academy of Sciences] she collected specimens of flowers that she found between cobblestones. She admired these hardy "foreigners" but feared for their future. "This spontaneous vegetation," Eastwood commented, "indicates by its cosmopolitan character the final result of civilization. The tendency is to reduce mankind as well as plants to one dead level." (44)



Included in Riley's roster of women environmentalists is Annie Montague Alexander who established, "Berkeley's Museum of Vertebrate Zoology, but she helped endow its Museum of Paleontology as well" (49) out of fear that animals were disappearing from the wild. She and her friend Louise Kellogg collected specimens of animals indigenous to the west (48-9).

Britton, Eastwood, and Alexander are only three of the dozens of women that Riley mentions in her attempt to recover and credit some of the women who were valuable members of the environmental/conservation community. However inclusive Riley's study is, she does not include frontier women whose work was largely domestic (they often did not have the freedom to work outside of the home as many of Riley's subjects did) and whose writing has been explored for historical and literary purposes, but not for what it offers the fields of rhetoric or environmental history. Frontier women's nature writing contains clear rhetorical moves that reveals women's attitudes toward nature and predicts the conservation activities of the women Riley mentions.

I will build on Riley's work by including frontier women's autobiographical writing as a source for tracing the American environmental movement and frontier women's role in founding it. I am adding to Riley's study by using women whose writing depicts an individual relationship with nature meant to encourage its reader to examine his/her own connection to their environment. The way frontier women reached out with their rhetoric demonstrates how they were environmental activists.

### ***Conclusion***

Unlike Lillian Schlissel and Sandra Myres, my work is not a historiography, nor is it intended to be a representation of frontier history. Their historical work contextualizes the lives of the women I analyze here. Without their background, it would be impossible to understand the

social and physical influences that affected what my subjects wrote about and the way they wrote about it. This background certainly affected the way each woman explored her relationship with nature in her writing.

The women in my study lived lives that fit stereotypes assigned to western women and they lived lives that were uniquely their own. Frontier women's autobiographical narratives represent the variety of challenges and experiences women had on the trail. Their individual focus on nature in their writing helps me to piece together an essential piece of America's environmental history and forecast how modern-day humankind can revise its own relationship with nature to live collaboratively in the future.

My subjects are historical ecofeminists. Their writing explores ecofeminist philosophy as it relates to their individual lives and the way they interacted with nature and their philosophical views of how humankind should react to nature. Elinore Pruitt Stewart is the only one of the three subjects I analyze who translates her environmental philosophy to her personal environmental ethic and lifestyle in an explicit way in her letters. However, collectively the writing of frontier women suggests that they had environmental philosophies that explored partnership and collaboration with nature. The environmental philosophies of frontier women allowed them to establish relationships with their environment that allowed them to promote nature in their writing. Their promotion of nature and closeness with nature helps them to lay the foundation for modern environmental policies and groups.

## Chapter Two: Frontier Ecofeminists

The challenges frontier women experienced while traveling the Overland Trail and homesteading in the west helped them to develop relationships with nature built upon partnership since many of them learned that cooperation with nature was the key to success and, at times, survival on the frontier. These frontier women wrote about their experiences in letters home to their families and friends and in their journals. In these documents, they created a feminine environmental rhetoric characterized by giving the land life-like characteristics and writing about environmental cooperation.

Glenda Riley laments the lack of attention western women received for their conservation efforts in *Women and Nature*, but she leaves out the frontier women whose rhetoric is full of environmental references that suggest that the philosophical ideals of frontier women paved the way for western women to advocate conservation of natural resources. Frontier women's autobiographical frontier narratives position them as historical ecofeminists who viewed themselves as partnering with nature on the frontier.

Frontier women's writing offers a wealth of information on women's experiences on the Overland Trail as well as their experiences in the West. Prior to undertaking their own journeys, many frontier women had read about other women's journeys out West and knew roughly what they should expect during their travels. They wrote of weather, types of plants and trees along the trail, mountain vistas, and water. Few entries were complete without mention of water and its availability. Frontier women were also well versed in geographical landmarks to be encountered along the trail such as Chimney Rock, Independence Rock, and the Platte River. However, reading each woman's description of her first encounter with such natural phenomena is fascinating. What frontier women reveal is an appreciation for nature distinct from their male counterparts.

Both surely appreciated nature's value and beauty, but women wrote as though they were conversing with the land and having an intimate conversation with nature. Marcia Hensley writes, "In the narratives of single women homesteaders, as in all western literature, landscape has overriding importance. It is the stage on which women homesteaders play out their dramatic adventures. The land and its attendant climate can even be seen as characters in that drama, sometimes the woman's adversary, sometimes her friend, but certainly her ever-present companion" (*Staking her Claim* 29). Frontier women's approach to understanding nature through conversation represents a give-and-take based upon cooperation rather than domination and it explores the ways in which humankind can not only appreciate nature, but work with it toward advancement. The environmental rhetoric of the women in this study suggests that they were historical ecofeminists in development, meaning that philosophically they were laying the groundwork for what scholars today call ecofeminism. Each of the three women featured here wrote detailed accounts of her interpretation of nature in her journals or letters. These entries suggest that as the women spent more time on the Overland Trail or on the frontier and explored their connection to nature, they were moving toward an environmental ethic that rejected domination and embraced cooperation with nature.

The environmental rhetoric of my subjects is, in part, influenced by their attachments to their homeland and their fantasies about the promise of a future out West. Similarly, Kolodny directly links humankind's fantasies about nature to its relationship with nature in the preface to *The Land Before Her: Fantasy and Experience of the American Frontiers, 1630-1860*. Kolodny writes, "My abiding concern for landscape as a symbolic (as opposed to a geographic) realm derives from the conviction that, in addition to stringent antipollution measures and the development of wind, water, and solar energy sources, we need also to understand the unacknowledged

fantasies that drive us either to desecrate or to preserve the world's last discovered Earthly Paradise" (xii). Kolodny's concern for humankind's environmental/energy future suggests the importance of my study as a way of understanding the evolution of American women's attitudes toward nature and the land of the American West. Piecing together emotional connections to the West through rhetorical choices offers insight into a tradition of women's involvement with their environment, which laid the groundwork for many modern-day environmental concerns and continues to influence the development of environmental advocacy groups and policies at the state and national level.

Although I utilize literary sources, I'm not seeking to rewrite literary history. More cultural history, my work looks to the importance of our environmental history and the way frontier women used environmental rhetoric to impart their own environmental concerns to their readers. Just as the journals and letters of frontier women are often excluded from English departments, they too, have largely been excluded from history and environmental history programs. Frontier women's autobiographical travel writing often has environmental themes that present a narrative of environmental transformation of western lands and individual. As attention to environmental and climate change becomes more and more prominent in scholarship as well as on the nightly news, America's environmental history takes on greater importance. Understanding where we've been environmentally speaking can help us to understand where we're going. For example, knowing how mining techniques from the gold rush changed the landscape in California can help contemporary environmentalists anticipate how modern-day mining might affect lands similar to those affected in the gold rush (*The Columbia Guide to Environmental History* 80-94). Simply put: understanding our environmental history can help us to understand our environmental future. Frontier women's narratives and their rhetorical motives can help scholars piece together

environmental history and understand how they navigated not only the overland trail, but 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century social and cultural norms in their writing as well as how those norms influenced the way they viewed nature. The environmental rhetoric in their journals also helps their individual relationships with nature take shape, which offers insight into how women perceived nature and its role in their lives.

### ***Frontier vs. Pioneer***

I use frontier to describe my subjects rather than pioneer because of the detailed relationships they each had with the land they traveled across or homesteaded. These women were moving to the frontier, and I want to focus on their connection to nature rather than their status as pioneers in the American West such as Lillian Schlissel, Sandra Myres, Glenda Riley, etc. Each of their texts is defined by their environmental ethic and the way they see themselves in relation to the land. Their environmental rhetoric explores and expresses their environmental ethics and relationships to place.

In scholarship where many have described world's population as "mankind," I have chosen to use the term "humankind" instead. This choice is reflective of my intention to avoid gendering the American population and my hope that I will avoid, where possible, placing blame or generalizing. Ecofeminist scholarship often places blame with men and describes them as the dominators of nature; I attempt to steer clear of this in my study so that my focus is more on my subjects and their work rather than how men have damaged nature and continue to oppress it.

Reading the journals and letters of frontier women is not enough to understand each woman as an individual or as part of the western migration. To understand and contextualize frontier women and their writing, I had to research the "conditions, lives, and practices of women who are no longer alive to speak directly on their own behalf" (Royster and Kirsch 71). An ar-

chival project, my study required me to engage in what Royster and Kirsch call an act of critical imagination in their book, *Feminist Rhetorical Practices: New Horizons for Rhetoric, Composition, and Literacy Studies*. By examining the lives of frontier women, not just their writing I was able to understand the impact of their narratives on a broader scale. Through my research, I got to know each of my subjects in ways that would have been impossible just from reading their texts. My research transformed their journals and letters until they were no longer texts to me; they became the embodied personifications of women who were speaking to me. I have done my best to represent each of them and their stories here.

As frontier women conversed with nature they became acquainted with their environment on another level; anticipating its motives and trying to understand it as one would a friend. Their awareness of nature is expressed in their journals or letters written back home. The three women in this study: Sarah Sutton, Nancy Sherwin, and Elinore Pruitt Stewart all wrote of their close connection to nature and the environment and each of them used their environmental rhetoric to attempt to connect her reader to nature more concretely by encouraging exploration in nature. Sutton, Sherwin, and Stewart's writing explores their relationships with nature as well as the development of their own unique environmental ethics.

### ***Environmental Ethics***

Environmental ethics and environmental rhetoric are very closely related. Everyone has their own, individual environmental ethic that defines their relationship with nature. An environmental ethic reveals an individual's reasons for connecting with nature and it explores the ways in which that individual establishes his or her relationship with nature. An individual's use of environmental rhetoric is affected by her environmental ethic. The environmental ethic of an individual provides context for the writer's rhetoric. Understanding how and why the author

connects to nature offers a foundation for understanding why the writer chose to describe nature in a certain way, or why they chose to write about one element of nature over another. The writer's environmental ethic is what makes her decide to persuade her reader to evaluate his/her own relationship with nature. Each of my subjects wrote about nature from a rhetorical perspective to depict nature and show her reader how to appreciate it on its own terms.

Sarah Sutton's environmental ethic is characterized by cooperation. Her journal explores the ways in which she viewed nature cooperating with her journey on the Overland Trail. Sutton's environmental rhetoric is characterized by her Protestant faith and use of the Bible to persuade her reader to have faith in the westward migration. Nancy Sherwin's environmental ethic is slowly transformed in her journal. At first she presents herself as a faithful woman who views nature as proof of God's existence, and as her journal progresses, Sherwin begins to see nature for its own value. Once she realizes this value, Sherwin is able to see nature as alive and this realization alone transforms her environmental ethic because she begins to care about nature for nature's sake, not God's. Much like Sutton, Sherwin's environmental rhetoric is characterized by her use of religious imagery, but she also begins to describe her interpretation of nature in terms of her friendship with it. Elinore Pruitt Stewart's environmental ethic is largely shaped by her immense love for her land. Having worked the land of her husband's homestead and that of her own for nearly 20 years, Stewart cared deeply about her land and its care. Her environmental rhetoric promotes a love for all things in nature and reliance upon nature for survival. A close study of the women included in my study and other frontier women writers reveal an environmental consciousness that foreshadows modern-day environmental concerns and conservation/preservation movements.



Environmental ethics explores who cares about nature and why. Aldo Leopold is considered the founder of contemporary environmental ethics. In the foreword to his *A Sand County Almanac*, Leopold wrote, “We abuse land because we regard it as a commodity belonging to us. When we see land as a community to which we belong, we may begin to use it with love and respect” (21). In “The Land Ethic” essay from *A Sand County Almanac*, Leopold describes three types of ethics. The first deals with relationships between individuals; the second, individuals and society; the third ethic should be between individuals and the land (238). According to Leopold there is no good model for the third ethic; humankind doesn’t know how to relate to the land or why they should relate to nature (239). The subjects in this study are attempting to create a relationship with the land and are slowly beginning to understand why they should interact with nature rather than dominate it. On the frontier women begin to see the community that humankind forms with nature and the delicate balance that must be established between the two. The time spent traveling the Overland trail or on the homestead creates the perfect environment for Frontier women to connect with nature, since they are removed from the familiarity of their previous life, including close friends and family, and they begin to look for ways to reach out to the world around them.

Much like frontier women whose ecological awareness was awakened or altered while they were encountering the land of the west, Leopold underwent ecological transformations and wasn’t afraid to revise his ideas in print. In his essay, “Thinking Like a Mountain,” he wrote,

We reached the old wolf in time to watch a fierce green fire dying in her eyes. I realized then, and have known ever since, that there was something new to me in those eyes – something known only to her and to the mountain. I was young then, and full of triggeritch; I thought that because fewer wolves meant more deer, that

no wolves would mean hunter's paradise. But after seeing the green fire die, I sensed that neither the wolf nor the mountain agreed with such a view. (qtd in Flader 15)

Leopold's description of this encounter with a wolf reflects the power of one moment with nature to change an individual's way of relating to his or her environment. Leopold's candor in revealing another layer of his environmental ethic for his reader is similar to the transformations my subjects undergo on the trail as they encounter nature outside of their own individual realms of comfort. All three of my subjects begin to relate to nature by comparing it to the nature with which they're already familiar: the environment of the homes they've left behind. As they travel further west, Sutton, Sherwin, and Stewart begin the process of relating to land as a new friend, rather than comparing it to the old friend who has been left behind. In their documentation of this slow transformation, Sutton, Sherwin, and Stewart demonstrate how frontier women engaged with nature and how they changed as a result of their time in the west. Frontier women are not afraid to explore their environmental ethics in their writing, nor are they afraid to step back and reevaluate how they interpret nature and its place in their lives. These alterations in their environmental ethics and awareness of nature suggest that environmentalists, even those who were raised in close connection to nature, find themselves and their relationships to nature as ever evolving. They are constantly seeking to get to know nature better, much as one would attempt to get to know a close friend more intimately. Leopold would agree that evolution is an essential part of ecological enlightenment.

Leopold and the frontier women included here send the same message: nature is not passive and it deserves care and compassion. Leopold wrote to remind Americans of what technological advancements had made them forget: nature has value beyond what we can take from it

for our own advancement. Nature's value is something frontier women knew intimately and couldn't escape on the Overland Trail because it was all around them and, they relied upon nature to survive in a way most Americans do not. At times, nature offered frontier women comfort or companionship when none other was to be found. For the break it offered from the monotony of trail and frontier life, frontier women valued nature, but it is the companionship women found in nature that they valued the most. Frontier women's journals demonstrate that they engaged with nature as though in a friendship, conversing with the land.

Leopold describes an ethic as, "a mode of guidance for meeting ecological situations so new or intricate, or involving such deferred reactions, that the path of social expediency is not discernible to the average individual. Animal instincts are modes of guidance for the individual meeting such situations. Ethics are possibly a kind of community instinct in-the-making" (239). Leopold's community instinct is an essential component for understanding environmental ethics because it reinforces the idea that everything is interconnected and individuals should make choices with the community in mind. The community instinct assures that choices made by humankind would benefit both humankind and nature. Taking his community instinct one step further, Leopold says, "The land ethic simply enlarges the boundaries of the community to include soils, waters, plants, and animals, or collectively: the land...a land ethic changes the role of *Homo sapiens* from conqueror of the land-community to plain member and citizen of it. It implies respect for his fellow-members, and also respect for the community as such" (239-240). As citizens of the natural world, the frontier women in my study extend themselves and explore their roles in their community as well as their reach into that community. All three women use their relationship with nature and their interpretation of nature's influence in their lives to explore social roles and boundaries, which influence the way that Sutton, Sherwin, and Stewart developed

their own environmental ethic. For Sutton and Sherwin, exploring nature's connection to Protestantism allows each of them to reflect on her individual interpretation of both nature and faith and their roles in her life outside of Eastern society and nature's position in her life. At times they both challenge eastern notions of nature as passive and by challenging this concept, they question boundaries established for women by patriarchal society. Stewart, on the other hand, has no trouble questioning the social roles ascribed to women by a male-dominated society. Her writing explores and expands on the ideas presented by Sutton and Sherwin, but her writing stands alone as establishing the strongest connection to community. Stewart's letters to each of her correspondents develops a community between nature lovers and her Wyoming homestead that explores how humankind/nature communities work cooperatively for the betterment of the group. The frontier women's writing explored in chapters three, four, and five reflect a conversation with nature that implies their participation and cooperation within the community.

Each has a developed or evolving environmental ethic. Their environmental ethics are reflected in their writing and reveal how they see themselves connecting to the natural world as well as how they choose to interact with their surroundings. The way each woman interpreted her own environmental ethic shaped her persona in the journal. In his essay, "*Thinking Like a Mountain*" Persona, Ethos, and Judgment in American Nature Writing," H. Lewis Ulman breaks environmental ethics into three parts, "The interface of ecology, ethics, and nature writing is shaped by three overlapping themes: (1) extending our sense of moral community, (2) constructing a theory and practice of self-in-nature, and (3) resolving ethical dilemmas in a manner reminiscent of what Thoreau called 'direct intercourse and sympathy'" (68). Sutton viewed herself as part of a community that extended spirituality to nature. Her writing describes herself and others on the Overland Trail and their place in nature; taking great pains to describe their interpretation

of nature and its role in the westward migration. Sutton also writes that nature is talking to her, it is alive and leading her to the West by providing her with a clear path to the Promised Land. Sherwin also viewed herself as a member of her natural community, which included the location of the evening's campsite. She also looked at her place in nature and how she fit into her surroundings. Sherwin was able to use her role in partnership with the natural world to construct herself and explore her spirituality in her journal. Sherwin corresponds with the land in her journal. At times her entries seem to function more as letters to nature than entries about her direct experience on the Overland Trail. Stewart's community is clearly the most straightforward. She uses nature to construct herself in her letters. Stewart establishes her ethos as a woman who knows the natural world and her place in it. She's comfortable writing about nature and exploring it. Stewart uses her romantic depiction of nature to sell the frontier as a cure-all for the soul, while also campaigning for the way she views nature ought to be treated since it had such healing powers and allowed women to write their own destiny. The way Sutton, Sherwin, and Stewart interpreted her role in an ecological community underscores her individual environmental ethic and the way she interpreted her ethic.

Nature and humankind as members of a community is the foundation of environmental ethics. However, each person has his/her own distinct environmental ethic. An individual's environmental ethic is shaped by the things in nature to which each individual is most connected. Roger J. H. King calls this a plurality of natures, meaning that each person defines nature individually,

I have argued elsewhere that "nature" is a cultural construct. What we care for, in caring about nature is internally linked to a process of character. The problem for an environmental ethics of care is not so much that human beings fail to care but

that there is a plurality of “natures” and a plurality of forms of caring. Caring and our construction of nature as an object of care are starting points, therefore, of moral inquiry, not something given with which moral theory can come to terms uncritically. (80)

The three women in my study used social constructs to define nature and evaluate how nature fit into the community as well as the degree of importance nature would have within the community. Sutton and Sherwin used Protestantism as a means of defining and interpreting nature. Stewart used western literature and romanticism to define how she shared nature in her writing. Each woman took what she knew and used it to guide how she not only saw nature, but created it in her writing. The plurality of natures as King uses it also reinforces the idea that each woman’s definition of nature is slightly different. One woman might not extend nature to the very soil only considering plants and animals, whereas another would include soil. Women might also not be that literal in their definition of nature, they might simply care for landscapes that they connect with emotionally. For example, Stewart writes extensively of creating gardens representative of her childhood in Oklahoma. By recreating a familiar landscape, she reveals the nature that she cares about. Sutton and Sherwin describe elements that they care about, whether they are the Rocky Mountains, or grassy plains, each woman sees nature in a way that is meaningful to her.

### ***Environmental Ethics and its Relationship to Place***

The journals of frontier women express their connection to place by sharing stories and myths while also describing their individual comfort or fear of a given place or situation. For example, women’s diaries and journals helped create stories and myths surrounding the Native Americans they encountered as they crossed the plains. Their comfort with or fear of these en-

counters influenced their retelling of them in their writing. Stories of encounters with traders and trappers as well as cowboys and gold miners colored the diaries and letters of frontier women, which helped to create a mythic west. These stories were created by frontier women who inhabited the west in the fullest sense; they absorbed their environment using all of their senses.

Central to how each woman related to her environment is her connection to place. All three women I analyze here compare the land of the west with their homelands in their writing. This comparison of familiar surroundings to new environment demonstrates the way that frontier women sought to make meaning out of nature and how they attempted to become acquainted with the unfamiliar. In *Geographies of Writing: Inhabiting Places and Encountering Difference*, Nedra Reynolds asserts that “‘inhabiting’ discursive spaces connects, of course, with concepts from classical rhetoric – *ethos* as haunt, for example – and invites us to revisit the connections between habits and places, between memories and places, between our bodies and the material world. Our earlier dwellings, some believe, become sedimented within structures of feeling that contribute to our responses to all other places” (141). By examining Sutton, Sherwin, and Stewart’s writing, the influence of place on not only their writing, but their interpretations of their newly encountered landscape becomes clear. Sutton describes land that she values as being fertile for gardening, whereas Sherwin compares the land to that of her home in Kentucky as a way of reflecting on her family and childhood. Out of the three, Stewart explores connection to place more completely than the other two, mostly because she spent years on her Wyoming homestead and focused on her ties to that environment in her writing. More than just comparing Wyoming to her homeland of Oklahoma, Stewart used her garden as a memorial site by planting flowers that represented people from her childhood. By combining her past with her present, Stewart comes to terms with the land and learns to inhabit a place. Her habitation of her Wyoming home-

stead merges her past with her present in a way that connects her to her land concretely and also suggests the value she places on her land and the interaction she has with it through her garden.

Understanding how my subjects are connected to either the places of their past or the place of their present helps to define each woman's own environmental ethic. Knowing how each woman related to her place(s) contextualizes what each valued in nature and reasons she had for caring about it. In Stewart's case, planting flowers that represented members of her family helped her to keep people alive in nature and she cared for each plant tenderly as it represented a special person from her past. Her nurturing of the garden reflects how Stewart was able to connect her past with her present, express herself, and explore her relationship with nature.

Some scholars of place such as Edward S. Casey also assert that not only does inhabiting a place change a person, but that people change the places they inhabit. Of course, women who traveled the Overland Trail certainly inhabited places and ultimately, they changed not only the course of history, but they changed the vast land along the Overland Trail. Casey theorizes that a person becomes connected to place when they undergo major life changes while living there. Reynolds agrees with Casey, "Many of our experiences in life 'take place' in a location, and then we draw upon characteristics of those locations to construct memories and to judge or respond to other places" (3). For example, an individual is connected to the land of their childhood in a unique way because they encountered many "firsts" there, likewise a woman who bares children on her family's homestead will be rooted to that land since it is the scene of a significant life event. Just as the location of major life events alters a person, as families work the land, they alter it. The mutual transformation between place and individual is significant because just as in a partnership, there is give-and-take between two parties as there is give-and-take between two friends.



Although Casey describes the mutual transformation of people and places that occurs during habitation, Reynolds describes habitation more complexly by suggesting that there are layers involved in learning to dwell in places, “Learning to dwell doesn’t necessarily mean ‘loving’ a place and settling in happily or for years at a time; it means paying attention to place, not just to the borders that surround it, and building third spaces. Learning to dwell means tapping into the circulation of practices that don’t show up on a map or in a photograph of a village” (142-3). Frontier women’s journals, not just the journals analyzed here, demonstrate their keen awareness of the borders that surround place and how it influences the lives of women not just frontier women. They suggest that women had a heightened awareness of social boundaries as well as physical ones, and how those boundaries not only restricted or influenced women, how the spheres of social conduct influenced the other, and how women considered the audience for whom they wrote.

By revealing how nature affects her, each writer is able to show her reader the aspects of nature that she finds most appealing. The variation in each woman’s scope of care in regards to nature is both individual and personal, which reflects the pluralities of nature that King describes. Each woman wrote about nature in a way that was significant to her. By exploring her individuality in her nature writing, a woman could come to terms with her changing surroundings and find comfort in nature’s solidarity. As the westward migration progressed, women and families were transformed in ways that paralleled the transformation of the American landscape that was forever altered by thousands of wagons crossing the plains.

### ***Ecofeminism and the Logic of Domination***

Where environmental ethics is concerned with how and why humans relate to their natural surroundings, ecofeminism attempts to understand women’s connections to nature and in-

volvement in environmental movements by examining cultural interpretations of women and nature; historical representations of women and nature; hierarchies relating to women and nature; and dualisms that restrict views of women and nature. It is difficult to analyze the writing of an ecofeminist without first examining her environmental ethic. At the heart of ecofeminism is the interrelatedness of women, men, nature, and domination. At its most basic, Ecofeminism is concerned with the connections between women and nature and the domination by men of women and nature.

There are many variations of ecofeminism. My subjects offer perspectives on many of those variations in their writing and these glimpses offer other possible sights of scholarly inquiry as they relate to historical figures and ecofeminism/environmental rhetoric. Historical interpretations study how humankind and nature have interacted and been represented throughout history. Other scholars explore how women's ability to bear children connects them to the earth separate from men (Warren 24). Ecofeminists also seek to relate spirituality with nature, view nature as an active subject, and they try to understand how women and the environment are affected by political decisions (environmental justice). Environmental justice is particularly influential in ecofeminism because it demonstrates clearly how women see an environmental problem and use it to become socially active problem solvers. The actions of women on behalf of the environment, or disadvantaged groups who are affected by environmental pollutants are very visible to the community.

Understanding the historical background of women and the environment lays the foundation for most discourse in ecofeminism. As historical figures, the frontier women whose writing I analyze here shed light on how women viewed themselves in relation to nature rather than what scholars speculate and their writing offers a way to see how women's environmental ethics have

(largely) transformed to become what they are today. My subjects do relate gender and nature to reproduction, especially Sutton who often describes land with little or no recognizable vegetation as “barren.” All three of my subjects link their spirituality to nature and their understanding of what they cannot explain and all three of them view nature as an active subject. However, only Stewart writes of, or engages in, any act of environmental justice. Stewart’s letters explore and offer commentary on political culture and women’s place in social order, and she also writes of using the land to help others through the great depression and attempts to persuade her reader to go back to nature for their worldly needs.

As historical ecofeminists, frontier women’s journals and letters often reflect an ecological transformation on the Overland Trail or an intimate connection to nature that formed a cooperative community. Some frontier women’s writing shows that they began to relate to nature in more complex ways thereby rejecting patriarchy; others began to interpret their role in nature within the boundaries established by patriarchy. These differences between how women interacted with nature and patriarchy establish awareness between women and their immediate environments that connect them to ecofeminism. As each woman relates to nature on a newfound level on the Overland Trail, she begins to awaken and see that nature is not something to be dominated by humankind. Their very awareness of nature as non-passive rejects the patriarchal view that nature was meant for humankind’s use. While the women in my case studies do not often discuss at length humankind’s abuse of nature, they do suggest alternatives to dominating nature, which rejects the logic of domination, a core philosophical concern of ecofeminism.

In *Ecofeminist Philosophy*, Karen Warren defines a logic of domination as a structure that “‘justifies’ domination and subordination.” (47). As it relates to ecofeminism, the logic of domination refers to humankind’s domination of a subordinate earth. The logic of domination also

comes with additional baggage, a value system that allows humankind to place itself as dominant over nature (Warren 48). The value system of humankind suggests that humans are more valuable than nature and humankind uses this value to justify abuses of the less valuable nature. Warren describes this superiority as humankind's "ability to radically alter their environment in consciously self-determined ways" (49). Ecofeminism seeks to explore and understand how and why humankind, or more specifically man, feels that nature is less valuable than humankind to such a degree as to be able to dominate and disfigure it.

Warren continues to point out the significance of the logic of domination by referencing that, "historically, at least in Western societies, the oppressive conceptual frameworks that have justified the dominations of women and nonhuman nature have been patriarchal" (50). Patriarchal notions of women and nature play an important role in frontier women's overland travel journals. Most notably patriarchy takes center stage in Sutton and Sherwin's accounts of overland travel where their connection of nature to spirituality and Protestantism inform every journal entry and support their observations of nature. Sutton relies upon her knowledge of the Bible to interpret her surroundings, while Sherwin goes to great lengths to present herself as a woman who lives up to the highest feminine standard established by Kentucky (Eastern) society and Protestantism. What is interesting is that Sutton and Sherwin seem to step outside of patriarchal boundaries by accepting nature as worthy of value beyond what is needed for survival and outside of its use to support God's Earthly presence. This alteration in their view of nature offers insight into a shift that many women traveling on the Overland Trail experienced (as evidenced by their discussions of nature in their writing), which changed their environmental consciousness and laid the foundation for modern environmental movements.

Spiritual ecofeminism is rooted in the desire to protect and act on behalf of others, which is an underlying belief present in the writings of Sutton, Sherwin, and Stewart. In nearly every entry or letter, each woman writes on behalf of nature, whose voice cannot always be heard. Their descriptions of nature on the frontier depict a land undergoing transition and in their writing these frontier women create a version of nature in the image of humankind. Giving nature human-like characteristics implies the depth of each woman's relationship with her surroundings and nature as whole.

To understand why women feel compelled to speak for nature, spiritual ecofeminist, Joanna Macy claims that,

There is the experience of being acted 'through' and sustained by something greater than oneself. It is close to the religious concept of grace, but, as distinct from the traditional Western understanding of grace, it does require belief in God or supernatural agency. One simply finds oneself empowered to act on behalf of other beings – or on behalf of the larger whole – and the empowerment itself seems to come 'through' that or those for whose sake one acts. (qtd in Warren 32)

What Macy suggests is that women were being sustained by acting on behalf of something (nature) and that this concern for something other than themselves empowers them particularly while they are in unfamiliar lands or situations. This empowerment makes them feel, at times, that they can challenge societal boundaries. The concern for nature and its resulting empowerment is true of all three of my subjects. Sutton finds her voice and speaks loudly of nature and its connection to her spirituality and its role in God's plan for the West. As Sherwin begins to explore herself and her relationship with nature, the tone in her writing shifts, suggesting that she has found a way to express herself and her changing impression of the world around her,

which boosts her confidence. As nature's biggest supporter, Stewart speaks loudly and with confidence about nature and all things related to her homestead. Her confidence is evident by the assertive tone she adopts in each of her letters. Their spiritual connection to nature and the imprint that nature left on each of the three case studies presented here expresses how closeness with nature offered frontier women a way to feel empowered outside of the home. This empowerment from acting on behalf of nature establishes a case for frontier women as historical ecofeminists who seek to protect the source of their confidence.

### *Dualisms*

Many feminists cite dualisms within a patriarchal framework as problematic such as scholars Stacy Alaimo, Donna Haraway, and Colleen Mack-Canty. Mack-Canty asserts that, "others consider ecofeminism important which, in addition to developing theory from the embodied perspectives of its participants, extends its values of diversity and interconnectedness to other species and the natural world, as integral to feminism today (Diamond and Orenstein 1990; Plumwood 1992)" (156). Describing the problems with dualistic thinking, Mack-Canty states, "Third-wave feminism, in particular, refutes dualistic thinking in general – thinking that divides the world into hierarchical dichotomies with one aspect regarded as superior and the 'other' regarded inferior, recognizing instead the existence of multiplicities" (158). The hierarchy that Mack-Canty references is that often, culture is placed above nature and that on the other side, often culture is meant to represent man and nature symbolic of women, which places man over woman in a subordinate relationship (155).

Restricting and narrowly defining how humankind relates to nature, and how they often place men above women, dualisms function as either-or-solutions to humankind/nature relationships. While the nature/culture duality does limit how women and nature relate to one another or

work together, this duality is still very much a part of ecofeminism. The argument between nature and culture, or man and woman is an essential part of understanding not only ecofeminism, but how men and women relate to nature. Although the nature/culture duality is not, by any means, the only way to view how humankind works with or dominates nature, it is certainly a starting point for the discussion.

The women in this study, at times, embrace dualisms. Sutton and Sherwin both accept and work within the dualism present in Protestantism: domination vs. stewardship of nature. The frontier women examined here also embrace the dualism that presents women as nurturers and nature as a wild-woman as well as the nature/culture duality. While some contemporary ecofeminists would point out the potential problems with accepting and playing within the boundaries established by dualisms, the frontier women in this study's acceptance of these dualities actually signals a rejection of them. As described in chapter three, when Sutton writes about dominating nature (i.e. climbing over it in an attempt to reach the West) she turns around and writes about working with it to reach the west. Sutton embraces BOTH sides of the duality and in so doing reflects that there is no either/or in the discussion of domination/stewardship of nature, but only something in between and while this doesn't always comply with the ideals of ecofeminism, it reflects a thoughtfulness on Sutton's part and her refusal to just accept patriarchal domination of nature. Sherwin's environmental rhetoric works in much the same way as Sutton's. She plays the middle ground between domination and stewardship. Stewart confronts the nature/culture dualism in her writing. In her letters she writes most clearly about stewardship of her land, but she spends a great deal of time writing about creating memory gardens and inscribing her own personal history (culture) onto the landscape, which reflects her acceptance of nature's power and her acknowledgement of the role culture plays in our relationships with nature. Stew-

art works the ground between nature/culture recognizing that the two sides of the duality don't always have to work against one another.

King addresses unrest with dualistic thinking in his discussion of environmental ethics and ecofeminism. He asserts that,

Ecofeminists see dualistic thinking as intimately related to oppression and domination when it serves not simply to mark differences but to legitimate subordination. In particular, when combined in the form of an abstract universalism, dualistic thinking sets up rigid conceptual frameworks that do not accurately describe the many different ways in which human beings relate morally both to one another and to the nonhuman world. (78)

Contrary to King's interpretation of dualistic thinking and its restrictions, for my subjects, dualisms don't offer restriction, but offer a wide range of possibilities in between the two worlds. Sutton, Sherwin, and Stewart work within dualisms by not accepting them as either/or possibilities, but accepting that there are too many ways for humankind to relate to one another and the nonhuman world.

Not only do my subjects embrace the space between the two sides of the duality, but they also avoid naming that space or categorizing it, which leaves them open to diverse relationships with nature without the necessity of labeling their partnership or its terms. Sutton's use of biblical imagery and story to describe her experiences on the frontier demonstrate her ability to relate culture to nature. She's inscribing what she knows on an unknown. When she does this, Sutton is merging the two without acknowledging dominance of one side of the nature/culture duality. Sherwin embraces the space between nature and culture. Sutton opens her journal with a description of nature that she likens to evidence of God's presence, "The wide Mississippi is as straight



as a line, dividing the level country from the mountainous Missouri. He had formed it hilly from the one river clear into the other to let us notice his handiwork, and the wide prairies waving in green hills are admirable” (1). The use of nature as evidence of God’s work is where Sutton aligns herself with Protestantism. She does so as a way to demonstrate both her faithfulness and her belief that going west is part of God’s plan for humankind. Sutton then begins to describe, nature independently from God, “Tree nods its welcome” (5). This shift, however small, gives nature a little nod and balances out the two sides of the duality. This small attempt at balance suggests that Sutton doesn’t accept or reject either nature or culture as absolute.

While culture influences her writing, in particular how Sherwin views her social position or duties while on the frontier, nature also influences her writing by helping her to connect to herself by conversing with nature. In her first entry on May 10<sup>th</sup>, Sherwin relies upon her Protestant culture to describe flowers she encountered on her journey, “’Twas a sweet pleasure indeed to look forth upon the beauties of nature and feel that A Kind and Heavenly Parent has created them all for the happiness of His creatures” (1). Sherwin’s description of nature as a representation of God is aligned with her Protestant upbringing, which relates nature to God’s glory. In the following entry, on May 11<sup>th</sup>, she writes “Crossed some bad sloughs and passed through a beautiful prairie clothed in grass and flowers” (2). While seemingly small, what Sherwin has done here is explore culture with her reference to God as a kind and heavenly parent leading the way for his child, and then turn it a bit on its head and make nature less God-like and more human-like by describing nature as clothed in grass and flowers the way a human might dress herself. Sherwin bounces back and forth between giving precedence to her familiarity with culture and allowing nature to stand on its own. By exploring this back and forth, Sherwin doesn’t choose one side over another; she plays the middle ground, which lets her reader know that she is

a faithful woman who is beginning to see nature by itself. In addition to avoidance of labels, or restrictions of either/or, Sutton and Sherwin use the space between the dualisms (and working either side of the dualism) as a rhetorical tool. Knowing their audience, each woman is able to anticipate that her reader will think within the boundaries established by the dualism. By playing the middle ground she is able to avoid rejecting her reader's point of view, while opening up a suggestion that perhaps the way to understand humankind's relationship to nature is not either/or, but rather, something in between.

When Sutton and Sherwin explore domination versus stewardship of the land in their journals, they avoid rejecting the traditional Protestant values with which they were raised, making their reader feel like his/her understanding of Protestant culture and faith are accepted. Slowly as they explore partnering with nature in their journals, Sutton and Sherwin's use of nature as living and cooperating with the individual on the trail paint nature as neither something to be dominated or something to which they should pay attention. Playing the middle ground between sides of the dualism allows the writer to slowly bring her reader around to her way of thinking.

Stewart attempts to mediate dualistic thinking in much the same way. Although she doesn't play the middle space like Sutton and Sherwin for her reader, what she does do is show how the sides of the nature/culture duality are often able to blend without asserting one's superiority over the other. In a June 1<sup>st</sup> letter written to Maria Wood, where Stewart engages with her spirituality, she writes,

I like to walk among the flowers at dusk. I like to fancy that my grandparents who both loved flowers, walked with me. Some times it even seems that He walks there, prays there, agonizes among my reverent blossoms. Could that idea be right, Woodsy-person? I mean could it be true? If it could be, then shall we not fill

the hours brimming with work, love and enjoyment for those who must look to us for earthly expression. Let's do it anyway. That sounds preachy, I know, it isn't meant that way. (28)

Stewart's questions in the above passage reflect her introspective questioning of how nature and culture are connected to one another. More reluctant than Sutton and Sherwin to see God in all of nature, Stewart muses about how they might be connected. Her exploration of spirituality and nature suggests that she doesn't place more importance on culture over nature, but rather Stewart sees how they're connected. Subtly this shows the reader that nature influences culture and culture influences nature, and that the way each influences the other can be mutually beneficial and lead up to a better balance between the two ways of thinking by inhabiting an unnamed space, middle, or third space.

Understanding how groups of people, including frontier women, have mediated the space between two sides of dualistic thinking can help modern-day ecofeminists and environmental historians to better understand how times of great upheaval and change alter and affect how people relate to their environment as well as how those changes help them to reevaluate their own environmental ethics and their role in environmental transformation. Charles Bergman describes what he views as the battle between humankind and nature in "The Curious Peach' Nature and the Language of Desire," "We are tourists of nature, watching it from our living rooms and cars. These ways of representing nature – visually more than linguistically – are the front line in the environmental battle with the economic forces of exploitation. The visual has largely displaced the verbal in our representations of nature, with its own luminous rhetoric of romantic twilights and intimate encounters with beasts, and created a kind of voyeur's desire" (295). Historical per-

spectives on environmental change can help scholars of modern-day environmental studies to understand and evaluate the changes our environment is undergoing currently.

### ***Partnership Ethic***

Of humankind's relationship with the environment, Bergman writes, "I believe that the issues we face in nature are essentially issues about relationship, and in our relationships with nature the same issues apply as in our relationships with other people" (282). Bergman suggests that we can't cooperate with our environment because we have trouble connecting with, relating to, and cooperating with other people. While this may be true it is not something with which frontier women struggled. The journals and letters of frontier women express a desire to partner with the environment. While their environmental ethics vary, all three women agree that nature is an active participant in the westward migration and their experiences on the frontier. Acceptance of nature as active participant is the first step in forming a cooperative partnership with nature. All three women write as though in conversation with nature and express a desire to understand the natural world on its own terms, which contributes to an environmental rhetoric defined by a partnership ethic. Partnership with nature as frontier women saw it was an extension of spirituality and a key to survival.

Environmental historian, Carolyn Merchant outlines her partnership ethics in her book, *Earthcare*. For Merchant, the answer to environmental problems is to work in partnership with the land. Her reason for choosing the term partnership comes from her desire to "avoid gendering nature as a mother or a goddess (sex-typing the plant), avoids endowing either males or females with a special relationship to nature or to each other (essentialism), and admits the anthropogenic, or human-generated (but not anthropocentric, or human-centered) nature of environmental ethics and metaphor" (216-7). Although Merchant intended her partnership ethic to avoid gen-

dering and privileging one sex's relationship with nature over another, the subjects included here refer to the land as male. Gendering the land as male is in contrast to historical views of nature as female. Their acceptance of nature as male is related to their understanding of nature and its relationship to Protestantism or other organized religions. Because of Protestantism's strong connection of nature to God, frontier women would have had a difficult time not seeing God in nature, or viewing nature as male. Their journals and letters reflect some frontier women's struggles to separate God from nature (although at times they do make the separation).

Partnership ethics is an extension of Leopold's community instinct. It asserts that by thinking for the group (humankind and nature) simultaneously there will be ecological harmony. Although Merchant's partnership ethic certainly stems from many of Leopold's ideas, she differentiates partnership ethics from Leopold's land ethic:

In contrast to Leopold's extensionist ethic, in which the community is extended to encompass nonhuman nature, partnership ethics recognizes both continuities and differences between humans and nonhuman nature. It admits that humans are dependent on nonhuman nature and that nonhuman nature has preceded and will post-date human nature. But it also recognizes that humans now have the power, knowledge, and technology to destroy *life as we know it* today. (217)

By accepting the mutual dependence of humankind and nature, that each needs the cooperation of the other to survive, Merchant gives both humankind and nature power over each other. However, rather than view the two as active agents engaged in a power struggle with one another, she seeks to acknowledge that recognizing the power each agent holds is the key to balance a harmonious relationship between the two. Frontier women attempt to demonstrate this in their writing.

Merchant's partnership ethics defines exactly what she sees as partnership between nature and humankind as well as the way she sees the partnership potentially functioning. Her plan for a partnership ethic is to have humankind and nature work together:

In the conclusion, I develop an ethic of earthcare based on the concept of a partnership between people and nature. Rather than seeing nature as more powerful than and dominant over human beings (whether as goddess or witch), as was usually the case in premodern societies, or seeing humans as dominant over nature through science and technology, as has been the view of most modern societies, a dynamic balance may be attained through a partnership ethic. Nature, as was once represented by Gaia, Eve, and Isis, is real, active, and alive. Human beings, especially women and minorities, as amply illustrated by their actions on behalf of the earth, are also real, active, autonomous beings. A partnership relationship means that a human community is in a dynamic relationship with a nonhuman community. Each has power over the other. Nature, as a powerful, uncontrollable force, has the potential to destroy human lives and to continue to evolve and develop with or without human beings. Humans, who have the power to destroy nonhuman nature and potentially themselves through science and technology, must exercise care and restraint by allowing nature's beings the freedom to continue to exist, while still acting to fulfill basic human material and spiritual needs. (XIX)

Merchant suggests a balance of power that accepts that humankind and nature have the ability to destroy the one another. While humankind can destroy nature with technological advances for extraction of natural resources, nature can destroy humankind through natural disasters, drought, floods, etc. Merchant's proposition attempts to right the improper balance between

humankind and nature that results in the destruction of nature. Merchant's partnership ethic also rejects the logic of domination by directly offering a solution to dominating nature for humankind's own advancement. By working together, Merchant suggests, there is no need for humankind to dominate nature (she also implies that there will be no need for nature to dominate humankind).

Merchant directly addresses nature's domination of humankind. She suggests that humankind should relinquish some of its technology so that nature can thrive. She writes,

Just as human partners, regardless of sex, race, or class must give each other space, time, and care, allowing each other to grow and develop individually within supportive and nondominating relationships, so humans must give nonhuman nature space, time, and care, allowing it to reproduce, evolve and respond to human actions. In practice this would mean not cutting forests and damming rivers that make people and wildlife in flood plains more vulnerable to "natural disasters"...(8)

By spelling out exactly how she defines partnership and nondomination between the partners, Merchant hopes to illustrate how to establish Leopold's community. The frontier women in this study offer an historical perspective of Merchant's ethic. While limited in their knowledge of western natural disasters, frontier women partnered with their land. All three of the women analyzed here use spirituality to communicate with nature, and they all view that communication as a way of opening themselves up to the potential of the West rather than mourning the loss of their homelands and family and friends left behind. This open communication is the beginning of frontier women's partnership with nature since they were more open to partnering with what they knew.

Merchant's partnership ethics is developed in three steps. The first step is an acknowledgement by an individual of nature as a living being. The second is the individual's incorporation of the concept of nature as alive into their personal environmental ethic and the third element is expressing the partnership in their writing. All three of the case studies presented here go through the three steps of Merchant's partnership ethic.

Sutton's rhetoric explores partnership with the land in passages that connect nature with spirituality and the destiny of the west. Sutton describes her idea of partnership with nature in very concrete terms. Although she sees evidence of God all around her, she also views the land as cooperating with weary travelers and providing them with a road to the West. Sutton's journal describes, in detail, how nature offers the travelers a way to travel from the east to west as though nature has opened itself up and brought forth a road free of obstacles directly across the plains. Upon seeing Devil's Gate, Sutton wrote, "Yet the Lord of heaven and Earth has made this part of the earth to be crossed, and has left a space for good roads and sometimes just room enough for a good road with the craggy cliffs on each side of us, with so many names inscribed on the rocks as if all that crossed the plains had left their names on record behind them" (11). Sutton's environmental rhetoric aims to persuade her reader that going west is humankind's destiny and that the Bible provides a framework for which travelers can face the challenges of overland travel. Her approach to environmental rhetoric in her journal develops Sutton's ethos as that of a faithful woman whose knowledge of the Bible extends to all things, which she demonstrates in her June 30<sup>th</sup> entry:

This was not Mt. Pigsah, for we did not see the delightful land that flows with milk and honey. So we have to go on until we come to that good land, if, not like Moses, we are not permitted to go there, but like him have to stop and lay our



lives down on this side of Jordon as hundreds have; but probably, some of us like Kaleb and Joshua will live to get to the end of the race and see what we are at all this trouble for and whether it is worth all the trails and difficulties and suffering of man and beast, cold and storms of dust, rain, hail that we have worried through.

(13)

While her partnership ethic is very different from that of Sherwin and Stewart, Sutton's presentation of partnering with nature presents a crucial first step in understanding how and why women began to view their relationships with the natural world as those built on cooperation and trust. By seeing a spiritual connection to nature and describing nature as an agent of God, in her July 17<sup>th</sup> entry Sutton prepares her reader to understand (without actually saying it) that acting on behalf of nature is acting on behalf of God, "Some say that they dont see what this part of the world is made for, but thank the Lord it is no mystery for me, for I can see God is all around us. He has made this foundation for the Inhabitants of the earth to pass from one part of the world to the other..." (15-16). In so doing, humankind reaps the benefits of a close relationship with the natural world and a stronger spiritual connection to God.

Sherwin's rhetoric develops a partnership ethic by slowly revealing her environmental awakening. Much like Sutton, Sherwin is a deeply spiritual woman who goes to great lengths in her journal to establish the ethos of a faithful woman. In her May 15<sup>th</sup> entry, she laments being unable to keep the Sabbath,

I can hardly say that my mind is at rest or satisfied as it regards traveling on the Sabbath. We are told to remember the Sabbath Day to keep it holy. Can we, when we start on the holy Sabbath morn, can we ask God's blessing on our heads, believing that He hears and approves our actions? If we can feel thus then it may be

no harm; if not, then we may rest assured that the displeasure of Heaven will rest upon us. (6)

However, along the Overland Trail, Sherwin begins to undergo a transition. As she begins to spend more time outdoors, Sherwin begins to connect to nature more and see nature as separate from her faith, “Nature has been very lavish in her gifts to this beautiful world of ours. The lover of Nature is never wanting for something on which to feast his mind; the smallest leaf, the tiny spire of grass, the simplest flower is a mystery and an object of admiration to the wisest philosopher of the world” (12). In this transformation, she awakens to the idea that nature is not necessarily an agent of God, nature has free will. Although, in her writing, it is clear that Sherwin struggles with the idea of separating God from nature. In her entries she goes back and forth with the idea that nature is its own agent, and that of God. Sherwin connects nature and God again in her June 28<sup>th</sup> entry, “We traveled two hours and a half; camped near a clear cold spring in a grove of roses whose sweet fragrance regaled our senses and thrilled our hearts with delight. Oh! How tame does the mightiest effort of man’s genius appear when compared even to a simple flower, whose Creator and Beautifier is God” (36). This suggests that her spirituality is in conflict with her growing connection to nature. Wanting to present herself as faithful and spiritual, while simultaneously recognizing nature with new eyes, Sherwin begins to accept her own contribution to nature by developing her relationship with it through conversation.

Stewart’s rhetoric is the most developed and detailed out of the three subjects in my study. While Sutton and Sherwin use spirituality and Protestantism as a way to develop their environmental rhetoric, Stewart relies less on spirituality and more on her personal, hands-on experience. Her use of her experience on the homestead establishes her ethos as a woman who is hardworking and knowledgeable about nature. In her June 15, 1918, letter to Maria Wood Stew-

art writes, “For a month we have been in our planting season and there’s no one but Clyde and I. I have an acre of war-garden which I planted myself – I have farmed grain, dipped grain and helped to sow grain – I have cut seed potatoes til my hands ache but I am having a fine time” (13). Out of the three women I profile, Stewart offers the most thorough and detailed environmental ethic. Stewart’s rhetoric uses examples of partnering with her environment to establish her alignment with ecofeminism. In her May 5, 1915, letter to Maria Wood Stewart describes her gardening activities and that she views gardening as an experiment rather than an exercise in domination, “Also I have set out two hundred cuttings of currants. I believe they will grow. There seems to me thousands of interesting things to do. I believe I would like to run an experiment station...” (6). In some of Stewart’s letters, which are explored in greater depth in chapter 5, she describes her gardening process and the way that she works with the land to better understand it and to develop a working relationship that is mutually beneficial to her family and nature.

The writing of Sutton, Sherwin, and Stewart explores different relationships in different contexts, but what they clearly show is that frontier women connected to the land as though it were a friend, a confidant, a way to know oneself. Stewart describes her relationship to her flowers in her March 17, 1931, letter to Maria Wood, “Memories of my sweet flowers that struggled with hardship to express and demonstrate beauty for me. I shall take the lark song, the serene day beauty, the wild exhilaration of the storm, the crooning of the pines, the frolic of the gypsy winds – the scent of the save and of the roses and honey suckle of other days – and the love of friends, the joys and sorrows of friends” (27). In this letter, Stewart is describing how intimate her relationship is with her garden. It is so intimate, in fact, that she will take all of her memories of her garden friends (flowers) with her when she dies. Stewart presents herself to the world with her

garden. In reflections on landscape and nature, frontier women got to know themselves as women in transition. By traveling to the West, women were met with challenges that exceeded those they faced in their eastern homes. Living and adapting to harsh traveling conditions where they were often separated from close family members and friends meant women had to turn inward for comfort. Sometimes turning inward meant absorbing new sights along the trail, internalizing them, and then sharing those sights in their journals and letters, which Sherwin does at length in her July 15<sup>th</sup> entry, “A lovely rainbow was painted upon the clouds. It seemed to rise and set in the mountains. ‘Twas a lovely scene to witness while its beauties were open to our gaze. The sun shed his last rays upon the mountain tops, while the valley was wrapped in the sober shades of twilight” (41). Rhetorically, the journals of frontier women functioned as a way to come to terms with the transition they were undergoing.

The way each woman wrote about the land and her interpretation of nature in her journal or letters also reflects her individuality and the way she connected to nature. Stewart describes herself as a very knowledgeable gardener in her October 5, 1931, letter to Viola Allen,

Before I learned to see the beauty of this country I thought it barren and uninteresting, colorless, so I planted for color. That is why I have poppies, calendulas, cornflowers, anchusas – anything for vividness. Roses do not thrive here as they must thrive there. We grow the most beautiful gladiolus and sweet peas. Some years hollyhocks do well. (29-30)

Writing in their letters and journals was one way for frontier women to express their individual sense of nature and beauty as well as her specific connection to the land. Even though Sutton and Sherwin rely upon their Protestant background to contextualize their emotional connection to nature, they both describe their relationship with the environment differently. Sutton

points to very specific biblical passages to help her reader relate to the environment and Sherwin writes of nature and her faith more generally such as she describes nature in her July 9<sup>th</sup> entry, “’Twas indeed a scene to be admired and well calculated to inspire the soul with reverential awe and adoration toward the Divine and wise Being who has created the universe and ruleth it at His will” (39). Stewart, of course uses her writing to express her individual relationship with her land in very detailed terms. She wants her reader to know just how proud she is of being a homesteader who is independent, as she describes in a June 1, 1915, letter, “My rhubarb is just getting large enough to use. I canned two quarts after supper tonight. I really like to can fruit and make pickles and jellies and jams. I feel so independent when my cellar and pantry are well stocked” (11).

While Sherwin doesn’t explore landscape with the same depth as Stewart, she does use the landscape to reflect her personal evolution on the trail. This journey is far more significant for her reader than her final destination because it allows her reader the opportunity to be a part of her awakening while on the trail. Sherwin’s writing not only explores and transcribes her spiritual and personal transformation; it also reveals both her personal and public personas. While Sherwin wrote herself the way she would want to be remembered: as a faithful and courageous woman, her journal persona was intended for her public audience, mostly her family, but it is the slow awakening that gives her reader a glimpse into her personal life and trail experiences.

### ***Conclusion***

Frontier women’s writing lays the foundation for understanding how an historical movement such as the western migration can alter the way a group of individuals view nature, their place in the natural world, and their role as stewards of the land. The environmental rhetoric of

the three women presented here reflect diverse environmental ethics, but a common goal: partnering with nature for western settlement.

### **Chapter Three: All Roads Lead to the West – The Journal of Sarah Sutton**

In the 1850s as thousands of men, women, and children made their way across the plains toward the far American West, Sarah Sutton and her family left their Cass County, Illinois, home for Oregon. Sarah Sutton's journal tells the story of their overland travel. Central to her narrative is environmental rhetoric that is shaped by her use of biblical reference and supports a transformation from a woman who relies on her faith to a woman who demonstrates her knowledge of nature. Using the Bible as a reference point, Sutton is able to stabilize her own ethos for her reader and share her real message: the land of the West is worth settling. Along the Overland Trail, Sutton undergoes a transformation by interacting with the natural environment daily. The transformation takes her from frontier woman to historical ecofeminist whose depiction of the frontier in her journal explores her evolving relationship to nature and the way she partners with nature along the trail. Her journal shares that evolution with her readers and offers a glimpse into how frontier women interacted with nature, and suggests how their environmental philosophies influenced modern-day activists. Undergoing the three steps in Carolyn Merchant's partnership ethic, Sutton reveals herself to be an historical ecofeminist.

#### ***Biography***

On March 21, 1854, Sarah Sutton left her home in Cass County, Illinois, for Oregon. The Sutton family traveled with several neighbors who took up the journey west after John Sutton, Sarah's husband and his eldest son, James, returned from an exploration of Oregon extolling its virtues. Two of John Sutton's sons, Solomon Henry and Asahel (Asa) who traveled west with him in his original expedition stayed behind in Oregon while John and James Sutton returned to Illinois for the rest of the family. When the family left Illinois for Oregon they were traveling with thirteen children. Eight were from Sutton's first marriage (she was widowed in June of

1847), four from John Sutton's first marriage (he was a widower), and one child, Walter, who was Sarah and John's son together. The Suttons traveled over what is known today as the Oregon Trail to Salem, Oregon. Sutton died on the trail after an illness, but her family eventually settled about 15 miles west of Salem (Holmes 15-16).

Sutton's diary resides in the Bancroft Library at the University of California, Berkeley. The library also has a typed transcript, which is what I relied on for the quotes contained in my analysis of her journal. Sutton's diary was anthologized in Kenneth Holmes' series *Covered Wagon Women: Diaries and Letters from the Western Trails, 1854-1860*, which is volume seven of the series. I utilize some of his biographical research in the paragraphs above.

### ***Sutton's Audience***

Sutton's journal offers one glimpse into women's lives on the frontier. Her journal captures the westering experience and offers unique snapshots of an historical moment in history. In *Women's Diaries of the Westward Journey* Lillian Schlissel suggests that the large numbers of diaries written during the western migration is due to the writer's knowledge of becoming a player in a significant historical event, "No other event of the century except the Civil War evoked so many personal accounts as the overland passage. Young people and even children kept diaries and felt that their lives, briefly, had become part of history" (9). Sutton certainly knew she was writing for family and friends back home in Illinois who were part of a much larger audience of potential travelers. Sutton's frequent descriptions of nature and trailside scenery suggest that her journal was intended to be a guide for future travelers. Her use of biblical reference and rhetoric helped her to persuade her reader that going west was a journey ordained by a higher power and worth the risk. Sutton felt that she and her family were following God's wishes to not only make the trek to the West, but in encouraging others she was doing his will. Sutton's



use of biblical rhetoric suggests a high level of audience awareness, allowing her to use common religious ground to help bridge the gap between reader and writer.

Sutton's description of landscape and life on the overland trail mirrors a spiritual journey that is represented in her text and demonstrates an increasing awareness of nature separate from a faith-based stewardship ethic. Although the journey west was spiritual for Sutton, it was less about self-discovery and more about levels of endurance and perseverance. Sutton relied upon her faith and biblical references throughout her journal to persuade her reader that the journey west was worth the trouble and a way to be closer to God. As Sutton connects her descriptions of nature to scripture, she depicts land as physical embodiments of God to remind her reader that as he/she travels overland they are in God's presence. Not only does Sutton quote from her biblical knowledge, she takes biblical scenes and adapts them to her individual situation. Sutton's inclusion of biblical rhetoric in her journal is infrequent in her entries, but she does devote some lengthy passages to the Bible and biblical reference. Toward the end of her journal in her August 9<sup>th</sup> entry, Sutton begins to devote more of her entries to physical land description including identification of specific flora and fauna, which demonstrates her keen awareness of her surroundings and knowledge of nature, "Here is considerable small timber on this creek, such as quaking Ash, Balm of Gilead, Alder, Haws, Larches, Birch etc... It is cheering to us to have such beautiful branches of swift running, cool water several times a day and pretty good grass" (21). Sutton used the Bible to help put the overland journey into a context for her reader. She used biblical references and passages to not only comfort herself, but reassure her reader along the way.

Despite her use of environmental and biblical rhetoric, Sutton also tried to narrate her experiences in a realistic voice that wasn't afraid to tell the story of her trek west truthfully. Sutton's journal paints a picture of overland travel more in keeping with the descriptions of histori-

ans who don't gloss over the difficulties of traveling overland by wagon in the 1850s. Sutton wrote with a straightforward tone and described encounters with Native Americans, prices paid for work along the way, weather and environmental conditions. She did not shy away from mentioning difficulties along the trail. Although she doesn't describe her chores, and rarely mentions them, according to Schlissel some of the long list of chores traveling women completed during the overland passage included but were not limited to: cooking, laundry, caring for children and the sick, collecting wood, buffalo chips, or weeds for the fire. Women also endured pregnancy and delivery on the trail (12). Sutton's journal reflects the complexity of the woman's overland trail experience. She neither paints it as a chance to encounter adventure and view beautiful vistas, nor does she depict the journey as fraught with insurmountable obstacles. Sutton's narrative offers a view of the western migration not often shared in journals and letters, and it offers scholars and readers a chance to see the westering experience as a more complete picture.

Like other frontier women, Sutton was keenly aware of her audience and created a persona in her journal. Sutton projected herself as a very faithful woman who saw her trail writing as a way to promote western settlement. Sutton wanted her family and friends to follow her, and her journal was one way to encourage them to leave their homes and go toward an uncertain future in the west. Because Sutton's journal depicted overland travel as less-than-perfect, her ethos suggested truthfulness. Her faithful reminders that God was watching over her shape the character of a woman who was often an optimist and knew that even though travel was difficult she was making an important journey. In her July 30<sup>th</sup> entry Sutton describes her faith, "Have very good grass and plenty of wood once more. We have Balm of Giead [Gilead] here, but have no need for a physician for our bodily health. But a physician that can cure the sick is greatly needed to give us a quantity of fortitude and patience, and teach us to trust in him, and know that be-

hind a frowning Providence he hides a smiling face” (19). Sutton’s reference to Balm of Gilead references the Bible again, but demonstrates that she struggles to marry her faith with her exhaustion. She reminds her reader that patience is required when traveling the overland trail, but that God will provide for travelers. As Schlissel described, Sutton knew her words were important and she wrote herself as a woman who wished to be remembered. She uses her faith to reinforce her ethos, while also expressing her impatience and frustration during their slow journey in the context of her faith.

Sutton’s journal is less introspective than Nancy Sherwin’s journal or Elinore Pruitt Stewart’s letters since her purpose for writing was more to encourage and lead others than to examine her own spirit and faith. Sutton’s journal provided more concrete info for her reader in regards to actual trail life. Her journal entries are largely environmental since the information of greatest interest to her reader was the land and being prepared for its inconsistencies and unpredictability, including the locations where settlers were likely to encounter Native Americans. Sutton wrote about difficulties of traveling on the overland trail including lack of water and firewood as well as unpredictable weather one example of this is early on in her journey in her May 17<sup>th</sup> entry, “Came about 18 miles today to a branch of the Platte River, drove our cattle over on the island and found grass better than we ever have before, but wood was very scarce” (5). In these entries Sutton sought to let her reader know that water and grass were not plentiful along the trail in every place and also to help her reader to understand that he/she would be sharing these resources with dozens of other wagons traveling in the same general direction. In her June 20<sup>th</sup> entry Sutton describes the trail population, “Have met ten or a dozen Mormon Wagons returning back with their families and told the Californians they were going to the city of destruction. We have met 30 or 40 pack mules loaded with women and children and provisions returning back

from Oregon. They said the winters were so cold and so sickly and money so scarce that they wanted to be found getting away” (12). Sutton’s ultimate goal was to prepare her reader for the journey. However, along the way her environmental rhetoric painted a picture of the West that was in keeping with biblical depictions of western land. By making the connection between the land of the North American West and images in the Bible, Sutton sought to entice other women specifically by calling on their faith as a motivation for the journey. Mark Stoll writes in his essay “Green versus Green: Religions, Ethics, and the Bookchin-Foreman Dispute,”

Historically, Protestants in particular have emphasized those Biblical and theological elements that focus on nature as the product of a good and wise Creator, indeed as a place where communion with the divine can most easily occur. Passages in Genesis, Psalms, and St. Paul’s epistles, especially Romans 1:20 – “For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead” – formed the basis for a theology of natural beauty. (414)

Sutton’s descriptions of nature in her journal reflect her connection to Protestant environmental ethics such as nature as a reflection of God; humankind’s dominion over nature; and humankind’s stewardship of the land. Sutton’s use of Protestant environmental ethics is an attempt to reach her audience. In her April 22<sup>nd</sup> entry Sutton describes nature within the context of her faith, “The wide Mississippi is as straight as a line dividing the level country from the mountainous Missouri. He had formed it hilly and from the one river clear into the other to let us notice his handiwork, and the wide prairies waving in green hills are admirable...” (1). Sutton sought to meet her readers on common ground by relying on a shared value system between writer and reader, ultimately creating a bond between reader and writer. Sutton’s text is more

persuasive because she understands the value systems of her audience. By tapping into those systems, Sutton shows her reader that she understands their concerns and fears about leaving their homes for an unknown land. Addressing the fears of her readers, Sutton is able to respond by providing her reader with information that would make the trip seem worthwhile despite the challenges and uncertainties of overland travel.

Anticipating the needs of her reader, Sutton attempts to describe what she sees on a daily basis. Her journal is less about what she did on the trail and more about what she saw. Sutton's journal does not gloss over the population of travelers on the prairie. While many writers omitted discussion of other travelers in their journals, Sutton specifically points out how many wagons traveled alongside them to allow her reader to visualize how the crowded countryside appeared. Sutton's description of a crowded prairie gives historians a picture of how the wagons might have altered the landscape and damaged nature during their historic trek. On May 7<sup>th</sup>, she sums up her day and the sights on the trail "Have traveled about twenty miles today and have camped on Little Blue. (We go up the river but do not cross it.) There was about 30 wagons in sights at one time and about 4,000 head of cattle. There appeared to be a string of wagon about a mile long" (4). Sutton wanted her reader to understand that they wouldn't be traveling alone on the prairie. Her intent was to provide her reader with some additional "security." The additional wagons on the prairie could help settlers to feel more secure and safe when faced with Native Americans, or illness on the trail, etc. Sutton also wanted potential travelers to know that they were part of an historical event that was immense. Understanding the thousands of travelers on the overland trail, Sutton hoped, would help her readers to realize that many acknowledged the American West to be a land of great promise and that they wouldn't be isolated from civilization upon arrival and that they would be participating in creating history.

In particular, Sutton knew that women reading her journals might not be traveling with other women in their caravan, and her words were intended to help women understand the rigors of the overland journey with limited female interaction. Sutton knew that some women would be afraid to make the journey west if they would be traveling without the companionship of other women. Women depended upon other women during the long and difficult journey, especially during pregnancy or childbirth. Of women's need for female companionship on the trail, Schlissel writes, "it was not merely the physical work which the women found difficult: it was that there was no closet for solitude, no corner to preserve modesty or privacy" (64). Sutton uses the population of the trail to also help women understand that in times of need; in particular pregnancy and childbirth, those women from other caravans could possibly be reached to assist as need be. Sutton also sought to encourage women by letting them know that they would not be alone once they reached their destination.

Sutton's writing demonstrates that she understands her audience intimately since prior to leaving for the west, she was once one of them. Part of understanding those to whom Sutton is writing is the ways she socially constructs nature. Roger King asserts that, "'nature' is a cultural construct. What we care for, in caring about nature, is internally linked to a process of interpretation whereby we come to understand nature to have a determinate character" (80). By using biblical stories to describe the lay of western lands, Sutton draws a picture of the West and the overland journey for her reader using images and stories with which they are already familiar. In this way, Sutton creates a landscape out of shared social knowledge. Sutton's construction of nature is significant because the undercurrent of this socially constructed landscape informs many of her rhetorical choices as she seeks to persuade her reader to travel west. Sutton uses words like "barren" and "fertile" to describe the land. Sutton's choice of words to describe the land in plac-

es and the patriarchal history of “barren” and “fertile” within the Bible and Protestantism demonstrates how Sutton’s culture not only influenced her own interpretations of nature, but how she created an environmental rhetoric with biblical undertones meant to influence her reader. Sutton’s May 19<sup>th</sup> entry reflects those cultural interpretations of nature, “Here is a flat, level, barren river bottom two and three miles wide from the river to the range of bluffs. We saw some small cedar groves in the bluffs today for the first time...” (6). Sutton carefully chooses a language not only understood by her reader, but valued by her reader. By using biblical imagery, Sutton wants to show how she, a faithful woman, takes Protestantism’s environmental ethic and transforms it along her trek west. In her July 19<sup>th</sup> entry, Sutton relies on biblical imagery to describe land and rock formations for her reader, “All got over and nooned on a spot of pretty good grass; here is a high precipice with torrents of water running out of the top, resembling the rock that Moses split, but it is not the same, for the Snake [river] runs at the foot of it; it is on the opposite side from us and the water runs into the bank and about halfway down” (16).

Sutton’s goal is to encourage and persuade her reader to not only travel west, but to examine nature, look at nature as something other than a tool for humankind, but rather as a live being. This live being offers humankind a way to connect with God through a physical medium. Sutton wants her reader to see that they can have a spiritual relationship with God by reaching out to him through nature. To form this relationship they have to see nature as a living being and respond to it accordingly. By describing nature as a live connection to God, Sutton subtly uses her faith to shape her own environmental philosophy and rhetoric, which ultimately connects her retroactively to ecofeminist philosophy.

### *Finding Her Place*

Like the other women in this study, Sutton does contextualize the land of the west in terms of the land from her home in Illinois. By doing so, she attempts to understand the differences between the two places by comparison. Contextualizing the unknown with her memories of familiar land, Sutton attempts to become comfortable in her interactions with the land of the west. In her April 29<sup>th</sup> entry, which is roughly a month into her trip, Sutton compares her current location to her home in Illinois,

We have traveled all day over high, rich, rolling prairie, far better than Illinois, well watered but a few scattered trees along the creek, just enough to make them a fire to warm themselves and to cook their meals but cannot fence these fields and must pass over this rich land and leave it behind for beasts of prey and men as fierce and wild as they. (3)

Sutton's entries that mention her home in Illinois support her attachment to place, but also reflect her ability to see beyond her attachment and look toward her future in the West. Sutton is able to interact with the land of the west by engaging with what she sees as the land of her future. It is her ability to connect to her physical environment that helps Sutton to see nature as more than just a tool for her own use. Her relationship with nature enables Sutton to transcend her Protestant background and partner with her environment. To understand how people respond to place and how people and place impact one another, Reynolds asserts,

People's responses to place – which are shaped in large part by their bodies, by the physical characteristics they carry with them through the spatial world – determine whether they will “enter” at all, or rush through, or linger – and those decisions contribute to how a space is “used” or reproduced. Bodies and places im-



pact upon each other; a body becomes marked with the residue of a place, but places are also changed by the presences of bodies. Those changes can't happen, however, if people won't cross borders, won't engage with a new place, or can't overcome their fear or aversion to a particular location. (143)

Having had time to prepare for her overland journey, Sutton is ready to engage with new places and cross borders. For her those borders are steps closer to reaching her destiny in the west. Sutton is ready and willing to go west and fulfill her destiny in the land she believes God has provided for settlers. She dwells in a place by interacting with it both physically and emotionally and it is these small interactions that allow her to undergo a transformation from frontier woman to historical ecofeminist. Part of Sutton's transformation stems from being changed by the places she encounters along the Overland Trail and change those lands as well by using the resources present at the evening's camp site. Sutton's experiences in a new place are affected by her mental and physical state. For example, when she is tired or frustrated, she sees her natural surroundings in a negative way. When she is feeling well and excited about her future, the land is beautiful and full of promise. Likewise when she finds the land to exceed her expectations, Sutton is exhilarated and her words echo that excitement.

Despite her transformation to historical ecofeminist, even toward the end of her journey, Sutton compares her immediate surroundings to the land of her home in Illinois to describe for her reader where settlers might establish homesteads along the trail. She compares the land of the West to Illinois so her readers will have some context for her landscape descriptions in the journal. Sutton knows her readers will need a way to understand how she evaluated the landscape to determine its suitability for settlement. Her August 14<sup>th</sup> entry describes "good" land for settling,

Saw some handsome situations for farms than I saw in Illinois. The land very rich and the side of the mountain covered with pine and beautiful places to build by scattering fir trees and springs. We have stopped for the night within three miles of Grand Round on a good spring. Grass good. Fir timber very pretty, near us the hills low, but we believe it too cold to live here as there is now frost every night.

(22)

Sutton wants her reader to know that the land in the west is, in places, more beautiful and fertile than the land of Illinois and the Midwest. Her use of words like handsome and rich in her entry help Sutton to sell her reader both on the beauty and promise of the West. She wants her reader to see beyond the familiar and know that their future is in the West.

Unlike Sherwin's spiritual transformation in her journal, the few times Sutton reflects on her faith in her journal she is relating the land to God's creation of nature and his purpose for doing so. Sutton also points to specific Bible passages to clarify her thoughts about not only the landscape, but how she sees her experiences in relation to her reading of the Bible. Her use of Bible passages is more reflective of her sense of purpose in going west and her justification for settlement of the west. Sutton was influenced by what Merchant describes as the recovery narrative, "The concept of recovery, as it emerged in the seventeenth century, not only meant a recovery from the Fall, but also entailed restoration of health, reclamation of land, and recovery of property. The recovery plot is the long, slow process of returning humans to the Garden of Eden through labor in the earth" (*Earthcare* 28-9). Sutton's environmental rhetoric supports the restoration of humankind to the Garden of Eden through hard work, and it is clear that Sutton considered the American west to be a Garden of Eden.

Early into her trip, Sutton reflects on nature's purpose in her journal. In her May 1<sup>st</sup> entry Sutton writes cheerfully that the land was created to inspire and soothe those who might cross over it,

Providence has formed this country delightfully for the weary traveler. Here it has the appearance of never ending prairie, still every day when we feel like stopping we find a branch of water and a few trees surrounding it without both together we would be in a poor situation.

There are about a thousand head of cattle ahead of us, in sight at this time they remind me of the 50<sup>th</sup> Psalm. If there were ever cattle on a thousand hills it must be on these plains. There is about no timber on them and they are very hilly.

(3)

In the preceding passage Sutton references the tenth line of the 50<sup>th</sup> Psalm, which states, "for all the living creatures of the forest are mine and the animals in their thousands on my hills." This reference is intended to show her reader her familiarity with the Bible and her attention to biblical accuracy, which solidifies her ethos as a faithful woman who represents God's wishes that the land of the American west be settled.

For Sutton the land of the West inhabits parts of the Bible. She sees religious imagery in the land everywhere and she uses the biblical stories that she knows intimately to describe the scenery for her reader. Her ability to contextualize her environment with the important stories of the Bible suggests, for her reader, the importance of nature for the frontier settler. For example, Sutton's arrival at Devil's Gate is recorded in her journal in the entry dated June 15<sup>th</sup>. In it she likens the natural rock formation to the parting of the Red Sea in the Bible,

Here are the very high mountains on each side of us with snow and then little cedars in the crevices. On one side the tops nearly covered with snow which looks as though it fell yesterday. Yes the Lord of heaven and Earth has made this part of the earth to be crossed and has left a space for good roads and sometimes just room enough for a good road with the craggy cliffs on each side of us, with so many names inscribed on the rocks as though all that crossed the plains had left their names on record behind them. Within three or four miles of the bridge we came to what is called the Devil's Gate. The high mountains, like the Red Sea, had fled back, not to let the Israelites pass through, but to let the sweet water run through. The high walls on each side were straight down on the sides of the stone house, and the river took such a horse shoe turn that the visitor could not get within 100 yards of it without ascending the mountain and looking through the sides.

(11)

Using images of the red sea to describe Devil's Gate, Sutton wants her reader to see how the land of the West, in places, almost seems to act out biblical scenes. By doing this, rhetorically Sutton seems to suggest that the nature gives life to the Bible and the Protestant faith. Sutton contextualizes nature to help her reader see what she has seen and relate to her overall message that nature has an active role in westward travel.

Despite her reflections that strong faith is required of the overland traveler; Sutton slips into the darkness occasionally is unable to locate the "good" in a particular landscape or environment. In her July 24<sup>th</sup> entry the difficulties of the road get the better of her, "We are now on Grass Hopper Creek, on the desert of death and despair. The grasshoppers are as thick here on this grass and in the air as a snow storm....The country is so poor that the Indians are ashamed to

show themselves on it” (12). Not only does Sutton tell her reader that the land cannot be inhabited, she shows her reader what the worst of the west might look like. As a desert infested with grasshoppers, no reader will think of settling there. Even though Sutton intends to persuade her readers to travel west in her journal, she feels the need to inform her reader of trouble places along the trail where they will find it impossible to inhabit the land, which further establishes her ethos as a faithful and truthful woman.

### ***Environmental Ethic***

Environmental ethics are the foundation of understanding how each woman relates to her environment and why. As Sutton begins her trip, and at key points along the trail she relies upon her faith to connect nature to her reader, as well as share her ultimate message about settling the West. Protestantism is the platform upon which Sutton begins to relate to nature. As she spends more time on the trail, Sutton begins to look at nature separate from her faith and view land as it relates to her frontier fantasy. The further separation of nature from faith begins to shape Sutton’s environmental ethic and suggest that she is aligning herself philosophically with ecofeminism and beginning to partner with the land.

As Aldo Leopold reminds us, an environmental ethic looks at the community that develops between humans and nature (*A Sand County Almanac* xviii). Sutton’s journal explores not only the community she is a part of in her wagon train, but also the community that she sees forming between herself and the natural world around her. As she crosses the plains and the mountains on her way to Oregon, Sutton looks for signs of God when needed and uses those signs as markers to show her how she must work with nature to reach Oregon. Sutton sees the land as a natural road leading her to her destiny, which she describes in her June 15<sup>th</sup> entry, “Yet the Lord of heaven and Earth has made this part of the earth to be crossed and have left a space

for good roads and sometimes just room enough for a good road with the craggy cliffs on each side of us..." (11). It is through her use of these natural roads that Sutton begins to partner with her environment to arrive at her future home. As a traveler along the road, Sutton viewed herself to be in partnership with nature to reach her eventual home in the West. Rather than attempting to cross land that could not be crossed easily, Sutton's company followed nature by traveling over land that was passable. Sutton knew that she had to work with the natural curve of the land in order to reach her destination. Domination, in that sense, was not an option.

Carolyn Merchant's partnership ethic describes a working relationship between humankind and nature. Each gives and takes from the other. Humankind respects nature and works with it rather than depleting nature's resources and abusing it. According to Merchant, humankind and nature, "must give each other space, time, and care, allowing each other to grow and develop individually within supportive nondominating relationships, so humans must give nonhuman nature space, time, and care, allowing it to reproduce, evolve, and respond to human actions" (*Earthcare* 8). Not only does Sutton partner with nature by traveling over what she views as natural "roads," but she exhibits the desire to partner with nature in her frontier fantasies of gardens, which she shares toward the end of her journal.

Merchant's partnership ethic is developed in three stages. The first stage is the acknowledgement that nature is a living, breathing being. The second is the incorporation of nature's living organism status into his/her environmental ethic and rhetoric. The third and final stage is the formation and implementation of the partnership ethic in one's writing.

Sutton's writing reflects all three stages of Merchant's partnership ethic. Her writing reflects her interpretation of nature as a living being and its inclusion in her environmental ethic reflects her desire to partner with the land in Oregon, while her writing also depicts the partner-

ship she imagined herself to already have with the land. Sutton viewed herself in partnership with the land as she traveled over it to reach her destination. She used what she had on the trail, but was respectful in a non-dominating way of nature. Her descriptions of the land as a road in places reflects her desire to instill in her reader the knowledge that humankind and nature are partners who are living life according to God's will. Unfortunately her death prevents us from knowing how she would have worked with her land in Oregon or would have written about her land upon her arrival. Although her concern for gardening locations along the trail suggest that she would have spent a lot of time planting and cultivating a garden on the land of her new home.

Unlike other women who wrote about their partnerships with nature and whose writing explored the three steps of Merchant's partnership ethic, Sutton's understanding of a partnership with nature was different and although her journal focuses heavily on the Bible and her faith in the beginning, as she nears the West, her focus shifts more toward descriptions of the land and the promise it holds for settlers. Sutton's partnership ethic expressed a partnership with God and nature simultaneously. Sutton developed the Protestant environmental ethic and made it her own by not just viewing nature as a platform for humankind to prosper and develop, but as an individual's way to reach God through nature. To reach God through nature this way, one would have to view nature as sacred and share a spiritual connection with it.

The first stage of Merchant's partnership ethic is viewing nature as alive. The best example of this is Sutton's impression of the Platte River. The most important geological feature on the Overland trail was most certainly the Platte River. Travelers often wrote of their relationship with the river along the trail and each writer's interpretation of the river varies. Schlissel's analysis of the descriptions in various dairies of the Platte, wrote,

The river was sometimes described as ‘moving sand,’ and those who did not find it beautiful said it was ‘hard to ford, destitute of fish, too dirty to bathe in, and too thick to drink.’ But it was not necessary that the Platte be beautiful: it served the emigrants as a clear road. Following it, emigrants could go across ‘broad yellow Nebraska,’ and more than halfway through Wyoming. For two decades, the Platte formed a two-lane highway with travelers along both of its shores. (23-4)

The Platte River features prominently in Sutton’s diary. It has been called the great Platte River Road because of its supreme influence on settlers traveling toward the West. Sutton saw roads everywhere in the landscape, and the Platte River was no exception. For her, the roads she saw were evidence that going west was part of God’s plan. The role of the Platte River in not only her journey, but her journal, reveals the impact that nature had on the daily lives of frontier women while on the trail. Sutton’s writing suggests not only the vulnerability of the overland traveler to the whims of nature, but also the way she valued nature’s role in her life.

Among the natural roads Sutton describes in her journal, the Platte River was most influential. Sutton’s description of the Platte River presents a partnership between traveler and river. In Sutton’s case, the river provided comfort and guidance as well as precious water. While Sutton and her family didn’t take much from the river other than shelter and water, they certainly didn’t seek to dominate or control it. Their goal was to coexist with it on a part of their journey. This partnership is one way that Sutton actively partnered with her environment and depicted it in her writing. Settlers, including Sutton, allowed the river to shape them.

Sutton’s May 17<sup>th</sup> entry describes her early impressions of the Platte River, which reflect the environmental rhetoric to which she has been exposed: the environmental rhetoric of men who relate nature to the female sex. Her use of the word “barren” relates to not the land being



completely bare, but the lack of vegetation of which she's familiar (vegetable gardens and plant species she knows from Illinois), "Came about 15 miles and stopped again on the shores of the barren Platte River. This is the fifth night we have camped by it and it is very cold, windy day after the storm" (5). Her use of male environmental rhetoric exposes one of the ways that Sutton uses what she knows to relate to and describe her new surroundings. The fact that her comfort level with the Platte River and her view of the Platte as anything but "barren" changes over the course of her travel upon it suggests that Sutton's familiarity with the river alters her view of it. The way Sutton begins to know the land shapes her rhetoric and helps her to create a feminine environmental discourse that allows her to write about nature using new, more feminine conventions of environmental rhetoric, which are friendlier and open to diversity of landscape. At this time Sutton also begins to see the land beyond its fertility, asserting that it has value beyond its use for gardening.

The further Sutton traveled along the Platte (notably one of the most present natural phenomena in her journal), the more she began to appreciate its virtues including utilizing life-like characteristics to describe it for her reader. By slowly showing how the land has its own life, Sutton is revealing to her reader that nature is more than a passive force over which travelers tread. This is one way that Sutton begins to create her own feminine environmental rhetoric. In her May 19<sup>th</sup> entry, Sutton describes land away from the Platte in negative terms, she also relates to the lack of resources in this location while reflecting on what they've passed:

We traveled about 18 miles today and camped on a slough, a great deal worse than the Platte River. This is in sight of the river, probably a mile and a half from the Platte. (River), and not a bush in sight or tree to meet us with their pleasant looks. We have to do the best we can with chips and have plenty of *Salicatus* wa-

ter.... Here is a flat, level, barren river bottom two and three miles wide from the river to the range of bluffs. We saw some small cedar groves in the bluffs today for the first time and the boys killed a young kioto wolf with the dogs. (6)

Sutton's description of nature in the entry above suggests that she's lonely. The trees and bushes represent friends to her. The more time Sutton spends on the trail the more she begins to depend on the presence of familiarity in the landscape. Not only does she become acquainted with nature on her journey west, but she begins to view it as a friend with whom she converses. When she gets lonely and her environment changes drastically on the trail, Sutton is quick to feel and internalize that change. Sutton's view of nature as a friend along the trail implies the way her environmental ethic has changed to include nature as an individual presence in her life and the way that her altered environmental ethic has influenced her rhetoric in her journal.

After traveling along the Platte River, which served as a road for many wagon trains traveling out west, Sutton comes to view it as a "friend" whose familiarity provides her some measure of comfort and support, allowing it to shape her. As long as they traveled along the Platte, Sutton knew they would have water and grass or timber. Leaving the security of the river left Sutton feeling exposed on the prairie and fearful of how long it would take them to find provisions along the trail again. She spent enough time with the Platte River to get to know it. Similar continuity didn't happen much on the trail. This reference to the river as a friend suggests that Sutton found comfort in spending time with nature and knowing landmarks intimately. In her June 13<sup>th</sup> entry, Sutton references her apprehension at leaving the Platte behind, "Bid our loyal friend, Platte River a final farewell this morning after camping nearly night on it for a month and are again left entirely out of sight of timber and have to make out on sage" (10). Sutton finds the Platte River a reassuring sight as though having it with them, they will be safe. She certainly

doesn't forget the value of knowing that they will have water as long as they travel beside the Platte. Familiarity and friendship with nature are just one way that Sutton works her partnership ethic into her writing and daily relationship with nature. She wants her reader to view nature and the landmarks along the trail as friendly toward other travelers.

Once they left the banks of the Platte River, Sutton and her company began to assign cultural conventions to the land. Karen Warren and Jim Cheney describe how ecofeminism asserts the value of diverse voices and the ways in which the nonhuman world has been described using social constructs,

All ecofeminists centralize, in one way or another, the "voices" and experiences of women (and others) with regard to an understanding of the nonhuman natural world...But it [ecofeminism] acknowledges that these objects are important sense both materially given and socially constructed: what counts as a tree, river, or animal, how natural "objects" are conceived, described, and treated, must be understood in the context of broader social and institutional practices. ("Ecological Feminism and Ecosystem Ecology" 186)

Sutton uses social conventions such as biblical scenes to contextualize and use shared social knowledge to help a reader to relate to nature through her rhetoric. As she spends time on the trail, she begins to assign social conventions by naming landmarks and bodies of water. This is another way that Sutton socially creates nature. On July 22<sup>nd</sup> Sutton writes,

Have been going up hill and over rocks and across the barren desert, and nooned where we can water our stock, on dry rocky creeks with now and then a pond of water. We name the creeks ourselves as we go, as there is no one in the company has gone this way before or knows the name of them. (17)

Sutton's revelation that she and those traveling with her family are naming the creeks they cross point to her attempts to get to know the land she's crossing as well as relate it to the land with which she is familiar. Sutton values nature and by naming the creeks she is ascribing value and culture to the water and its natural course as well as making nature a part of her narrative so that other travelers will look for and have some familiarity with the landmarks she passes along the way, which encourages her readers to view her attempts to relate to nature as an example of how humankind should interact with the land along the overland trail.

Sutton relates her faith to her experiences on the trail and her use of faith reflects one side of Protestant environmental ethics that views the land as something to be used by humankind. However, some of Sutton's words suggest that her environmental ethic was more complicated than simple alignment to Protestant environmental ethics. While she subscribed to Protestantism's doctrine that the land was to be used for humankind, she simultaneously suggests that nature (not necessarily God) always has the upper hand. Nature is a way to reach God, but that doesn't mean that God *is* nature. At times she gives nature life-like characteristics much like the other women in this study, but Sutton also describes nature as providing travelers with surprises such as unusual weather conditions, or in the case of the hot springs, water that boils from the ground for no known reason. Sutton is acknowledging that humankind is small in comparison to nature and a thing to be respected. This acknowledgement by Sutton also demonstrates that to her, nature was a live being that acted of its own will, which is the first step toward a partnership ethic where humankind and nature work together in non-dominating ways; nature and humankind respecting each other. Sutton's recognition of nature as a being suggests that despite Protestantism's view of nature as a tool for humankind, Sutton put more emphasis on acting as nature's steward, rather than the dominator of nature.

Sutton's environmental ethic is also characterized by her partnership with the natural world along the trail. Sutton describes working together with the land as she traveled overland. When Sutton uses her depictions of nature as providing natural roads she is telling her reader that westward expansion is part of the natural order of things. She is also saying that nature and God are connected and that God wants humankind to expand into western lands. Sutton gives nature a role in westward expansion as though nature is encouraging humankind to move west by providing natural roads. In this way Sutton's journal becomes promotional literature for individuals who are uncertain about traveling to the west. Many frontier women's narratives, either diaries or letters, functioned as promotional materials encouraging women to move west. According to Schlissel, many diaries were reprinted in newspapers from the writers' home (10).

Exhibiting the first stage of Merchant's partnership ethic and nearly two months into her journey, on May 16<sup>th</sup>, Sutton writes of the prairie as if it is alive and capable of exhibiting free will:

Here it is flat prairie clear into the river and not a stick of wood on this side. There is plenty on the other side.

The trees look real pleased to think we can't get to them. One tree stands close to the shore dressed in a brown petticoat with a green sacque and with uplifted arms and looks very pleasant and is continually nodding to us but can't come over. (5)

This entry also suggests that nature has the opportunity to manipulate humankind, but Sutton's tone is one of playfulness meant to remind the reader that she acknowledges nature's power without a second thought; as though to think man capable of controlling nature would be foolish. Sutton's imagery here describes the tree as a human with its arms in the air. Sutton even goes so far as to describe the tree as clothed. She wants her reader to see nature as human-like.

Continuing the imagery, Sutton tells her reader that not only does nature resemble humankind, but nature is capable of communicating with humans as well. The idea of nature as able to communicate with humankind suggests that Sutton views nature as a companion, one whose relationship she values. Communication between humankind and nature reflects a communicative partnership and reflects Sutton's ecofeminist philosophy. Nature here welcomes settlers to the west with open and uplifted arms.

Sutton also describes nature as welcoming in her journal. She uses small, everyday occurrences in nature to reassure herself that nature is encouraging her journey. These encouragements are also meant to provide her reader with comfort and assurance that the journey is worth the risk and that there is comfort to be found in nature if the reader only looks. The entry on May 21<sup>st</sup> points to the song of a Meadowlark as a sign that nature wants to be inhabited,

Sunday morn comes on very pleasant and serene and our home Meadow Lark  
with dew upon her breast has come before sunup to charm us with her songs and  
seems to be welcoming on the day of rest and says "Your my native land and I  
love Thee, and I love to visit the stranger and welcome to our soil." (6)

These small occurrences reflect how Sutton interprets her conversation with nature and how she sees her fantasy of nature welcoming her to the West playing out on the frontier. The inclusion of small conversations between Sutton and nature in her journal reflect how she wants her reader to look at nature and communicate with it during the overland journey. Her transcription of conversations with nature are a representation of Merchant's partnership ethic. The way Sutton views her relationship with nature and the way she communicates with it depicts the way that Merchant encourages humankind to cooperate with nature in a non-dominating way.

Sutton's entry on July 26<sup>th</sup> relates her first encounter with hot springs. Sutton describes the springs and then states that she doesn't understand the underlying cause of the boiling. She writes about the hot springs to prepare other travelers for their appearance, but the realization that she cannot explain the natural phenomena reflects Sutton's acknowledgement of nature's supremacy:

Came about 8 miles and called to look at and felt the water of the Hot Springs here; was 15 or 16 Springs, smoking and bubbling up out of the ground and nearly boiling hot. A good deal too hot to go to washing clothes in; little branches of hot water running from them. We have nothing to say as we can't understand the cause and don't know from whence they came nor what fire is heating the water.

(18)

Sutton's inclusion of descriptions of natural phenomena in her journal is one way that she wants her reader to understand the complexity and mystery of nature in the west. Sutton wants her readers to know that they will encounter nature as never before. The preparation Sutton provides in her journal helps her to make her case that nature holds mysteries to which humankind is not privy and that accepting that nature is mysterious helps the reader to understand that dominance is not effective. Partnering with nature and accepting the mysterious in nature is the only way to be prosperous in the West and get closer to God. Modern-day ecofeminists challenge descriptions of nature as mysterious claiming that to describe it as such paints it as a wild and uncontrollable force separate from rationality. The separation of reason and rationality from nature reinforces the patriarchal view that women need to be controlled or dominated so that they wouldn't rage out of control. Although Sutton uses the nature-as-mysterious trope, her intention is to remind her reader that there are mysteries in nature that are not understood by humankind,

not that nature and women are unreasonable and mysterious, but more likely that God cannot always be understood. Sutton seems to suggest that cooperating with nature in a partnership ethic requires both parties to acknowledge that there are unknowns that require mutual trust for a successful partnership.

Sutton also views nature as accommodating. Her descriptions of travel overland don't point to a traveler who believes that nature exists to provide for humankind, she suggests that nature exists independently of humankind, and that it does provide for humankind. Sutton's words suggest that perhaps nature is selfless in that it instinctively provides for travelers so that they might reach the Promised Land. In her entry on June 5, Sutton relates nature to a large natural road that allows room for wagon trains to pass, which acknowledges God's hand in creating spaces in the land suitable for crossing, while crediting explorers for locating good ground over which to travel,

We have traveled over the Black Hills the last two days. To look at them they look as though they never could be crossed, but we have beautiful natural roads and the Pioneers of the Western Mountains deserve great credit for selecting such good places for a road. (9)

This entry not only acknowledges nature's role in the life of the weary traveler and the pioneer in general, it suggests that humankind must work with nature not against it by admitting that nature holds the upper hand and will provide for weary travelers. This impression of nature reflects the second stage of Merchant's partnership ethic, which is the internalization of the partnership ethic into a personal environmental ethic. Sutton seems to suggest that nature itself provides a natural road to the West because God himself wanted humankind to travel west and settle those lands. The idea of nature as a natural road is in keeping with Sutton's environmental ethic



and its Protestant roots while exhibiting characteristics of Merchant's partnership ethic. Sutton's acknowledgement that man and nature must work together in her writing demonstrates the way that she weaves Merchant's partnership ethic into her own environmental ethic and rhetoric.

### ***Environmental Rhetoric***

Sutton's environmental rhetoric is influenced by her Protestant faith and reflects the dualistic view of nature present in Protestantism. Seeing nature as a tool for humankind and humankind as a steward for nature's wellbeing, Protestantism offers conflicting views on how humankind should interact with nature. Despite the contradictions in Protestantism, Sutton uses her rhetoric to play both sides of the dualism. At times she presents nature as a tool for humankind such as when she lists natural resources available along the trail; and then she suggests that humankind is nature's steward. Nature provides for humankind by revealing natural roads to the west, but Sutton's mentions of gardens and cultivating of land often in her journal suggest that she values stewardship of the land as well by working with it and caring for it rather than simply using it for one's benefit. Stewardship is one way to partner with the land.

Sutton describes gardens, good places for gardens, and the lack of gardens on the trail. Protestantism viewed the land as a vessel to be used by humankind for survival so the lack of available land suitable for gardening and growing sustenance for her family made the land seem inhospitable to Sutton. The reality for Sutton and other frontier women was that they needed to be able to plant a garden and grow vegetables for their family in order to provide a variety of foods for their families. Many settlers, Sutton included, looked at the land of the west as a Garden of Eden to be developed by settlers upon arrival. Not only did frontier women like Sutton look for suitable garden locations because they knew they would need to be able to grow vegetables to feed their families, but they also looked for land that they could improve upon with flow-

ers. These gardens, Kolodny has written, were part of the western fantasies that frontier women brought with them out west. Kolodny describes the environmental fantasies of frontier women as, “Avoiding for a time male assertions of a rediscovered Eden, women claimed the frontiers as a potential sanctuary for an idealized domesticity. Massive exploitation and alteration of the continent do not seem to have been part of women’s fantasies. They dreamed, more modestly, of locating a home and a familial human community within a cultivated garden” (*The Land Before Her* xiii). Sutton’s narrative suggests that she expected to live out her gardening fantasies on the frontier and that as she traveled overland she was looking for sites where others might live out their fantasies as well. In this way, Sutton’s journal functions as a guidebook.

Part of the gardening fantasy of frontier women, Merchant has argued that settlers saw the frontier as a Garden of Eden that they wished to cultivate and restore to its glory. This recovery of the Garden of Eden was shaped by two different narratives. Merchant describes the narratives as the recovery narrative in Genesis 1 that encourages recovery of the Garden of Eden through domination of the earth and the recovery narrative in Genesis 2 that advocates stewardship and care of the land (*Earthcare* 31). Sutton subscribes to the environmental philosophy present in the narrative in Genesis 2, which is supported by her interest in gardening, locating viable garden spaces on the frontier as well as her desire to partner with her surroundings. Sutton’s environmental rhetoric reinforces the relationship she is building with nature along the trail and she sees herself working with nature to settle the West.

### ***Gendering the Land***

A central concern for modern-day ecofeminists is how gender has been related to the land. Frontier women often related to nature as if it was an individual and they described nature in either feminine or masculine terms. Two of the three women I included here relate to nature as

masculine. Often whether a woman genders the land as male or female, she is doing so because of particular social conventions. For example, Sutton uses the term “barren;” to describe some western lands, borrowing the term from the patriarchal language of childbearing to impose gender upon the land. Men are not “barren” they are sterile. As a word used to describe the environment, barren carries negative connotations because women have been valued for their ability to bear children. Land that is not thought to be fertile, a subjective word at best, is undervalued. Sutton’s use of “barren” represents the social construction of nature with which she is familiar. Falling prey to relating to the land as though it were feminine, Sutton views the land and its visible fertility in feminine terms. Her use of the word barren reflects her understanding of the value of nature’s ability to reproduce. Sutton uses this term to demonstrate her knowledge of gardening and it shows that even though she values partnership with the land, she is influenced by social norms that value land according to its ability to produce. Merchant describes the way that humankind has used the Garden-of-Eden narrative to connect women to nature through biology and its far-reaching implications in modern-day interpretations of humankind’s relationship with nature, “As virgin, Eve represents pristine, untouched nature; as fallen Eve, she symbolizes a barren desert wanting improvement; as mother, she implies a planted garden, an improved land, a ripened, fruitful world (XVI).” Sutton’s Protestant background supports her vision of nature as feminine and her rhetorical choices imply that Sutton’s “ideal” landscape is as Merchant describes; the matronly version of nature that can be found in a cultivated vegetable garden for feeding a family. To be practical, Sutton had to look for land that would support a garden.

### ***Nature as Personal Reflection***

Although Lawrence’s focus in *Writing the Trail* is on gender on the frontier, she spends a great deal of time analyzing her subjects’ interactions and interpretations of nature on the trail.

Her insights offer valuable connections between women and nature in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> century and help to understand how women related to their environment. Lawrence asserts that “As the landscape becomes increasingly alien and the travel more arduous, their romantic language constructions break down, and they identify their emotional and physical discomfort with the landscape. The desolation of the land reinforces their sense of dislocation” (5). The idea that as women encountered new lands so different from the land of their home they became unable to connect to nature and found themselves more isolated and lost suggests that women traveling on the Overland trail had to renegotiate their relationship with nature to come to terms with the lands of their new home especially since many women’s families went west specifically to obtain land of their own. The way that frontier women established new relationships with nature along the trail offers insight into how modern-day society has to learn how to reevaluate its own relationship with nature by conserving or protecting endangered lands, minimizing waste, and reducing its carbon footprint.

As Sutton nears the end of her fourth month on the Overland Trail, she begins to reflect on what she’s missing from her life in Illinois. Unlike other women who wrote of frustration and exhaustion in their journals, Sutton’s intent is to use nature to describe the gap between what she views as civilization and fertility to the promised land-as-Garden-of-Eden. She does this by showing her reader how nature is not measuring up to her expectations and lamenting the dry weather which also reflects her exhaustion and her loneliness in her July 31<sup>st</sup> entry,

We are at noon on the beautiful Boise River under the Balm of Gilead trees. This river would be called a creek in the states, but on this trip all the large creeks are called rivers. This river has rocky shores and bottom and the prettiest banks of white coarse sand we ever saw....Have not seen a vegetable growing this year.

We have not seen any rain for two months, nor do we expect to see any very soon, and we are nearly smothered and covered with ashy dust, and the sage looks like it would set on fire without help. (19-20)

Sutton describes the missing vegetable gardens on the frontier to let her reader know that the land is not particularly suitable for growing vegetables. Her mention of a lack of rain is intended to help her reader to value rain and water resources when they are found as well as prepare for long stretches without reliable sources for food and water by preserving what they had and bringing as much from home as they could carry on the journey. Sutton's text also suggests her fatigue. She's tired and the journey has taken its toll on her: she uses her journal to vent her frustrations and also to express her emotional fatigue.

After her frustration with the dry weather at the end of July, Sutton begins to look for the promise in the land in relation to its ability to be cultivated for individual use, which is another way that Sutton promoted the settlement of the frontier. For Sutton this means nature's ability to produce and sustain a vegetable garden. This reflection is for the reader who might be thinking of traveling overland but perhaps wanting to settle in the land between their current home and the Oregon Territory and her descriptions hone in on the frontier fantasies of other women who are either considering or preparing for the trip west. In her August 2<sup>nd</sup> entry Sutton expresses her belief that the land is occupied by "savages" who don't know how to grow a garden, "This bottom we think would yield common produce well but it is not probable that it will ever be cultivated. It is too far away in a savage land – an uncivilized land among the savage Indians who know no more about garden vegetables than they know about work" (20). Sutton wants her reader to understand that she connects civilization to understanding and using the natural world to produce food for humankind. Her frustration with savages who don't know how to grow a garden is more

reflective of her exhaustion and frustration with having not reached her destination and her attempt to connect to anything tangible, whether it is positive or negative, in the landscape.

Traveling the next day (August 3<sup>rd</sup>) Sutton reports on the pesky grasshopper population that has made quick work of a settler's garden (20). Sutton's reflections on land suitable enough for a garden suggest that she's describing lands that she considers habitable. At this point Sutton begins to shift from describing land just to describe it and enjoy it, to describing how the land might be used for settlement. Her writing has taken on a more useful role for potential settlers or travelers by offering up useful information in place of simple description and demonstrates her knowledge of nature in her August 3<sup>rd</sup> entry,

They have a garden enclosed here with poles but the grasshoppers have eaten it up. It is now 100 miles to the Grand Round and 550 miles to Salem Oregon.

Snake River is about half as wide as the Illinois River and runs into the Columbia. Boise runs into Snake River and is about half as wide and a much pleasanter river with its beautiful trees pretty enough to stand in a Horticultural garden, while Snake River has nothing but bunches of white willow. Can hardly make out to get a bite to eat here. (20)

Sutton wants her readers at home to know how to find the Boise River and she wants them to understand it as a habitable, fertile place worthy of settlement; a place that aligns with her own frontier fantasy of fertile land in the West. Along the trail Sutton is constantly looking for spaces in which settlers (women) might establish their gardens to live out their own gardening fantasies. This brief passage is another way that Sutton attempts to reach a broader audience of potential settlers. Since her husband had traveled out west prior to their marriage, it would be reasonable to expect that her journal would be sent back to Illinois to encourage a steady stream

of followers including her own family and friends. Sharing the ins and outs of the trail in her journal, Sutton is encouraging settlement not just in Oregon and California, but all along the trail. Sutton's mingling of environmental and biblical rhetoric reminds her reader that she believes the West should be settled and that God created the west for it to be settled. In particular her use of large biblical passages that describe explorers who traveled great distances to uncover wildly fertile land for pious people expresses her belief that God wants settlers to go west.

In one of her longest passages, Sutton exhibits her knowledge of the Bible for her reader. Taking a passage from the Bible and placing her family in the narrative, Sutton describes the land of the west as a literal land of promise in her June 12<sup>th</sup> entry,

The grass is very poor and our undertaking requires patience. The roads on both sides of the river have left others and we have to take over the hills and worry along to this side of the Jorden, and try to possess the good land which we believe is reserved for us and our children; for Jon the son of Nun has been there and James the son of John has searched out the land. They went up to the mountains and came into the valleys and they saw we must go up and possess the good land of Egypt. – but this is a land of hills and valleys and watered with springs from the mountains and flows with milk and butter and an abundance of green grass for our cattle. So John and James returned to their own land and told the good news that they had found a pleasant land and had come for their families and friends to go with them to enjoy the health and mild climate of that far land that is set before us. But it is a way yonder over the Rocky Mountains and through the great wilderness and across wide spread deserts. But come on, never fear, be not afraid of the face of man, for God said, “I will be with you, and lead from them that trust in

me safe through.” And charge John and his son James, encourage them and strengthen them and speak comforting words to them and they shall go before, to lead you the right way. (10)

Using the religious imagery of the Bible to describe the promise of the west, Sutton further invites her reader to participate in the western migration by casting her family in familiar biblical roles. Sutton places herself in the role of the voice of encouragement for other settlers. She is “telling the good news” of the west even though she herself has not yet arrived. Her telling of the promise of the land of milk and honey is somewhat premature, but it is also reflective of her faith in western migration and God’s intention that western lands be settled as well as the descriptions her husband and stepson brought home with them. Kenneth Holmes notes that Sutton executes a biblical “play on words” by using her husband’s name, John, in place of “Joshua the son of Nun” and his son James, who had both traveled before the family to scout out the land (48). Sutton is selling nature to her readers here in the form of a biblical story. She depicts a perfect vision of nature along the trail and relates it to her reader’s familiarity with Bible stories to give it more credibility.

### ***Modern Day Implications***

What makes Sutton’s diary so remarkable is that it functions as a way for the writer to examine overland trail life in a more complex way. Not only does Sutton describe in detail the rigors and excitement of overland travel, she writes of the landscape in biblical terms to offer her reader an enlightened and inspired way to interpret traveling west. She explores the landscape with vivid description that blurs the line between romanticizing the landscape and promotion of the frontier to vivid details of the minutiae along the trail.



In contemporary environmental discussions, Sutton's journal contributes to a feminist discourse that embraces women's interpretations of the relationships they develop with nature and the landscapes they inhabit. Sutton's narrative shows not only how she interacted with the land as she encountered it, but how she inscribed her social culture onto the land to persuade her reader that not only was California a land of promise and opportunity, but that God himself seemed to be calling pioneers to the land of the West. Unlike other diarists of the overland trail, Sutton's rhetoric embraces a transformation of Protestant environmental ethics by slowly taking her reader on the overland journey with her and changing his/her mind about how humankind should view the earth. While Sutton cannot be truly objective about nature because of her cultural and religious background, her writing certainly shows a thoughtful attention to the conflicting values about nature present in Protestantism. Sutton makes it clear that she chooses friendship with nature and stewardship over domination of nature in her writing. While she explores this value at length in her journal, she uses the familiar language of the Bible to impart her message to her reader. It is this understanding of her audience that reveals Sutton to be a skillful rhetorician.

Sutton's journal not only offers insight into the environmental ethics of other frontier women who sought to make homes for their families on new land, the journal also shares a glimpse of the way that the westward migration altered the landscape forever. For environmental historians, the descriptions of a densely populated overland trail depict the physical scarring of the earth by wagon train and mutilation of the prairies by settlers using natural resources indiscriminately as they traveled. By describing the vast numbers of wagons on the prairies, Sutton offers up a real-time account of the density of travelers on the overland trail, which describes the

toll they took on the natural resources by painting a picture of how they changed the land they crossed.

## **Chapter Four: Nancy Sherwin: A Spiritual Journey Transcribed in Landscape**

When Nancy Sherwin and her husband left Kentucky for Nevada in 1858, she had no idea that on the Overland Trail she would undergo a spiritual and philosophical transformation. In Sherwin's journal she explores her relationship with the environments of her past, present, and future, all the while getting to know herself. Although she relies upon her Protestant background to relate to nature in the beginning of the journal, Sherwin slowly begins to relate to nature for nature's sake; they are simply getting to know one another. In the process of getting to know her environment, Sherwin begins to understand her place in that environment and arrives at a deeper understanding of who she is as a person. The environmental rhetoric in Sutton's Overland Trail journal reveals her to be an historical ecofeminist whose view of nature as a living being aligns her philosophically with modern-day ecofeminism.

### ***Biography***

In May of 1858, Nancy Colvin Sherwin left Falmouth, Kentucky, with her husband, James Sherwin, for Nevada. James Sherwin had returned to Kentucky to marry Nancy after having corresponded with her for ten years. During the years of their correspondence James Sherwin worked as a successful miner in California and served one four-year term in the state legislature of California.

Chronicling her journey overland, Sherwin kept a faithful journal. Writing almost daily, she never failed to record the date and day of the week as well as distinctive scenery, weather, and road conditions. Often these descriptive sections include Sherwin's own responses to the challenges and pleasures of the journey. Beginning in Iowa on May 10, 1859, the journal ends on August 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1859, with the Sherwins' arrival at the Humboldt River in Nevada. After a few

years in Nevada, the Sherwins moved to Benton, California, finally settling in Round Valley, California, in 1866 (Sherwin family typescript UC Bancroft Library).

### *Audience*

Overland journals often described the toll wagon trains took on the land and their resources; most especially how they affected water and food supplies. Since often the role of the journal was to guide remaining family members on their trip out West, details such as where good water and food might be found (or where they were scarce) helped family members following the group to know what to expect at certain points along the trail. In *Women's Diaries of the Westward Journey*, Lillian Schlissel describes the various purposes for which nineteenth-century diaries were written, "As a general category, the nineteenth-century diary is something like a family history, a souvenir meant to be shared like a Bible, handed down through generations, to be viewed not as an individual's story but as the history of the family's growth and course through time" (10). Sherwin's journal was meant as a guide for family members who might join her out West and it was also intended to be the story of her family's incredible journey, but it was more than that. Sherwin's spiritual focus in her journal and her strong ties to Protestantism offer details of some of the underlying reasons settlers went west in the first place and how they related not only to the overland journey itself, but nature along the trail.

In *Gender and the Journal: Diaries and Academic Discourse*, Cinthia Gannett synthesizes research on the differences between male and female journal keepers. In the chapter, "Gender and Journal-Keeping Traditions," Gannett cites Robert A Fothergill's research on types of journals: "Fothergill proposes four classes of pre- or proto-diary writing that evolve into different strands of the journal/diary tradition: public journals, travel journals, journals of conscience or spiritual journals, and journals of personal memoranda, akin to commonplace books" (105).

Sherwin's journal falls somewhere between the categories of spiritual journal and the travel journal; her goal was to transcribe her trip, but she also describes her spiritual journey while on the trail. Sherwin's journal is much more than just a family history; it is her own spiritual transformation.

Sherwin's first nature-related observations describe the lack of natural resources along the overland trail. In her entry from Thursday morning, May 19<sup>th</sup>, Sherwin reflects on not having enough resources day-to-day along the trail, "Timber is very scarce. We have traveled two days without passing any heavy timber. Occasionally we see a grove either to our right or left" (10). Despite her reflection on nature and natural resources, her focus in her journal is her spiritual journey early in her trip as she travels to the land of her future home. However, as her journal progresses and as Sherwin spends more time on the frontier, she becomes more attuned to her surroundings. Her exposure to nature intensified, Sherwin begins to relate to nature on an individual level that is reflected in her journal entries. Relating to nature individually is the first stage in Carolyn Merchant's partnership ethic and Sherwin's first step toward becoming an historical ecofeminist.

On the trail, as Sherwin's ecological awareness rises, she learns how to dwell in a place, as Reynolds describes it by paying attention to place (142). By paying attention to place and its borders on the frontier, Sherwin is able to transcribe her transformation in the journal of her overland trail experience. Sherwin's journal offers important insights not only into how the land was changed by overland travelers, but how the travelers were changed by the land. Sherwin focuses less on how she changes the land, but how the land affects her spiritually and philosophically. Her spiritual reflections depict how frontier women began to view the land philosophically

as having life-like characteristics. It is this new view of nature and land that suggests frontier women were historical ecofeminists.

The mutual transformation of traveler and landscape helped to shape and create the myths that surround the American West in scholarship and literature, including frontier women's narratives. This transformation is most evident in the civilizer myth, which utilizes woman as a symbol of civilization on the frontier. Women were thought to be good and God-fearing and their presence was intended to tame wild savages or, at the very least, some wild cowboys. The myth of woman as civilizer was intended to make reluctant settlers feel reassured about the settling in the west. Scholarly literature still puts women into the role of civilizing force on the frontier, which contradicts what we know of frontier women and their complicated and layered lives. Despite the contradictions between frontier myths and reality, Sherwin chooses to use her journal to cast herself as a frontier civilizer.

Journals have a diverse set of purposes, and each writer interprets his/her relationship with their journal differently. As a tool of the writer, journals represent a unique opportunity to create an audience that meets the writer's specific needs. For example, if the writer is using the journal to describe their lengthy overland journey for family members, the tone and scope of included information will be different than the journal written to explore the spiritual transformation of an individual where the writing is most likely very personal and not necessarily intended to be shared. Sherwin's journal met her needs as a spiritual transcription of her journey and the transformation of self, her journal was meant to be shared (as most overland journals were), but its purpose was different from other journals which were written to highlight trail features and challenges. Sherwin's purpose in writing her journal was not only to highlight her spir-

itual self for her reader, but to show him/her how to live a moral life on the overland trail while also awakening to the powers of nature.

Although contemporary definitions of journals or diaries describe them as an expression of self, historically diaries and journals had more public uses than private. For example, a woman might keep a journal as a way to record the main events in her life. She is recording these events as a way to pass the information down to her family members, or share it with her children, rather than recording it for herself. Because the book has a purpose outside of her the writer will construct a more public audience and carefully select not only the information that she records, but the tone in which she shares the information. Sarah Sutton's journal, as described in chapter three was intended to be a public document and that is certainly the case with Sherwin's journal as well. Sherwin used her journal to create a public self, despite the very personal transformation that occurred while she kept the journal.

Sherwin's journal offered a snapshot of her spiritual self that she intended to create to leave an impression of who she was and her possible contributions to the Overland trail. The snapshot of Sherwin's life included in the journal shows a woman who never questions her spirituality, but allows her interpretation of her faith to take on new layers and develop as she undergoes transformations. Sherwin certainly saw her spirituality as a civilizing force on the trail. In her May 16<sup>th</sup> entry Sherwin expresses her faith on the frontier, "although I woke up early, the birds were already awake and singing sweetly. Their sweet songs cheered my drooping spirits, and made me feel like following their example and pour forth in song my Great Creator's praise" (7). With her references to God and nature, she is showing how the natural world doesn't have to be separate from civilization. If her journal was intended to be sent home, it creates a comfortable picture of spirituality in nature and on the westward journey. At the end of her May 16<sup>th</sup> en-

try, Sherwin relates to nature and spirituality once again, “The moon shone in all her splendor and the stars looked down upon us in all their mild beauty, lifting our thought to Him ‘Who fixed those orbs of glory there’” (8). This comfort reflects civilization and familiarity on the trail.

Sherwin’s use of civilization in her journal was a rhetorical move meant to encourage and comfort other women. She wanted to encourage other women to travel west with their families, but she also wanted to reassure them that they could survive the journey and that their spiritual selves would remain intact no matter the obstacles they encountered along the way, as she displays in the two passages from May 16<sup>th</sup> quoted above. Sherwin certainly believed that women were the force that could civilize the West. It is perceptions of travel and settlement like Sherwin’s that helped scholars to categorize frontier women as “civilizers” of the trail. The spirituality that many frontier women brought with them was thought to be an essential ingredient to settlement and order on the western frontier because organized religion offered spiritual order and reminded people of how they were supposed to live their lives. This reminder encouraged men and women on the western frontier to behave as though they were living in their eastern homes.

Like many other women on the Overland Trail, Sherwin’s journal records details of the journey including the passing of landmarks such as Chimney Rock, scenery including types of plants and weather, people she encountered, as well as many reflections on her relationships both intimate and superficial. In her June 20<sup>th</sup> entry, Sherwin describes her impressions of Courthouse Rock and Chimney Rock,

Sand hills and clay banks arose on our right. Some of the bluffs presented the appearance of old fortifications and ruins of some ancient city. One we passed looked like a woman on horseback. Away in the distance we descried Courthouse Rock – so named from its appearance, being in the form of a house, while to the



right of it, and still further in the distance we beheld Chimney Rock lifting its tall head above the surrounding rocks. We traveled in all about 20 miles. (31)

Sherwin's description of Chimney Rock holding its head up high gives the rock life-like characteristics. For Sherwin these natural landmarks along the trail were waiting to greet travelers and were a representation of nature's personality.

Sherwin offered up a variety of details of trail life for her reader. Not only did she describe the information she would likely pass along to travelers following her out west, but she writes of special places and people who were either influential in her life as a whole, or in her life that day. These reflections suggest that for Sherwin there was nothing too small to mention in her journal and that the unexpected was everywhere on the overland trail.

The key to understanding Sherwin's audience is how she creates her persona in the journal. The way that Sherwin casts herself in the journal reflects her intention to be remembered as an honest, God-fearing woman who looked for the good in everything and lived up to the ideals her faith and patriarchal society established for her. In her May 31<sup>st</sup> entry Sherwin saw the good in nature and used it to lift her spirits, "We passed through some beautiful country, but was too stupid and dull to notice even the beauties of nature. I saw some lovely flowers growing by the wayside. It seemed as though they grew there to cheer the weary pilgrim as he or she wends her way over this vast country" (20). By creating her persona as such a "good" woman, Sherwin allows herself to be categorized historically as a "gentle tamer," which was in keeping with the persona of a woman who is so good that she can tame wild savages (men) on the frontier. Joan M. Jensen and Darlis A Miller's essay "The Gentle Tamers Revisited: New Approaches to the History of Women in the American West," critiques Dee Brown's "elaboration of an older male image of western women" (9) in his book *The Gentle Tamers*. Jensen and Miller define four dif-

ferent stereotypes used to place women historically in the western migration: “gentle tamers, sunbonnetted helmpates, hell-raisers, and bad women” (12).

Jensen and Miller’s description of a gentle tamer falls right into line with Sherwin’s characterization of herself, “a chaste beautiful creature which cowboys placed on a pedestal and worshiped from afar – who received credit for improving manners and morals. Pious, pure, and submissive, the refined lady nevertheless administered constant pressure to respect the Sabbath, inhibit cursing and drinking, promote better grooming and more diversified diet and in general smooth rough edges from frontier society” (13). Although Sherwin didn’t view herself as one to tame wild savages, she clearly used her journal as a way to situate herself in the discourse of the western migration by offering up a romanticized version of trail life by showing how women can offer civilization to the frontier and its inhabitants as well as how the journey can change women for the better while showing how women travelers can keep up with societal standards in the primitive west. Although less tangible than the frontier fantasies of Sarah Sutton, Sherwin’s frontier fantasies were grounded in her romantic notions of a frontier that was civilized. It is only that as she spends more time on the trail that her world begins to include her interpretations of nature. Sherwin’s June 20<sup>th</sup> entry includes the following description of nature as she sees it:

Our path lay through the beautiful green valley of the Platte. On our left the river sped its onward way, while upon its broad bosom were lovely islands clothed in rich verdure and sweet flowers with here and there a green tree. They were of every size and form and presented indeed a lovely scene. We find here in the western wilds a vast field for admiration, meditation, scenes calculated to inspire the soul with love and gratitude toward Him who created them all. (31)

Sherwin catered to an audience that expected her to remain a lady on the frontier, perhaps even personify the frontier women present in popular literature. In some ways her reflections on nature suggest that nature was one of the safest and most ladylike subjects to discuss in her journal without breaching social conduct standards. By discussing nature, Sherwin provides her audience with the information that was essential knowledge for an overland traveler, while avoiding discussions of how to remain modest while traveling across the country in a covered wagon. In her July 12<sup>th</sup> entry, Sherwin describes Devil's Gate and the its surrounding environment in an effort to prepare her reader by providing a detailed description of the location, "We left camp at seven, traveled three miles when we came to Devil's Gate, a deep and narrow canyon between the mountains where the river runs through. Our party, most of them, went close enough to get a good view of it and some of them climbed a good distance up the rock. We camped in about three miles of this place on the banks of the Sweetwater, ate our dinners and traveled on" (40).

In particular, Sherwin's use of her journal offers a way to view frontier women's journals as a rhetorical space from which they shared their views of the West as well as its potential for settlement. Sherwin's use of land as a central character in her journal also suggests that the active role of nature in women's journals offers a way for scholars to explore women's historical environmental writing and place them in contemporary environmental discourse. By focusing her overland narrative on the landscape as a central character Sherwin is acquainting her reader with nature. This way of showing her reader the complexities and the beauty in nature suggests to her reader that nature's many mysteries could be revealed to those who travel overland to the west. The way Sherwin organizes her narrative in relation to nature shows how intimately some women connected nature and spirituality, thereby valuing nature and her interactions with nature greatly. This emphasis on nature and spirituality contextualizes the environmental ethics of

women like Nancy Sherwin who used their overland journals to express their views on nature and understand their personal relationships with the natural world during their time on the Overland Trail. Sherwin's journal entries also suggest that she began to understand how her Protestant background influenced her feelings toward nature by exploring the contradictions of humankind as nature's steward and dominator of nature. Her expressions of nature as alive represent her awareness of the contradiction and her struggle to decide for herself whether humankind should act as nature's steward, or use it for its own purposes.

Sherwin's journal combines her spiritual journey with her physical trek. Often she infuses her observations of trail life and nature with Protestant rhetoric that explores how she sees her earthly life connected to her spiritual life. Protestant rhetoric, as Sherwin uses it, connects nature to God and expresses Sherwin's spirituality in relation to her faith and her experiences on the Overland Trail. Sherwin's use of Protestant rhetoric, much like Sutton's, is an attempt to reach out to her reader through shared knowledge. Sherwin relies less upon specific biblical scenes than Sutton, and she refrains from quoting large scriptural passages. Sherwin includes broad Protestant themes in her writing such as beauty in nature as a sign of God's presence such as she describes in her July 21<sup>st</sup> entry,

Traveled 10 miles and camped near the Big Sandy River – a clear cold mountain stream. Our road was hilly and lofty mountains arose on each side of us. Near where we camped for dinner was a lofty gravelly bank which presented nearly all the colors of the rainbow. 'Twas a beautiful sight to look at. It looked as if some master painter had taxed his utmost skill. It had been painted by the Hand that gives the flowers of the field their lovely tints. (43-44)

Despite her evolving connection to nature, Sherwin, at times, seeks less to connect with the land than to use it as a springboard to not only discuss her faith, but display it. This display comes about when she describes the scenery along the trail as evidence that God exists because he presents such beauty for mankind to experience such as in her July 14<sup>th</sup> entry, “The evening was gloriously beautiful. ‘Twas indeed a rich scene to behold – the sun setting behind the snow-capped mountains. It lifted the mind in reverential devotion to Him Who is the Creator of them all” (41). Sherwin’s repeated use of Protestant rhetoric in her landscape descriptions forces her reader to remember her as a pious woman whose words reflect her devotion to her faith. Despite the fact that the Sabbath was not often kept because the demands of the trail required them to travel seven days a week, Sherwin uses her journal as a way to reflect on her spirituality and stay faithful to her church. Sherwin writes that she is fearful that Sunday travel will incur God’s wrath, and on occasion she fears that an illness or accident is a result of God’s displeasure that the wagon train continues to travel on Sunday (May 15<sup>th</sup>). By exploring these fears and displaying her faith, Sherwin reminds her reader that she’s doing the best she can to live up to the expectations of Protestant doctrine, which is something that is difficult when faced with the demands of overland travel such as covering as much ground as possible in the shortest amount of time. In her entries, Sherwin’s Protestant background creeps in and she strives to impress upon her reader that she values her faith and that she carries it with her in the face of a difficult journey.

Despite the fact that her experiences and impressions are the focus of her journal, Sherwin herself is often not at all present in the narrative she writes. Her reflections discuss the landscape, weather, basic everyday events in the order in which they occurred, and any significant happenings (sometimes her health or an illness is recorded), but Sherwin’s inclusion of herself or

her emotions are often excluded in her daily entries. Cinthia Gannett calls this omission of elements of a woman's life from her diary as being "muted" (127). This muting of one's life is done because, "women have been both implicitly and explicitly discouraged as speakers and writers and have been socialized to focus on the needs or interests of others, it's not surprising that the diaries many women have produced over the centuries show the traces of women's mutedness in their content and/or functions, which often serve the dominant discourse community's needs" (Gannett 128). Perhaps the regular omission of herself as a central character (nature often takes center stage in Sherwin's journal), suggests that Sherwin is censoring herself as a way of protecting her reader from the grim realities of the overland trail by focusing on what she sees as the positive aspects of travel. The omission of many travel hardships points to Sherwin's need to create a positive record of her journey. She needs something powerful to "sell" the overland experience to her readers and persuade them to care about nature and establish a relationship with it. Using the land as an active participant in the overland travel experience, Sherwin is able to literally use the beauty of western scenery and its connection to environmental values based in Protestantism to persuade her reader to travel west and be transformed by the land in the same way she is undergoing change. Sherwin desired to create a beautiful and positive record of overland travel and she ignores some of the very real obstacles that travelers faced on long and dangerous journeys. These omissions put her potential readers at a disadvantage and keep her reader at arm's length by denying the reader the opportunity to really know Sherwin through her writing and experience the overland trail as she experienced it in a more complete sense.

The intersection of spirituality and nature on the trail is what makes Sherwin's journal so interesting: she begins to overlap them and show how one influences the other without always connecting to her Protestant roots. Her transformation on the trail from subtle nature observer, to

active recorder of the natural world makes Sherwin an example of an historical ecofeminist. Sherwin switches from simply observing nature to becoming an active participant in nature by recording all that she sees. The depth of environmental description Sherwin uses in her writing reflects that she views her writing as a way to “conserve” nature as it existed at that very moment. Surely knowing that the wagons traveling behind them would change the land yet again, Sherwin’s transcriptions stop time and create a picture of an environmental space for her reader. In this way Sherwin becomes an historical ecofeminist whose words conserve nature in snapshots she writes in her journal. In her journal, Sherwin allows nature to remain alive and unchanged.

### *Place*

As Edward Casey, Nedra Reynolds, and others have noted, people shape and are shaped by the places they have inhabited. Sherwin is no exception. In the beginning of her journal she relates scenery to the land of her childhood. While Stewart physically alters her landscape and tries to bring her childhood home of Oklahoma to Wyoming, Sherwin describes scenes along the overland trail that remind her of home and remind her of how much she misses her home in her Thursday, May 12<sup>th</sup> entry:

We passed through some beautiful wooden country and passed some beautiful farms. My heart thrilled with pleasure as I listened to the sweet music of the birds and beheld the lovely wild flowers growing along the banks of the clear, ripply stream, the sweet Williams and the modest violet remind me of my dear Kentucky home and the happy scenes of my childhood when, with my dear brothers and sisters I roamed o’er hill and valley in search of the sweet wild flowers. (3)

Sherwin's words reflect how she feels connected to the familiarity of the land of her home. Yet, as she travels overland her words also show how Sherwin is trying to make sense of the landscape and get to know it by searching for signs of familiarity. Making a connection to the land offers Sherwin comfort and stability. This making of meaning helps Sherwin to ground her experiences in the concrete examples of faith represented in her natural surroundings. If Sherwin's journal was to offer her family a way of understanding her trip, then her use of faith to describe the landscape offers her family a way to connect to her experiences and see her as a strong heroine who is faithfully adhering to the social codes established by her Protestant religion as well as comfort her family by assuring them of her wellbeing during the journey. She may also be describing the land in detail so that her family will know as much about the route as possible should they decide to follow the Sherwins out west.

As she begins to get more comfortable with overland travel, Sherwin begins to appreciate nature without the need to contextualize it with memories of Kentucky. In her June 8<sup>th</sup> entry, Sherwin describes nature without connecting it to her faith, demonstrating that she is beginning to relate to nature without always relying upon her faith to contextualize it, "We camped early in the evening in a lovely and romantic stop, a clear ripply stream with green shady banks bounded our camping ground on the west, north and east, while upon the south lay the broad level prairie" (25). As she learns to dwell in the home they establish each night as they camp, Sherwin's connection to place expands and she begins to care about landscapes that have changed her. Her writing suggests that Sherwin learned that one night in a place can forever change an individual. This shift in her attitude toward unfamiliar landscapes also suggests that Sherwin is opening herself up to be able to connect to her future home. Despite the longing she occasionally expresses for Kentucky, Sherwin also finds herself overcome by the romanticism of the newly encountered



vistas of the west and opens herself up to a promising future shaped and cultivated by the land of the West.

Reynolds and Dobrin assert that geographical rhetorics are tied to the way(s) the writer relates to space and place (142). The way that a writer learns to relate to or inhabit a place influences how he or she writes about place as well as the way he or she connects to that place. Sherwin relates to place in a number of ways that shed light on her rhetorical choices. At the beginning of her journey, Sherwin relates to space by comparing it to her homeland of Kentucky, but as she gets to know nature and her environment a little better, she begins to connect with nature without the familiar context of past places. Sherwin's rhetorical choices are influenced by her level of interaction with and influence by the place she inhabits while she writes each entry. She is either moved by a place, or reflects on her past when she sees it, she may relate that place to her faith, but place impacts her writing every day.

Sherwin's encounters with nature on the frontier help her to learn how to dwell in a place by raising her awareness of her environment and the forces that act upon it. Not only does she learn to dwell in a place for a short span of time by paying attention to place and its borders, but she relates to the land by comparing it to Kentucky. The description of the land below was recorded at the beginning of her journey and reflects Sherwin's need to contextualize the landscape in terms of what she knows: her homeland of Kentucky and her faith in a higher being,

Tuesday morning, May 10<sup>th</sup>, 1859

But at noon the clouds dispersed and the evening was mild and beautiful. Our path lay across a broad prairie, covered with beautiful verdure, thickly interspersed with lovely spring flowers whose fragrance was borne to us upon the balmy air. 'Twas a sweet pleasure indeed to look forth upon the beauties of nature

and feel that A Kind and Heavenly Parent has created them all for the happiness of His creatures. (1)

By imposing the familiar onto the newly encountered; Sherwin tries to comfort herself with the land of her past. By making connections in this way Sherwin is reaching out to the land to embrace nature on familiar terms. Her use of the land as comfort in the face of the unfamiliar shows how Sherwin hopes her journey can guide and educate those who might follow in her footsteps as well as solidify her character in the journal itself. By connecting the new to the familiarity of her past, Sherwin shows how other travelers might connect to the land and look for similarities to make themselves more at home in foreign lands. Sherwin uses the landscape around her to cope. Not only does she rely on her faith and her connection to her homeland of Kentucky to make sense of the land around her, she taps into the “newness” of the land by opening herself up to the ways in which its familiarity could comfort her and the ways in which its differences could be exciting and interesting. By relating to nature through her past and exploring nature’s diversity, Sherwin learns to dwell in a place and learning to dwell alters her environmental ethic by connecting her to nature emotionally in a variety of ways.

### ***Sherwin’s Environmental Ethic***

Sherwin’s personal environmental ethic is grounded in her Protestant faith, but at the heart of her spiritual transformation is a shift in her environmental ethic. As Sherwin encounters difference on the trail, she begins to see herself in connection to her environment differently. Although she struggles to break free from her Protestant interpretation of nature, Sherwin begins to relate to nature beyond what it has to offer her physically and spiritually; she awakens to the idea of nature existing outside of humankind and its needs. Sherwin depicts this awakening in her June 26<sup>th</sup> entry,

Our road at first was level but we soon entered what we called the black hills and here the most sublime beautiful and romantic scenery met our gaze. The lofty hills, or mountains rather, were covered with evergreen cedar and pine. The summit of many of them was level and covered with green grass bordered by evergreens as though some hand of taste was preparing for himself a home of beauty.

‘Twas indeed a feast for the mind to meditate upon the rich beauties and taste displayed in nature’s works. About 50 yards from our camp was a spring of cool and sparkling water by which flowed a little clear brook which meandered through the grove, its banks lined on either side with roses. ‘Twas indeed a lovely and romantic spot that reminded me of my dear Kentucky home. (34)

Here Sherwin begins to relate to nature as something more than a representation of God. She begins to see nature as having a role in her life separate and distinct from her faith. Sherwin sees what nature has to offer her visually and emotionally by providing a break from the trail as well as putting her in the romantic novels that depicted the West that many women read prior to their own journeys west.

It is the realization that nature is not always connected to God that is most reflected in Sherwin’s journal as she begins to see nature as living outside of the context of her faith. In “‘*Thinking Like a Mountain*’ Persona, Ethos, and Judgment in American Nature Writing,” H. Lewis Ulman breaks down some essentials of environmental ethics according to Aldo Leopold, “Environmental ethics looks beyond the human sphere, defining human subjects and informing human behavior not only in the context of human rights and values but also in relation to non-human entities” (68). As Sherwin begins to look past herself at nature she begins to assign value

and potential “rights” to nature, which helps her to better align herself with ecofeminist philosophy.

Sherwin’s sense of self is revised as she begins to describe the landscape and her experiences on the trail with more clarity, which suggests that her time on the trail has given her a stronger voice. Sherwin’s ecological and spiritual transformation follows the stages of Merchant’s partnership ethic. Sherwin records in her journal her interpretation of the land as a living thing, and then she begins to incorporate the land as a living being into her personal relationship with nature and she reveals her thoughts on nature in her environmental rhetoric. However, since her journal stops before she actually begins to homestead, I can only speculate that she would have used this new environmental awareness in her future writing and as she cared for the land of her homestead.

Carolyn Merchant’s partnership ethics reflects key tenets of ecofeminism such as rejection of dominance over nature. Described in detail in *Earthcare*, Merchant describes an environmental philosophy that allows humankind and nature to work together each giving and taking from the other in a symbiotic balance, “Nature, as was once represented by Gaia, Eve, and Isis, is real, active, and alive. Human beings, especially women and minorities, as amply illustrated by their actions on behalf of the earth, are also real, active, autonomous beings. A partnership relationship means that a human community is in a dynamic relationship with a nonhuman community. Each has power over the other” (XIX). Merchant’s partnership ethic suggests a working relationship with nature that respects nature as an individual being. Sherwin’s interpretation of a “live” earth demonstrates that she is beginning to align herself with Merchant’s philosophy. While Sherwin doesn’t seem to go as far as recognizing a give-and-take with earth that is balanced (her writing reflects that she is firmly rooted in the Protestant doctrine that accepts nature

as a thing to be used by man) she does begin to view the land as having a life of its own and her writing suggests that she hopes to get her reader to slowly look at the land differently. On Thursday, July 28<sup>th</sup>, Sherwin writes, “Traveled 12 miles through the mountains. Our road lay over the lofty mountains and through deep, narrow and gloomy canyons. The scenery was such as to fill the mind with awe and reverence toward Him who created them” (45). Even though Sherwin contextualizes this scene with her spirituality, what she intends to do is remind her reader of the way that the traveler can connect to Him (God) in nature. Sherwin, like Sarah Sutton seems to suggest that going west is a spiritual quest and settlers are following the wishes of God by conquering and settling the land of the West.

### ***Sherwin’s Environmental Rhetoric: A Budding Partnership***

The influence of Protestantism on Sherwin’s environmental ethic is evident by examining her rhetorical choices. One of the most significant rhetorical moves Sherwin makes is gendering the land as male by describing the landscape as reflecting God, or Him. This is in sharp contrast to the historical descriptions of nature as a female waiting to be fertilized and bear fruit for man. Annette Kolodny examines the environmental rhetoric of the male explorers who wrote home of the pure, virgin land of the New World in *The Lay of the Land: Metaphor as Experience and History in American Life and Letters*. In their letters and journals, the land becomes a thing to be owned, and it is described with the same virtues valued in women: virginity, fertility, and beauty. Kolodny examines the rhetoric of explorers who describe the land as female and their conflicting reactions to the overuse of the land or the lazy farmer who grows wealthy off of the land’s abundance (7). Kolodny asserts that the explorers described a feminine New World to encourage settlers to make the journey to the New World, “In a sense, to make the new continent Woman was

already to civilize it a bit,” (9). Presenting the New World as already civilized helped to sell the unknown by making it less frightening for those thinking of leaving their homelands for the complete unknown. Sherwin’s journal reflects her frontier fantasy and her intention to bring goodness and piety to the frontier. Civilization also refers to domesticating the landscape. Domestication differs from domination in that it implies the use of land for survival rather than prosperity. Sherwin and her fellow overland travelers were looking to the land for both sustenance and prosperity, which closely aligns itself with the contradictions of domination and stewardship in Protestantism.

Sherwin’s use of male characteristics to describe the land of the west contradicts the feminized view of the environment most often present in literature and environmental rhetoric for centuries. In *Ecofeminist Philosophy*, Karen Warren cites Donna Haraway’s concept of “situated knowledges” and applies it to ecofeminism and nature’s role its relationship with humankind:

On this view, nature is an active subject – not a mere object or resource to be studied. Nature actively contributes to what humans know about nature. The job of the scientist, philosopher, and theorist is not to try to give accounts that “mirror nature,” since mirroring assumes that nature is an unconstructed “given.” Nor is it to act as if one “discovers” nature, since claims to discovery (like “Columbus discovered America”) mistakenly assume that there isn’t anything (or anything important) that already exists and that has agency. (34)

Haraway’s view of nature as active force in understanding the world is a philosophical view that Sherwin begins to adopt during her journey. Ecofeminist assertions of nature as alive and active offer insight into the differences between how men and women interpret their relationships with nature by helping to trace how and why gender traits are applied to nature. Ac-

cepting that nature has a role in scientific study as well as a voice that speaks for itself challenges patriarchal notions of humankind as superior to/dominate over nature. In patriarchal society women and nature were viewed as subordinate to man. The mutual subordination/domination of women and nature made them allies. Although Sherwin slowly begins to see nature as alive, she continues to connect nature and spirituality through Protestantism as a way of showing her reader that she still follows the “rules” of her faith by seeing nature as a representation of God. Rhetorically, Sherwin is playing both sides of the Protestant dualistic view of nature in her July 28<sup>th</sup> entry, “Traveled 12 miles through the mountains. Our road lay over the lofty mountains and through deep, narrow and gloomy canyons. The scenery was such as to fill the mind with reverence toward Him Who created them” (45). On one side she is a budding ecofeminist who sets up an ethic of care that encourages stewardship of the land and on the other side she is a pious, faithful woman who sees nature as a representation of God.

Part of the construction of self in her journal, Sherwin’s gendering of the land as male supports the patriarchal structure present in Protestantism. By placing God as the driving force behind nature in her journal at times, Sherwin reflects her struggle to balance the patriarchal order of things in her society as well as the growing importance of nature in her life. In order to balance the two sides, she downplays the role of women on the frontier (herself in particular in her journal by ignoring many of what would have been her individual contributions to life on the trail either helping to prepare food, clean up, or wash clothing). Sherwin mutes her functions on the frontier as observed by Cinthia Gannett. She often refers to tasks along the journey as just being “done” and in this way she lumps the women together in a collective. By doing this she removes individuality from the women she travels with and gives the men more of an individual presence in her trail narrative. What Sherwin does by eliminating much of the individuality from

the women in her wagon train as well as her own individual contributions on the trail is continue to present herself as the pious frontier woman, which upholds the ideal of the male pioneer that already existed in frontier literature and supports the patriarchal notion of women as “doers” and civilizers. While she removes individuality from the everyday work women did on the frontier and trail, Sherwin’s writing suggests that she is embracing individuality in nature. By relating her own relationship with nature, Sherwin reveals her individuality in writing. Her voice can be heard in her July 27<sup>th</sup> entry, “Left camp at half past seven, traveled 8 miles through a deep and narrow canyon between the mountains. We were emphatically surrounded by lofty mountains. I never before beheld such grand, sublime and beautiful scenery” (45). Sherwin took on the role of writer and observer and she treats the task of writing and observing trail travel as a privileged position, one that suggests women had free time on the overland trail to write and record their experiences. Unfortunately this was not a realistic representation of trail life for most women since most women had endless chores to do on the trail. Sherwin’s experience as she tells it is that the trail challenges came mostly in the form of weather and limited resources. Sherwin’s experience was also unusual as she did not have small children to care for during her journey and there is nothing to suggest that she was pregnant along the trail unlike many of her fellow female travelers.

Sherwin’s description of the land as a representative of God also reflects her gendering of the land as male. Her alternate depiction of nature as male points to Sherwin’s unique understanding of nature and her environment; by gendering the land as masculine rather than feminine, Sherwin relies upon the land as a source of stability for herself as she travels along a road with which she is unfamiliar. It is a road that will leave her family far behind and alter her life irrevocably. The one stable thing Sherwin had other than her husband James was her faith, which she



leaned on frequently during her trip. Sherwin's use of masculinity as a source of comfort suggests that she's not traveling west to be a pioneer herself, she is following her husband. It is her use of masculinity that supports patriarchy's view of women as the weaker sex. Sherwin does little throughout to describe herself as strong physically in the traditional sense. She doesn't see herself as brave in the sense that she is fearful during her trip, but she does consider it her responsibility to be positive, which reflects her emotional strength. Her creation of her character plays into the stereotype that men are strong and women are faithful. Her May 29<sup>th</sup> entry depicts her fear of divine retribution for traveling on the Sabbath,

The holy Sabbath was not kept holy, I fear, by us. I think too much labor was done in preparation for the succeeding week. It may be that we have committed no sin in doing what we have, yet I must say for one that I do not feel satisfied about it. I know not to ask the blessing of God upon our labor today. And oh! Should we ever do aught what we cannot ask expecting to receive His blessing upon. Nay, verily. Then I hurriedly pray that He may influence our hearts and minds aright and guide us by His wisdom in the path of duty. (18)

At times Sherwin relies upon her husband's strength to provide her with a measure of comfort during a time of uncertainty. By adhering to her social role and respecting her "place" Sherwin was able to construct an ethos that helped her reader to see her as a good and pious woman who is submissive to her husband. Sherwin used her journal to give her some freedom to explore herself while still respecting her social role: that of a faithful and dutiful wife. Her observance of patriarchal roles aligns Sherwin's journal with the representation of frontier women drawn up by historians for decades. However, Sherwin's environmental transformation and representation of nature as human-like link her with ecofeminism.

In the early entries of her journal, Sherwin describes nature as passive. Nature is a thing to be imposed upon, which she heartily does by contextualizing nature with her faith. As she begins to view herself in connection to the land differently, her tone reflects that she sees nature as an active force. Nature becomes a character in the story of her overland journal. By giving nature this presence in her journal, Sherwin invites her reader to see how nature is slowly becoming an active participant in her life and altering her experience on the overland trail. On Monday, May 23<sup>rd</sup>, she writes, “The sun was shedding his fitful glances o’er the scene. Anon there came a sun-beam and then a shadow, giving the landscape a rich and variegated appearance. The green grass which carpeted the earth was waving in the wind. And the lovely spring flowers nodded their heads to the breeze” (14). Sherwin begins to view nature as exhibiting free will, which further separates nature from God and allows the reader to see a little more of Sherwin herself as she too is transformed by the experience of traveling the overland trail. Subtly Sherwin is offering her reader the opportunity to alter him/herself for the better by traveling west and connecting to nature. This is the foundation of Merchant’s partnership ethic. By beginning to view the environment as a living being, Sherwin must recreate her entire relationship with nature because she can no longer view nature as a thing to be dominated and used exclusively for humankind’s benefit since it is alive and contributing to the lives of men and women who live with it. Sherwin must reexamine what she knows about the land and learn to take only what she must and also learn to treat the land with care rather than as a disposable producer of resources for humankind.

Sherwin’s imposition of Protestant rhetoric on the land in her early journal entries reflects, in part, the core of her environmental awareness. The beauty of the landscape, for Sherwin, is proof of God’s existence and his goodness and it remains so even after she begins to relate to nature differently and with greater awareness. Sherwin’s trepidation concerning her jour-

ney is not often expressed outright in her journal, but her observance of faith on the trail suggests that she is reassuring herself that God's will is for a safe journey to the West by reminding herself of his many blessings. Sherwin reminds herself of God's protection in her May 31<sup>st</sup> entry, "I confess the thought of being blown over at night when the thunder is pealing, the lightning flashing, and the rain pouring in torrents around fills my mind with fear. Yet we are in the care of Him who hath ever preserved us. Let us seek His protection still and may He grant us a safe and happy arrival at our far-off home in the west" (20). Among those blessings are the gifts present in nature. Sherwin's extended use of faith in her writing also encourages others to look for physical reminders of Him as they travel to provide them with strength in the face of difficult travel conditions. Early into her journey Sherwin describes how small she feels in comparison to the natural phenomena that proves God's power:

Tuesday morning, May 17th

Before I got done [eating supper] clouds began to gather in the west and it began to thunder and lighten; about dark there came quite a gust – the wind blew very hard and for a few moments the rain poured, while flash after flash of lightning illuminated the whole scene around us. To be far from home and friends, away from my habitation, camped out in open prairie, and to see all the mighty elements of nature in all their awful grandeur, fills the mind with solemnity. And we feel our insignificance in sight of Him Who ruleth the universe and all its mighty elements. (9)

Sherwin's placing of herself as insignificant in the face of nature as God's representative strengthens her creation of herself as the pious heroine. Despite the absence of organized religion while on the trail, Sherwin's frequent reflection on God's influence in her life further grounds

her everyday experiences on the trail in her faith. In the description from May 17<sup>th</sup>, Sherwin uses her fear of the natural world and the journey as an opportunity to reflect on the fragility of the human existence/experience. Her insignificance in the face of new landscape and climate also mirrors her fears about being on the trail so far away from family and home. By describing the human existence as insignificant Sherwin is able to camouflage her fear by hiding behind her religious rhetoric connecting God to nature through unpredictable weather.

Sherwin seems not only concerned with reflection on her faith and the creation of her image as a pious woman, she is also concerned with casting herself as a woman who is able to look on the bright side of difficult times. In her journal the morning of May 16<sup>th</sup>, she writes:

The rain was over and gone, and although I woke early, the birds were already awake and singing sweetly. Their sweet songs cheered my dropping spirits, and made me feel like following their example and go forth in song my Great Creator's praise...

The moon shone in all her splendor and the stars looked down upon us in all their mild beauty, lifting our thoughts to Him "Who fixed those orbs of glory there."

(7-8)

By showing herself as a woman who can make the best of challenging circumstances, Sherwin expresses her desire to be shown as a woman who is strong and hopeful for her future. This presentation of self allows her to offer her family a positive view of her life on the trail. By offering this view of her journey, Sherwin shows that she considers the concerns that her family might have for her safety and wellbeing on such a difficult and long journey to a land of which they know very little. She also shows her reader how sometimes the challenges of the trail can strengthen one's faith in God.

Sherwin's environmental ethic and rhetoric are supported by her deep faith. Although at the beginning of her journal it is pretty clear to the reader that Sherwin's environmental ethic stems from Protestant views of man's relationship with the land as well as God's presence in nature. Her location of God in the physical realm of the earth echoes Protestant beliefs about nature: that God is present in all nature, "The world is both manifestation and medium of divine power, glory, and goodness" (Stoll 13). Sherwin's descriptions of finding God in nature have Protestant undertones that reveal her deep faith. Protestantism described nature as God's gift to man, a place that depicted God's glory. Sherwin's descriptions often follow that train of thought and express her faith in God through her experience with the landscape. However, as Sherwin's journey progresses her environmental ethic transforms. She begins to see nature as its own being, which reflects her spiritual connection to nature and its growing importance in her life. Sherwin's July 13<sup>th</sup> entry explores her growing relationship with nature, "The evening was cool, the air delightful; the moon, fair queen of the night, arose from behind the mountain and shed her mild radiance down upon the lovely valley beneath, rendering it doubly beautiful. The scene was so enchanting that it was with reluctance that I closed my eyes in sleep" (41). This evolution steers Sherwin philosophically toward ecofeminism.

With the foundation of her environmental ethic firmly rooted in her faith, Sherwin's relationship with nature stems from her desire to respect and revere nature as the place where God expresses and exhibits his glory for mankind. Nature becomes a place for humankind to worship. The nature duality present within Protestant teachings also grounds the complexity of Sherwin's environmental ethic. It is Protestantism's conflicting views on nature that complicate how Sherwin sees herself in relation to the natural world. While Protestantism sees nature as a place that reflects God's glory and should be protected, it also views nature as something to be used for

man's benefit, "Yet one of the most important implications of the doctrine of dominion is human stewardship of the earth, which combines the theme of dominion in the first chapter of Genesis with man's purpose of dressing and keeping Eden in the second" (Stoll 25). These two perspectives on man's relationship to nature through religious doctrine contradict one another and influence Protestant individuals' relationships with nature. This contradiction within Protestant teachings seem to suggest an "anything goes" sort of philosophy encouraging humankind to protect nature as a representation of God and utilize nature for the benefit of humankind. According to Mark Stoll, Protestantism didn't just encourage humankind to utilize nature for his/her survival, Protestantism encouraged the use of nature indiscriminately for humankind's advancement, "Until very recently, Christians have generally assumed that man always played center stage in the terrestrial drama" (Stoll 25). This idea is central to the drive of western settlement and American colonization. Settlers traveled west to make their fortune during the gold rush and they traveled west to claim their "free" land under the Homestead Act of 1860. However, journals like Sherwin's show how Protestants struggled to understand and adopt Protestant environmental ethics into their lives. Sherwin's tone suggests that she wants her readers to take greater care with nature and develop more thoughtful relationships with their natural surroundings.

Sherwin's use of landscape to describe her faith is in contrast to the goal of achieving prosperity in the west because it puts an emphasis on the nature/culture duality rather than man and his ability to use nature for himself. The use of faith in Sherwin's environmental rhetoric underscores the competing goals within Protestantism: caring for nature in a stewardship role, or using nature for man's wellbeing and advancement. Sherwin's rhetorical choices support her changing view that nature is a thing to be regarded as alive and active, which reflects her recognition that nature, at times, should be afforded greater value than humankind often offers it.

Unlike Stewart who sought to know and understand her land, Sherwin writes that God has created nature (flowers, etc.) for man to enjoy, which suggests that humankind can only ever obtain a limited knowledge of nature. However, as her journal progresses, Sherwin begins to give the land life-like characteristics, suggesting that she is beginning to view the earth as a living thing and that nature begins to offer her another way to connect with her spirituality outside of Protestantism. With prolonged exposure to land other than that of her homeland, Sherwin's, and many other frontier women's perceptions of their natural environment develops more layers. The awakening experienced by the frontier women analyzed here suggests an ecofeminist leaning because the increased involvement with nature increases the scope of care through knowledge of nature.

While it is her Protestant faith that provides the first two layers of her environmental ethic, that of God's presence in the natural environment, his creation of the land for man's use, it is the layer that Sherwin adds on her own of the earth as a living organism that offers the greatest possibility for insight into how other frontier women experienced the land of the west on their journey. How many frontier women experienced the same kind of environmental transformation as they traveled overland? Just as Sutton and Sherwin were altered during their overland journeys, countless others were changed and their environmental consciousness was heightened. By viewing the land as a living organism, women were able to relate to the land in a more personal way. As such they could enter into relationships with nature that were founded on communication rather than domination. By communicating with the land and following its lead women were able to alter their way of seeing themselves in connection to the land. Frontier women like Sherwin began to realize that their role in cultivation of the land reflected who they were as individuals. Sherwin began to see that she could individually impact nature for the better by listening to

it. Sherwin's environmental discourse begins to reflect her own awakening away from home and her own transformation from daughter and sister, to wife and frontier woman. On Saturday morning, May 21<sup>st</sup>, she writes,

I find so much to admire as I pass through this beautiful country. Nature has been very lavish in her gifts to this beautiful world of ours. The lover of Nature is never wanting for something on which to feast his mind; the smallest leaf, the tiny spire of grass, the simplest flower is a mystery and an object of admiration to the wisest philosopher of the world. (12)

This entry expresses that nature has a will of its own. Nature has her own gifts to offer man and God. She is beginning to see the land as being alive and having something to offer her that is not representative of her faith. This representation is also outside of the nature/culture duality. Sherwin is offering a third possibility: the land as its own personality, which reflects her way of beginning to understand how she fits into the natural world as well as how she should interact with it. By listening and communicating with the land, Sherwin embraces a relationship with nature built on trust and individual cooperation. It is in this way that she tries to show the overland traveler how to approach nature in a civilized way and encourages him/her to have an appreciation for nature.

Protestantism embraces the nature/culture duality in Ecofeminist studies. The struggle to make sense of one's environment is present in the dualities that represent the struggle to both protect nature and use it for survival and even to prosper. Ecofeminists try to make sense of humankind's complex relationship with nature outside the restrictive bounds of the nature/culture duality, whereas Protestantism accepts it complete with its contradictions and flaws. Humankind has struggled to interpret its relationship with nature for centuries and the individual need to



connect to nature offers scholars rich insights into ways of relating to the landscapes that define people. Sherwin's transforming environmental ethic also suggests that she begins to view the nature/culture duality as a restrictive way to understand her connection to the land. By interpreting the land as alive, Sherwin tells her reader that the land is beginning to speak to her and show her that she can know it as she knows another individual. Simply listening and looking attentively, Sherwin comes to understand that she can become intimately acquainted with nature. On Sunday, June 26<sup>th</sup>, Sherwin writes,

There one of the most beautiful landscapes met my gaze that I ever beheld. Around on every side were the tall hills clothed in evergreen; below, the little green valley, the silvery stream bounding onward through it while the sweet flowers went forth their fragrance which was borne to us upon the balmy air. Far away in the distance, looking up in all its grandeur, was Laramie Peak lifting its head far above the surrounding hills. (34-5)

Sherwin's use of human-like characteristics to describe the hills and Laramie Peak reflects her changing attitude toward nature; it is no longer an inanimate object to be trampled over on her way to the West. This change in Sherwin's environmental rhetoric reveals how her reverence for nature as a representation of God becomes respect for nature on its own terms. Philosophically, Sherwin is beginning to view nature as a friend.

Of course, Sherwin's relationship with nature, as the reader is able to glimpse it, is somewhat restrictive in that she is only able to know the land in small pieces as she passes through and over it on the way to the next camp site. The snippets of information that Sherwin is able to offer in her journal suggest that she wants to show her reader that the land of the west is alive. She wants her reader to see the land independently of the confines of the nature/culture

duality that Protestantism prescribes by offering them a version of nature that doesn't align with either side. Sherwin's way of exploring the landscape outside of the nature/culture duality is to try to give it the opportunity to speak for itself through her words. She makes the land life-like as though through its actions it is able to communicate with its observer. Sherwin and nature engage in a partnership where the land speaks to her and she then writes on behalf of the land. In this way the observer takes a back seat to the land. Sherwin's approach to sharing the land's voice through her journal reflects the transformation of her environmental ethic and reveals that she views her connection to the land as a force that is developing and changing as she travels to the West. This approach to understanding and communicating for the land supports Merchant's partnership ethic and also reaches out to the reader by showing them an environmental ethic in transition through the eyes of its writer as she begins to make sense of her ever-changing surroundings. By learning how to create connections with the land as she encounters it even briefly, Sherwin is making meaning out of her own life in the context of her travels. By doing so, Sherwin contextualizes herself and begins to view herself as a part of a world much bigger than her childhood home of Kentucky. In her entry on Friday, May 27<sup>th</sup>, Sherwin describes nature as an active force on the trail,

The morning bright and lovely. The wood was alive with the sweet and merry music of the birds...on the south side, the banks are very steep and the country is undulating and presents quite a beautiful appearance. Some of the cliffs on the river are covered with what appears to us evergreens and in other places the banks are lined with trees and bushes all clothed in their rich summer attire. (17)

The way Sherwin begins to look at nature without referencing her home state of Kentucky shows how she begins to see her place in the West. Many of her newly encountered vistas

are described using human-like characteristics that make each new landmark feel like a character in her overland narrative. As Sherwin describes the land as alive with beautiful music and clothed in summer attire, she uses language to feminize the landscape and make it seem friendly and open for the weary traveler. Sherwin's enthusiasm for new landscapes suggests her excitement to "meet" the land of her new home.

### ***Sherwin's Modern-Day Contributions to Environmentalism***

Sherwin's journal reveals a woman who is beginning to undergo an environmental awakening. Her Protestant background might have kept her from real environmental activism since her writing reflects her struggle with Protestantism's conflicting views on nature and conservation. Sherwin's casting of herself as a pious heroine, and a civilizing force on the frontier reinforces patriarchal stereotypes of women and their roles in westward expansion. Although she was reluctant to separate herself from society, Sherwin begins to explore her individuality in her journal. This exploration of individuality foreshadows the work that Sherwin might have aligned herself with after settling in her new home. However, Sherwin's compliance with social roles in her journal also suggests that she would not have found herself an outspoken environmental activist. What her journal also shows is why traveling west may have played a large part in an ever increasing environmental consciousness that influenced modern-day environmental activists and movements.

As Sherwin transforms slowly during her overland trek, her words open up the possibility that many women may have undergone similar transformations as they made their way west with their families. In so doing, they may have formed an attachment to nature they had not possessed before. The possibility of these transformations poses the question of whether or not frontier

women having seen environmental destruction at the hands of eager travelers traveling overland were the first to work on behalf of nature.

## **Chapter Five: Elinore Pruitt Stewart – The Woman Homesteader**

Called *The Woman Homesteader*, Elinore Pruitt Stewart's letters reflect a woman who is deeply connected to the natural world and rooted to her Wyoming land. Going through the steps of Carolyn Merchant's partnership ethic, Stewart's letters offer a clear picture of a frontier woman interacting with her land through a formed partnership. The only frontier women analyzed here whose writing explores her physical relationship to the same land over duration of time, Stewart's life was different than that of the women whose writing spans their time on the Overland trail. Stewart had the luxury, if you could call it that, of maintaining a fixed home. She cared for her children and home in a fixed location, whereas Sutton and Sherwin were constantly on the move. Sutton and Sherwin also keep up appearances by maintaining their social roles in their writing by describing the duties of women along the trail. Whereas, Stewart openly described the masculine chores she mastered in addition to raising her children, tending the garden, and cooking for her family.

Stewart exhibits all three steps of the partnership ethic. The partnership ethic was integrated into nearly every letter that Stewart wrote and expresses her deep connection to and reverence for nature. Stewart writes of the land as alive, integrates the land as an individual into her personal environmental ethic, and then puts that philosophy into action when she works on her homestead and writes her letters. Unlike the other frontier women who wrote about their personal environmental ethics on the trail, Stewart's letters describe, in detail, how she interacted with her land and how she put her environmental ethic into practice. By writing about her environmental practices, Stewart reveals that she is an historical ecofeminist whose uniquely feminine discourse offers insight into the way women relate to nature.

## ***Biography***

Susanne K. George, Stewart's biographer fell under the spell of the woman homesteader and wrote her doctoral dissertation on Stewart's life and letters. That dissertation led to the publication of her book, *The Adventures of the Woman Homesteader*. Meticulously researched, George tracked down as much information as she could about Stewart's upbringing in Oklahoma as well as the background of each of her correspondents. George also interviewed two of Stewart's children; Clyde, Jr. and Jerrine and transcribed Stewart's letters from correspondents not included in *Letters of a Woman Homesteader*. George donated all of her research materials to the Sweetwater County Museum in Green River, Wyoming. The letters transcribed in George's collection and not included in the biography as well as some letters that were included in her biography of Stewart are the primary letters examined here. These letters offer Stewart's romanticized reflections on the land as well as lengthy descriptions of her garden and its contents. I have chosen excerpts from her letters that express her working relationship with the land as a way of understanding not only how Stewart connected to her land, but the way that she wished to describe Wyoming and the West for her readers. Through Stewart's letters readers can glimpse how invested she was in persuading her reader that homesteading, in its purest form, offered women the opportunity to take charge of their own lives and exist largely outside the boundaries of modern societal restrictions. Stewart resisted domination of any kind: just as she resisted being dominated by patriarchal society, she chose not to dominate her land. Stewart was homesteading's chief female champion. Her epistolary narratives provide insight into the ways in which nature offered women freedom from gender restrictions.

According to Susanne George, Stewart was born in 1876 in White Bead Hill in the Chickasaw Nation, Indian Territory. The oldest of nine children, Stewart became the caregiver of

the younger children when her mother and stepfather died just a year apart: her mother from complications of childbirth and her stepfather killed in a work-related accident. Married to Harry Cramer Rupert in 1902, Stewart bore one daughter by Rupert, Jerrine, in 1906. When Jerrine was roughly 10 months old Stewart and two of her younger sisters, Susie and Josephine, traveled by train to Colorado (George 1-5).

In Denver, Colorado, Stewart took a domestic job as a laundress for Mrs. Coney. Despite its origins as a relationship between employer and employee, their close friendship lasted the rest of Coney's life and defined Stewart's in ways that are evident in their correspondence. Coney was especially influential as one of Stewart's literary benefactors. She often sent Stewart and Jerrine books to read and encouraged Stewart's writing in what could be described as a parental capacity. Stewart makes it clear in her letters that she dearly loved Mrs. Coney.

How Stewart and Clyde Stewart, her future husband, met is a matter of conflicting opinion. Stewart wrote that she placed an advertisement looking for work and that Clyde answered, but George's research reveals that most likely in 1909 Stewart answered an advertisement for a housekeeper on Clyde Stewart's Wyoming ranch. Clyde Stewart's advertisement described the position as "a good permanent home for right party" (George 11). After a week-long interview in Boulder, Colorado, Stewart and Jerrine joined Clyde Stewart on his Wyoming ranch. On May 5, 1909, Stewart married Clyde Stewart and later that month filed on 160 acres adjoining Clyde Stewart's land. Although she would have rather filed on land in more forested country, Stewart was talked into claiming land "within two feet of Mr. Stewart's house, so it was quite easy to build on" (*Letters of a Woman Homesteader* 77). This allowed Stewart to establish her home on the homestead as well as meet the residency requirement established by the federal government

in the Homestead Act of 1860. Stewart's homestead also increased Clyde Stewart's total acreage since she was his wife.

Playing an important role in the settlement of the West, The Homestead Act of 1862 offered any head of the household (man or woman) the chance to file a homestead claim of 160 acres. Taking effect on January 1, 1863, the act provided "People over the age of twenty-one – both men and women, both citizens and immigrants who had declared their intention to become citizens – were eligible to file for up to 160 acres of surveyed land on the public domain" (Hine and Faragher 134). The homesteader had to live on the land for five years and make improvements on the land during their tenure (Hine and Faragher 134). Those improvements usually included a home and irrigation, the planting of a garden and perhaps livestock. The Homestead Act was one of the first opportunities for women to own their own land, and they answered the call. Marcia Meredith Hensley's study of single women homesteaders, *Staking her Claim*, asserts that single women homesteaders were plentiful and successful:

But the accounts of single women homesteaders in this book show that some women did indeed "light out for the territory." Unmarried women who went west because they wanted to and who were not burdened with providing care for a husband and children differ from the image of the reluctant pioneer wife. As single women making their own decisions, going west became a chosen adventure rather than an imposition of someone else's will. (19-20)

However enthusiastic Stewart was about "proving up" on her own land, the careful verbiage of the Homestead Act required that she meet certain residency requirements, with which Stewart could not keep up due to her constraints as a mother and wife since she chiefly resided on Clyde Stewart's homestead. As a result, Stewart's land was transferred over to Clyde Stew-



art's mother. Stewart and Clyde Stewart purchased the land from his mother when she "proved up" (George 16). Many have criticized Stewart's accounts of homesteading and proving up as a woman since she wasn't able to meet the governmental requirements to prove up and claim land on her own and she chose not to share this with her readers. While Stewart does write of her concerns over being able to prove up on her land, she doesn't actually write that she and Clyde Stewart signed her land over to Mrs. Stewart. This important omission reflects Stewart's desire to maintain her status as a buoyant woman homesteader who can do anything. Revealing to her readers that she had failed to prove up on her own claim would have damaged Stewart's credibility with her readers since she was promoting homesteading to women.

Stewart and Clyde Stewart welcomed four boys in their marriage; James Wilber (1910), Henry Clyde Jr. (1911), Calvin Emery (1912), and Robert Clinton (1913). All but James Wilber lived into adulthood. In addition to tending to her home and the homestead, Stewart had her hands full with four children! Although Stewart often laments the lack of available time for letter writing, her letters are often long and detailed.

During the first years on the homestead, Stewart maintained a faithful correspondence with Mrs. Coney in Denver. Her letters often featured vivid, if sometimes fictionalized, accounts of her new life in Wyoming meant to entertain Mrs. Coney. Ellery Sedgwick, the editor of the *Atlantic Monthly* was a friend of Mrs. Coney's and she called his attention to Stewart's letters (George 18). First published serially in the *Atlantic Monthly*, Stewart's letters were combined into a manuscript and published as *Letters of a Woman Homesteader* in 1914. The next year, *Letters on an Elk Hunt* was solicited for publication. While Stewart insisted that the letters she wrote to Mrs. Coney published in *Letters of a Woman Homesteader* were never intended to be

read by a broad audience, the letters she wrote for *Letters on an Elk Hunt* were written with the intent to publish.

In the fall of 1927, Stewart had a mowing accident, which put her in bed for six months. (George 129). Stewart then became very ill in the early fall of 1933. She underwent surgery to remove her gallbladder. On October 8, 1933, Stewart succumbed to a blot clot in her brain. She was fifty-seven years old (George 195). After Stewart's death, Clyde Stewart continued to work the ranch until 1940-1943 when he leased it. In 1945 the family decided to sell the land. Clyde Stewart moved to Whitefish, Montana, with his son Calvin's family. Three years later, in 1948, at the age of eighty, Clyde Stewart passed away. He was buried beside Stewart in Burntfork (George 196).

### ***Stewart's Audience(s)***

Stewart's audience has been a source of much controversy. Although Stewart herself always said she wrote the letters published in *Letters of a Woman Homesteader* only for Mrs. Conney, there is much speculation that she wrote with publication in mind since she had tried to write for publication previously and since many of her letters tell wild, tall tales that seem to embellish the life of the woman homesteader and make the everyday seem exciting. Some of her correspondents also questioned the way she told stories in her letters and suggested that large amounts of their contents were indeed fiction. George also acknowledges that some of the characters from the letters were composites of many individuals she encountered, "Although Elinore often deliberately borrowed from several acquaintances to create a composite character, Ma Gillis alone was the basis for Mrs. O'Shaughnessy, Ma Dallas, and Mrs. Pond" (120). Stewart's use of creative license in her letters reflects her strong desire to tell stories and share them with a wider audience than just a singular reader.

George, asserts that Stewart “deliberately wrote for publication, embroidering her facts with fiction, and that she firmly and self-consciously relied on literary tradition when composing her works, publishing under the guise of ‘found literature’” (199). Several of Stewart’s letters tell short stories of her “adventures.” It is clear that she is writing to entertain her reader. Her letters to Mrs. Coney were meant to catch her reader’s interest, but once her letters began to be published, her letters to other recipients, including Mrs. Harrison, carried on her tradition of sharing short stories in letter form. In this way, Stewart appears to be using her friends as a preliminary audience, perhaps a way to try out her stories on willing readers. The letters and their literary leanings express the value Stewart placed on education and literature. Stewart does not shy away from quoting a book or mentioning the most recent book in her library to remind her reader that she is well-read. Stewart is also writing to persuade other women that homesteading offers women a way to make a life for themselves outside of the societal restrictions many of them faced in other regions of the country. Homesteading offered Stewart her frontier fantasy: freedom and independence, and she wanted others to experience the same. Stewart describes her frontier fantasy in one of her letters published in *Letters of a Woman Homesteader*, “I should not have married if Clyde had not promised I should meet all my land difficulties unaided. I wanted the fun and the experience. For that reason I want to earn every cent that goes into my own land and improvements myself. Sometimes I almost have a brain-storm wondering how I am going to do it, but I know I shall succeed; other women have succeeded” (134). Her letters told women that they would find this freedom and independence in the West as women homesteaders.

Despite her limited education, *Letters of a Woman Homesteader* was very successful right after its publication. Susanne George believes that the success of Stewart’s letters during her lifetime was a result of her readers’ interest in,

Letters, especially those the reader believed had not been intended for publication, satisfied the public's taste for verisimilitude. This form, one Stewart may not have realized she was employing in the beginning, linked her to an outside world and an audience with whom she could share her experiences and talent. In addition, the letter genre, with its aura of authenticity, its journey patterns, its use of the familiar style, its structural unity, and its stylized Victorian conventions, easily encompassed the type of variety of subjects she wished to record. (George 200)

Some of her readers began long-term relationships with Stewart through letters. Miss Maria Wood and Mr. Zaiss reached out to Stewart after reading *Letters of a Woman Homesteader*. Their correspondence contains fewer fictionalized stories and more landscape and gardening description. After Mrs. Coney's death, her primary audience for her fiction seems to have been Mrs. Coney's daughter, Mrs. Florence Allen. Stewart's letters to Miss Wood contained less fiction, and more reflection on the everyday and the pleasures of her life outdoors in her garden and on the Wyoming frontier. Stewart's letters to Miss Wood seem to suggest that although there was an age difference between the two women (Miss Wood the older of the two) they shared a common interest in the outdoors since much of their conversation reflected on the garden and gardening-related tasks. The language of gardening seemed to be a common ground for the two women, a place where they could discuss a shared interest or passion. Marilyn Ferris Motz explores the middle-class woman's ability to use her garden as a space for expression of identity and creativity in ways that were socially acceptable in "Garden as Woman: Creation of Identity in a Turn-of-the Century Ohio Town" (35-6). Motz's assertion of garden as expression of individuality certainly reflects Stewart's environmental ethic and the goals of her environmental rhetoric. Women's work in gardens, whether ornamental or agricultural point to their increasing influence in

nature/humankind relations. Warren asserts that “The so-called feminization of agriculture refers to the increasing proportion of women in the agriculture labor force...Women are farm workers, either as unpaid family laborers or as wage laborers” (10). Their increasing scope of influence in environmental relations gives women a specialized language through which they can demonstrate their individuality and creativity as well as their unique relationship with nature. Stewart’s knowledge of gardening and her use of nature as a platform for self-expression demonstrate an ecofeminist philosophy that supports the value of nature as an extension of the individual. By representing herself in the garden, Stewart depicts her deep connection to nature and her respect for nature as an organism by examining her individual relationship with her land. Not only does Stewart view herself as promoting the west as a place for women to gain independence, but she sees the landscape of the West as a way for women to connect with themselves.

One of Stewart’s other pen pals, Mr. Zaiss, was a blind man whose correspondence with Stewart began after reading her work in braille. Her letters to him focus on detailed descriptions of the outdoors, including as much sensory description as possible. Since only the letters Stewart wrote are accessible to us (Miss Wood returned to the family all of Stewart’s letters to her after her passing) we do not know if she is responding to requests for description by her readers and we can only guess at the complete context of her lengthy conversations with her pen pals. What her responses to Mr. Zaiss in particular reflect is her desire to share her sight with him to insure that he is able to “see” what she can see and experience Wyoming with her. For Stewart this sharing is important so that she may pass on nature as though it were a gift. Stewart wants Mr. Zaiss to understand nature the way she understands it. She wants to help him relate to nature by helping him to fill in what he misses without his sight. Stewart seeks to make the land feel alive to her readers and none more so that Mr. Zaiss. Her desire to offer a view of nature as alive and

changing is an attempt to help her reader relate to nature and form an attachment to it that would encourage gentle and respectful treatment. In these letters Stewart is attempting to pass on Merchant's partnership ethic by externalizing and sharing her desire to see humankind partner with the land rather than dominate it. The connection she attempts to make with Mr. Zaiss through her correspondence is indicative of the attention she gave each of her epistolary relationships and the connection she tried to establish with the readers of her letters. This attentiveness is also present in her environmental ethic and her love of nature. Stewart's detailing of her gardening experiences as well as her lengthy descriptions of Wyoming landscape remind her reader not to overlook the tiny details in nature. In her letters to Mr. Zaiss, Stewart takes extra care to provide as much visual as possible so that she might "share" her land and her garden with him. In her letters, Stewart partners with nature to give Mr. Zaiss the gift of sight. Her letters provide a rich narrative filled with imagery. Mr. Zaiss is her one audience member who would most likely relish the descriptions of nature she provides.

Despite her descriptions of an adventurous life on Wyoming's frontier, Stewart still fell prey to the pitfalls of frontier life as did her sister homesteaders. Specifically, a lack of female companionship occasionally took its toll on Stewart. Despite boasting about how full her life was in Wyoming, she also longed for conversation and intellectual stimulation. For Stewart the letters filled a void aching for friendship. Even though she had relationships with her neighbors, Stewart's relationships with her pen pals suggests that she desperately wanted to connect with the world outside of the homestead and she was able to do so through her letters to others across the US. Stewart entreats Maria Wood to visit in her July 29<sup>th</sup>, 1919, letter, "How I wish you could make up your mind to try my sincere, if crude hospitality. The drouth has been so mean to us that I must go to Boulder, Colo. for the winter. Could you come that far?" (SGC 15). The let-

ters were her way of practicing her literary skills, a chance to try on new, literary personas, or to simply express her true self. Some letters seem to step outside the bounds of the literary and share everyday details, but most show a deep appreciation for romantic literature, especially in her landscape descriptions. Stewart's descriptions of nature in *Letters of a Woman Homesteader* borrow heavily from the romantic literature, with which she is familiar,

After we quitted the cañon I saw the most beautiful sight. It seemed as if we were driving through a golden haze. The violet shadows were creeping up between the hills, while away back of us the snow-capped peaks were catching the sun's last rays. On every side of us stretched the poor, hopeless desert, the sage, grim and determined to live in spite of starvation, and the great, bare, desolate buttes. The beautiful colors turned to amber and rose, and then to the general tone, dull gray.

(10)

However, her letters also project a literary persona carefully crafted by Stewart to describe herself as hopelessly positive and optimistic; hardworking and strong; adventurous and faithful; caring and persistent. In her February 11, 1929, letter to Maria Wood Stewart describes her plan for entertaining herself during a period where she was snowed into her home,

And it is going to be less amusing later because we can get nothing from the R.R. [Railroad]. The mail is brought by almost superhuman effort, nothing so heavy as groceries can be brought and when the snow starts to go out it will be even worse. You see My Dear we are snow bound. Here at our house we are very well fixed to stand a siege, we have never gotten over our old time habit of laying in a year's supplies. I didn't get caught up with my reading last year so I have stacks of mag-

azines and all my old favorites on the book shelf. Many others are not so fortunate. (23)

In the above letter, Stewart describes herself as a woman who knows how to make the best of a situation that would be desperate for many, and she also suggests that she's a hardworking woman well prepared for being house-bound for a few weeks when the snow was too high to pass through. For Stewart all of these things were embodied in the Woman Homesteader she created for her audience. This persona is on display when Stewart explores her connection to the natural world in her letters.

### ***Stewart's Environmental Ethic***

Stewart's environmental ethic and her use of environmental rhetoric are intertwined. As the most outspoken historical ecofeminist analyzed here, Stewart writes of her love for nature and expresses her environmental ethic through her rhetoric in every letter. Not only does Stewart describe her own relationship to nature in detail, but she describes nature in detail for her reader so that they will be moved to evaluate their own relationship to nature. Stewart encourages her reader to embrace their own individuality by connecting with nature, and she uses nature as a way of expressing herself outdoors, which she explores in letters where she describes how and why she plants certain flowers in her garden. By working with nature to learn how and what to grow on her land, Stewart demonstrates, rather than describes her environmental ethic. In her letters, Stewart details how she chooses which flowers to plant in her garden, and how she experiments with choosing vegetables to grow. In each letter Stewart tells her reader to get outside, get dirty, and look at what nature has to offer. Only then can an individual truly be free.

Stewart's romantic descriptions of nature reflect her view of the land and her relationship with the land reveals an environmental ethic that is grounded in appreciation for the natural



world. In her December 1, 1928, letter to Maria Wood, Stewart describes the scene from her window in romantic terms, “And I have a lovely view from my window, so beautiful when the sun sinks behind the willows and all their lovely tracery is against the sunset sky. This evening the sky was bright orange and the willows were black against it” (33). H. Lewis Ulman describes environmental ethics as looking “beyond the human sphere, defining human subjects and informing human behavior not only in the context of human rights and values but also in relation to nonhuman entities” (68). Stewart looked beyond herself in nature and her relationship with nature was diverse: she tried to get the land to produce, but she also worked hard to learn how to accommodate her land. Her writing expresses her view of the land as a living, breathing being. Stewart viewed her relationship with her land as a work-in-progress that was constantly evolving. In her November 1, 1928, letter to Maria Wood, Stewart describes her flowers as people, suggesting that elements of the natural world and the human world were closely related and she gave them each tremendous value, “Did I tell you about my flowers? Did I tell you that I have some sweet pink clove pinks that I call Woodsy? That pink wild roses flourish all around my home?” (SGC 23). Her writing reflects her passion for gardening and her love of western scenery. From the time she arrived at her new Burt Fork, Wyoming, home Stewart began the long process of introducing herself to the land and getting to know it through a trial-and-error process that allowed her to try to plant new flowers and vegetables in the high altitude. In her March 25, 1928, letter to Maria Wood Stewart describes her approach to gardening in high altitude, which offers great insight into her environmental ethic,

It has taken me twenty years to learn to grow tomatoes in this high altitude but I *have* learned. I used to reason that a small tomato would mature sooner than a large one, so I tried every human way of growing them. No good. Lots of green

ones for pickle but never a ripe one. Then a seedman put in a packet of mixed seed – they called it the kid’s garden. I took all the tomato plants and most of them were large kinds. I expected no ripe ones so gathered them when the freeze came. They ripened in the boxes and we had fine sliced tomatoes in Nov. So I learned how to do it. This year I shall have six varieties of *large* tomatoes.

(George 134)

Stewart’s description of learning which tomatoes would grow on her land expresses her desire to work with her land to produce for her family. Stewart’s pride in her horticultural bounty suggests that she views her success with the tomatoes as a reward for her patience and determination, representing how her land is an extension of herself. Stewart’s garden also afforded her status among her neighbors by establishing her as a successful gardener where many others had failed. Stewart’s letters offer up a way of relating to a new environment and forming lasting attachments to a land that was completely unknown.

Looking back on her Oklahoma childhood, Stewart often tried to recall flowers and vegetables of her past and grow them on her new land. She was not always successful, but her attempt to merge the environment of her old home with her new home reflects the way that she used the land to merge her past with the present. Clarissa T. Kimber offers a description of the various ways scholars study vernacular (dooryard) gardens in “Gardens and Dwelling: People in Vernacular Gardening,” “One such method of inquiry is using the garden as a way to understand how an individual or a group of individuals ‘come to terms with a foreign environment’” (Kimber 272). Stewart’s work in her garden and the choices she made concerning her garden such as plant choice describe her way of creating visual familiarity on her Wyoming land and show how she learned to “dwell” on her land in a physical way. This transformation and domes-

tication of her landscape offers Stewart comfort and peace as she creates a home on unfamiliar land. The symbolism of using nature as a way of establishing familiarity with her land suggests that Stewart desired a connection to her land for more than nourishment in the form of her vegetable garden. Stewart's need to be at home on her land and work with it suggests an environmental ethic that sees the land as an extension of the individual. As an extension of the individual nature becomes a way for Stewart to come to terms with change and adapt as well as engage in a dialogue with nature as she works closely with it to express herself and provide for her family.

Even after describing her plans for her garden, Stewart is still looking to the past and ways of including her past with her present. A way of mourning those lost to her, Stewart's use of her garden as a living memorial not only reflects her strong connection to her past, the land of her past, and her need to use the garden as a place of comfort and remembrance,

Did I ever tell you that each plant in my garden means some one? Iris for my French grandfather, peonies for a sister, forget-me-nots for my dear Mrs. Coney, daisies for Helen Groves, a sister of Mrs. Coney – lots and lots of dear ones, lots and lots of flowers. It is such a comfort, almost like doing something for those we love, to care for the sweet representatives. Pansies and sweet peas both do marvelously here – iris and gladiolus, too. Roses have not proved much of a success but some kinds of lilies do well. I have had twenty-two dear years of experimenting with growing things. (George 163)

In "Garden as Woman: Creation of Identity in a Turn-of-the Century Ohio Town," Marilyn Ferris Motz describes the subject of her study, Lucy Keeler, and her use of garden as a memorial as well, "My wall might be called a 'keepsake garden'...but indeed every part of the garden around the Cot is full of keepsakes and memories.' A lady's history is reflected in her

garden, she noted” (42). Stewart uses her garden to reflect on her history and keep her memories close. Her need to have physical reminders of her family members draws on her deep commitment to the land and echoes her belief that everything is reborn. As such, her memorial garden becomes a physical representation of her faith and belief in reincarnation.

Despite Stewart’s attempts to grow plants from her Oklahoma childhood in Wyoming, not all of them took. Although Stewart was constantly experimenting and working on cultivating her home landscape, her successes and failures allow the land to determine ultimately what will work. In this way, Stewart and nature are working together in partnership to combine the past with the present to create a landscape unique to her Burt Fork homestead.

Stewart’s environmental ethic is further defined by her merging of the landscape of her past with her present. Her use of memory to define her new natural space is one way that Stewart personalizes her landscape and gives it significance. Stewart comes to terms with Wyoming by transforming the landscape with the familiar. In this case she transforms the land with flowers. By creating and memorializing individuals with flowers she suggests that not only are people part of the land, but that the land is part of each individual. Stewart seems to assert that by growing plants she associates with individuals from her past, she can make them live again in her land, a sort of botanical reincarnation that keeps them close to Stewart in her time of need and reflects how she values the land and why she cares for it. Motz reflects that “In cultivating a flower garden, one imposes culture on nature, and the degree to which either culture or nature prevails in a garden is indicative of the taste and philosophy, as well as the diligence, of the gardener” (41). Stewart did impose culture on nature by choosing to plant flowers of significance to her to create visual beauty. She planned her garden each year and then planted it according to what did well the previous year. However, Stewart let nature dictate how the garden would come

together because she recognized that she had no control over how well certain plants would do in her garden. Allowing nature to be her guide shows how Stewart valued her environment and respected it.

In addition to the physical presentation of her environmental ethic in her daily life, Stewart's environmental ethic is present in each of her letters. She even describes her pen pals as plants. When writing to Miss Maria Wood, for example, Stewart writes,

Other friends that are like some plants, stand much neglect and are sweet even through that. You are such. I always feel guilty about the way I treat you. As if I hadn't watered you, or put you in the sunny window...But coming back to flowers and you. You are a geranium or some other long-suffering plant dear to my heart. How can you like me when I am so negligent?...You suggest many things to me, geraniums and woodsy-things, chipmunks and wrens, soft tinkle of little hidden springs, a star twinkling through the ponies. You are a lot of things to me. You are a faint whif of white rose, a pinky glimmer of lavender color: the bravest thing in the world and --- a benediction. (SGC 20)

The connection Stewart makes between friends and plants reflects her view that the earth is a living, breathing entity, which reflects Stewart's alignment with the first step in Merchant's partnership ethic. By seeing nature as alive, Stewart is able to engage with it in a more thoughtful and respectful approach rather than dominating. This approach to her friendships exemplifies Stewart's relationship to the earth and reveals her environmental ethic to be one that expresses her respect for her land and all of its possibilities. Stewart's care for the garden and her enthusiasm for the growing season reflect her passion for the outdoors and its benefits.

The way that Stewart went about building her relationship with the land is an example of the partnership ethic that Carolyn Merchant championed in her book, *Earthcare*. Stewart's writing expressly describes her attempts to learn how to utilize her land to feed her family and delight herself in domesticated scenery. Her descriptions of what she called garden "experiments" reflect how she worked hard to see what would do well on her land and she didn't give up when one type of vegetable or flower didn't do well in the high, Wyoming altitude. She would try another variety of the same plant. This trial-and-error method of learning how to work with her land implies cooperation and careful negotiation between garden and gardener and explores how Stewart partnered with her land in a cooperative agreement where the gardener exhibits patience while allowing the land to lead.

Some of Stewart's enthusiasm and excitement over her garden may have had to do with the relatively short growing season in southwest Wyoming as well as the often long and hard winters. With winters that could last on and off for nine months, Stewart may have looked forward to the spring and summer months as an opportunity to be outdoors more freely. Stewart writes of lengthy and hard winters that restrict her freedom. She took to looking at seed catalogues when winter weather turned discouraging:

It is so snowy outdoors – great drifts piled every where, a world of gleaming, white is very beautiful if one uses yellow paper to write on – it suggests dandelions, daffodils, prim roses. Then too, I fight the white depression with seed catalogues. I have a pile of them on my bed. I find that the cheery red tomatoes, the beets, carrots, cucumbers and golden bantam corn lessen the blue effects of snow, snow! (SGC 31)

The use of the seed catalogue and the promise of the visual variety of her garden in the spring helped Stewart to fight winter depression and transport herself to the garden in her thoughts. Stewart sees nature all around her and uses the promise of spring to cheer her up by beginning to plan for spring and how she will partner with nature in her garden.

In addition to dreaming of her garden in the spring and making plans for it during the winter to beat winter depression, Stewart brought her plants and flowers indoors when she was able,

When frosty days begin to come I become sorry for all of the flowers that came too late to enjoy this blooming season so I pot them and bring them in. I think you would like to see what is blooming here now. The kitchen windows have four geraniums, two petunias and two peppers. (The only way I can grow pepper). In the dining room is a small tub with a giant white cosmos in full bloom, in smaller vessels just under it are two pink snap dragons just bending with blossoms. In my room I have a red stock or dillyflower in a pot with a white candy tuft. Jerrine has two sunny windows in her room so she has more flowers than I have and there is where we have a clump of clove pinks taken from the border. She has a pot of nasturtiums and a long window box of pansies. We have four baskets of wandering Jew. (SGC 32)

Stewart's description of bringing flowers in to keep them growing during the first snows of the winter season and her empathy for them suggests that she wants to keep the flowers alive as long as possible for the sake of the flowers, but of course the color added to the inside of her home helped to keep winter depression at bay. Stewart can be empathetic toward nature because

she sees nature as her companion, and her garden is the text through which she communicates with nature.

Despite her struggles with winter depression and her longing for the spring growing season, Stewart's letters also describe her excitement over physical contact with the earth, which expresses her need to work with her environment. For Stewart, working with the land is a way of conversing with it. In a letter to Miss Wood, Stewart describes the effects of gardening on her body and spirit,

I have been gardening all day, and my hands are so tired and stif I can hardly write. I just can't give up grubbing in the earth – I am trying out several experiments with flowers this year. I have established a bed of tulips. Also I have set out two hundred cuttings of currants. I believe they will grow. There seems to me thousands of interesting things to do. I believe I would like to run an experiment station...I am going to have some hollyhocks this year, Next year I am going to have a grandmother garden. In it I am going to have everything my grandmother loved, even a row of sweet basil. (SGC 6)

Stewart's love of being outside and the healing effects of gardening work are expressions of not only her desire to be outdoors, but her need to physically connect with nature. Her enthusiasm for her garden and its care further connect her to Wyoming and her land and show how she applies her ecofeminist philosophy to her relationship with her land.

### ***Garden as Text***

Motz writes that "Maintaining the garden involved intellectual skills of planning and research as well as emotional qualities of nurturing and generosity: it was both public and private, domestic and artistic" (41). In this context, the garden becomes another text. The flowers and



their arrangement become another way for the gardener to express herself to the outside world. While a gardener in an urban setting has a much wider audience than that of a homesteader, it is not hard to imagine that Stewart used her gardens, most notably her flower garden as another text. In her March 28, 1914, letter to Maria Wood, Stewart describes the plants she has been able to successfully grow in her garden, as well as her lack of success with others,

We raise a heap of flowers but they never finish blooming before the frost gets them. What we raise are beautiful. We have poppies, zinnias, pansies lark-spur, cosmos, nasturtiums sweet peas, sweet alyssum ragged robin, holly-hocks dahlias, morning glories – and wild cucumber vines; At the east window of the dining room we have a hop vine that climbs to the top of the house. We all love roses but have never succeeded in getting them started. I think they would grow here, there are lots of wild ones but they always dried out and brittle before they get here.

(George 25)

In her garden she physically writes her memories of people and places from her past as a way of honoring and remembering them. Stewart also uses her garden as a space for demonstrating her individuality and personality. The flowers she chose not only reflect her past, but the variety of her experiences with different places, most notably Oklahoma and parts of Colorado. In her flower garden, Stewart can let her ecological imagination run wild.

The garden takes on another dimension for Stewart, it is a place to memorialize, commune with the earth, create, and nurture. As the nurturer, Stewart takes on the power of the writer. She selects the plants, decides where they should be planted, plants the seeds and then takes on the task of caring for them. The selection of the plants is the writer's outline where Stewart roughly decides what is to be included in her garden and where it ought to go. Planting the seeds

is the rough draft, the writer's first glimpse of how the flowers might look when they begin to sprout and bloom. Caring for the flowers is the writer's opportunity to revise the text. Not revising in the way that the author can cut, change, or move the words around, but the time for the writer to begin to revise the garden and plan for the next season. What would she like to include and remove? Which plants are flourishing, and which not doing so well? These decisions allow the writer to begin planning well in advance of the next growing season, an act that Stewart actively participated in as evidenced by her letters, "I think most of my flowers have winter killed but I am not discouraged. It will be fun to plant and plan. Especially with Jerrine home. She likes to plan and work for beauty" (SGC 27).

The significance of the garden as a text is not just the connection placed between the writing of the garden and the writing of the written text, but the anticipation with which the gardener plans out the future of the garden. This attention to detail and loving care draws a link between Stewart's desires for beauty as she defined it by carefully selecting the flowers to be planted, and between her enthusiasm for the natural world and working closely with it reflecting her environmental ethic.

### ***Spiritual Ecofeminist***

Stewart's spirituality is present in almost all of her letters, often reflecting her connection of faith to nature. Although Stewart had been raised a Catholic (George 89), her connection to the land supports a more Transcendentalist attitude toward nature with emphasis on the individual and her relationship with nature and spirituality. Stewart saw God in nature everywhere and felt his presence when she was outdoors, often writing about her spiritual experiences in her letters. George, describes her literary influences, including religion as,

a sense of nature and the individual in nature, a tradition that echoes the transcendentalists and earlier nineteenth-century romantics. From late-nineteenth- and early twentieth-century realists she inherited an interest in dialect and local color, and from her acquaintances and her reading she developed an eclectic religious philosophy. In addition, classic and popular children's literature, with its sentimentalism and strong didactic element, influenced her choice of subjects and themes. However, the most important literary heritage to affect her writing came from the epistolary tradition. (George 200)

Having read two books on Theosophy that she cited in her letters, Stewart found that Theosophy encouraged an approach to life that was similar to her own, such as refusing to be sad or depressed (George 90). Stewart's letters rarely allow the reader a glimpse into any sadness or depression and when she does mention any difficulties in her life, she downplays them with humor or offsets them. In this way Stewart is refining her persona in each letter. She's crafting the person she wants her reader to see.

Susanne George points out the significance of *The Key to Theosophy* as an influence for Stewart and offers that the book has "many horticultural and garden images in its explanation of doctrine" (90). The connection between the garden and divinity was especially strong for Stewart and she often wrote of finding God in the outdoors. Keeping her spirituality rooted in the earth, Stewart related to Theosophy's approach to doctrine connected to the natural world. Stewart explores her spirituality and reincarnation as it relates to the natural world; she sees them as intertwined, much as Emerson and the Transcendentalists believed nature and spirit to be connected. This intimate connection between nature and the individual is related to ecofeminism's rejection

of humankind's domination of nature by failing to acknowledge that humankind ranks higher than nature in the natural order of things.

Stewart referenced reading Helena Blavatsky and Theosophical doctrine in her letters. In one such letter Stewart uses wit and a little humor to describe being snowed in and looking longingly through the seed catalogue to break up the monotony of the white landscape outside her window. Reading the catalog's description of the tomatoes borne out of the seeds, Stewart reflected:

But I think the Theosophists are right about us coming again and again until we conquer all our failings. It was not the "Key to Theosophy" or "At the Feet of the Master" that convinced me, it was the seed books. I think the seedmen will have to reincarnate until they grow things that come up to their own description. Seven pound tomatoes! One such tomato should fill even the Stewart. (134)

Making fun of the seed catalogue descriptions, Stewart takes the opportunity to approach the issue of reincarnation and her letters suggest her acceptance of reincarnation. This belief that everything comes back to conquer its past failings, suggests that Stewart thought of life and death in terms of nature. She saw humankind as plants, able to be born and die in growing seasons. In "Outside the Mainstream: Women's Religion and Women Religious Leaders in Nineteenth-Century America," Mary Farrell Bednarowski describes part of theosophical doctrine when she says, "Theosophists coupled their belief in the human person as permeated by a deity with a belief in karma and reincarnation. The combination resulted in a denial of human depravity and a stress on individual power and responsibility regardless of gender or a particular situation" (222). Stewart's description of people from her past as flowers reflects her desire to care for nature as though loved ones who had passed on had returned to her.

Stewart also aligned herself with value Theosophists placed on accountability and improving oneself and those around her, which is present in her letters. Although Theosophy mirrored the ideals and values that Stewart tried to live by, what those ideals and values represent is individuality. Stewart was proud of her individuality and enjoyed her independence, which is clearly present in her letters. Her interest in Theosophy and her tendency toward Transcendentalism relates to her appreciation and value of independence and individuality and its presence in nature. Many of her letters flaunt her independence; in particular those letters that describe long treks by herself or with several of her young children and those letters also mention the frequency with which she broke societal rules. Stewart wanted her reader to know that she didn't just follow her husband's orders; she was an individual and was proud of her choice to live in a hard land.

For Stewart nature and religion are intertwined. Her description of flowers as individuals reincarnated with her as caregiver, places religion in the everyday pleasures of her garden. Her garden is proof of a higher power, and it relies upon her to nurture it and care for it so that it might express itself in natural beauty. In this way, Stewart demonstrates that she aligns herself with nature rather than culture by acting as a steward over nature. Stewart's connection to nature and her way of seeing it as a place(s) worthy of worship indicates how strongly she tied religion to the natural world,

I like to walk among the flowers at dusk. I like to fancy that my grandparents who both loved flowers, walked with me. Some times it even seems that He walks there, prays there, agonizes among my reverent blossoms. Could that idea be right, Woodsy-Person? I mean could it be true? If it could be, then shall we not fill the hours brimming with work, love and enjoyment for those who must look

to us for earthly expression. Let's do it anyway. That sounds preachy I know, it isn't meant that way. (SGC 28)

Stewart's descriptions of her faith were often found in terms of her gardening descriptions or her landscape observations. To have been given the chance to live in Wyoming, Stewart felt was a blessing, "I know God loves me, else He would not have placed me among His high hills where his wonders are spread and where every glance of the eye fall upon a place to worship and to love. I mean a place to worship God and to love Him" (SGC 37). For Stewart the beauty of nature wasn't just the proof that God existed, nature was something God gave to humankind not just for survival, but for enjoyment. Nature was God's gift to humankind, a divine expression of love and a place to find Him. Unlike Sutton and Sherwin who bounce back and forth between viewing nature as a thing to be used by humankind, and a thing to be protected, Stewart accepts no ambiguity. She sees God in everything and she believes that humankind must care for and protect nature. Stewart's spiritual awareness of the many wonderful things in her life, including the natural world around her, made her hungry for more life. In one of her letters to Maria Wood, she reflects on the promise of reincarnation yet again, this time in relation to humans:

I think the Theosophists must be right. We surely must come again to this earth. There is so much to enjoy that no one lifetime could embrace all the delights, there is so much to do. I can think of a dozen things I would like to do any one of which would take a life time. My dear, my dear the longer I live the greedier I am for life. (SGC 38)

For Stewart, religion and faith were connected to the natural world. Not only did she find in nature a place to worship, she also found evidence of both a higher being and the gifts nature

could bestow on man. Since nature is mentioned in nearly all of her letters, in particular those written to Miss Wood and Mr. Zaiss, it is easy to see how much nature influenced Stewart and her belief system. This influence permeated all aspects of Stewart's life and places her in the company of women whose love of nature encouraged their environmental activism.

### *Ecofeminism*

Stewart would likely have thought of herself as an ecofeminist and her actions and words reveal that she fit the profile. First and foremost, Stewart's environmental ethic places her in a group with women who interacted with their natural environment in partnership with it. This partnership rejects domination of the earth that is traditionally associated with humankind. While Stewart did not participate directly in environmental movements of the twentieth century that modern Americans would associate with the green movement, she did participate in local environmental causes such as educating her neighbors about their gardens. During the great depression, Stewart, her family, and some neighbors supported themselves comfortably on their land. While they did not go hungry, the depression reached the Stewart family through their less fortunate neighbors. To do their part, the Stewarts shared the canned goods they had accumulated from their own gardening efforts and took care to save as many seeds for upcoming planting seasons to share them with the less fortunate and they followed through by checking in on the recipients of their seeds to make sure that the gardens were being cared for properly in order to feed individual families.

The act of sharing with her neighbors as well as assisting them in the establishment of successful gardens is a form of environmental activism in the sense that Stewart used her knowledge of her environment to act on behalf of her neighbors who were suffering. In her letters, Stewart expressed the strong desire that she and Mr. Stewart had to help others during diffi-

cult economic times. By educating her neighbors and sharing both the fruits of her garden and her gardening experience, Stewart participated in an environmental movement that helped ensure the care of the earth and her fellow human beings. Stewart's need to care for and help sustain her neighbors is a particularly feminist approach to a national problem. She took what was available to her and used it to make a difference in the lives of local families as part of a collaborative effort. In addition to helping her neighbors to plant and care for large gardens, the Stewarts took in a small family and helped them to get on their feet. Stewart's nurturing instinct had a wide reach that extended from nature to her fellow humans. Seeing everything as connected, Stewart felt compelled to care for all things the same. Just as she would plant and nurture the seeds in her garden, she would help plant and nurture the seeds of caring for the earth in her neighbors.

Stewart and her neighbors sustained themselves comfortably throughout the great depression on their land and tried to help out others where they could with food,

We are a very valiant army. We fought the depression with hoes, plows, rakes, mowers, hayrakes, pitchforks, milk pails and Mason jars. We kept up our morale with sweet peas, pansies, lilies, iris, tulips, gladiolus, delphiniums, poppies, baby breath and peonies...There was so little money to be had that seeds for garden planting were hard to get. We tithed our own supply and gave to the families who needed help. Then we took turns calling on the ones being helped to see that the gardens were properly planted and cared for, so on through the canning and drying season. (George 178-9)

Stewart's use of the garden army metaphor to describe her efforts to help others suggests that she viewed the economic depression as a war. The depression was a war to be fought by going back to the earth and relying upon that which was readily available. For Stewart, going back



to the earth and using nature as a means of survival was a comfortable place with which she was familiar. She knew how to sustain herself and her family by growing and canning and it is her comfort with these activities that shaped her role in helping others to successfully feed themselves and learn how to take care of their family through their land. Stewart partnered with her land to help her family and other families live out the depression in relative comfort.

Ecofeminists would describe this as an act of environmental justice since she used her connection to nature to fight what she considered a war to fight and feed her neighbors.

Stewart's description of her vegetable garden as a "war-garden" connects her everyday activities with activism. Her garden was the way in which she fought the depression and contributed to the lives of the men and women who needed help. Stewart's description of her activities during the depression also paints the picture of a very busy lady giving as much as she can to her land and others:

For a month we have been in our planting season and there's no one here by Clyde and I. I have an acre of war-garden which I planted myself – I have farmed grain, dipped grain and helped sow grain – I have cut seed potatoes until my hands ache but I am having a fine time – only I have to neglect my friends, No wonder you feel like a stepchild. (Susanne George Collection 13)

Stewart's words suggest that although she viewed her work on the land as the more important calling, she longed to reach out and share her experiences with her friends. Stewart may have felt that wanting to spend time corresponding with her friends was a frivolous and non-essential task, which may have made her feel guilty for both writing and not writing.

For Stewart understanding nature and learning how to work with it was the key to independence and a key ecofeminist trait: the thing she most valued and sought, "My rhubarb is just

getting large enough to use. I canned two quarts after supper tonight. I really like to can fruit and make pickles and jellies and jams. I feel so independent when my cellar and pantry are well stocked” (SGC 11). Stewart’s connection of food with independence offers further explanation for not only her love of gardening, but her enthusiasm for trying new things to expand and improve upon her cellar holdings, “All under ten feet of snow – tons and tons of snow. But my cellar has been a joy this Winter – Each day we have enjoyed fresh salads made of Witloof, endive, celery, Bermuda onions and cabbage and we have an abundance of potatoes, beets, carrots, parsnips and salsify. Of course we have plenty of cream, butter, milk, eggs and meat” (George 134).

Stewart was comfortable with the view of herself as a nurturer of the earth. She was proud of her garden contributions and her role in cultivating food for not only her family, but the families of others. In her November 26, 1932, letter to Mr. Zaiss, Stewart describes her approach to environmental justice, “Each day was a very busy one for each member of the family. We are a very valiant army. We fought the depression with hoes, plows, rakes, mowers, hayrakes, pitchforks, milk pails and Mason jars. We kept up our morale with sweet peas, pansies, lilies, iris, tulips, gladiolus, delphiniums, poppies, baby breath and peonies” (George 178). Despite the challenges in modern scholarship that women have been limited by the assumption that all women nurture other individuals and nature instinctively, which restricts them to narrow categories and a very shallow understanding of their intimate relationships with their environments, it is clear that Stewart embraced the role of nurturer and celebrated it. Perhaps Stewart felt comfortable as a nurturer because she was able to step outside the bounds of traditional feminine roles regularly in her work on the homestead and didn’t feel confined by social roles. By celebrating her nurturing instinct as well as her hard work ethic, Stewart demonstrates her individuality while also exhibiting the diversity of women’s roles as well as the complexity within those roles. Working her

homestead with her husband, Stewart often worked her land in ways that are most often associated with men. She mowed the land, plowed for her garden, and cared for the livestock on the homestead. Stewart was comfortable with her multiple roles and relished being able to do work that was identified as masculine. In fact, she wrote that she was proud to be able to do work that men often did. Although many rural women, not just women homesteaders, explored a wide range of agricultural roles on their land, Stewart's words show her enthusiasm for hard work of a wide variety and demonstrate how she did, in fact, live out her frontier fantasy of being independent and owning her own land.

### *Stewart's Place*

Wyoming gave Stewart an invaluable gift: her independence. By moving to Wyoming and homesteading with her husband, Stewart was able to free herself from some societal restrictions and the fears of being able to provide for her child as a single mother in the big city. Stewart often wrote of her devotion to her Wyoming land and the family homestead. She viewed the land in very personal terms and was unafraid to discuss its impact on her. She altered the land by planting her gardens and building her home, but she was far more shaped by the land than it was shaped by her. Despite her memories of growing up in Oklahoma and her attachment to her childhood home, Stewart saw Wyoming as her forever home.

In *Geographies of Writing: Inhabiting Places and Encountering Difference*, Nedra Reynolds writes that "'inhabiting' discursive spaces...invites us to revisit the connections between habits and places, between memories and places, between our bodies and the material world. Our earliest dwellings, some believe, become sedimented within structures of feeling that contribute to our responses to all other places" (141). Despite Stewart's devotion to Wyoming and her homestead with Stewart, she was unable to leave her past dwellings and brought them

(Oklahoma and Colorado) with her, in the form of her garden, to Wyoming. This mingling of dwellings keeps Stewart from having to choose her past home over her new home and it affected how she responded to Wyoming.

Many women connected themselves to place through their homes (land and house), and despite Stewart's claims of independence, she was connected to her home as much as any other woman. Where Stewart's experiences differed was that unlike other women, she was not largely confined to her home. Her life often took her to Colorado or other parts of Wyoming. These excursions away from home allowed her to connect to a "broader" place outside of her homestead and cross more borders. It is her encounters with place that shape her writing and enable her to dwell within that place in her writing. Reynolds quotes Richard Marback who says, "'a material act of building and maintaining spaces that is at the same time an ideological act of fashioning places where we can feel we belong, where we create meaning, and where we organize our relationships to others'" (141). Stewart uses her letters to build and maintain spaces that she feels connected to and reflect what she views to be her "true" self as a wild, independent, western woman. Her representation of her life, homesteading, and Wyoming demonstrates her own ideology that informs western mythology and places Stewart somewhere between the categories of sunbonnetted helpmate and wild woman. It is Stewart's connection to and comfort with Wyoming and the land she creates/describes in her letters that allow her to express her ideology so clearly and sell it to her reader.

It is no small coincidence that Wyoming impacted Stewart so profoundly. Just as Edward Casey described in "Between Geography and Philosophy: What Does it Mean to Be in the Place-World?," Stewart's experiences while on her Wyoming homestead were significant and they shaped the person she would become (688). Casey asserts that when an individual undergoes ma-

major life changes such as the kind of transformations an individual undergoes during childhood, that individual forever associates memories of that transformation with the place of residence at the time. Casey also asserts that an individual forever changes a place during these alterations as well, which suggests a partnership that allows each member to be changed and influenced by the other. Reynolds further explores these ideas,

People's responses to place – which are shaped in large part by their bodies, by the physical characteristics they carry with them through the spiritual world – determine whether they will “enter” at all, or rush through, or linger – and those decisions contribute to how a space is “used” or reproduced. Bodies and places impact upon each other; a body becomes marked with the residue of a place, but places are also changed by the presence of bodies. Those changes can't happen, however, if people won't cross borders, won't engage with a new place, or can't overcome their fear or aversion to a particular location. (143)

Stewart's writing explores her fascination with new places and her enthusiasm for crossing new borders. Not only does Stewart cross physical borders by moving from place to place, but she crosses emotional boundaries by connecting with nature in new ways when she plants flowers or vegetables, etc. Part of her literary persona, place and fearless exploration are character traits that Stewart not only uses to characterize herself in her letters, but to encourage and excite her reader. She wants her reader to be unafraid to inhabit new places and cross borders. Stewart's writing also likely helped her to inhabit and learn to dwell in her new “place.” As a coping mechanism, her writing offered her a way to work through the many new places and things she encountered after moving to Wyoming.

Reynolds asserts that “*places* are hugely important to learning processes and to acts of writing because the kinds of spaces we occupy determine, to some extent, the kinds of work we can do or the types of artifacts we can create” (157). This observation is especially important in Stewart’s case since her most successful writing was her first published collection of letters. Despite numerous attempts to produce and publish different types of writing, very little else was published or ever reached an audience other than the recipient of a letter. Her isolation in Wyoming influenced the types of writing she was able to do. The fact that most of Stewart’s writing was confined to, in one way or another, epistolary writing suggests that she was most comfortable sharing Wyoming and reaching out to others through personal letters. What this suggests is that not only did place affect *how* she wrote by restricting the time available to write, but it affected *what* she wrote since she rarely had time to write as well as what *type* of writing she did as her time restrictions would have made letters seem the most fulfilling type of writing for her to accomplish.

Stewart was forever changed by not just the decision to move to Wyoming, but the years of growth and experience on her land altered who she was and shaped who she became. Not only did Wyoming offer Stewart the chance to own her own land and claim the independence she craved and so valued, it also brought her to Clyde Stewart. The Stewarts’ children attest to the strong relationship their parents shared. Stewart bore four children on the Wyoming homestead, raising her three boys with Clyde and daughter Jerrine on the homestead. The defining years of spent raising her children in Wyoming cemented Stewart to Wyoming in a way that little else could.

Stewart’s connection to place also alters her environmental ethic. It changes what land and environment-related issues she supports. Stewart’s environmental ethic is shaped by her

connection to southwest Wyoming. Because of her intimate relationship with a geographic location, her environmental area of concern would be more concentrated on the area to which she was most connected. In modern-day environmental discussions it is not hard to see that Stewart would adamantly oppose extensive oil and gas drilling as well as the building of large wind farms on Wyoming's land to generate electricity. She would fight to protect and preserve her land for her children. While she may have opposed these environmental encroachments all over the United States, her most passionate advocacy would be for the areas that immediately influenced her "place." Stewart's love of Wyoming and nature as well as her work to assist her neighbors in their time of need, demonstrate the ways in which she was an historical ecofeminist.

### ***Frontier Ecofeminist***

Stewart's writing and her relationship with the natural world offers a way to track the role of women in modern-day environmental movements. Understanding how women not only fostered their own environmental ethics by putting their values into practice as well as how frontier women encouraged other women to develop their relationships with their land can help environmental historians track the involvement of women in environmental causes and movements. Observing how and why women participated in conservation and protection of the natural world can help scholars to understand and map the transformation of individual environmental ethics in modern-day discourse. Mapping changes in individual environmental awareness can help interpret humankind's reaction to an ever-changing landscape that is again greatly impacted by large migratory waves and increasing population density.

Although her descriptions of her environmental ethic and practices in her letters offer a picture of Stewart that was personal, her letters explore an environmental rhetoric that seeks to encourage her reader to take up a more natural life and to live in a participatory relationship with

his or her natural environment. Stewart seems to tell her reader, “Look, this is what nature has done for me, and don’t I have the best of everything?” Even though her lifestyle is completely subjective, Stewart doesn’t shy from espousing what she thinks are the vast benefits of homesteading and living a natural lifestyle. Stewart is not as far removed from contemporary consumers who seek the most organic, local produce and meat for their families to give them the best in natural food for pure nourishment. Of course contemporary consumers also support environmental causes when they shop for organic or locally grown produce. Their dollars support the reduction or elimination of pesticide use, and they also encourage farmers to raise their animals outside of cages and feed them without the use of hormones. The thoughtful use of grocery dollars toward food movements subtly pledges allegiance to environmental causes. These dollars speak loudly to those in who make agricultural decisions for mass populations. Stewart’s rhetoric looks prophetically forward to the struggle for healthy produce and healthy agricultural practices and she is speaking loudly to her reader: follow my lead!



## Conclusion

As historical ecofeminists, frontier women such as Sarah Sutton, Nancy Sherwin, and Elinore Pruitt Stewart paved the way for an ecologically aware population of women in the American West. Their treatment of nature as a friend and confidant rather than a way of making money or feeding a family laid the groundwork for women who would organize conservation efforts on behalf of nature. The philosophical shift from nature as object to nature as human-like present in frontier women's writing represents the influence of nature on women settling the American frontier and their writing. Frontier women's writing explores ecofeminist philosophy and activism in an historical time frame that can help modern-day environmentalists to understand that fundamentally conservation and protection of natural resources is about more than the refusal to dominate nature. Americans and humankind in general, do not want to protect what they are not connected to or concerned about.

Historical ecofeminists such as frontier women help to bridge a gap in environmental history by revealing how and why individuals engaged their environment in historical settings and how that engagement with nature has changed for contemporary environmentalists. Frontier women viewed nature as a friend and confidant on the western frontier. Nature filled a very specific role for them, it offered them companionship. Because of the nature of the intimate relationships established by frontier women, they began to care about nature deeply. Frontier women's attempts to partner with their surroundings, whether the partnership is actual or symbolic, suggest that they knew and understood the value of nonhuman life, which is a key component of ecofeminism. For contemporary scholars, frontier women's environmental rhetoric and its ecofeminist undercurrents offers some insight into the biggest problem environmentalists face: getting individuals to relate to and care about their environment enough to treat it with care.

In an historical context, frontier women and their relationships with nature have much to teach us. Frontier women offer insight into the modern-day relationships and struggles faced by individuals and their environments. Unlike frontier women, Americans today are often very removed from their natural surroundings. With little need to grow gardens and produce their own food, Americans connect to nature through their grocery stores or purchases. Most individuals are unaware of which foods are in season or where their food actually comes from since they are so far removed from the production of their food. Working outside the home today often means working in an office environment separated from the outdoors. Caring for the family yard is a chore now hired out to landscapers, keeping individuals removed from their own yards and indoors more and more. Children growing up in cities may be limited to few opportunities to play and explore outside since their homes might not have yards, or access to outdoor play spaces. These are simplistic representations of some very complex situations that affect the relationships that individuals have with nature and their immediate environment and they are just a few of the reasons that Americans are not as connected to their environment as the generations past. The further Americans move away from nature, the more that nature becomes a passive force to be dominated and utilized. The domination of nature today is a result of the separation of human-kind from their environment.

Since Americans are often removed from their natural environment, most Americans today relate to their environment as that of a consumer. Climate change and environmental discourse have entrenched themselves into the lives of American consumers. With “green,” “environmentally friendly,” or “ecofriendly” placed on labels, many consumers are encouraged to believe that their purchases have an impact on climate change or environmental protection.

The environmental rhetoric included in consumer advertising makes consumers believe that they are connecting to their environment and protecting nature through their purchases. Consumers want to do the responsible thing by purchasing products that help to reduce the population's impact on nature because environmental discourse tells them that it is the right thing to do. While many individuals do work hard to live a green life, the desire to want to live that life has less to do with one's consumerism and more with their environmental ethic and their reason for caring about nature and its conservation. The further we move away from nature, the easier it becomes for us to disconnect with it and the harder it becomes for us to really partner with our surroundings so humankind and nature flourish.

Examining the relationships that frontier women had with their environment is one way to truly explore environmental change. The women who traveled to the Western American frontier explored environmental change as it related to their immediate surroundings and they had to learn how to connect with the unfamiliar in order to form a partnership with nature. The writing of the three women analyzed here represents their desire to experience nature along the trail and reveals an intimate involvement with their immediate surroundings. Their connection to nature increases their ethic of care and makes them more invested in caring for nature because nature plays such an important role in their lives. Some frontier women treated nature like an intimate friend and because their relationship with nature was so close, they were more invested in conserving and protecting it. What many contemporary Americans are missing from their lives is a connection to their environment outside of consumerism. They are concerned about the environment because it is what one is supposed to do. However, as Americans spend more time indoors rather than out, they lose touch with their environment.

When they are disconnected from their natural surroundings, Americans are removed from a need or a desire to care for it. Frontier women's writing reminds Americans that in order to care for something and do it justice, whether it be in reducing energy use or recycling garbage, they have to know it and want to know it better.

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