

NATURE/CULTURE AND FLY FISHING IN THE NEW WEST

by

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Jeffrey William Hostetler

April 2006

DEDICATION

I could not have accomplished this without the faith of those around me for the past two years. So many of you believed in me, even when I felt weighed down by the currents of thought and progress. To my treasured son, Kerby, who will achieve great things with his amazing heart. To Erica, Cole, and Shae, who taught me unconditional love with theirs, and showed me how to live outside myself while pursuing my dreams. Mine are dedicated to you.

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ABSTRACT

Cultural theorists define the New West as the region including most portions of the states of Washington, Oregon, California, New Mexico, Colorado, Wyoming, Montana, and the entire portions of Idaho, Utah, Nevada, and Arizona. Their term assumes, as does anything new, that there was an Old West as well, possessing distinct characteristics from the New. What analyses of historical, cultural, and theoretical texts reveal is the seamlessness of terms such as New and Old; that throughout this region, the complications and conflict involved around limited resources like water, wildlife, and timber have always existed. No particular date signifies when the Old began, nor when the New commenced.

However, to illustrate these complications, many define the New West with stuff-private jet ports, jet skis, ski resorts, espresso bars, and micro brew pubs are all characteristics of a New West rife with competition and commodities. One crucial concept to acknowledge is the wider perception that the environment of the West offers a regenerative therapy unlike any other region in the U.S.

Herein I utilize the activity of fly fishing and its corresponding literature in the last half of the twentieth century as a microcosm of the larger New West cultural (political, economic, recreational, environmental) condition to illustrate many of the same occurrences in other activities of the region. What surfaces throughout the analysis of the aforementioned texts is the notion of the paradoxical retreat—that nothing specifically in the Nature of the New West offers a retreat from Cultural pressures. When one escapes something, that *thing* is waiting upon arrival. Even the terms Nature and Culture do not work in a twenty first century discussion of the West; neither term stands alone, distinct and identifiable from its traditional *opposite*. Culture cannot impose itself on Nature anymore than Nature can redeem the ills of Culture, although throughout fly fishing texts we see a perpetuation of this myth of the West as a panacea. Seeing the cure-all as a myth will offer all readers the opportunity to rethink their actions within this region.

THE YELLOWSTONE AS A MOVING MODEL OF THE NEW WEST

Before the Zoo, Yuppies, and the SUV

“The Creation Story begins with the story of a person who was floating on the water. He didn’t have a name because he was the only person” (George Horse Capture). Neither did the river when there were no people. No one discovered the Yellowstone River. Before French fur trappers named it la Roche Jaune, the Minnetaree (Siouan Hidatsas) tribe called the river "Mi tsi a da zi," which means "Rock Yellow River." Deep inside the canyon walls of the river within Yellowstone National Park, tourists assume the yellow volcanic rhyolite is the inspiration for its name; however, others speculate that the name comes from the yellow sandstone cliffs on the lower end of the river where the Minnetaree lived. The Crow, who lived upstream called the river *E-chee-dick-karsh-ah-shay*, or Elk River, attesting to the abundance of these ungulates in the upper drainage. Joe Medicine Crow has commented that “the meat supply is gone, you know [...] but we were fortunate here in this area where the Crows live that there was still a lot of animals to eat. Elk, lot of Elk. That’s why they call this river Elk River, just loaded with elk” (26).

Who knows what inhabitants called the river when mammoths caroused up and down the drainage. Either white aggression or disease removed the Native Americans who gave the river the aforementioned names, and the lack of a reservation within 100 miles is proof that they got the heck out of dodge before the yuppies invaded. As a result, unlike Billings and Hardin, or Whitefish and the Flathead Valley, Paradise Valley has very little *obvious* Native influence.

One odd location where this influence surfaces near the riffles is at Native American Nations, whose motto is “If an Indian made it we’ve got it.” Although they don’t sell many originals, they have the true New West mentality in that they “mainly deal in museum quality reproductions” (Native American Nations). Daryl operates this store; he is currently trying to sell the business based on its 2004 sales of over \$400,000. From the picture on the website, it is tough to determine whether he is Native or not, but his mullet and porn star mustache lead me to discount any Plains ancestry.

However, Daryl capitalizes on tourists traveling from Billings and Bozeman to the Park, who have relented to the afternoon hankering for a huckleberry ice cream at Mark’s In and Out, and drop a cool fifty on a piece of Montana’s native past. Whether the image, token, or handcrafted pipe is anything like a local authentic piece, or whether the authenticity of any Native art is determinable matters not. The passer through takes home a piece of what was Montana, before “Montana.” This type of business, rife throughout the West, perpetuates the mythical past which no longer exists but in souvenirs. Moreover, although understanding the compulsion to buy and sell Native-ness is an anthropological, sociological endeavor, here it is worth noting in the discussion of transient travel and the tourist economy along the corridor nostalgically named *Paradise Valley*.

According to historians, before the establishment of Yellowstone National Park in 1872 and before 428,869 passengers entered Gardner’s north entrance in 151,050 cars in 2005 (NPS Stats), Native Americans roamed the upper valley in search of game. Even the early whites marveled at the abundance of wildlife in the Yellowstone drainage. Although both the early whites and the natives utilized the wildlife for their survival, only

200 years later, the abundance of wildlife is an economic staple for the fall and winter hunting outfitter economy.

Archeologists, not economists, however, discovered that the valley supported indigenous life well before the Corps of Discovery, or the sailing ships of Cristobal Colon discovered America. It appears that in the small farming and ranching community of Wilsall, stretched along the Shield's River, archeologists date skeletons and tools made from mammoth bone back 10,000 years. According to Frederick E. Hoxie, in "An Undeniable Presence: Indians and Whites in the Yellowstone Valley, 1880-1940" he found that near Hardin, along another tributary of the Yellowstone, other archeologists discovered shelters and cave dwellings that were 8000 years old (42). Hoxie notes additional research that claims groups of hunters followed mastodon into the Yellowstone River Valley at the end of the last ice age. Although the Sioux named the river for its distinct sandstone cliffs on the *lower* river, by the end of the 19th century they, along with the Gros Ventres, Assiniboines, and Blackfeet had suffered indisputable defeats in wars with the U.S. Army, and by 1880 the Crow appear to have settled and adapted well to the upper valley.

This apparent adaptability encountered a new struggle, however. Hoxie states, "Conflicts with newcomers-both on and off the reservation-were a central feature of Crow life" (44). By 1886, in order to reinforce and maintain the land designations, which were constantly at risk of loss to white ranchers and settlers, one officer reported that "the Crows have made peace with all the different bands of Sioux" (47). The vigilance of these truces became strong; Hoxie describes them as "sophisticated", meaning their negotiation approaches looked united and intelligent, like the United States' government.

For example, the tribes appealed to Washington for protection of their native lands, and they opposed the coming railroad. According to L.W. Gay Randall's *Footprints along the Yellowstone*, the whites "promised the Indian his rights to hunt and fish and travel over the lands. Colonel D.D. Mitchell negotiated one of these first treaties, which became known as the Peace treaty of 1851 at Fort Laramie" (15). Although the Crow and Hidatsa became efficient negotiators, they had to surrender to progress, and "the deal struck in 1898 severed a final piece of historic Crow country from the reservation, the area between Fort Custer and the Yellowstone" (48).

Hoxie's description of this period is interesting in that he falls into the trap that ensnares many writers of the West when they discuss Natives. Concerning their dealings with whites, if all out warfare is the natives' *modus operandi*, they tend to be acting under their savage instincts. Historians and critics typically describe this discourse of warfare regarding whites as strategic and powerful; the juxtaposed value judgment seems inescapable by a modern historian, whether that writer is aware of his malady or not. However, once the Natives begin negotiating, petitioning, and "insisting on having a voice in administration of reservation affairs" they are described as vigilant, sophisticated, tenacious, and highly skilled (47). These qualities are admirable by the propulsive American expansionist, especially when the almighty dollar is fueling that rocket.

The Crusade for Cash

Crow country is exactly in the right place. It has snowy mountains and sunny plains, all kinds of climates and good things for every season. When the summer heat scorches the prairie, you can draw up under the mountains where the air is sweet and cool, the grass fresh and the bright streams come tumbling out of the snow banks. There you can hunt the elk, the deer and the antelope when their skins are fit for dressing. There you will find plenty of white bears and mountain sheep...you can go down onto the plains and hunt buffalo or even trap beaver on the streams.- Arapooish

Before the indigenous lifestyles were threatened and the U.S. Government reduced their lands to the least productive plots of Montana, a natural resource provided some income to early explorers. *Castor Canadensis* (“Animal Records”) became highly sought through the 1850s in the Yellowstone valley. Fortunately, for the buck-toothed limb-gnawing rodent, by 1870 the fur trade worldwide had slowed, and extractive economies became the priority.

Gardiner, Montana, squished between the foothills of Electric Peak, the Yellowstone, and the yearlong north entrance to the park, became the hub for this extractive economy. In nearby Bear Gulch prospectors discovered gold, and near Devil’s Slide (presently indicated by a long red streak on a western hillside and a green reflective sign along highway 89) others discovered coal. The Northern Pacific Railway terminated at Gardiner, and by 1890, according to Randall, “new business sprang up, especially thirteen saloons, a half-dozen parlor houses, and a line of cribs” (84). Although the cattle country was much further downstream in the pastures and prairies below Livingston, a rough crowd of railway workers, miners, and soldiers frequented the bars, and preceding them each week before payday came “some fifty women...imported from other Montana towns. Some of them [men] would spend a week in town, if they took a shine [or

something more] to some of the new girls” (84-5). In his description, Randall seems titillated by the bacchanalian aspect of this river town. These were the seed stock days of the reliance upon tourism in this “toughest of western towns” (83).

The Northern Pacific Railroad “changed everything” according to Debbie Richau’s submission in Bill Schneider’s *Montana’s Yellowstone River*. By 1883, the Montana Territory had an east-west railway that brought people to Southwest Montana by the carload, and Gardiner became the “end of the line” as “the Yellowstone River was now paralleled by a main thoroughfare to the Pacific and all kinds of trade and commerce boomed” (Richau 27). One black and white photograph portrays The Gardiner Station with the Roosevelt Arch at the North Entrance in the background. Because the route terminated at Gardiner, the valuable minerals had a direct route via railcar to the industrialized East. In the 1883 work *Chronicles of the Yellowstone*, E.S. Topping discusses the hopes of the mines around Gardiner and Bear Gulch, stating, “when mills and proper machinery are applied to the working of these ores the output of gold will be second to no camp in Montana” (243). The hopes of the determined local permeate the language in this text; however, the ores that came out of Alder Gulch and the copper mines of Butte surely surpassed Topping’s expectations of Gardiner. The railway, however, made the upper valley accessible.

One interesting painting that incorporates a crux in time, and foreshadows the simplicity with which the valley becomes accessible, is the 1865 painting *Sully’s Crossing* by J.K. Ralston. The viewer sees covered wagons crossing the lower Yellowstone River, pulled by teams of oxen and others by teams of either horses or mules. Several Cavalry soldiers dot the landscape and the emaciated bulls, tongues lolling

from their exasperated mouths suggest a long, hot, strenuous day's travel. The line of wagons on the opposing shoreline suggests Manifest Destiny in its fullest pursuit, and the buffalo skeleton in the foreground implies the taming of the Indians and the conquering of the landscape. Ironically in the picture are two steamers, chugging via their stern wheels upstream. As wagons tip in the heavy current, the steamers appear to glide along silently. The Northern Pacific eclipsed this image of progress upstream on the Yellowstone in less than twenty years. The proliferation of steamers was abandoned, primarily because of the unnavigable upper river and the rapid ease with which the locomotive progressed.

Richau explains in her essay "The Railroad Changed Everything" that because of the river access and the railway passing through, several towns became boomtowns. Names like Glendive, Miles City, Livingston, and Billings all relied on the passenger and industrial income that the railroad brought (27). Livingston inherited its name from Crawford Livingston, the director of the Northern Pacific Railway (59). It just as easily could have been called Trout, or Wind, or Lumber, but it was the train and its minions that placed this river city on the map.

Before the train, travel through the valley was limited to foot, horse, and horse drawn wagon or stagecoach. One legendary character from the West that capitalized on this traffic, and grabs a little piece of my heart is Yankee Jim George. Randall describes Yankee Jim in his prime in 1872 as "a rugged, tough, typical pioneer who had been a free lance trader and trapper, buffalo hunter and for a time, scout for the army, while they were taming the West" (180). Above a tight canyon on the river north of Gardiner, Yankee Jim claimed a squatter's right to this "natural barrier" to the upper Yellowstone

and especially, the newly designated park. He immediately began work on a hotel and then enjoyed a complete monopoly on all travel through his venturi-like gateway. Jim capitalized on the tourism moving through the area, and he earned a successful, if not entirely ethical living by his toll road until he met workers from the Northern Pacific Railway at his gate with a .50 caliber buffalo gun. Ultimately, Yankee Jim settled on a right of way, but regretted it from the day he dismantled his tollgate. Legend has it that

Until his death some 30 years later, he vented his contempt for the intrusion. Every day, when he heard the train coming, he would rush out of the kitchen door, his long, snow-white hair and flowing beard waving in the breeze, his bony hands clenched into fists, his high-pitched voice flinging his favorite cuss words from his seemingly inexhaustible vocabulary of profane language. The engineers always saluted the old man with a few blasts of the whistle, which infuriated him even more. Yankee Jim could always be seen shaking his clenched fist at the train until it was out of sight (181).

Jim explained to the author that his toll was “better than a gold mine, the money just came to me, until the railroad came and tricked me with a few hundred dollars for coming through, and building me another road. But now, look what has happened! They are doing all the business and making all the money!” (182). Yankee Jim’s angst at modernity in the name of profit--at the expense of the old ways--is a common theme in the discourse of the New West; controversial, maniacal legends like Ted Kaczynski operated with a twentieth century version of this high-intensity protest.

Identification of these early stories, where the West is for sale to the highest bidder or the biggest gun, is essential to comprehending the similar approach to the lands surrounding the river now. Below the park, realtors sell sections along the river, advertising the land as if it is connected to, and appealing because of, the river access. Ironically, in Montana the Stream Access Law states, “the public may use rivers and streams for recreational purposes up to the ordinary high-water marks. Although the law

gives recreationists the right to use rivers and streams for water-related recreation, it does not allow them to enter posted lands bordering those streams or to cross private lands to gain access to streams” (“Stream Access in Montana”). Despite the law, many realtors sell the land based on the reputation of the river. Pam McCutcheon advertises herself as the Real Estate Outfitter, playing with the notion of fly fishing, outdoor recreation, and river property. One example of this advertising from her website describes this \$1,900,000 home as complete with New West amenities:

This property has everything! Log home with a guest house, blue ribbon trout stream, private pond with trout and waterfowl, trees and turnkey. Call soon for a brochure on this one of a kind property.

Alternatively, there is this one, located downstream from Yankee Jim Canyon in the small town of Pray:

This property also features a magnificent 6,000 plus square foot home, plus a smaller caretaker's home. The grounds are beautifully landscaped with an underground sprinkler system, man-made pond and waterfall. The home is completely furnished, tastefully appointed and outfitted with a modern security system. Truly a gem! You can move right in and start enjoying the scenery as well as the fishing in the pond, Mill Creek, or the nearby Yellowstone River (Realestate outfitter).

Therefore, brokers use the fishing in the river to sell land, and the land is there to be profitable; as Yankee Jim stated “better than a gold mine.” Nevertheless, water, trout and private access are not the only amenities for sale along the Yellowstone. Several ads in Southwest Montana’s *Big Sky Journal* advertise the intangibles: “elbow room for the soul” (3); or they claim the area is “a place crowded with elbow room” (30). Sun West Ranch on the Madison River advertises their properties as “The life you promised yourself” (11). Even the interior decorators of these river properties are cashing in on the river discourse. Fantasia Showrooms has a half page ad in *Big Sky Journal* of one of their

custom bathroom sinks made of round cobble stone, with the caption “River Rock Runs Through It” (24).

Another property, advertised by David Viers & Associates, Inc., is listed at \$5,200,000, and its tailing comment is “Fishing in the Yellowstone River is just 5 minutes away.” Then there is the cream of the crop, the foam in the eddy, the Renaissance Ranch. “355 +/- acres of irrigated hay meadows, lush river bottoms teeming with wildlife, frontage on the legendary Yellowstone River for nearly 2 miles plus a private 5 acre pond with a ½ mile spawning stream” grace this ranch. Only \$15,000,000 (52). At Renaissance, not only will one have his own river and pond, but the native Cutthroat and wild rainbows and browns will mate in the backyard. Renewable resources galore! The irony of a place like this is that no one would be able to buy it with the hopes of using the 355 acres as profitable pastureland for cattle or hay. It is the dream, the ideal lifestyle of the West that Viers & Associates are selling, and they do not intend to sell it to a Montana rancher. This is high class, immaculate property. Muddy four wheelers and cows with prolapsed uteri will not be splashing around here. This is the condition of the New West—a land of irony and contradiction where homesteaded land is now worth millions--and the Yellowstone is the stomping grounds now of the rich and famous, not the displaced Yankee. Advertisements aimed at retired wealthy preserve the Montana lifestyle, and this approach has encroached on the rural heritage.

In addition to historians and novelists, who have always contributed to the myth, realtors and amenity advertisements reinforce it in their promotion of the New West. The common vein for all of these promoters, however, is that profit and economic success are tied directly to the land that has water. In Charles F. Wilkinson’s discussion of a solution

to viewing the West as more than conflict, he calls for an “Ethic of Place” and within this illustrates the power water has. He claims

The most relevant boundary lines for an ethic of place in the American West accrue from basin and watershed demarcations. The region is marked off by water or, more accurately, by the lack of it. It is not always easy, or necessary to define precisely the relevant watershed—to resolve whether people living in, say, Bozeman, find definition from the Upper Missouri, the Three Forks country, or the Gallatin. The point is that Bozeman’s cultural and economic identity is as likely to be perceived of in relation to one of those watersheds as it is to the state of Montana or the Upper Great Plains (76).

People say the same about Livingston, Gardiner, and Billings. They are essentially inseparable from the watershed that fated them into existence, and currently, the better the fishing, the more connected to the river their identities are.

The Zoo

*Tatanka Oyate, to us Natives, has always symbolized life and spiritual survival, we are related.
The buffalo are sacred and always have been so.
I've not come here as a representative of any two legged nation. I am here to speak for those whose voices have been silenced by gunfire and slaughter. Pray America, for our Buffalo Nation. Gerald Millard*

The literature on Yellowstone National Park is as deep as Old Faithful is high. Biologists write about the threatened Yellowstone Cutthroat and anglers write about the outstanding fly fishing for them. Tourists write about the natural wonders, and newspapers write about the snowmobile conflict in the winter. What the park amounts to, especially as far as the river is concerned, is another example of the New West, imbricated with layers of meaning and conflict.

For example, these multiple meanings and contradictions surface when studying the discourse of the river when the historical voices, speaking as *the* authorities, mislocate the headwaters of the river. Several texts and websites state the length of the river as anywhere from 641 miles to 678 miles. Apparently in the discourse, the river does not really start until it is accessible by vehicles, which is at the outlet of Yellowstone Lake. From wherever geographers measure its length, according to Bill Schneider, its headwaters drip from a unique source, nearly 70 miles from the lake, (10) high on the Two Oceans Plateau. The region gets its name because the Yellowstone drains north and east, and ultimately to the Gulf of Mexico, whereas the Snake River pours off the other side of the plateau and drains south and west into the Pacific.

This region is remote, and only receives pressure from anglers willing to hike for their native Cutthroat. According to one source, “The headwaters of the Yellowstone River is the farthest one can get from a road in the lower 48 states” (Greater Yellowstone Coalition). Guidebooks and maps describe the area as the Thorofare region, which it is not, whatsoever. Another fishing website suggests, “The 30 miles of headwaters above Yellowstone Lake present a true wilderness fishing opportunity. This stretch runs through perhaps the most isolated land in the lower 48, and can only be reached by hiking, horseback or via Yellowstone Lake. Allow yourself plenty of time, as the hike itself is 4 days roundtrip” (Troutsource). Not many tourists in 35 foot Winnebagos or some of the 100,000 vehicles have the time to plod around in the most remote portion of the United States. This is especially apparent given the annual reports of tourist maulings by 800-pound grizzlies. Those threats take a little away from Roger Clawson’s pastoral celebration of the headwaters in *Yellowstone Reflections*:

Silver threads at snowfield's jagged edge braid into rivulets. Rills join in brooks. A fish fighting its way up the Yellowstone would find no upper end, no furthest reach, no beginning here in Two Ocean's Pass. (60)

Instead of the inherent danger of this remote region, Clawson imagines the Cutthroat falling off the edge of Two Ocean's Plateau into the headwaters of the Snake and finning his way down to the Pacific. In *Downriver*, Dean Krakel II writes with candor about the source of all this history: "This is how the Yellowstone begins—a dark stain seeping down the flank of Yount's Peak from beneath melting snow. Hundreds of rivulets gathering among the elk dung and tundra flowers. A glimmer of silver through the willow below" (15). He lulls us into some personification with Yount's Peak, but otherwise adds the excremental pellets of the areas local inhabitants. Given the pastoral language in most of the texts I encountered, elk droppings are an appropriate and welcome surprise (if not a little symbolic too).

Even with these poetic, pastoral and earthy descriptions of the nearly inaccessible headwaters, the river section that gets all the applause is the portion below the lake. In this section, according to Jim Carrier in *Letters from Yellowstone*, "is the best fishing in the world, much of it in Yellowstone National Park, some of it as good as it ever was." Carrier, true to an objective report of the park and fly fishing, notes that, "It got that way, ironically, by the heavy hand of man, by restricting the fishing" (80). What is astonishing about the river in this portion of the park is that in 2000, the park issued 67,687 permits for fishing, ("NPS Angling 2000) and the average angler catches one fish per hour (Carrier 81). That is an incredible catching rate, given the ability of many once-a-year fly anglers. It is, however, an amazing testament to the catch and release practices of trout

anglers. Conclusively, the entire sport has become a quality experience of aesthetics, rather than a quantitative endeavor spurred by meat eaters.

Therefore, what we see here, in Yellowstone Park, is a situation where tourists apparently hammer the fish, but the numbers of fish in the 80s and 90s remained steady. Ironically, according to Montana's Fish, Wildlife and Parks, it is non-native species of fish in the river system that threaten the survival of the Cutthroat. Repeatedly, the discourses surrounding the river represent conflicting interests.¹

Congress enacted the designation of Yellowstone National Park on March 1, 1872. The act set aside "the tract of land in the Territories of Montana and Wyoming, lying near the headwaters of the Yellowstone River, [...] and dedicated and set apart as a public park or pleasuring-ground for the benefit and enjoyment of the people" (Historicaldocuments). Therefore, the initial language of an act of Congress did not suggest that the area remain wild, or that it look like pristine habitat. They suggested that it be a park. I suggest extending this definition to claim that YNP functions a lot like a municipal zoo. I have already noted the amount of traffic traveling through the park, and the amount of angler fishing for native cutthroat. Nevertheless, as Carrier comments in his *Letters* "The animals seem tame, so used to cars are they, and they become part of the landscape, to be photographed or ignored. The park becomes a giant drive-through zoo" (16). Carrier appreciates the notion that outside the direct corridors of cars, just off the road, is a world of carrion and skittish wolves; off the beaten path is a forest with unique subspecies and uncharted springs. Nevertheless, the main drag, the thoroughfare of autos, is a place where wild buffalo, the Tatanka Oyate, and other animals have become

accustomed to tourism. Unknowingly, they are the main attraction; as the story goes in the New West, the river runs through, and underneath the pavement.

Lifting a Leg on the Prairie

As the rains fell, the medicine men stretched the buffalo skin across the mountains. Each day they stretched it farther. Then Spotted Bear tied one corner to the top of the Big Horn Mountains. That side, he fastened to the Pryors. The next corner he tied to the Bear Tooth Mountains. Crossing the Yellowstone Valley, he tied one corner to the Crazy Mountains, and the other to Signal Butte in the Bull Mountains. The whole Yellowstone Valley was covered by the white buffalo skin. Though the rains still fell above, it did not fall in the Yellowstone Valley. The waters sank away. Animals from the outside moved into the valley, under the white buffalo skin. The people shared the valley with them.
Cheyenne Tale

Lest we forget about the river, it is important to understand that the preservation and conservation efforts have not proceeded uncontested. After the designation of the park, steamers on the Missouri, lower Yellowstone, and especially the Mississippi needed deep-water channels. In the early 20th century, in the true entrepreneurial spirit of western expansion, many suggested that a dam on the river could retain the prolific spring run off, and could facilitate depth control on the larger rivers downstream. One site that was proposed was at the current location of Fishing Bridge.

The theory behind an impoundment here was that the vast acreage of Yellowstone Lake could contain an extra half-million acre-feet of runoff without significantly raising the level of the lake (Schneiders 21). Proponents also addressed aesthetics in their argument here, commenting that the apparent volume levels from the dam would be nearly imperceptible from lake side to river side (255-256). George E. Goodwin assessed the site and concluded that the lake already absorbed excessive run off. His claims excited the Senate, “But more than any other factor it was the sanctity of the national

park idea that swayed the Senate” (Schneiders 260). Essentially cost shot holes in this proposal, but in the never say die spirit, a new location several miles downstream became an appealing site at two significant times during the 20th century, for two significantly different reasons.

Leaving the park to its tourists and Congressional Act, dam proponents looked at a location five miles south of Livingston, at a bottleneck in the river flow named Allenspur. In his essay “In the Yellowstone: River, Myth, and Environment” William I. Lang critically denotes, “There is an inherent power in irrigated landscapes [...] the ability to command water has long made and maintained empires” (20). Wallace Stegner claims in *Where the Bluebird Sings to the Lemonade Springs* that “Aridity, and aridity alone, makes the various Wests one” (61). This hindrance by dryness unites westerners and compels creativity and industry to capitalize upon the abundance of water in scarce locales. Allenspur became one of those locations. As seen in the floods of 1996 and 1997, the river in June could approach 30,000 cubic feet per second.

To those downstream, they saw June runoff as a golden chalice of ‘wasted’ wine, demanding it be put to ‘beneficial use’ concerning their endeavors to navigate the river and irrigate lands. Engineers decided that this was a costly approach, but that “Irrigation was a better use of the Yellowstone’s waters than channelizing the river to make it friendlier to barge traffic” (20) especially with the success of the Northern Pacific. In the 1920s the discussion proposed a 250-foot high dam at Allenspur, but ruled out a dam in Yankee Jim Canyon because it would have drowned Gardiner. By the 1930s, appropriated water rights entered the discourse, and a dream of a wet west became political. Lang illustrates this by writing

The thirsty lust for what the saturated have, and between them they often create a fractious and litigious landscape. In Montana, the access to water followed the doctrine of prior appropriation, which meant that the owners of the oldest water rights stood first in line to fill their buckets. In the Yellowstone, that spelled trouble for the hydraulic dreamers who wanted unlimited water without hamstringing restrictions. (22)

In the 1940s, the discourse turned to the benefits of the dam for the environment, not just farmers. Lewis Pick was a proponent of the dam, and suggested that, as Schneiders summarizes “A dam and reservoir represented an improvement on nature anyway” (283). This lust and thirst spawned even larger dreams, and Allenspur became the spot in the 1960s of a proposed 380-foot dam that would back the river up 33 miles south into Paradise Valley. The Renaissance Ranch would be a lakeside retreat.

In the 1970s, the environmental health of the river became paramount to the industrial and economic benefits of it. Dewatering of the river shed became a concern to fisheries biologists, and they pointed the finger at excessive approaches to irrigation and coal extraction. Not only did biologists come to defend the river, but so too did Dan Bailey, a quiet passionate fly angler and owner of Bailey’s fly shop in Livingston. In Montana FWP’s documentary *Three Men, Three Rivers*, the filmmakers portray Bailey as a strong defender of the natural condition of the Yellowstone. His conviction stemmed both from an appreciation of the environment, as well as an entrenched economic dependence upon the wild fishery his guided clients had come to adore. By the late 1970s, the “state approved instream reservations of water as a ‘beneficial use.’ The state could now keep water in the river for fish and other aquatic life” (Lang 25).

Schneiders writes in his self-declared bioregional-historical account of the Missouri and Yellowstone Rivers that ultimately, “This dam battle was an example of elites turning a western river away from agriculture and toward tourism. Rather than

serve irrigation, the Yellowstone would cater to the privileged few who wanted the river as scenery” (261). Schneiders is critical of this stance taken by the state, and writing from his desk in Lubbock, Texas, he attempts to deconstruct the tourist discourse, claiming, “Tourism represented a new form of Eastern imperialism, designed to keep a subject region ‘pristine’ or undeveloped. Tourism was old Eastern imperialism disguised behind a kinder, gentler, preservationist mantra” (261). Millions of anglers, trout, the Baileys, and the proprietors of service stations, hotels, McDonalds and fly shops all tip their hat to this form of imperialism.

Unlike the scornful Schneiders, Lang is an obvious critical thinker and a writer who embraces the notion that the West is a complexity of competing meanings. Interestingly, however, like all of the literature regarding the river, he falls into a trap: one of nostalgia and tradition. When analyzing the industrial discourse, he states that “the portent of siting smokestacks on the lands where Custer fell, where the XIT wranglers rode and where the Crows and Cheyennes hunted threatened *the meaning of the place*” (emphasis added 24). What he suggests here is that there was, at one time, a fixed meaning to the land, and that the Yellowstone itself, not particularly any given location, was a *place*.

In this statement, the past conflict and expansion defined the land in the Yellowstone Valley. I argue that the contemporary Yellowstone is subject to the same definitions. It is a symbol of the New West. In reference to the term Western exceptionalism, Lang contends that “the Yellowstone’s exceptionalism, if it is real, rests in the texts of the stories told about how people have used the river, schemed it, and continue to revere it as the unifier of a vast and open country” (25). Lang’s language here

is presumptive. I have yet to encounter language that claims the river is a unifier in the state of Montana, except under Stegner's definition. What all tales tell is that conflicting values and deterministic discourses imbricate and imprison Yellowstone National Park, Paradise Valley, and the lower river and always have controlled this region.

The Fly as Vein of Gold

They didn't like to fish, Crows. Lot of fish North of in these streams, creeks, a lot of good trout but they don't take time to sit down and fish. That's kind of a dull way of getting food. (Medicine Crow 26)

The temporal edges of recreational fly fishing on the Yellowstone River, primarily between the Park boundary and Springdale, extend each year a bit further into early spring and later fall. Anglers from across the world have been fishing the Yellowstone with the likes of George Anderson and Dan Bailey, and the ol' Pro himself, Pat Barnes for over thirty years. What the old time tourists understand is that although July provides the most stable weather and water conditions for fishing, it is also the most crowded. Events like the Great Boat Float have become polyurethane parades of booze and boobs. Promoters now market it as the chance to retrace the Lewis and Clark expedition "all the way to Laurel" ("Visit Montana"). The GBF is a weekend adorned with water wienies, Igloo Coolers and the cold bold taste of the Rockies, Coors Light.

Intuitively, locals and veteran tourist anglers alike know July is the time to fish above Livingston or stay home and mow the lawn. As a result, profits for the local outfitting services have benefited from an extended fishing season. Now anglers fish throughout the year, including the winter. The only setback in winter is when the river

either ices over entirely, or becomes choked with slush. The busy season for visiting anglers is now from March until October.

The language regarding fishing on the Yellowstone varies often times by the age (mental or physical) of the speaker. Such comments as “Dude, the ‘stone rocked with fatty brownies Saturday” to the more eloquent, “A vacuous hatch of sporadic *Ephemera septentrionalis* scintillated my visceral certitude a noon ago” jade fly shops on Mondays. Whichever way one tells the tale, the Yellowstone is full of legendary fish, and legendary anglers. The proliferation of the discourse in fly shops and within fly fishing in general is full of hyperbole. A good day fishing becomes a 20 fish day. Fish over a foot long become several over 18 inches. Most anglers barely spend the time to measure a fish, but the assumption is that the bigger the fish, the more the man. So goes western history.

The compelling aspect of the New West and fly fishing is that the bigger the better mentality surrounds the advertising of the river and the outfitters that fish it. Anderson’s Yellowstone Angler calls the river its “home water” implying that they know it and its inhabitants better than any other water. The shop describes the water from Gardiner to Livingston as “prime water” like a cut of beef. They state, “the water closer to Livingston holds the most trout”; it is also the closest to the shop, which puts more money in the guide’s pocket and less into his gas tank. In reference to Yankee Jim Canyon, they agree it looks like there are big fish in those deep pockets, but “we have found that this is not the case.” It also takes an incredibly experienced boater to negotiate the class IV rapids, and an even bigger insurance policy if someone drowns. George touts the section of river from Mallard’s Rest to Carter’s Bridge for “Beautiful scenery, and easy rowing [that]

make this Paradise Valley section very popular with anglers and recreational floaters” (“The Waters We Fish”). To veterans this means that in July they must (begrudgingly) watch out for booze barges and (carefully) examine half-naked inner tubers. Aside from the printed word, the web site is filled with illustrative text: photographs of anglers holding hefty trout and the perception that no one else is around. Visual representation carries with it validation. Even in the age of digital enhancement and reproduction, it is difficult to resist marveling at the color and size of the trout in his pictures.

Through these photographs and pastoral textual descriptions, George is selling the hyperreality of the West. Just as length and girth are victims to hyperbole in the fly shops Monday morning, so too is the atmosphere of fly fishing the Yellowstone. In selling the illusion that the river is immaculate, uncrowded, solitary, and conflict-free, based on a constructed myth that never existed, he pushes the viewers mind to perceive the West as they want it to be, rather than as it is. People and their conflicts have always populated the area. There is no escape from societal forces, from the Culture one wishes to leave behind on a week long vacation or an afternoon trip to wet a line. In the very act of fishing on a river that parallels one of the busiest highways in Montana, the angler is complicit in selling the image of the pristine recreationalist. The image of fishing is for sale, and the companies that sell the gear know tourists and future customers see, photograph, and marvel at anglers throughout the tourist season.

This is why Bozeman manufacturer turning marketing company Simms Fishing, Inc, heavily brands their gear. They want Iowans leaving the park on their way to the Billings airport to see the fly fisher in Simms gear. According to Naomi Klein in *No Logo*, branding is the cheapest, most efficient form of advertising, and it works. “Unlike

classic household brand names” says Klein, brands like Simms’ were “becoming cultural accessories and lifestyle philosophers” (16). Consequently, even the label on a pair of \$425 Gore-Tex waders becomes text for the New West. Matched with a Simms vest and boots, rounding out the package at nearly \$700, the angler on the Yellowstone is ready for battle. The price tag alone implies success, ruggedness, durability, and exclusivity. These qualities are the same that motivated the move west, and for those who sought stability, they had to possess these characteristics.

On the other hand, even the dirt bag can catch fish, and this is where the discourse strays even within the fly fishing world. Each year *Fly Rod and Reel* magazine hosts the Trout Bum Contest. Essentially, anglers drum up teams to apparently dirt bag it around the U.S., primarily the west, in search of the ultimate untarnished, or incredibly tarnished trout fishing summer. What interests me is that the real bums, like *The River Why*’s Gus Orviston wouldn’t ever enter a contest, nor would they even know of it, since they would be camped “in a van down by the river.” It is the New West participant, the amenity migrant possessing the economic and cultural capital to participate in such a manufactured persona, who is out there popping shots of 20-inch browns and emailing them to *FR&R* via WiFi or Wireless LG VX6100 streamside.

The Mouth

*I have prepared your canoe with cedar boughs. It is time for you to leave William Blake.
Time for you to go back to where you came from.
You mean Cleveland?
Back to the place where all the spirits come from and where all the spirits return. This
world will no longer concern you.”* Nobody and William Blake, *Dead Man*

Because of these many examples of perspective regarding the Yellowstone River, one can truly see the postmodern characteristics involved, even in regards to primary elements like water. What was true, believable and a way of life to thousands of Native Americans in one tribe was contested practice to another tribe. When Euro-Americans entered the landscape of the Yellowstone River valley, they separated these clans in contestations of land, although they eventually reunited. Upon contact, Sioux, Cheyenne, French, Spanish, English and Crow all competed for the natural resources of elk, bison, beaver and navigation. What was true for one was pagan to another, and what was thought of in 1872 as *conservation* of the pristine was considered *potential* for the agricultural economy thirty years later. In that time, the *original* inhabitants lost their voices in any of the land use discourses, while still other new ones cried foul. As shown throughout the last century, someone always had the next best plan for the river, and someone else was always in opposition; both, and all others in the discourse, possessed the subjective, true objective of the river and its resources. At times state and federal governments have stepped in to determine beneficial legislation. They have based their decisions on what is best for the most people, but even this is subject to criticism when we realize that thousands do not have access to a voice in the discourse.

I have a friend that thinks he is assuring me when he says, “the one thing you can count on is change.” Only this very moment do I see how that applies to the West, as seen in the literary history of the Yellowstone. However, through this analysis I see that some things never change. Opposing forces always pulled land in the West in varying directions. Ten thousand years ago humans didn’t drastically alter the landscape, but weapons have been found that suggest animals and humans battled; but I could contend

that so too did nomadic tribes. 9800 years after, we have oral and written tales that tell of warring tribes. As discussed with the “dam battle” the manipulation of the land and water for agricultural uses was at the forefront in the 20th century, but now tourism and fishing interests have trumped those discussions.

Consequently, to define the New West merely by conflict is to undermine the power of any notion of Old West. If there is a New, there had to be an Old; if both were rife with conflict over land and economic interest, what makes our West, new? Today’s condition is not just a black and white dichotomy of competing sides. In the last fifty years, the West is a landscape that entertains several different voices as once, often agreeable on one aspect of a given resource, but opposed in another. As a result, several present conditions, all occurring simultaneously, contribute to a New, but not necessarily improved, West.

Within the discourses of tourism, we see these competitive forces. Yellowstone National Park is the sight of legislation in Washington D.C. regarding the use of snowmobiles in the winter. Some say to leave the park to skiers in the winter; that the animals obtain a break from the non-stop vehicular harassment during summer. Businesses in West Yellowstone benefit from an additional season’s capital, and want the machines there. The use of the river, less for extractive and hydrological purposes, and more for river recreation, has rifts as well. Drift boat guides do not like to compete for prime fishing water and solitude with flotillas of shrieking Nebraskans on rafts from Yellowstone Whitewater. Other anglers do not like the tackle and limit restrictions imposed by the state on what they believe are *their* fish. The catch and kill tactics of the *uncivilized* angler disgust catch and release proponents. However you slice it, the New

West is a land of competing, multi-layered meanings, and thus the discourse has always been about competing interests.

The Paradoxical Retreat Hypothesis

I discuss here the impact that artistic novels have on the minds of anglers, and how writers like Richard Brautigan and David James Duncan try to crack through the veil of nostalgia, to illustrate the environmental impact the American Dream is having on our constructed notions of *Nature*, as experienced through fly fishing. The very forces of the veil shape and define these perceptions; even when one is fortunate enough to peek beneath it, it is impossible to escape the warmth of its cover. Lest we just lie down in a mossy bog, and let *Nature's* wet dew chill us into apathy, or succumb to the tedium of *Culture's* mechanization, we can search for alternatives that embrace both but acknowledge that no one resource is infinite, nor can we as humans control all global forces. Even a return to what is local, such as what Duncan calls for, is a challenge in a global environment. However, it is one worth exploring. To discern how each individual's actions on any given day, in the many interactions he has with his environment, affect every other action, is a step in the direction toward progress. The condition of post-modernity pleads for either an acceptance or a destruction of competing realities. Fly fishing is a microcosm of the bigger picture in the New West, where each fly fished, each cast, each fish and its type, either caught or released, adds or subtracts another layer to the wooly veil that is, and that hides, the realities of the West.

The other aspect of the New West that is not new at all is the notion of commodification. At the root of Manifest Destiny, the American Dream, Western

expansionism, Eastern imperialism, better fishing, pristine landscapes, clearer water, or more civilized natives is the almighty dollar. Money and the stuff it buys are inseparable from any other characteristic of the West. So what separates the New West from the Old is less time, and more the technological stuff obtained in those times; how the use of resources has had to adapt as the less renewable ones (coal, copper, gold, trees) are replaced with regenerative surrogates (trout, snow, “natural” spaces, wildlife). One step beyond natural resources and the New West is inseparable from the globalizing and acculturating forces that have come to shape it.

In *Cultures of the New American West* Neil Campbell defines “the New West as a network of lines between past and present, crossing different groups, ethnicities, genders—not to create a fixed, singular notion of the West, but on the contrary to emphasize its heterogeneity and its hybrid, relational texture” (29). The Yellowstone is an ideal study because it has embodied all of these pulls at its shores. The River inspires artists, and because they have an undammed river to paint and write, Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks sells a lot of fishing licenses. Service stations owned by big wigs in Texas cash in on those license holders, and so too do outdoor giants like Orvis, and Cabellas, and travel and amenity moguls like Delta Airlines (maybe not a good example), Budget Rent-A-Car, Super 8 Motels, and McDonald’s. This is the imbricated nature of the New West. The chain is inescapable, and if political or social beliefs keep one from using fossil fuels, then the nations longest free flowing stream, its most “natural” river, is unobtainable by the person who might appreciate it the most. Why? Because a dollar (-Rent-a-Car, -Value Meal) runs through it.

Philip Connors claims in the introduction to *The New West Reader* the New West in the twenty first century should be examined “in a grown-up way” (XIX). Here he is signifying that the Old West was new to European settlers, but in the twenty first century, the sense of irony is intrinsic in any discussion. The landscape has matured in that it no longer offers one of two alternatives. That understood, Connors notes that these writers of the West have that sense of irony, but it “doesn’t curdle their vision” (XIX). He states that “We like to be outdoors...we like the look and sound and smell and feel of the world,” and that shows in the writings discussed here. However, “these folks are dreamers of a sort themselves” and the dream of Eden anchors deep in the foundation of all discussions of the West. For example, he states, “The desire for a soothing fiction has always, in the West, been stronger than the collective stomach for reality” (XV). The maturity then, of examining the West must come in the acknowledgement that even in the act of dreaming a New West, one must deny other aspects of the same region that are nightmarish.

That Edenic fiction has propelled all aspects of the West, and is essentially the defining framework for intense and conflicting interests played out on the playgrounds of the Western landscape. Connors illustrates the reality through his ranching example: “There are those who argue a wilderness without cattle is utterly worthless as a natural resource; and there are those who believe a wilderness without large predators is a wilderness in name only.” Exemplifying the West he concludes, “These two camps have been at war for decades” (XVII).

The Atlas of the New West opens with William Riebsame’s acknowledgement that the contributors “felt loss. Ski resorts, fur shops, and espresso bars have edged out feed

stores, cowboy bars, and greasy spoons. Walled estates, golf courses, and factory outlet malls weave through mining and ranching towns” (12). According to Riebsame, “we wanted to map the geographical skeleton on which the New West hung: private-jet ports, water diversions, the few home-grown corporations, and gold medal trout streams” (13). Realizing that the “modern cowboy and amenity migrant” are only a portion of the New West’s character, they “then explored the underside of the New West: nuclear bomb factories, chemical dumps, and endangered species” (13). Behind the veil of Nature proposed by outfitters is the dark underbelly of Culture.

“The rise of the high-stakes recreation industry” in the West, according to Charles Wilkinson “epitomized a new dynamic in the region” (*Atlas* 17). Although “innovations in fly rods, hiking boots, ski equipment, and bicycles” developed from an increased interest in recreation, like Connors, Wilkinson notes that “The New West also has brought its full supply of irony” (17). This irony surfaces in the proposed solution by some of “tourism as an economic alternative to the traditional extractive industries”; only to discover that “hordes of tourists can wreck the land every bit as thoroughly as an open-pit mine” (18). Although in current marketing schemes in America, New is always better and improved, Wilkinson warns “that the New West has given us ample evidence that it is not necessarily better, only different” (18). It has grown up.

In “The Montana Face” Leslie Fielder describes this maturity as the “contradiction between their actuality and their dream” (745). Fielder anticipates the New West condition in 1949 by stating that “the contradiction remains largely unrealized geographically sundered; for those who continue to dream the Dream are in their safe East, and those who live the fact have become total Westerners, deliberately cut off from

history and myth, immune even to the implications of their own landscape” (*The Last Best Place* 745). These implications are important in understanding the New West. As mentioned before, competition plagues the region, and always has. Fielder expands this notion, to claim that even the serenity of living Western has its antagonist: “Montana is [...] torn between an idolatrous regard for its refurbished past (the naïve culture it holds up defiantly against the sophistication of the East, not realizing that the East *requires* of it precisely such a contemporary role) and a vague feeling of guilt at the confrontation of the legend of its past with the real history that keeps breaking through” (746). That guilt is just another aspect of the New West discourse. Newcomers acknowledge that they are part of the problem, while others struggle with the history of Native Americans, after Europeans settled the West.

The history of this Edenic myth of the west was described in Henry Nash Smith’s *Virgin Land*. He illuminates the influence dime novels and James Fennimore Cooper’s fictional works had over the imaginations of Easterners. These works promised land, freedom, and economical success to the West. His analysis of the West, as created through the perpetuation of myth and symbol, is compelling and applicable in several areas to *A River Runs Through It*. This is seen especially in a comparison of Cooper’s and Maclean’s work, where the Rev. Maclean seems to embody “the antithesis between nature and civilization, between freedom and law...more strongly devoted to the principle of social order and more vividly responsive to the ideas of nature and freedom in the Western forest” (60-61). Additionally, R.W.B. Lewis² says the “collective affair” of texts, stories, and images has contributed to the myth in the first place; and now the perpetuation of this myth is what motivates commerce. What fishing companies do, as I

shall describe later, is create a new hero for the west; a caricature of both man and nature “untouched and undefiled by the usual inheritances of family and race...the hero of the new adventure” (Lewis 4-5).

Again, characteristics of the respective time delineate the interplay of New and Old. Fielder claims that “Under the compulsion to examine his past, the contemporary Montanan, pledged to history though nostalgic for myth, becomes willy-nilly an iconoclast” (750). He means that the truth is tough to swallow, as the past is not as seamless as initially written. Like the present New West, “Back then” there were victors that told the stories and the vanquished that fought back. In the twenty first century, “the cruelest aspect of social life in Montana is the exclusion of the Indian” (751). Nevertheless, whether New Westerners can acknowledge this cruelty is debatable. It is in the New West where these things are painted over in the quest for escape. Where else, but in the Edenic West, can one retreat from the problems of the East. Moreover, even if one does, someone else “is torn with inner feelings of guilt, the knowledge of his own complicity” in contributing to the silencing of a harsh reality (752).

These theorists have captured an intense and provocative snapshot of the New West. Earlier I used the Yellowstone River as an exemplary sample of what the New West looks like. The preservation of the nation’s longest free-flowing river has always encountered competing interests, and in the first decade of the twenty first century, tourist dollars have temporarily won. Utilizing the narratives surrounding the river enhances the work of other cultural theorists like Campbell, who states as his objective to “articulate a rejection of mythic order and metanarrative in favour of complexity and contradictions much closer to the New West” (152). The fly fishing narratives represent this complexity.

Any detailed examination of the West reveals several important commonalities. The first is that everything is for sale, enmeshed in the roots of our capitalistic system. Realtors benefit from New West ideals; fondling inside the pockets of each benefactor are the recreation companies, the automobile industry, and the chic slim technology companies involved in computer and cellular service. The second is that prices and conflicts increase the closer the objective is to water. Again, the riverfront property ads pander to the Dream of owning a chunk of blue ribbon trout water. The third is that change is inevitable, and that is the most unchanging characteristic in the New West.

In the past thirty years, several theorists have labeled what they consider the decline of the West within literature as a *declension narrative*, including William Cronon and Donald Worster. Even Riebsame above expresses the sense of loss for greasy restaurants and authentic bars to cappuccino cowboys and leer jets. Throughout this discussion, lament for that which was percolates to the top of nearly every tale surrounding the West. It is as if the very decline of the West is what continues to motivate myth and the insistence on that myth contributing to newness.

In Carolyn Merchant's chapter "Eden Commodified", she discussed the mall as spaces that "feature life-sized trees, trellises decorated with flowers, stone grottoes, birds, animals, and even indoor beaches that simulate nature as a cultivated, benign garden. The 'river that went out of the Eden to water the garden' is reclaimed in meandering tree-lined streams and ponds filled with bright orange goldfish" (167-8). To me this sounds like a nice place to fish, complete with carp cousins and shade. Ironically, this is an encapsulated space, constructed of the *faux*; yet it is the place that provides a significant portion of the same retreat that anglers seek. As she states, "Malls are places of light,

hope, and promise—transitions to new worlds. People are reinvented and redeemed by the mall” (168). If we substitute *Mall* from the above quote for *river* throughout the following fictions, we easily see the parallel. Additionally, if we make this hop across the cobblestones and see this comparison, then we must make the acknowledgement that the rejuvenation is in our minds, not something inherent in the physical world.

In David Oates’ work *Paradise Wild* he discusses this internal Eden in the language of dis-separation. Rather than the plagues of civilization, or what he terms Culture, being distinct and omnipresent from the benevolent wild forces of Nature to which anglers run, he claims they are much more intertwined. According to Oates, “foraging, telling stories, walking. That is what human was, before cities, before agriculture, before priests and kings. That is what our bodies still tell us, what our minds whisper. There’s something else close by, that does not exclude culture but that also is a step closer to the natural conditions that produced us” (21-22). And according to Oates, this is “that path we’ve always been walking” (22). Therefore, this path, the metaphor Oates uses here claims that we are always in Nature and in Culture.

In 2006, this is not an innovative thought. However, I use it here to blur the boundaries between what really is Nature, and what really is Culture. If we are always on the path of both, then which is which? As Merchant notes, people find the same connectivity in the mall as they do in the woods. Oates then pins the tail on the trout by claiming, “Authenticity and purity are *our* hang-ups” (Oates 22). It appears, then, that the wild (unlike the *native* trout) is merely a walk away. “The deep past laps like a silent ocean right up to the very edge of the present. All it takes is a walk to reawaken it” (23).

Oates' use of the Native American explains the idea that a wild trout is more rewarding than catching a planted one, and that a native cutthroat is a catch that connects us with a deeper force in the West. He quotes Native American scholar Jana Sequoya to illustrate this idea. "Most Native American communities define members on the basis of kinship affiliations and social acuity rather than blood quantum, so that the key to being Native American...does not depend on the degree of Indian blood, but on the degree of incorporation into the social network of that community." (23). Concerning native cutthroat and wild rainbows, one must say that there would be more of the former if humans never introduced the latter. The same goes for whites and Indians, I argue.

Nevertheless, here we have it, now, 200 years later, and what makes any one trout or human less authentic, original, or worthy than the next is merely a construct of our minds. Applying Sequoya's definition of the intrusion of whites, we could speculate that if we had fit in, and offered a "degree of incorporation" Indians might have offered a sense of kinship. Nevertheless, we think individualistically, says Oates, and our actions displayed that. The trout competes for habitat, and therefore rainbows, browns and cutts share a lot of the same water; however, some water is more suitable for the individual characteristics of each trout. This is why there will be *more* browns in the lower Yellowstone, because of eroded banks that provide cottonwood roots for habitat, than the upper. The upper Yellowstone, because of its cobbled bottom and fast, oxygenated water is ideal for rainbows, but they share this water with browns and cutts. The point here is that although some of these fish were non-native, they have become an essential part of the river, and although they affected the *original* population of cutthroat, all species have

found a way to survive. To label one as wild, another as native, is merely the same type of construct Oates and Merchant are illustrating.¹

Essentially Oates is breaking down the dichotomy of Nature/Culture from which so much of the fly fishing narrative is spawned. In the chapter “Wilderness” he discusses the very construction of such a term, in ways that Duncan used it, with its implied definition of “‘virgin’ [...] ‘pristine’ clean and pure, removed from the smudged world of people” (24). What he realizes is that this does not exist out there. A touch of the “wild” is within him, and he needs it, but to call such places distinct and separate from our Culture is a deception. As I have continued to show throughout, the corporations, the magazines, and the networks have perpetuated the escape to Nature to sell their wares, and many of the anglers, and the angling fiction writers, have signed their checks. Therefore, the suggestion of Dana Phillips, that “the ecocritic’s [angler’s] epiphany is more self-revelatory than revelatory of the world: the world, that is, of both words and things” (11) applies to describe the imagined, created environment that reveals more of the angler or fishing writer than of the river and its inhabitants.

Astonishingly, companies like Honda, T. Rowe Price and Cingular know that the identification with nature is one of freedom and escape. They therefore use fishing scenes to sell SUVs, retirement accounts, and mobile phone service, all of which are new millennium icons of a free lifestyle in the New West. Essentially, these three corporations have used fly fishing to say “escape with the guys in your Honda Ridgeline, which you were able to purchase with your petty cash fund held at T. Rowe Price, and use your phone to call your dad and have him slide downstream, silently, to where you, and better fishing, are.” According to *the Atlas of The New West*, “the New West lifestyle has a lot

to do with the flood of well-off newcomers and their consumption patterns. Urban and suburban refugees come to the Interior West looking for salvation from the rat race; they appreciate the rugged landscape, the big sky, the mythical ‘Wild West,’ and opportunities to make money and spend it” (117).

Like Oates, the authors of the *Atlas* can identify the contradictions associated with lovers of the West for its *Nature*, but many newcomers cannot escape their Culture. It is too subjective and presumptive to conjure an accurate assessment of the degree of the retreat. However, I use this example to show that not everyone wants a complete escape, and as I have argued here, once one decides that is his goal, he trudges along toting satchels packed to the gills with corporate logos and mass-produced consumer goods. When the bags get heavy they go in the SUV. When the SUV is no longer big enough, the Yakima Rocket Box straps on top for additional carrying capacity. For \$100.00 more, he can improve gas mileage with a Yakima fairing, stickered with logos from his favorite outdoor brands.

The world of the New West is one of contradiction, marketing schemes, limited natural resources, metropolitan amenities tucked into forested hillsides, and a rapidly growing population. Hiding these New West essentials are economic, artistic, and political constructs that function as veils to distract perceptions toward an idyllic pastoral image of this region known as the West. Again, there is not something inherent in Nature or fly fishing that gives us the benefits of the retreat. These benefits are constructs and beneath the veil of constructed escapes are the same corporations, oppressions, and technological advancements from which the angler is escaping.

Furthermore, we can apply Fredric Jameson's words from *The Political Unconscious* to what happens with fly fishing because of novels and their big screen adaptations, as seen with *A River Runs Through It*. What has taken place, here, is a "rationalization" as Jameson explains. The techniques used to comprise the gear for a recreational activity--turned spiritual quest--have been rationalized into reification where:

The traditional or "natural" unities, social forms, human relations, cultural events, even religious systems, are systematically broken up in order to be reconstructed more efficiently, in the form of new post-natural processes or mechanisms; these now isolated broken bits and pieces of the older unities acquire a certain autonomy of their own, a semi-autonomous coherence which, not merely a reflex of capitalistic reification and rationalization, also in some measure serves to compensate for the dehumanization of experience ... and rectify the otherwise intolerable effects of the new process (63).

The natural unities of community fly tying groups still happen on small levels, but have been replaced and rationalized by the more efficiently operated fly factory.

Additionally, Jean Baudrillard pioneered an analysis of that which results from the combination of film, literature, and cultural texts such as fly fishing magazines and advertisements in Western publications. In *Simulacra and Simulation*, he writes, "When the real is no longer what it used to be, nostalgia assumes its full meaning." As other cultural theorists write, when nostalgia assumes its full meaning, the population longs for what there was, even if more hope than reality jades the past. As a result, "There is a proliferation of myths of origin and signs of reality, of second-hand truth, objectivity and authenticity. There is an escalation of the true, of the lived experience; a resurrection of the figurative where the object and substance have disappeared" (*Simulacra and Simulations*). His work applies directly, as the literature shows, to the phenomena in the West. By applying such a theory, we can begin to analyze the contradictions of the New West. It is in this space where rivers and irony come together, engaged and perpetuated

Baudrillard's notion of hyperreal. From fly shop web sites to national television commercials, we can identify the motives as Baudrillard describes them: "What society seeks through production, and overproduction, is the restoration of the real which escapes it."¹

Baudrillard explains the resulting behavior in the New West, then, is "a panic-stricken production of the real and the referential, above and parallel to the panic of material production. This is how simulation appears in the phase that concerns us: a strategy of the real, neo-real and hyperreal" (166). In later discussions, I will show specific examples of this theory manifest in the West.

Ultimately, throughout this entire discussion and the texts of the West, the notions of Nature and Culture begin to fail. They are not, and never were, distinct. William Cronon references in *Uncommon Ground* that Rousseau thought "the best antidote to the ills of an overly refined and civilized modern world was a return to simpler, more primitive living" (76). He notes the commonly held belief that I explore here, as Nature, or "wilderness offers us the illusion that we can escape the cares and troubles of the world in which our past has ensnared us" (80). Cronin's essay entitled "The Trouble with Wilderness" closes where the *paradoxical retreat hypothesis* picks up: "The trouble with wilderness is that it quietly expresses and reproduces the very values its devotees seek to reject [...] the flight from history represents the false hope of an escape from responsibility, the illusion that we can somehow wipe clean the slate of our past" (80). According to Carolyn Merchant in *Reinventing Eden*, wilderness and its ancient roots "*wildrenes and wylderne* could also mean a retreat, a place to worship God in the desert

wilderness as described in the Bible. The wilderness was thus a place in which one could gain insights into the meaning of its opposite—*Civility*” (68).

Edward Soja and other contemporaries have taken these failing binaries, and exploded them to represent what occurs when they are fused into the concept of both/and. He writes in *Thirdspace*, that traditionally the world was perceived as black *and* white. What results from fusing the two of them, a world of both/and, is a world of trialectics rather than limited binaries. Soja explains, “Thirthing [...] does not derive simply from an additive combination of its binary antecedents but rather from a disordering, deconstruction, and tentative reconstitution of their presumed totalization producing an open alternative that is both similar and strikingly different” (61). By applying this to the Nature/Culture dichotomy, we can perceive it as an imbricated space of multiple meanings, a thirdspace formed by “unnatural technologies” and “convoluted techniques” as well as the latent instinctive urge to dominate.

To add to, and further complete, the cycle of determining what the New West is, and how it is propagated, commodified and consumed, we must now turn to the fictional depictions of fly fishing in American Literature, and carve a niche for them within these aforementioned contributions to the discourse surrounding the West. Merely casting a delicate fly atop the ink of fly fishing prose, however, is not the fare for this exploration. We need heavy line, lead, and constant reflection upon the New West discourse to reveal the progression of, and complication surrounding, the paradoxes of any retreat into fly fishing writing. The fiction is important, because so many of the advertisements and successors of past writers depend upon their audience’s knowledge of art surrounding the sport. As said often, art imitates life, but so true in the New West is the reverse.

The recreational activity of fly fishing has occupied a significant space within Western literature of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. This occupation commences in the 1960s and 70s with Norman Maclean's *A River Runs Through It* and Richard Brautigan's *Trout Fishing in America*. Following these early texts, David James Duncan's novel *The River Why* tries to offer solutions and alternatives to the conceptions of what an escape is, and how complex the motivating forces for it are. The one similarity that arises from the pages of these texts is the protagonist's notion of fly fishing in a river as an escape.

This escape typically is from some sort of land-based demon. Gambling debts, avalanching credit card debt, or a persistent spouse flooding one's head with honey-do lists all flush the modern fly fisher out of the house and down to the stream for Montana style therapy. The quality of demons, however, is manifest larger than these. War, politics, greed, the state of the nation, the responsibilities of corporate leadership and the pressures to live the unattainable American dream weigh heavy on the souls of fly anglers in these works, and the place where all this *seems* to melt away is in the healing waters of Western streams. As stated earlier, each of these components contributes toward a commonly held definition of Culture. Within contemporary fly fishing fiction, we can problematize the withdrawal of these characters from the mechanized, corporate space, because even the act of withdrawal into serene space has already been absorbed into the very space the angler intends to avoid.

Through examinations of these contemporary fictional works and various cultural artifacts such as television advertisements and fly fishing magazines, arises the *paradoxical retreat hypothesis*. In accordance with the definition of the New West--a

layered region of competition and meaning--the paradoxical essence of retreat is inherent in any escape from Culture to Nature. Who is escaping, who is *selling Nature* as an escape, and why this body of fiction views the idea of *Culture* (everything not in Nature) as separate and negative is important. Its contribution to discussions of the West and as its function as a motivator for retreat are results of the fictional qualities. As a result of these examinations, we see Culture and Nature as an imbricative mosaic of contemporary contradictions, restraining and combining with the retreat into any perceived Natural space.

Crafting this space has been the objective of several late twentieth and early twenty first century texts; laying them over this aforementioned context, we see how writers depict the river as the place of rejuvenation, spiritual contact, and societal escape. However, standing *next* to a river is less spiritual than probing it, attempting to master the creatures in its depths with nine feet of graphite fly rod. Moreover, although these fictions perpetuate that myth, when we apply the paradoxical retreat hypothesis within the context of economics, politics, and in general perceptions of *Culture*, it blankets the confluences where we create meaning in the New West.

.The fiction is not just limited to the novel form. The actual marketing practices of the fly fishing industry co-opt the escape myth of fly fishing and sell it back to the public. Of interest here is the impact that the literature and media, including Hollywood, have on the techniques businesses use to remain profitable and competitive in the recreational market. Similar to the clothing and automotive industries, American fly fishing businesses use overseas labor to produce goods affordable to the average angler. What I

reveal here is that behind the nostalgic image of fly fishing is a global market dependent on inexpensive overseas labor and the façade of American nostalgia and tradition.

The *paradoxical retreat hypothesis* is apparent throughout the West, and as cultural critics and literary theorists, we can apply it, in principal, to any activity in the west to reveal the *multiple meanings immersed around the participant and the observer*. The value herein is that cultural critics can overlay this newly revealed fly fishing template to illuminate the deeper layers of all outdoor activities in the contemporary world climate. A list far from all-inclusive should include activities like rock climbing, kayaking, big game hunting and mountain biking.

FISHING THE WEST WITH A PEN

Theorists and readers often perceived traditional western literature as the western novel, written by the likes of Zane Gray, Louis L'Amour and Larry McMurtry. Appropriately, in these tales, the West was still unsettled, land was available if you were willing to work it, and oftentimes the perceived threat of Indian attacks manifest with a good clean scalping. In these texts, it always seems the protagonist is too busy with Western activities (e.g. fighting Indians, fixing fence, ridin' the range) to spend much time recreating. However, the established classes of humanity throughout history have always found time and places to relax and depart from the day's toils. The lower classes have not always, but some in certain economic positions they did find the time. Cowboys did not.

Consequently, in the late 1960s some American writers began to incorporate recreation into their fictional works. Recreation seemed to be the way to escape the imposing and presumably separated pressures of Culture, and retreat to Nature. One form of that recreation is fly fishing. Fly fishing literature's father of retreat is Sir Isaac Walton. He looks to Nature and the rivers in his 17th century English work *The Compleat Angler* as the place where the contemplative angler can find solace and connect with God and the pastoral world. The full title itself, *The Compleat Angler, or the Contemplative Man's Recreation* implies the time, space, and serenity simply to be. It is a place where man can "purpose to give rest to your mind, and divest yourself of your more serious business, and (which is often) dedicate a day or two to this recreation." In other words, Walton can cast aside the pressures of aristocratic English society, and indulge in the

simple life. Walton, however, wrote in a cultured, upper class environment, without the complications addressed in the fishing texts of the late twentieth century.

In the conditions of the after effects of two world wars, space exploration, Vietnam, Interstate highways, the assassination of John F. Kennedy and mass production, recreation became perceived as the place where one could restore, using the ecosystem language, the “natural internal balance.” It was as if one could escape the rigors of mechanization—what Leo Marx labeled *the Machine in the Garden*—and touch the world of godliness. One example of this recreation, which exploded in the late 1960s, was fly fishing.

I claim again here, that there is an inherent irony in any form of retreat into Nature. Three novelists of the twentieth century use fly fishing within their works; however, each takes a drastically different view on how the activity of fly fishing attains the American recreational escape. These three selections are representative of a way of viewing the West and Nature, although they I do not discuss them chronologically. Norman MacLean published *A River Runs Through It* in 1976, whereas Richard Brautigan wrote *Trout Fishing in America* in 1967; the latter takes a much more postmodern, critical approach to its discussion of the west and fishing. David James Duncan’s *The River Why* displays a vast knowledge of its predecessors, but looks toward solutions rather than critiques. Each has differing perspectives on the same activity, and all make a claim to what nature is to the industrialized, commercialized American who seeks an escape.

Here is where the *paradoxical retreat hypothesis arises*. Through this lens we see that whatever it is we are escaping, it is impossible to leave it completely behind when

we go to the construct called Nature; this is specifically true with fly fishing. The rivers become a place of tension, flowing both through pristine lands and unsoiled paradise as well as through super fund sites and landscapes scattered with 49 Buicks as bank reinforcement. Cultural meaning and economic tension imbricate the rivers fly anglers fish making them neither holy pristine or wholly defiled.

Additionally, the distinctions made between Nature and Culture are no longer functional for any discussion involving the West and the activities that take place there. Herein I use the terms often in relation to what others say about them, realizing that ultimately they are inseparable. Utilizing fly fishing allows us to see how amorphous and indistinct Nature and Culture are, thus allowing us to combine the words into an inseparable form, a bigger picture, where third and fourth distinctions are shaped and allowed to define this region.

A River Runs Through It

Norman Maclean set the retreat in motion in the West, and specifically in Montana, with his novella *A River Runs Through It*, published in 1976 by his employer, the University of Chicago. The novella is unabashedly about the joy of fly fishing. Set at the confluence of “great trout rivers” (1) the Maclean family home lies in Missoula, Montana, where the Big Blackfoot meets with the Clark Fork near East Missoula. The period for the novel is 50 years previous, and Maclean writes of a “Montana of his youth.” The entire text looks fondly back on what was once a peaceful place, where the young Norman fell in love, fished with his brother and father, drank and brawled. The fishing, specifically fly fishing, was the place where Norman’s father “would unwind”

after a day's service as a Presbyterian minister. It was the place of rejuvenation, where the eldest Maclean would listen to the words of god beneath the stones "cut by the world's great flood." For Maclean, he cannot escape the nostalgia of his youth, nor does he really try.

The novel opens with the lines "In our family, there was no clear line between religion and fly fishing" (1). From the get go, Maclean places fly fishing on a spiritual plane. It is as if fly fishing inherently transcends the pressures and gravity of the sins of earthly living. The opening paragraph also relates the importance of Christ's disciples as fisherman, which "we were left to assume, as my brother and I did, that all first-class fishermen on the sea of Galilee were fly fishermen, and the John, the favorite, was a dry-fly fisherman" (1). Though Christ was a fisher of men, the Maclean brothers are fishers of trout. Maclean is adamant that fly fishing and spirituality are the same, and where, in 1920s Montana there is fly fishing, there is Nature. To assure us of this, Norman explains, "As a Scot and a Presbyterian, my father believed that man by nature was a mess and had fallen from an original state of grace" (2).

On Sunday's between services, the Maclean brothers would walk with their Presbyterian minister father, "on the hills where he could restore his soul and be filled again to overflowing for the evening sermon" (2). The writing here implies the need for human perfection as only can be found in the natural environment. First of all, Nature is a place different from Culture; secondly, the family feels an attachment to Nature. *A River Runs Through It* struggles with the need for perfection in a fallen world, and the younger brother Paul is the character that encapsulates the notion that in Nature, he was perfect,

but in the city, in Culture, he was flawed. Before we examine Paul's struggles, the theological parallels are continuous and worthy of a few more explications.

In an odd gesture for a novel, the narrator speaks directly to the reader, and, as if the text was an instructional manual as well as a story, he writes "if you have never picked up a fly rod before, you will soon find it factually and theologically true that man by nature is a damn mess" (3). This passage interests my analysis here on several levels. The first is Maclean's distinction between fact and theology. Often those who believe in God and live as spiritually as does this family, God, and his creation, are fact. However, here he makes a distinction between the two, implying that fact is separate from religious theory. The next is that he elicits a predisposition of man as a fallen creature from the beginning, but plays with the language here. "By nature" in this case, is not next to, or immersed in the natural environment, but the uncultivated soul of man without God's grace. This was man as flesh and blood, without the teachings of God to settle his savage body. Yet, the minister and his boys connect with the Edenic rejuvenation in *Nature*, written about throughout the stories of the West.

The tension then, is between a prelapsarian garden in nature, the external, and the fallen condition of man internally. He reinforces this by saying "until man is redeemed he will always take a fly rod too far back, just as natural man always overswings with an ax or golf club and loses all his power somewhere in the air" (3). He continues the metaphor of the natural, fallen man on page four, stating "Then, since it is natural for man to try to attain power without recovering grace" he incorrectly casts a fly rod against its intended design. In summary, Minister Maclean believed "all good things—trout as well as eternal salvation—come by grace and grace comes by art and art does not come easy" (5).

Patricia Nelson Limerick explicates this notion of the restorative nature in *The Atlas of the New West*. “Square at the center of the dreams directed at the American West has been the hope that the West will prove therapeutic, medicinal, restorative, and reinvigorating. Name the affliction and the West seems to offer the remedy [...] freedom and independence to provide a restorative alternative to mass society’s regimentation and standardization” (153). Limerick accurately describes the fond spiritual, and in these texts, nostalgic approach toward Nature as it was before the fall.³ She continues this critique by claiming, “The late twentieth century provides another chapter in the long story of Americans wanting the West to be a remedy, a cure, and a restorative, wanting the West to make them feel young, vigorous, clean and replenished again” (162).⁴

I mentioned Isaac Walton at the beginning of this section, because although scripture depicts the disciples as fishermen, it seems Walton was the first to meditate on the spiritual principles, he claims, belonged to the fishing experience. In the twentieth century, novelists often (in all three of these novels here) refer to their roots, as if Walton was the seed. In this case, the father solidifies the attitude in the boys that fly fishing is more spiritual than bait fishing. The minister claims that Walton is not a respectable writer because he was an “Episcopalian and a bait fisherman” (5). Later in the text, Norman’s brother-in-law is pinned as a lesser being, not only for his California tan and for his tennis sweaters, but for his “Hills Bros. coffee can” filled with worms (58). He was a bait fisherman, and for that Paul exclaims, “I don’t like anything about him” (51). Brother-in-law Neal also defiles the sanctuary, not only by bringing bait, but he brings Ol’ Rawhide, the town prostitute and a bottle of 3-7-77. If that was not enough, they drink the brothers’ eight beers sunk in the stream for *après* fishing. The baptismal waters,

the notion of art, and the transcendent sacrament of fly fishing forced the gluttony of drinking alcohol to the end of the day.

Before we leave the religious language, to look at the nostalgic language within the text, Norman the narrator waxes about the essence of fly fishing. If an angler is out there catching fish to dominate, then that is fishing, but nothing more. However, “it is not fly fishing if you are not looking for answers to questions” (47). In the cast, Norman finds the grace instilled upon him by his father, and he reflects that “One of life’s quiet excitements is to stand somewhat apart from yourself and watch yourself softly becoming the author of something beautiful, even if it is only a floating ash” (47). That ash is a fly on the end of a leader, and the story written is the tale of what comes if a fish rises.

Maclean here demands that the reader buy into the notion that the stream holds a tale of its own, its inherent past with a story to tell for those who are able to listen. A bait fisherman barely hears the roar of the rapids, but a fly fisherman “has a phrase to describe what he does when he studies the patterns of a river. He says he is ‘reading the water’ and perhaps to tell his stories he has to do much the same thing” (69). This section offers such subtle language, and departs from the narrative of the brothers’ lives, that, for the reader it is as if we are fish, or water, and effectively we become the story. For example: “As the heat mirages on the river in front of me danced with and through each other, I could feel patterns from my own life jointing with them. It was here, while waiting for my brother, that I started this story, although, of course, at the time I did not know that stories of life are often more like rivers than books” (69). Only while in the environment of sun, water, and trees can Norman experience the essences of his life; the sublime and

intangible that come from reading water, immersed in Nature, and not Culture, where the “nature of man” is rampant and savage.

Although the text of *A River Runs Through It* expounds the spiritual side of fly fishing, and that portion is essential for examining the roots of the paradoxical retreat hypothesis and the retreat’s popular embeddedness in fly fishing, we must also turn to look at a prominent thought pattern within the New West discourse. This is one of a nostalgic view on what the West was, and what it is becoming. What it is becomes what the West was: a mythical place with more fish, bigger sky, and fewer people. However, it is never the West of savage Indians, too many grizzlies, or harsh winters. What the West was is a prosaic lament for an imaginary time somewhere between wildness and civility, a place where much was tamed, but not too tame. What I conclude is that it is a state of mind, not a state of Montana, and the finest piece of literature to illustrate this concept is Maclean’s work.

Through his work on two narratives about the 1930s dustbowl, Cronin raises the question essential to this analysis; that being, as Merchant writes “one of the fit between stories and reality” (5). Both the narrator Norman of *A River Runs Through It* and the author Maclean suffer from a malady that leaves them longing for the West of stories. Separating any Western story, including those noted by Jim Kitses in *Horizons West*, from the truth is nearly impossible, because the story is so idyllic; Westerners want it to be *real*.

An initial kickoff for this discussion is the discovery by Norman and Paul as young boys that “the outside world [...] was full of bastards, the number increasing rapidly the farther one gets from Missoula, Montana” (7). Here we see a common

perspective of those living in the West: an egocentric attachment to their closed in arena, and an inherent threat posed by anyone outside that circle. According to Paul, if someone born in the Rockies went west, he was a failure: “Practically everybody on the West Coast was born in the Rocky Mountains where they failed as fly fishermen, so they migrated to the West Coast and became lawyers, certified public accountants, presidents of airplane companies, gamblers, or Mormon missionaries’” (11). This comment contributes to the discussion by these theorists regarding the drawbridge syndrome and the anxiety of belatedness. Once a newcomer enters the frontier, he wants to draw up the bridge, lock down the gates, and insure that “things will never change.” Paul continues his rant about Rocky mountain evacuees, arguing, “all those Montana boys on the West Coast sit around bars at night and lie to each other about their frontier childhood when they were hunters, trappers, and fly fisherman. But when they come back home they don’t even kiss their mothers on the front porch before they’re in the back garden with a red Hills Bros. coffee can digging for angleworms” (11). Again, we see the fallen male hero, spoiled by civilization, uncultivated inside though polished on the outside, who abandons his rural values for base needs.

To reinforce these notions of natural changes overcome by the mass of humanity, Maclean includes passages that describe the formation of the river valley millions of years before humans lived there. On one level, they seem to display Maclean’s geographical knowledge; on another, he is showing the distinction between nature’s time, and humanity’s time (45, 14, 68). They also stress the importance of origins. To Maclean, it appears that places of origin are important when discussing the West. “I also became

the river by knowing how it was made” (68) implies the same about knowing a person, as relayed through the relationship with Neal.

Maclean also writes *A River Runs Through It* as a lament for the past. At one point he claims, “What a beautiful world it was once. At least a river of it was. And it was almost mine and my family’s and just a few others” (62). Unfortunately, as he looks back on this time, he realizes those days are far from his old mind. “What a wonderful world it was once when all the beer was not made in Milwaukee, Minneapolis, or St. Louis” (62).

Prophetic as it is, I doubt Maclean estimated this lament, when he commented on the dewatering of his favorite family river “but not far downstream was a dry channel where the river had run once, and part of the way to come to know a thing is through its death. But years ago I had know the river when it flowed through this now dry channel, so I could enliven its stony remains with the waters of memory” (68). This natural drying of a channel and the memories that once flowed through it are common in much of fly fishing literature of the late twentieth century in a West where, as noted in “Lifting a Leg on the Prairie”, water is a commodity and competing interests run through it. In this genre, writers lament over the old conditions of a river: big steelhead runs, abundant hatches and cool August rivers; versus the global warming, post hydroelectric power, corporate farming, dewatered stream of the present. Maclean add to this theme by writing: “Then, one of his [the fisherman’s] biggest problems is to guess where and at what time of day life lies ready to be taken as a joke. And to guess whether it is going to be a little or a big joke.” Discernibly, however, he realizes “For all of us, though, it is much easier to read the waters of tragedy” (70).

At once, I thought Maclean was unaware of his sentimental view of the past, as if he could slide it by us so we would believe there was a Montana like his. Then, in an uncanny fashion, he writes about his reflections of a Montana that has passed:

That's the way it looked then, but, when I view it now through the sentimentality of memory, it belongs to a pastoral world where you could take off your clothes, screw a dame in the middle of the river, then roll over on your belly and go to sleep for a couple of hours (73).

Before the fall, that was Montana. After the fall, "If you tried something like that on the Blackfoot River these days, half the city of Great Falls would be standing on the shore waiting to steal your clothes when you went to sleep. Maybe sooner" (73). What a world it must have been, when Adam could lay Eve on the riverbank, and the masses, of which there were none, left only more room for bigger fish and cloudless skies. In Maclean's period, that was the 1920s in Montana. For other writers in the West, it was when they arrived, or were young. Again, this all leads to the fact that the retreat into Nature for restoration is in the mind, rather than an inherent rejuvenational quality of nature. I claim this because in the Zocolo of Mexico City or Times Square people have weighty, deep epiphanies, inspirations, and they are surrounded by millions of people.

Like the speaker in Wallace Stevens' poem a "Anecdote of the Jar", Norman looks back to this particular scene, and says to Paul,

"I want to take another look so I'll always remember.'

"We stood there for a minute and made an engraving on what little was left of the blank tablets of our minds. It was an engraving in color. In the foreground of the engraving was a red Hills Bros. coffee can" (74). The arrival of the Californian brother-in-law eternally tainted the treasured landscape. It no longer was of "bird or bush"; however, "The wilderness rose upon it / and sprawled around, no longer wild." Because

his brother-in-law defiled such a place with a whore, Norman recalls, “I never again threw a line in this hole, which I came to regard as a kind of wild game sanctuary” (74).

For him, the fly fishing experience was one where “old George” gave them free flies, tied from natural hair and feather. They fished with hand crafted bamboo fly rods, cast catgut lines, and father MacLean even wore a leather glove on his casting hand. They caught eight-pound trout out of the Blackfoot (a huge trout by today’s standards). Bait fishing was for posers from the “West Coast” and those include the likes of Norman’s brother-in-law, who moved from Wolf Creek, Montana to California two years previous. The tradition of fly fishing is rich, nearly ripe and rank in MacLean’s work, and it reinforces much of the literary tradition established by Walton in England. Both are deeply involved with God, nature is a place to find spirituality, and both are writing about a class of cultured anglers with time to recreate and re-create the past.

As we look deeper into the text, we see that Maclean chooses to confront directly some of the social pressures we have brought to table in the discussions of the New West. Paul Maclean embodies many of the contradictions and conflicts surrounding life in West. He is an alcoholic, he is behind in “the big poker game out at Lolo” and he dates a hard drinking, hard dancing Indian Norman calls “Mo-nah-se-tah” (28). In one scene Paul gets in a bar fight because a white patron snickered at him and his date. Where Maclean leaves off with the conflicts, and writes a novella about escape rather than conflict, is during the episodes when Norman and others view Paul as a giant among giants when fishing:

“He must have looked something like a trick rope artist at a rodeo” (24);

“His wet shirt bulged and came unbuttoned with his pivoting shoulders and hips” (23);

“The spray emanating from him was finer grained still and enclosed him in a halo of himself”; “he steadied himself and began to cast and the whole world turned to water” (22);

“I remember him both as a distant abstraction in artistry and a closeup in water and laughter” (110).

He had become an “artist” and the rendition; any pressures to be a journalist, gambler, drinker, womanizer or good son faded into memory and he was an angler.

Ultimately, the demons in Paul’s life kill him, but the power of the natural experience is what a lamenting Norman recalls at the end of the novel. Montana now is a place too big for the old man. His friends suggest he not fish the big rivers alone, but “in the half light of the canyon, all memory fades into being, and the four count rhythm, and the hope that a fish will rise.” This is the place, still, of rejuvenation and strength. It is a place where he can still find the answers in the river, reading deeply as a true angler does. To emphasize this timeless vitality, Maclean poetically closes the novel, waxing that “The river was cut by the world’s great flood and runs over rocks from the basement of time. On some of the rocks are timeless raindrops. Under the rocks are the words, and some of the words are theirs.” (113). Like I argue in this thesis, “all things merge into one, and a river runs through it” in the New West environment, touching the interlinked borders of spirituality, economics, politics and each of the areas entrenched and re-rooted throughout the story of the West.

Trout Fishing In America

He was leaving for America, often only a place in the mind (72).

Ironically, the very rivers Maclean writes about were highly toxic from mining tailings in 1976 when he wrote the novella. Resultantly, if the fit between fiction and

reality is tenuous in regards to the American novel, some writers have embraced this tension and exploited it. Richard Brautigan and his unconventional novel *Trout Fishing in America* is an example of an attempt to destroy tradition and ignite these ironies, unlike Maclean who was baptized in tradition. Not only is it 112 pages, but it has 47 chapters, each formatted in unconventional shapes, each incongruous with the previous. It reads as a poem at times, and the reader forms connections, by reading it several times; ultimately, this approach might be a disservice to the apparently disconnected text.

As the sum of its parts is less than the whole, to dissect it traditionally from a critical literary standpoint is an undertaking worthy of contradiction. Much like a comprehensive analysis of Joyce's *Ulysses*, a conventional treatment could limit the potential of the text. Therefore, viewing the text through the *paradoxical retreat hypothesis* and the themes therein, offers a contemporary analysis of the New West condition and fiction's role in it.

"Knock on Wood (Part One)" opens the story with the narrator reflecting on when he first heard about "trout fishing in America" (3). He recalls that his stepfather, "The old drunk" told him about trout fishing in a way that described trout "as if they were a precious and intelligent metal" (3). The character Trout Fishing in America is the protagonist. The narrator depicts him in several different settings throughout the country exploring symbolic aspects of the recreation portion of the late 1960s American Dream. In the first scene, in response to the above memory, Trout Fishing in America responds with "particular amusement" his recollection of "people with three-cornered hats fishing in the dawn" (3). Given the emphasis on the cover of the text and throughout on the

discourse of Benjamin Franklin, I believe the novel is insinuating that recreation and trout fishing have been part of the American Dream since the revolution.

“Knock on Wood (Part Two)” becomes the narrator’s first opportunity to catch a trout. Having heard “it was better to go trout fishing early in the morning”, he sets off early, only to find that his waterfall on the hill “was just a flight of white wooden stairs leading up to a house in the trees” (5). The illusion of Nature near the city was merely that, an oasis on the hill that was nothing more than a mirage, not the mythical stairway to heaven. In the narrator’s conversations with Trout Fishing in America, he discovers the same case of mistaken identity.

“As Trout tells it “I remember mistaking an old woman for a trout stream in Vermont, and I had to beg her pardon.

“‘Excuse me’ I said. ‘I thought you were a trout stream.’

“‘I’m not,’ she said.”

In the “Red Lip” chapter, the narrator claims that 17 years after his first attempt at fishing outside of Portland “Many rivers had flowed past those seventeen years, and thousand of trout” (6). In this scene, he is hitchhiking along the Klamath River in Oregon, and from this scene, we are able to discern a few items regarding the narrator and his fishing experiences. The first is that he is not like the images of the yuppie angler of today. He doesn’t own a car, let alone a sport utility vehicle. The other is that fishing is a lifestyle for him, rather than an escape. The people that do drive by him, neglecting to pick him up, scarcely identify him as a fisherman; “I guess they didn’t see many hitchhikers up there” (7). The tension in the novel is between the natural environment, as we perceive it, and the unnatural, human condition, which, throughout *Trout Fishing in America*, becomes blurred and less defined. Whereas in *A River Runs Through It*, Nature is the place to revive, and Culture is the place from which to escape, the characters in

Brautigan's novel find their inherited American dream ideals difficult to employ in a world wrought with unobtainable illusions of Nature.

One pattern that is consistent throughout the novel is the inaccessibility of Nature. In "Grider Creek" the narrator "had heard there was some good fishing" (14). A bus driver drew him a map to where the good fishing was, but the narrator concludes, "You had to have a car to get to Grider Creek where the good fishing was, and I didn't have a car." With a tone of questionable lament, he states dryly, "The map was nice, though" (14). These types of scenes, less than a third of a page long, are loaded with meaning, yet are on a first reading so ambiguous and purposeless that I imagine many readers question the significance. *Trout Fishing in America* is a novel that teases the reader into laughter, but upon a second reading, she scowls with the significant weight of the cynical message of the American Dream as seen through trout fishing.

Though I want the chapters to move chronologically throughout the novel, they do not. Neither do they interlink thematically page by page. Because of this, after the section on Girder Creek we get "A Walden Pond for Winos" which is a chapter about the narrator and two of his buddies sitting in the Benjamin Franklin Park in San Francisco after work, drinking port wine and contemplating retirement in an insane asylum. The title is significant here. I think that Brautigan is trying to get at the mythical early foundation of environmental perspective in this country, developed by the likes of Thoreau. It appears that the accessible nature is statues and winos "huddled in the park" watching "office girls ... returning like penguins from Montgomery Street" (17-18).

The chapter "Tom Martin Creek" and David James Duncan's chapter "Closing the Door" have noteworthy similarities. In Duncan's, U.S. Grant Creek is a poisoned

stream running through the outskirts of Portland, and included “all the places I’d fished as a kid, [...] There was scunge, car bodies, garbage, sewage and shredded plastic everywhere” (195). In Duncan’s novel, Gus lands “the last trout in U.S. Grant Creek” and lets it go in the Willamette River, imagining it destined for better places.

In Brautigan’s novel, the narrator drops “a fly in a small pool just below where the creek flowed out of the culvert and [takes] a nine-inch trout” (19). Gus contemplates the death of a stream that holds fond memories of his youth. Similarly, the narrator on Tom Martin Creek notes, “After that first trout I was alone in there. But I didn’t know it until later” (19). Both feel the weight of decline in nature; it is as if the civilized and the wild now mesh into one, and that trout are the barometer for the quality of Nature. In a world after Maclean’s vision, death and decline is the story in Nature. To influence this theme even further, Gus decides to trace the creek to its headwaters. He discovers its source

was a replica of the Liberty Bell. And rain poured onto that bell, cohered on it, grew heavy, rolled slowly down the brassy sides, onto the roof, down the roof to the gutters, to a drainpipe, to a drainfield, (and perhaps a buried spring, where deer and Indians once drank), then into and out the underground pipe at the curb. Here was the uttermost source of the waters that had been Sisisicu: an imitation Liberty Bell on top of a mock Independence Hall

otherwise known as the Benjamin Franklin Bank (190).

This theme of death and nature is no stranger to any of these novels, but in Maclean’s he clings to the fond memories of vitality and youthfulness gained in the escape to Nature. The other two differ in that Nature and death by civilization are intermeshed in their worlds. The following chapter in Brautigan’s novel called “Trout Fishing on the Bevel” is the story of fishing Graveyard Creek at dusk. On one side of the creek are the elaborate tombs and marble headstones of the rich. On the other side are the

“small boards that looked like heels of stale bread” that marked the graves of the poor. 20). The narrator “worked some good trout out of there” but hauntingly claims, “Only the poverty of the dead bothered me” (21). Even in death, the cards are dealt inequitably.

The discussion of this inequity is especially apparent in a story similar to both those of U.S. Grant Creek and Tom Martin Creek. In “The Last Year the Trout Came Up Hayman Creek” the creek, named after “Charles Hayman, a sort of half-assed pioneer in a country that not many wanted to live in because it was poor and ugly and horrible” we get the story of Hayman, who built his homestead in 1876. Here, he “used to catch a trout or two and eat raw trout with his stone-ground wheat and his kale” (27). Instinctively, once Hayman died, the trout refused to come up the creek anymore. “Twenty years after Mr. Hayman’s death, some fish and game people were planting trout in the streams around here. [...] They dumped a can full of trout in the creek and no sooner had the trout touched the water, than they turned their white bellies up and floated dead down the creek” (28). Later I shall recall the debate between *native* trout, *wild* trout, and planted trout. This small anecdote recounts the instinctual nature of the fish, as well as man’s hand at improving nature. If we anticipate the discussions of Eden in later chapters, the act of planting fish is an example of Merchant’s recovery narrative. If we can restore what was once there, it will be again like Eden. However, as this story illustrates, the native have their own way of balancing their existence, and man’s futile attempts float belly up in failure.

In a continuation of this notion of natural order and instinct, “Trout Death by Port Wine” depicts the story of a trout that dies “by giving it a drink of port wine.” The narrator unabashedly claims, “It is against the natural order of death for a trout to die by

having a drink of port wine.” However, he claims cynically, that “It is all right for a trout to have its neck broken by a fisherman and then to be tossed into a creel or for a trout to die from a fungus that crawls like sugar-colored ants over its body until the trout is in death’s sugarbowl” (29). However, to “soothe its approach into death” by pouring “a good slug into the trout’s mouth” is unnatural. (32). These distinctions are important, because the text cannot find a true center to label nature, and another to label culture.

In one scene, the narrator goes to a campground and is astonished at how crowded it is. Campers fill the first sixteen campsites, and he questions whether he went to nature or to the city. In another camping scene, the only available tent is one in which a camper has died. The ambulance hauls off the corpse, and later in the night corpse robbers try to return it to the tent. The inhabitant curses them away, and listens as they stumble through the dark woods with the body.

Brautigan’s narrator encounters the “Sheep” on his beloved Paradise Creek in “On Paradise”. As if foreshadowing Maclean’s text, he claims “the 1930s will never come again” but the sheep have. Initially everything smelled of sheep while he fishes the creek, but as the sun comes out, and he proceeds through the creek, he “was then close enough to see the sheep. There were hundreds of them” (49). Not only are these creatures visible, “The dandelions were suddenly more sheep than flower, each petal reflecting wool and the sound of a bell ringing off the yellow” (50).

As the novel progresses, we see more invasive situations like this one, where Nature is taking on the characteristics of Culture: death, foreign odors, and ultimately, overcrowding. The chapter concludes with this theme of overcrowding: “That afternoon the sheep crossed the creek in front of my hook.” In the American New West, this is an

ongoing debate for anglers on western streams. Not only do the riparian zones along most streams serve as a competitive arena for landowners, ranchers and their livestock, and anglers, but also all three claim the other is affecting their ways of living in the West. In this passage, if we substitute the word sheep for tourist, or even angler, we get an accurate portrayal of the perspective of recreation and economics in the contested New West contact zone called the trout stream. The chapter closes with the tension created when too many of anyone is too much in the New West, where people get so close, an angler could bemoan that she “practically caught trout up their assholes” (50).⁵

What is happening here is the death of the escape. No longer can the American “go” to Nature. The nostalgic view of it is dead; the realistic one is much like the city, with ambulances, corpses, and the “omnipotent Coleman lantern.” Unlike Maclean, Brautigan writes less a *declension narrative*, and more a postmodern disjointed series of snapshots framed in the sport of fishing, riddled with the bullets of capitalist critique.

We hear about campgrounds described as “the Forest Lawn of camping in Idaho, laid out for maximum comfort” (61). The narrator disguises his disgust for pay to camp areas, because “they charged fifty cents a day, three dollars a week like a skid row hotel, and there were just too many people there” (61). Nature now has “halls”, “Trailers”, “the elevator” “carpet”; the trees are compared to telephone booths, and unlike Big Redfish Lake described above, the narrator is astonished to find that Little Redfish Lake had “practically nobody camping” and “it was free, too” (62). In Idaho, as well as the rest of the West, free-dumb is an exception, and not the rule. Like other characters in the text, “He had no idea the mountains would be so crowded” (74). Brautigan was able to

comment on the decline of the American Dream in the West, as if it never really existed, and the narrator wanders the West trying to find it.

The fishing also becomes warped and civilized. Trout are “mesmerized by the vanilla pudding” and a University of Montana student goes home empty handed after “two hours of intimate and universal failure” (64). The West is a place where the Surgeon can retire as an amenity migrant that has “enough money to travel around for six months, looking for a place to settle down where the hunting and fishing is good.” (72). Wandering is a theme throughout the text, and this surgeon, like the narrator “was leaving for America, often only a place in the mind” (72). Nature is a myth in the New West, lingering like liver and onions on the palate of those who believe in freedom of open spaces, but struggle to ever truly recapture that Edenic bliss.

In “The Last Time I saw Trout Fishing in America” the narrator claims the Big Wood River in Idaho is “where I met Trout Fishing in America.” This character knows the fish in the river intimately, he remembers “Indians and fur traders” in Great Falls; he remembers Lewis and Clark (89). He remembers “the day Lewis discovered the falls. They left their camp at sunrise and a few hours later they came upon a beautiful plain and on the plain were more buffalo than they had ever seen. A nice thing happened that afternoon, they went fishing below the falls and caught half a dozen trout, good ones too, from sixteen to twenty-three inches long.” (91). Trout Fishing in America tells the tale of trout on a Missouri River that no longer exists. There are no cutthroats in the river, and the number of dams has flooded much of what was the Great Falls.⁶

The coup d’grace for the narrator is when he stumbles into the Cleveland Wrecking Yard. Temporally it is immediately after the last time he sees the character

Trout Fishing in America. Nature is for sale here. The price sheet lists birds, deer, trees, bushes, and of most interest to the narrator and us, is the trout stream for sale. When asked if he may look at it, the proprietor directs him out back to the yard. What he finds here are stacks of sections of trout stream. Some are 100 feet in length, others mere yard long sections. The proprietor tells him ““We’re selling it by the foot length. You can buy as little as you want or you can buy all we’ve got left. A man came in here this morning and bought 563 feet”” (104). When asked if the trout stream is clear, the owner quips ““Sir, I wouldn’t want you to think that we would ever sell a murky trout stream here.”” (105). It is so clear, he watches trout dart around inside the stream. Of course, the trout come with the stream, but you get what you pay for. Some sections, like real streams, have more fish than others do. ““But the fishing’s very good, you might say it’s excellent. Both bait and dry fly”” (105). In the back of the Yard waterfalls sell for more than the stream, at \$19.00 a foot. Also for sale are woodpeckers, sparrows, insects, and seagulls. Nevertheless, regarding the stream, “it was stacked in piles of various lengths...there was one pile of hundred foot lengths. There was also a box of scraps.” (107). Mice, bushes, and trees were for sale here too. A make your own riparian wilderness was available at a wrecking yard. Like selling lumber (another commodity of Nature), the Yard sells the stream by the foot.

With the Wrecking Yard scene, Brautigan writes the death of Nature, as history has depicted it, and reinforces the commodification of it. In the west right now, in ads in *Big Sky Journal* you can “own three miles of private trout stream.” The propheticism within Brautigan’s work is uncanny. His wrecking yard is straight from the glossy ads of New West land, ranch and recreation magazines. Nevertheless, lest theory and prophecy

weigh too seriously, the novel closes with nonsense: “Expressing a human need, I always wanted to write a book that ended with the word Mayonnaise” (111) and he does.

“Trout Fishing in America NIB” is a haunting conclusive chapter. It is conscious of the writing process, as it discusses the fountain pen with a gold nib. “After a while, it takes on the personality of the writer,” Brautigan writes, adding, “it becomes just like a person’s shadow.” The narrator then thinks to himself “what a lovely nib trout fishing in America would make with a stroke of cool green trees along the river’s shore, wild flowers and dark fins pressed against the paper” (110). In essence here, then, trout fishing in America is the pen, the ink, the metaphor for Brautigan to discuss what was America in our minds, and what it is in practice. Green, cool, damp, wild and mystical is the trout stream of our imagination; through the narrator’s journey, we see that commodification, overcrowding, and metaphorical sheep are the invasive and dream-altering intrusions into that lofty sleep. Counting sheep is no longer the activity to get one to dreams; that activity is the dream now, and because of them, the dream is awash in wet wool.

The River Why

Less than a decade after *A River Runs Through It*, Sierra Club Books publishes Northwesterner David James Duncan’s first novel. The 300 page novel entitled *The River Why* traces the escape of Gus Orviston from Portland, Oregon and his spiritual return. This novel is brilliant in that it is completely aware of the traditions in which it performs. Much of the early story focuses on the “Great Isaac Walton Controversy.” This centers around Gus who is the progeny of Henry Hale Orviston III (H2O), a pipe smoking, tweed wearing intellectual outdoor writer who philosophizes on the spiritual benefits of

fly fishing, and Ma, a bait chucking, meat eating, fundamentalist hating redneck from eastern Oregon.

The Compleat Angler is as much a bible for the family as is the “Bood Gooky” (the Good Book) but each member extracts different meaning from it. Duncan here operates in the literary fly fishing tradition by basing his story around the conceptual literary text of fishing. He not only summons the roots of fishing literature, but also pays homage to tradition, in that both Maclean and Brautigan discuss *The Compleat Angler* in their texts. From this move, we might assume that to be a fly angler or fly fishing writer, one must identify and associate with nostalgia. However, as Duncan uncovers in his text, no matter how aware anglers are of Walton’s seminal work, that very awareness is jaded by an angler and writer that kills his fish, uses bait, and expounds the joys of eating fish as much as the contemporary does of releasing them.

The River Why begins with “Book One” entitled “The Compleat Angler.” It is a text that mockingly anchors its roots in tradition. This opening also identifies the protagonist’s parents, Henning Hale-Orviston and Ma, a member of the Carper Clan. Henning, or H2O as Gus calls him, is an angler steeped in tradition. “His parents were English aristocrats” and his every action reinforces this noble birthright. For example “he drinks Glenfiddich Single Malt Scotch; he smokes Rattray’s Highland Targe and Balkan Sobranie in meerschaums and briar perfects; he drives a Rover in the city” and, as all good traditional anglers do “he fishes in tweeds” (4). H2O is the symbol of English traditional angling.

His antithesis, and arguably better half, is Ma, who is “a bait fisherman. A fundamentalist. A plunker of worms” (5). She is the embarrassment and nemesis, yet

passionate partner to H2O, who at one time was the target of H2O's sophistication/improvement endeavors. To fix her, he thought, he would give her a copy of the hallowed text, and enlighten her on the age old tradition of fishing with an artificial fly. This action set in motion name of chapter 5a, "The great Isaac Walton Controversy: The Parental Version." After Ma "finished the book in two days, slammed it shut and stormed into H2O's study" she began to read several excerpts which she had spilled coffee on, torn the pages to, and underlined, annotating the revered copy with "'Whoopie's" and 'Wow's and other spectacular marginalia applied by brightly inked felt pens" (32). In her reading, she informed H2O that Walton was a killer of animals, including otters, chubs, pike, and, god forbid, *trout*. In the trout section "the sagacious Piscator catches and kills a number of trout—employing the crudest, barley-buttedest kind of plunking available to mortal man, using grasshoppers, grubs, maggots, minnows and worms" (33). Walton, as Ma elucidates, also suggests catching trophy trout during the night, and "Recommended for nighttime fishbait are such cunning materials as a 'piece of cloth' and, even more interestingly, 'a dead mouse'!" (33).

Thus ensues the great controversy, and as Gus details, "my childhood home became a fishy little Belfast, strife-torn by an interdenominational 'dialogue' that consisted of little more than name calling, jibes, scoffing, bragging, and weird wrestling matches that eventually resulted in the advent of my little brother" (35).

Gus determines in chapter 5b, "The Great Isaak Walton Controversy: My Own Rendition" that "the more I read the more I doubted whether Izaak Walton gave a coot's hoot whether one fished with a fly rod, plunking poles, trot-lines, harpoons or gill-nets." In fact, Gus determines that Walton's purpose is to praise the "God of Nature" who

created and feeds every “various little living creature” (37). Truly, this book is far removed from the Western purist traditions of American fly fishing. However, some desire for the old nostalgia of England marks this book and Walton as the bible and father of fly fishing. Paying homage to tradition is an example of the contradictory nature of an activity that insists on maintaining a status of purity in a fallen world. Thus, Gus slips the book onto the dusty shelves of H2O’s library, along with Shakespeare, Spencer and Milton, and begins to form his ideal schedule.

This schedule echoes of both the schedule in Maclean, and that of Ben Franklin. These all break the day into hourly components, within which the creator determines how to spend his day most effectively, in order to maximize his human potential. Franklin’s schedule inspired Gatsby and each of these writers uses a similar schedule to focus the hours. In Gus’s schedule, he allows for 14 ½ hours per day for fishing, which computes into 4,000 actual fishing hours per year. The “WAYS TO ACTUALIZE IDEAL SCHEDULE” which included number 2: “move *alone* to a year-round stream” and number 3: “avoid friendships, anglers not excepted (wastes time with gabbing)” exacerbated this schedule (58).

In this section, the character Gus breaks his moments into “Neutral Minutes” “Unsatisfactory Minutes” and “Satisfactory Minutes.” By weighing N.M.s, U.M.s and S.M.s, Gus determines that he can “attain a state called ‘Unending Satisfaction Actualization’ or ‘U.S.A.’” In other words, Gus wants to live the American Dream through trout fishing. What he ultimately realizes, however, is that “‘U.S.A.’ failed to pan out” (57). It is uncanny how both Brautigan and Duncan go at the same notion of freedom as symbolized by American recreational activities. These inclusions in the text

suggest that Duncan is operating in a similar fashion as Brautigan, but the result is significantly different.

Immediately after high school, Gus decides he is going to fulfill this ideal schedule. This moment of maturation came out in the passionate claim toward H2O shouting at him that “*You’re a fucking fishing Fascist! You’re a flyrod Nazi, and every fish but trout or salmon and everybody but flyfishermen are niggers and Jews and wetbacks to you!*” He then turns to his mother and screams “*And do you know what you are? You’re a greedy, gloating, murdering shrew! You’d butcher and elf or an angel if you could catch one! You’d blast a hummingbird if you thought there’d be a drop of blood left to lick!*” and as quickly as it had come, Gus calmed down and told his family he was moving to a cabin on the Tamanwis River (66). They helped him move, and after they left, Gus claims he “was surprised by [his] sadness.” He continues by reinforcing the traditional view of fishing: “So much of my reason for coming here had been to escape them”. However, in true to angler form, he “knew one good cure for sadness: [he] took up [his] fly rod and turned to the river, and to a new life devoid of every obstacle between [Gus] and [his] beloved art of angling” (68).

At this point in the novel, Duncan allows Gus to comment on two particular aspects of his retreat that contribute to our hypothesis here. The first is the notion of Nature as a place to go to, as a place to rejuvenate and revitalize the soul – essentially why Gus leaves Portland; the second is the commodification principle inherent in any discussions about the West and its products. Quite similarly, Brautigan includes trout stream sections for sale in a wrecking yard to reiterate the commodification of the west. In the chapter “Where I Lived and What I Lived For” in *The River Why* Gus describes “a huge clear-

cut—hundreds of acres of massive spruce stumps interspersed with tiny Douglas firs—products of what they call ‘Reforestation’” (71). Many who have studied the impacts of clear cutting in the watersheds of the Pacific Northwest claim that heavy rains and exposed hillsides have directly contributed to the decline of salmon and steelhead runs in coastal streams, and Gus here notes how short-sighted the idea of reforestation is. He states, “They even call the towering spires they wipe from the earth’s surface forever a ‘crop’—as if they’d planted the *virgin* forest! But I’m just a fisherman and may be missing some deeper significance in their strange nomenclature and stranger treatment of primordial trees” (emphasis added 72).

...As Maclean wrote, one is not fishing unless he is looking for answers, and in the early days of Gus’s retreat, this is much of what he does. The other important notion here is that the forest was once virgin—that it had inherently pure qualities before Weyerhaeuser cut it down for profit. It is the same sort of touch that Norman offers us in the end of *A River Runs Through It*—that nature is no longer what it once was. Brautigan offers the same argument, as noted, in his own cynical way. Conversely, by the end of the novel, Duncan offers more than a declension narrative or a cynical critique, though he does both of these as well in building toward a solution.

Duncan allows us to see another form of the West’s commodification characteristics in this same chapter. It comes in the form of a brief few lines, but it reinforces the solitude of Gus’s environment, as well as the West’s new profit motive. He states, “The only people who use the River Road are fishermen, loggers, hunters and an occasional mapless tourist.” This road becomes the contact zone for western economy and recreation. Comically, the tourist who comes to enjoy nature through the windshield

returns down the road “trying to get back to the Willamette Valley by a ‘scenic route.’ [They] drive by my cabin all shiny-autoed and smiley, and two or three hours later come spluttering back with mud and disgruntlement on their cars and faces, hell-bent for 101 and screw the scenery” (71).

Just down the road from this weekend scene, is more of the imbricated space of the West. Gus describes the scene “below the dairy [where] the Tamanwis Valley got more populated—a few farms, sportsmen’s shanties, here and there one of those antennaed, yarn-floored boxes poor dumb suburbanites call ‘contemporary homes’; then a sawmill, a huge poultry farm, and a trailer court defacing the edge of a nice little town at river’s mouth” (71). This description resembles those of other western towns like Livingston or Gardiner, where nature is a commodity, a place to retreat, a place to live and survive, and a place to worship.

The ecological slant does not end here, however. Later in the book, Gus actually leaves the Valley, and hikes up above his cabin. It is a strange moment, and one that undoes the angling obsession within the protagonist. Although he spends most of his days in the water, in the baptismal flow of Eden, this day he leaves the shadows and climbs. At the summit of Tamanawis Mountain he looks across the valley to see a hill that “looked like a green-haired Mohican, buried to the neck, beaten, tortured and left to die. An entire mountain, not just scalped and maimed but made ridiculous, robbed of all mountain dignity.” He then claims the mountain had been raped, using terms as “forced mutation”; comparing the clear cut to “mass murder.” Then he looks to the river, and its curves spell out “Why” and he awakens spiritually to compare himself to the loggers: “Why it asked me, and the questions slowed and confused me just enough to let me remember myself

down there fishing, maiming and murdering trout like enemies in wartime, ticking them off in my Log by the thousand, robbing them of all dignity at death by stuffing them, still thrashing, into my creel” (132).

All the while, from his hilltop, the river answered why to all his searching questions. With “shame twisting” in his gut, he “wanted to make amends.” He wanted to restore the forest and the stream to its Edenic, or in his words “primordial [...] mysterious virgin” condition; he wanted to experience a world before the fall, when only balance, harmony and goodness were known. Then, he realizes fish are food, that they always have been, that Jesus fed the multitudes with fish. What tears him up inside then, is less the killing, than the ingratitude exercised by “Mohican-mountain makers, gill-netters, poachers, whalehunters, strip-miners, herbicide-spewers, dam-erectors, nuclear-reactor-builders or anyone else who lusted after flesh, meat, mineral, tree, pelt and dollar” (134). A highly critical reading of Gus here would claim that by excluding himself from this list because he shows gratitude, is merely a justification for his obsessive fishing habit. By easing that off a notch, we see Gus as opposed to the ingratitude of those who make money from the earth, while never returning another penny, thought or action toward paying off their global indebtedness.

What I claim Duncan is encouraging here is an act of enlightenment, a move toward progression in the discourse of the West; he suggests not how to escape any of the actions from the list above, but to acknowledge one’s own complicity in the very acts of destruction. To claim that Nature is a place, and Culture is its antithesis, like Ma is to H₂O, is to see the world through a limited frame. As a result Soja’s thirding becomes the postmodern answer to traditional, inseparable dichotomies. thirding describes the

transformation within the entire Orviston family in the novel, but particularly here, it relates to Gus and his relation to the world.

...In this moment of introspection, Gus admits his complicity in this eco-system of which he is a part. He comments on this awakening, “But that I personally might be bringing suffering to something or someone besides my catch or myself—this possibility appalled me.” The solitude of his existence begins to haunt him, and he questions whether the ideal notion of escape is in fact harming the planet. He then asks himself “avoiding all anglers and neighbors, fishing for and by myself—was this my crime against the people?” Continuing in this vein, he claims he is like Weyerhaeuser, “An aquatic logger; Rodney [his fly rod] my chainsaw, trout my trees, I had clear-cut many a pool” (132). Though he was unsure this was his crime, he again calls into memory *The Compleat Angler* and a scene in which the protagonist gives a loggerhead chub to a maiden. Though the maiden story is comical and somewhat hypocritical, it spurs Gus into action. He visits several of his neighbors, offering smoked trout and companionship, and in return leaves with arms full of vegetables, eggs, steaks, and milk. He learns their names, their passions, their children’s quirks. He offers fishing lessons.

As a result, he abandons his early notions that to be whole, one must escape his Culture. He states, “I’d believed that solitude was a cure-all, a psychic panacea, an invisible knife certain to cut me clear of all the parental debates, the wasted time, the drivel of school, the unending parade of cars and machinery.” Essentially, all the forces in a young man’s life would magically disappear if he escaped to Nature. What he discovers, however, is that “solitude...was no guarantee of anything. Day after day I stood alone on whispering streams, tranquility and beauty on all sides, not a city nor a

suburb nor a soul within miles and Presto! A swarm of hobgoblins cam scuffling into my skull” (147). What man is, on his own, is “what he alone made of himself. One needed either wisdom or tree-bark insensitivity to confront such a fearsome freedom. Realizing now that I lacked both, I let myself long for company” (146).

..The paradox here is much like the old adage that too much of a good thing...But, Gus takes the critique much further than that. To him it is deeper, the emptiness, the searching, the questions answered only by Why, lead to stirred awakenings within himself. He realizes that he cannot depend on any one law of Nature, claiming, “you make one lousy rule to describe it and it’ll contradict you even if it has to transmogrify and metamorphosize and bust its ass to do it.” Because everything in his head “came from fishing magazines, fishing manuals, fishing novels” and not from real experience with culture, he compares himself and other anglers to a herd of “overstuffed cattle” letting “obscure lust”, “odes to fish-lust” drive their minds into a jaded adoration for nature and a blind ambivalence toward those around them. Essentially a hatred for Culture forces these anglers to retreat into Nature. What Gus realizes on his retreat is that one cannot escape the demons. His inherited ideals of Nature and Culture fail him.

However convincing this view of a colluded world of meaning is, and how important Culture is to Nature, (or shall we say, how inseparable they are) Duncan creates Nature as a place where God and love are obtainable. Even though he continually describes the purity of nature tainted by the mechanistic manifestations of humankind, of a fallen world, more grey and decaying than green with vitality, the old Western theme of the landscape as a Garden of Eden, and the Restorative dream of returning to a pre-lapsarian world, take over the novel.

Beginning with the chapter entitled “Eddy” we begin to see the results of Gus’s surrender to a power beyond him. In “The Warble of the Water Owl” Gus is on a day’s hike up the stream, when in a moment of discovery, a woman appeared high in the limbs of a tree. He describes her as assembled from nature. Her lips are “the color of silver salmon roe; long lashes curved like the hind legs of mayflies.” She then hooked a fish from atop the tree, and “the entire up and down of her rippled like a zephyr across a lake...she struck! And sang out like a meadowlark” and then she stripped and “the lithe and blinding figure of the naked girl was airborne, soaring out in an arc and flashing down through the leaves in a swan dive” (154). The delusion that nature provides is a reality here, and the girl named “Eddy” (symbolic of the calm spot in a river) is an angler of the natural type. She uses a hazel pole, which Gus spends many lines describing. We realize she is the modern Eve, and shortly before she flees from the bearded Gus, we see her “sunbathing on a stone [...] in an utterly unsuspecting, utterly alone pose of poses” (155). To an antisocial angler, this is anathema to pornography: sunlight, big fish, and naked Eves jumping from the tree of knowledge. Ultimately, Gus and Eddy marry, and like a good Shakespearean comedy, harmonious union ties all knots.

Gus finds his soul with the help of a philosophizing friend named Titus, and his trusty dog Descartes. He begins a small business of tying and selling flies and building fly rods, and gathers a local following. He claims that “Portlanders started stopping by, and a few Californians,” and ultimately he was filling his “belly with swapped-for food, meeting my bills with profits, salting away a few bucks, and I had a half a hundred people I could call friends” (207). Humble success, it seems, is appropriate for a renegade

escapee, but the types of resolutions at the end of the novel seem too quaint to meet with a post-modern dilemma entrenched in a global capitalistic climate.

Gus becomes tight with the neighbors, spending Halloween with the farmers, the dairy family, and the Zen Buddhist hippy candle maker family. That night Eddy shows at his cabin, and they “went together to the loft, and scarcely spoke, and didn’t sleep till daylight” (267). Again, like in Maclean, eroticism is connected with the stream. This depiction, however, occurs in the cabin, and passionately “off screen” reinforcing the amorous draw of water and wood.

The second to last chapter is a spiritual baptism. Eddy hooks a salmon on fine leader, and plans to return for Portland for the day. She then gives Gus explicit instructions “If the fish wants line, give it. Don’t let it go slack, but don’t *fight* the fish: just keep track of it. My last wish is this: *play the Chinook*.” She then leaves Gus to wander with the fish throughout the pools and eddies of the Tamanawis. The fish becomes acquainted with Gus’s presence on the shore. It continues in its reproductive journey upstream toward the gravel bars of its conception. It meets a mate, and “often they would come close to me, letting me watch them journey together [...] the salmon led me up the river while men were sleeping. And the newly bestirred love coursed through me as steadily and easily as the light line cut through the water.” (276). Eventually Gus becomes Nature. He retells the baptismal event as such: “My face entered the river; I felt my ears fill; the water poured in at the neck of my coat and ran freezing down my chest. I opened my eyes: she was blurred to me now, but still my salmon hadn’t moved. I slipped my numbed left hand down. I touched her moonlit silver side” (277). The reconciliation had come full circle at this moment of release. Gus atones for his sins against the fish; he

expurgates his sins, his guilt of deeds undone, but releasing this hen Chinook under a moonlit sky, while his heart was run through with love and with water. All conflict in Gus's life becomes resolved and reversed. Ma begins fly fishing and H2O flings a spinning rod. Gus's little brother, who the family knew to be allergic to water, takes up fishing, and gains a little sister through the rekindling of H2O and Ma's love.

What Gus realizes is that the purist fly fishing tradition that H2O seems to extract from Walton's work is nearly non-existent. Walton discusses the benefits of chumming, using live bait and other befouled manners to catch a fish. Eventually, the teenage Gus escapes to solitude on a rented river cabin alongside a coastal stream. Here he discovers that Mt. Tamanawis is clearcutted, except for the Mohican "seed trees" left by Weyerhaeuser. Gus also realizes that Nature is useless without Culture. He struggles to maintain sanity even though, like Benjamin Franklin's ideal schedule, Gus has scheduled his life so he can fish nearly 14 hours a day in the summer.

In *The River Why*, Duncan constructs a character that becomes increasingly discouraged with his solitude, but also with the urban environment of Portland. As discussed in the section on Brautigan, a small stream he used to fish as a kid becomes a source of exploration for Gus, and he traces its headwaters to the Benjamin Franklin Bank gutter system; he specifically tracks the source to the rain running off the Liberty Bell atop the bank. No longer do streams remain untainted, or purely natural. The American Dream of capital success, symbolic in the bank, has permeated all aspects of the Natural.

As theorists such as Dana Phillips discuss, the lines between Nature and Culture are not as distinct as Norman Maclean wished they could be. According to Phillips, one

fault of those that hold onto the pastoral, or the beauty of Nature is “the pastoral’s tendency to assume that the countryside and the territory are much *simpler* places than the city or metropolis, when in fact they aren’t” (18). Phillips makes reference often to Lawrence Buell’s premise that there is a “myth of the land as properly unspoiled, a myth that can give shape and impetus to more recent environmental restoration projects” (54). Both argue that the “new world pastoral anticipates the modern would-be environmentalist’s dilemma of having to come to terms with actual natural environments while participating in the institutions of a technologized culture that insulates one from the natural environment and split’s one’s allegiances” (Buell 54-55). Duncan argues that the pastoral seen throughout Maclean’s work is no longer an effective perspective toward the perceptions of escape in Nature. As all argue here, *both* are inseparable and inescapable.

Both Duncan and Brautigan shatter the impression of trout fishing as an escape from the cultural pressures of the urban. The river, used as a symbol of nature as a place to “go,” is tainted, tied together, implicated and imbricated in the very fabric from which anglers wish to escape. In *The River Why* Gus discovers as much madness and ecological insanity from within his own solitary mind as he did in Portland or in the destructive forces of clear-cut logging and commercial salmon fishing. He ultimately discovers that he needs culture, human contact, and nature, but that they are inseparable, as well as are the forces that destroy the good in both.

The novel however, cannot escape its own belief in the dream. Examples such as the love story with Eddy, the reversal in roles of the parents and the bonds with the community may be included as a testament to hope; they reinforce a belief that if one

looks beyond himself, good things may come. However, the net is too wide for Duncan to escape. He offers no solutions to the clear-cuts. He could be suggesting that good fishing experiences can happen none the less, but the apocalyptic visions of nature that are communicated in the novel are left unresolved. Yes, Gus finds love, and his life is renewed. But the trees don't grow back.

We are left with much of the same environment that Brautigan depicts in *Trout Fishing*. Granted, Gus doesn't find his stream for sale in a wrecking yard, but his salmon are still for sale at Albertson's. He is still complicit in promoting a sport that, as Gus discovers, is as destructive, greedy and lustful as is the clear cutting of Western hills. Really, the only answer Gus offers us at the end of the novel is Love. It is like a trout stream, he says. "Try to capture a trout stream with a dam and you get a lake. Try to catch it in a bucket and you get a bucket of water' try to stick some under a microscope and you get a close-up look at some writhing amorphous microcooties. A trout stream is only a trout stream when it's flowing between its own two banks, at its own pace, in its own sweet way" (286).

The Trialectics of Fishing Stories

As a result, fishing stories are about romantic love. They are about the way things were, and about the way they have declined. They are about catching, releasing and losing. They are about glimpses of what lies below, beneath, behind. They are about what jumps out explosive and shocking, what lies latent and mysterious and what shatters the silence on the topside. Maclean writes about the Montana of his youth, some 50 years earlier. Brautigan writes about the death of the American Dream. In his west, freedom is

just another word for “sale” and the best qualities of nature are available to those who can afford them. Duncan embraces the traditional views of Nature and of fly fishing; he then introduces the complexities, the paradoxes, the heresies and contradictions that are embedded in any one way of knowing anything. Then, however, rather than offering some new approach to the age-old Nature/Culture dichotomy, he saves the day with spiritual discovery.

To argue that love is not a solution is to argue that hatred is; to argue that commodification is bad solidifies that freedom is good. To slice up fishing into its class distinctions of bait and fly, or commercial or sport, is to say that one is less complicit in the worldview than the other is. However, what Duncan leaves us with at the end of the text is a world that is inescapable via physicality. One brings, within his or her mind, the escape. Nature, as we see it in Duncan’s view, is something separate that is worth preserving because it is in decline. Nevertheless, the salvation, the rejuvenation, the restoration, happens in the heart of each individual, not in the arena of a trout stream. In that case, love is like a stream. It is never constant. Never is it the same love, or the same river, at any given moment. It ebbs, flows, crashes and crusades. Because of this, one finds the escape from any given ailment in other people, in the patience and care for them, not in the Yellowstone in a \$7000 drift boat.

This is the nature of the *paradoxical retreat hypothesis*. These books drip of nostalgia, of good times in simple worlds. In 2006, those worlds are in the eye of the beholder. When the investment banker or the oil executive flees Atlanta or Houston to relax in Montana, he assumes there is something in the Big Sky air that offers him this moment of relaxation. However, in that same space that he is relaxing, other scourges of

culture are ongoing. Her alcoholic husband in Belgrade beats a woman. A drunken man falls off a bridge in Gardiner. Public employees slaughter nine hundred bison for the preservation of cattlemen's profits.⁷ An undercover drug squad arrests eight Montana State University freshmen for selling cocaine, ecstasy and psilocybin mushrooms.⁸ Mom and pop businesses fold to make space for Home Depot. The New West is just as much a part of the corporate world as it is of the place of retreat. Therefore, the paradox is inherent in the retreat.

With escape on the minds of anglers, these three writers design stories that represent varying perspectives on the perceptions of river, and the ability to retreat from the cultural pressures of work, capitalism, greed, war, or whatever might ail the soul. I argue that all three of these works display proof that one cannot escape to anywhere, and leave Culture behind. Maclean is the least aware of this condition. Brautigan is brutally, cynically aware that nature is for sale and is not what nostalgia wishes us to think it is. Duncan comes close to Soja's trialectics of spaciality. He understands the imbricated, layered interests involved in the city and the woods, and creates a work that tries to rise above the rhetoric and the binaries of Nature and Culture. Unfortunately, he fails to escape Nature or Culture, or the lament for lost paradise. This is the condition of paradoxical retreat. Most likely, as Nature/Culture are inseparable, part of the condition of being American is longing for the unobtainable while lamenting the past and the way things were. In some sense, this is the motivation for the retreat, and the paradox inherent in it. Whether one is fleeing the city or the clear cuts, they follow closely in the next story.

NO CLEAR LINE

The Film as the Non-Reality; Life Mimics Art

The landscape west of Billings, Montana is a land divided by many of the same contradictions much of the twenty-first century New West Rocky Mountain states experience. Economic and recreational boundaries blur here, as growth becomes the middle name of western counties. The western half of Montana is now a landscape where developers of 20-acre ranchettes buy up cattle grazing land, and make millions on their divided parcels. It is also a land where Super Fund sites like the Berkeley Pit in Butte geographically link treasured wilderness areas such as the Bob Marshall and the national parks Yellowstone in the south and Glacier in the north⁹. The irony of this space, as Maclean writes, is that *A River Runs Through It*.

Maclean's story may be a prosaic lament, but Robert Redford's film, and, what I argue the fishing corporations have done, is create in their audiences a false image of fly fishing, the west and Montana specifically. Maclean looks fondly on what Montana was. What Redford does is resurrect the color and vitality of Maclean's youth, swathing his canvas with a story of the past; obviously, he filmed in the late twentieth century, thus *selling* the contemporary audiences images of Montana blurred with the nostalgia of the past. Feeling the resultant surge in business from this sales pitch, and riding the wave of consumerism in the United States, the mom and pop fly shops and companies cashed in on the image of western fly fishing promoted by the film, while having to rapidly adapt their business practices toward the model of global capitalism. With careful but

discernable recognition, then, we can see the perception of the recreation paradigm shift from a lamentable declension narrative with Maclean, to a magical resurrection of the past, with Redford's use of contemporary images of Montana. From there we see an incorporation of a smoke and fog sales pitch via catalog, brochure and website from the corporations, trying to uphold the traditional images of fly-fishing; however, behind the scenes, the companies are shifting business practices from local manufacturing to overseas production and inexpensive labor. Whereas fly fishing became confused with religion in Maclean's narrative, now the hyperreal environment of fly fishing is confused with consumerism. The result is an elimination of the distinctions between spirituality, consumerism and the recreational activity of fly fishing.

Maclean's river in his story was the Big Blackfoot. This is a symbolic river for the story of western Montana. Our motto is "Big Sky Country." Perceptions of Montana are that everything is big: the mountains, the sky, the rivers, the elk, the ranches, and of course, the trout. The name Blackfoot evokes images of a native tribe that once thrived, although the irony here is that there still exists a strong Blackfoot tribal government in Montana.¹⁰ Though the Big Blackfoot is the mythical river in the story, where the brothers Norman and Paul spent their youthful days fly fishing, currently the river is recovering from the industrialization of the late 70s and 80s. In a 2004 article by Monte Burke, he describes the condition of the Blackfoot during the filming of the movie: "by the early 1990s the Blackfoot was in such bad shape—its valley scarred by ugly clearcuts, its tributaries poisoned and turned orange with acid goldmine runoff—that the movie was filmed on rivers to the south."¹¹

Maclean's story is a lament for the Montana of his youth. New West historians, including William Cronin use the term declension narrative to describe Maclean's approach. He reflects fondly on the past, which "fades to being with my soul and memories" (113). It is the Montana of the first half of the twentieth century, and he longs for the way it used to be.

Having worked in a fly shop for five years in Bozeman, Montana, I have listened to this same lament from the proud but rare native Montanan, who lets everyone know his birthright. One-sided conversations went much like this: *The rivers used to be less crowded, and the Californians stayed there instead of moving here.* I have heard the same woeful moaning from the 20-year-old North Carolinian General Studies student, who, with his Pabst Blue Ribbon hat perched in reverse on his shaggy locks, complains about *how many more people fish the Gallatin now than two years ago.*

Many fly anglers have read *A River Runs Through It* and can relate to the narrative, the spirituality, or the personalities within it. Maclean's novella had an inspirational effect on many anglers across the continent, several who came to Montana to fish for a week long vacation from the office. Many of these visitors stayed, and like John Bozeman, left wives, and kids (or in some cases husbands) to become trout bums.¹²

One myth that tends to surround fishermen is "the one that got away." This *one*, has become the metaphor for the youth, the space, the lover, the spirituality and the trout that the angler had and loved, but let escape. Whichever way the universality of the story goes for fly angler, water surrounds our lives, and the fictional stories surrounding Montana paint a picture that really is not there. The past always had fewer people, deeper holes, bigger hatches, better knees, and of course, bigger trout.

The lament, then, seems to mourn the loss of paradise. Anglers want that imagined Eden: a new adventure of Montana before the fall, with its nude Adams and Eves waving magical wands to experience the pre-lapsarian command of finn'ed beast. This imagery is what drives the advertising for U.S. fly-fishing companies.¹³ Maclean explored this new adventure, Redford expanded it, and corporations exploited it. Since we have explored in detail Maclean's declension narrative we shall shift from it, to examine how the film adaptation of *A River Runs Through It* changed the way companies and individuals view fly fishing in Montana and throughout the West.

Operators of businesses on all levels of fly fishing report an unbelievable explosion after the film hit the theaters in 1992, directed by none other than the glorifier of western myth, Robert Redford. Redford creates a film that functions under what Jim Kitses in *Horizons West* defines as a Western. Kitses states, "The Western is one of America's grandest inventions. Like jazz and baseball, two other unique pastimes, it represents a distillation of quintessential aspects of nation character and sensibility, and has entertained millions of audiences with its intense aesthetic and ideological pleasures" (1). What Redford creates is a climate where fly fishing becomes the unique *state* pastime; it becomes a distillation of state character and sensibility. Kitses resurrects the director as the auteur, the creator of what the viewers see and perceive, and *A River Runs Through It* exemplifies his definition.¹⁴ However, the reality of these perceptions must hold up to scrutiny.

The film, under Redford's direction, captured the sunny late summer days of Montana: the uncrowded rivers, the bars in the middle of nowhere, the unrestrained youth and gravel roads. According to Redford, his films are to "show how it is and also...

[present] the audience with a view of something that was about to go away” (Nicolas preface). What he must not realize, is that it was already gone.

Liza Nicholas writes in “1-800-SUNDANCE” “Redford places himself in the somewhat peculiar role of helping destroy the very thing for which he pines” (266).

I argue that Redford’s code is apparent in his auteurship of *A River Runs Through It*. He does not necessarily view Maclean’s text “in all its freshness” but as a medium in which to apply his own interpretation of how the West was, and especially, how it *should* be. It is a West that ironically, he wants to preserve and needs to create in order for his film to sell.

If It’s Western, It’s for Sale

Redford himself is not naïve as to which parts of the west sell, as seen with his *Sundance* catalog.¹⁵ He also knows that to preserve a piece of the past, he must reinterpret it beautifully and let it sell. In her article “Scripting the West” Elaine M. Bapis writes “Redford’s films offered new ways of seeing Utah and later Montana, through perceptions of desire for open spaces in contrast to the everyday use of land as a resource and a place of work [remember the Berkeley Pit].” She continues by stating, “Redford’s films became a kind of Disneyland of western identity and authenticity” (242). This billboard of the hyperreal, the imagined simulation of an original that does not exist, is what Redford put up for sale, and the public bought it.

We have already seen how Livingston and the Yellowstone contribute to common themes and perceptions in the New West discourse. Another contribution to these themes, commonly known to anglers throughout the west in the 20th century, is Dan Bailey’s fly shop in Livingston. Located on the main drag of this sleepy western town, Bailey’s

employed several women who sat at tables in the front of the store, tying the flies that stocked the bins of the shop. Even in *Rancho Deluxe* written by Thomas McGuane and directed by Frank Perry and William A. Fraker, a young Jeff Bridges is seen walking into Bailey's and flirting with one of the young fly tiers sitting at her table with her vise and feathers.

Late in the 1930s as Dan Bailey's shop met with success, Pat Barnes, a young, local man, began tying flies commercially. He states "I'd go down on Saturday and show him [Bailey] what I'd tied during the week and he'd separate the ones that looked a little different and buy the rest" (Barnes 10). An impressive analysis of the fly fishing phenomena in the New West is Ken Owens' article, "Fishing the Hatch: New West Romanticism and Fly-Fishing in the High Country." He traces much of the growth of the sport, but contextually here comments on Bailey's tying operation in Livingston. "There he opened a business tying flies and selling them...Bailey could not rely on in-store sales to keep his business going. In 1937 he published his first catalog, advertising the flies that he and soon a small part-time crew of local housewives were tying" (Owens 114). As Owens notes here, 70 years ago, Bailey laid the groundwork for what now is a commonplace multi-million dollar assembly line production of trout flies.

Bailey eventually had to move his tying operation overseas, and similarly to Leigh Perkins, who bought the Orvis Company in 1965, he cashed in on "the continuation of the [fly fishing] boom that began in the 1970s" (Owens 117). However, after 1992, the film initiated advertising of the expansive, Edenic west that neither Bailey nor Perkins could have ever imagined in their respective marketing schemes. They marketed and sold

the west, especially to those in the east, but *A River Runs Through It* did what no marketing genius could afford or mastermind.

According to Dave Corcoran, 20 year owner of The River's Edge Outfitters in Bozeman, Montana, the film changed the course of his shop's progress. "It was a major deal" says Corcoran. "I had no idea, nor was I prepared, for what it would do for the sport of fly fishing." Corcoran continued by stating that the film brought people into his shop that before 1992 had no interest in the activity, nor did they have an interest in Montana. However, post *River*, "people just showed up. They would come in and say 'I want to experience the movie.' People saw the movie and wanted to try it."¹⁶

Even if the book was based on the life of Maclean, it is a story of the Montana of his youth with dew still on it (Redford included this phrase in the film, although it is not in the book), a Montana that no longer existed. By the time a 1992 audience sat munching on popcorn in the air conditioned theater watching Brad Pitt (who's fishing double was casting legend Jason Borger) wave his magic wand around the Gallatin River (not the Big Blackfoot) they were so removed from any sort of reality, that the simulation became the reality. As locals and tourists alike showed up with grandpa's old bamboo rod and a mismatched reel, wishing to reenact what they saw in the film, they engaged and perpetuated Baudrillard's notion of hyperreal.

This desire to engage in a fictional endeavor, based purely on Redford's interpretation of Maclean's nostalgia, produced an economic boost in the Rocky Mountains. As Corcoran witnessed, the sales increased as the newest graphite and machined aluminum equipment, waders, boots, flies, leaders and the rest of the requisite uniform to fly fish in Montana replaced the novice's old moldy gear. After these novices-

in-drag returned fishless and tangled, the guiding portion of the business increased. Ryan Harr, managing partner of C1 Design Group (makers of Waterworks-Lamson reels of Idaho) reinforces the impact the film had: “It drove a surge in trial from middle-class men (and some women) who often were not fishermen previously. Many fell away after initial experiences, a minority has become regular fly fishermen” (Harr). This in turn boosted the industry, and although Corcoran believes the sport saw a 10% retention rate in the initial influx, it changed the emphasis of fly fishing corporations from manufacturing based to marketing focused.

The Sweatshop’s Role in Artificiality

As noted earlier, guys like Pat Barnes were able to walk into Dan Bailey’s with a handful of flies and walk out with cash. As demand increased not only in quality but also in quantity, businesses like Dan Bailey’s, and newcomers like Rainy’s and Idylwilde flies had to become competitive and efficient. Bailey’s moved their tying overseas, and because Rainy’s and Idylwilde followed suit, they are two companies worth examining in relation to their global market strategies.

Zach Mertens, owner and operator of Idylwilde Flies, essentially went to the Philippines with a mountain bike and bags full of materials, and began operations in Manila. Rainy Riding operates a five-story facility in Thailand devoted to the production of flies. Each business employees nearly 100 people; the majority of these individuals works in the overseas factories. Rainy claims that she tried for years to get Utah State University students to tie for her; but that “American kids [are] not disciplined to work at home.” Eventually she had to “fold the business or move overseas.” She continued by

stating, “I have always been a great loyalist and truly did not want to be a part of anything that had any reference to ‘sweat shop.’” Although cheap labor was not her motivation, “it is however much less expensive to get flies tied” overseas, she says. Her 95 employees work eight-hour days, six days a week. She typically pays them a piece rate, except for managers.¹⁷

Mertens is much more candid about his reasons for operating in Manila. As he states “It all comes down to labor. Look at our economy any job that has a labor component to it is being transferred offshore.” In order to maintain a manufacturing business, Mertens believes one has to move production overseas. I asked him what sort of incentives would entice him to move production back to the United States, to incorporate the old tradition of locally tied flies. He responded, “I don't think there are any. Cost of labor is to [sic] high here to compete.”¹⁸ Basically, the reality of manufacturing flies in the fishing industry is far from the traditions Maclean and Redford endowed in their works.¹⁹ However, the public still clings to the images, the hyperreality.

Marketing managers for the business end of fly fishing realize this in their economic plans. They know that the public comes to Montana to fish uncrowded rivers, catch large trout, and experience sunny days and calm winds with large insect hatches. As the Montana adage goes, if you don't like the weather, wait ten minutes: these conditions are impossible to control. Anyone who has floated a Montana river on the 4th of July knows that he will share the stream with up to dozens of his closest friends. Nevertheless, the companies maintain control of our imaginations through their catalogs and marketing strategies. In Michael Lundblad's essay on Patagonia, he summarizes the appeal these catalogs have: “By looking at this catalog, I can at least live vicariously through accounts

of outdoor adventure written in essay form, published alongside pictures of expedition-worthy garments” (Lundblad 73).²⁰

The latest campaign from Simms Fishing Products of Bozeman is an excellent example of perpetuating the image of fly fishing as traditional, surrounded in lore, and somewhat nostalgic. Simms is a local Bozeman, Montana company. They used to produce all of their products in Bozeman, but as their lines increase, they have sent all production except for their waders overseas. Via E-mail president K.C. Walsh stated, “100% of our waders are made in Bozeman. We are committed to this, and believe our consumers value the quality and innovation that it affords us.” He also elaborated on the misconceptions of sweatshops, and says that Simms uses high-quality factories in Hong Kong, and states “Wage inflation is a big issue right now in Southeastern China, and factories are being encouraged by the Chinese government to push north and west.”

Though most of their product is manufactured overseas, their ad campaign uses grizzled fishing guides, photographed in black and white and glazed in digitally enhanced sepia images, to invoke the dreams and vicarious musings mentioned by Lundblad. For 11 ½ months of the year, the consumer can fantasize about fishing in Montana while daydreaming at the office. Within their web site and paper catalog, they flaunt the durability and exceptional quality of their nylon and Gore-Tex goods, with images such as Beaverhead River guide Tim Mosolf donning a suspicious beverage can and his ZZ Top beard, while it appears his client is trying to fish his fly from the shrubbery behind them. They claim their products to be the choice of professional guides everywhere. They do not tell the consumer that most cannot afford them at full retail.²¹

The ads also cannot capture the smell emanating from five seasons worth of sweaty feet. Again, the image is selling the product, not the reality of the experience.

Compromising the West

Another local company that perpetuates and cashes in on the nostalgia of fly fishing is the R.L. Winston Rod Company of Twin Bridges, Montana. On their web site, they have a photograph that blends the traditional and the modern. Winston is a company that still manufactures, by hand, bamboo fly rods for the aficionado, and an extra \$3000.00 and a year long wait will get you one. They also have one of the most innovative graphite and boron rods on the market today; again, one of the priciest rods on the market.²² However, they too, have succumbed to the twenty first century contradiction between American artisanship and the bottom line. In a *Ruby Valley.com* article in 2003, they reported, “The company recently laid off 11 employees, including the vice president of sales, chief financial officer and one shipping supervisor.”²³

In an article entitled “Former Winston Rod owner upset over possible outsourcing”, Perry Backus interviewed the bamboo rod builder and former owner Glen Bracket about the layoffs and outsourcing. Bracket said “It saddens me, of course. It deeply saddens me. It's been what Winston is all about,” he lamented. “It's never been about putting profit in front of people ... I think that compromises the heart and the soul of our business.” The employees of the rod company reinforced bracket's sentiments. In Backus's article, he quotes an “open letter signed ‘Concerned Employees of R.L. Winston Rod.’” The Twin Bridges employees wrote: “This outsourcing goes against everything that R.L. Winston stands for. We have been building rods in the United States

for 75 years, and we plan to keep building them for the life of the company in the United States.” According to the Backus article, employees felt that “The decision to outsource compromises the integrity of the company.” Backus also says, “At a recent meeting, the letter said the company's CEO told them workers in China would receive between 30 and 50 cents an hour.” The employees’ letter continues by stating: "Not only are we opposed to this outsourcing, but then to send them to a country that has such human rights violations is inconceivable." They continued with "We are now asking the owner of the company to step up and make the choice to keep all of our rods here, in Twin Bridges, Montana."²⁴ One entire line of Winston Rods is now manufactured overseas.

Although Winston’s 2004 catalog had the word “uncompromising”²⁵ in script across the front of a bamboo rod, they did compromise to the power of global commerce. This is a company enmeshed in the contradictions of the west. However, as noted, Winston is not alone in this move. Like Winston, all of the companies now sell the lifestyle and traditional images surrounding the product without acknowledging the other realities. Here I use *other* realities because the postmodern hyperreal is as real to the consumer as the behind-the scenes economics is to the corporation. The simulation of the past has become a truth, and no one can discern or even contemplate what the original ever looked like. As life comes to imitate art, so has fly fishing come to imitate the art that depicts it. In this case, the simulation of what fishing in Montana is has become what fishing in Montana is. What fly fishing has also become, because of the film, is an activity of commercialism that has taken on a life of its own.

The natural unities of community fly tying groups still happen on small levels, but have been replaced and rationalized by the more efficiently operated fly factory. The

mom and pop businesses, naturally passed down through generations, spend more time on marketing the Rocky Mountain myth. The bits break, float, and take on a new life, and as anglers and consumers, we allow for this and endorse the quality of new flies and gear as necessities, and neglect how or where they now originate. The boundaries of traditions and spirituality have been reconstructed as Jameson states, and through rationalizations, we now pay for a made up tradition and materialistic spirituality.

What the big picture looks like then, is a blurring between the components of the actual consumerism of the sport, and the sport itself. The nostalgia of what was has waned in importance, and the current story of Montana is less the sublimation of mom and pop businesses and more the profitability of the imagined Montana. In Maclean's opening sentence, "there was no clear line between religion and fly fishing" (1) he invokes the spirituality and solitude once found where "the river was cut by the world's great flood and runs over rocks from the basement of time" (113). In twenty first century America, where we love to shop,²⁶ the distinctions between religion and *stuff* are becoming blurred. We love the next best thing more than our hour in church, and in order to find god on the stream, we need more of the stuff these companies are selling. The marketing strategies, from shops to corporations, give lip service to quality and service, but as we know, a picture is worth a thousand words. Images of blue skies, seasoned guides and big fish sell more flies and rods on that path of Montanan enlightenment than do fancy slogans or ancient scriptures. That taste of heaven is for sale in the West, and now, in America, because of this intertextual discourse, there is no clear line between consumerism and fly fishing.

HAIL TO THEE, MIGHTY TROUT

Any trout on any day would surely be willing to forgo all such honor and praise if it could just be let off the hook (Washabaugh 1).

To the fly angler, the trout is an object of obsession, and fishermen seek it more often with a fly than any other fish. According to William Washabaugh in *Deep Trout*, “Trout-fishing has been touted as an especially noble activity, and the trout themselves have been portrayed as bearers of virtue” (1). Anglers can catch the trout every month of the year in Montana, winter conditions permitting, and at all elevations and all types of water. Interestingly enough, the trout eludes anglers in its appearance, appetite, and daily routine. Oftentimes one can find the same trout in the same hole in the same shady afternoon time after time. Like Gus’s rule of nature, following superb fishing with dry flies one day, one would swear the creatures did not exist the next day. Each species of trout has evolved with its own patterning upon its back, and this allows it to lie at any elevation in the stream or lakebed, and essentially disappear. Many instances I have gazed through expensive ground glass polarized sunglasses into a stream from atop a bridge or boulder, and noted the fish’s *shadow* before I spotted his bespeckled back. From our egocentric place upon this earth, many anglers think that the trout is eluding *them*; however any time spent in osprey or eagle country offers a slice of humble pie to the baffled angler as the claws of one of these creatures plucks an 18-inch unwary victim right before our fishless creel. Predator and prey are both the fates of the trout, and our flies are the least of its worries.

Anglers especially find that trout are deceiving us because they are so hard to find. Often times, in our heavy, soggy wading shoes and jangling nippers, tippet and mirrored sunglasses, we scare the entire pod away before we ever knew it was there. Watch an osprey hunting sometime, and note where his shadow lies. Rarely will it hunt and cast its shadow on the river's surface. Fish fear death from above, but any vibration sensed in the lateral line along their sides (the rainbow stripe on *mykiss mykiss*) signals danger to the trout. Another mentor that fishes along river banks is the blue heron. Just a few minutes spent watching this bird, and anglers learn a lot about how to approach a trout stream: stealthily, silently, motionless.

Again, we often sink our beers in the bank, stumble along the cobbles, and march five feet into the stream before we make a cast. Those five feet, if ever fished from a drift boat, is the most productive habitat for hefty, lazy brown trout. Anglers know them for their carnivorous, oftentimes cannibalistic tendencies; where else would one find small fish, rodents, and ducklings, as well as big grasshoppers and salmon flies, than beside the bank.

If or when we do catch one, they are undeniable beautiful. Artists throughout the New West have photographed and painted these characters as if they were the queen's jewels, and writers pen them in the same light. We have given the Rainbow trout the name of hope, the Yellowstone Cutthroat trout the name of its "discoverer" and the small high alpine Golden trout the name of the west's early passion. As I will discuss later, this trout of hope and prosperity is exactly that for the New West's recreation and tourism economy. When there are big fish, an abundance of them, and the threats of whirling

disease, New Zealand Mud Snail and drought fade from the headlines of local and national newspapers and publications, everyone supposedly benefits.

Internationally known wildlife photographer Denver Bryan has commodified the trout in his years of photography, and finds that big trout held by beautiful women are a moneymaker. His images have donned the front covers of *Fly Fisherman*, *Fly Fish America*, *Gray's Sporting Journal* and other well-know sporting magazines.

A few important subtleties arise when we examine these covers for what they are, and what they are not. Rarely does one see an image on the cover of a fishing magazine that is just the fish. After a quick perusal of my several years worth of fishing magazines, one issue in ten does not have a person in it. In another review of the same collection, three in ten have a woman holding the trout; every one of them displays the trout's nose pointing to the left. None of these happens by accident. The typical audiences for these magazines are males in their late 20s to early 60s. The women on the covers are attractive, suntanned, longhaired late 20s to late 30s women with nice white teeth and joyful appearances. According to the website guidelines of one fly fishing magazine, they claim, "Since *American Angler* focuses on coldwater fishing, most of its covers will show coldwater subjects. Trout, trout fishing, or a trout fisher with a trout will probably account for five covers a year; the sixth might show steelhead or salmon. Naturally, we try to pick a seasonal cover photo" ("Guidelines"). They stress the importance of the fish, and the fisher on their publication.

If you go to a website like FishSniffer.com, it is full of the real women who fish for trout. They appear average, smiling, protected by clothing, bug spray, ball caps, sunglasses, and windblown, messy hair. They typically have no makeup on, and are

usually wearing pants and a long sleeve shirt rather than a bikini or name-brand gadgetry (O'Toole).

The distinction here is that there are women who fly fish, and publishers that use women to sell magazines to middle aged men fishing for trophy trout and trophy wives. Not to distract too far from the subject of the beauty of trout, Reel Fish Calendar Productions presents the Women in Waders calendar, each dis-“tastefully photographed” in rubber hip boots and two piece bikinis, either affectionately holding a rod, or even better, and more erotic, a big trout. To titillate online shoppers, Reel Fish plays upon the subconscious dreams of every man that spends a lot of time away from his wife, thigh deep in water, searching out the elusive and the unknown by writing

Just imagine walking down to the bank of a river and finding a **beautiful woman in waders** instead of a crowd of fishermen. We realize you may never actually run across women dressed like this in your favorite stream, but with the Women in Waders calendar on your wall, you can **dream about it everyday**”(advertisement's emphasis “Women in Waders”).

This is worthy of remembrance in regards to David James Duncan's novel *the River Why*. Gus finds Eddy--the post-modern eve--on the stream, wader-less and clothes-less, angelic, and of course, *fishing*.

The trout, however, that glorious finned creature, written and admired by writers from Sir Isaac Walton to Hemmingway to hundreds of contemporary journalists, is adored, revered, and cursed on any given stream, any given day. The irony of all this iconoclasm is that it works in every venue used. The trout sells magazines, real estate, books, videos and even John Bozeman's Bistro, which has little or nothing to do with Mr. Bozeman or trout, has two trout on its logo in a yin-yang formation. In the real photos that magazines and advertisers use for marketing, and thus perpetuating the mythology of

the New West, it is impossible to verify whether a trout came from the respective stream, or one a thousand miles away. The most recent cover *Fly Fish America* displays a brown trout rumored to be out of a stocked private pond, and netted by the photographer and his crew. The model has perfectly manicured nails, and perfect makeup.

Why anglers worship this creature is about as shallow or deep as the waters in which they swim. I argue that in much of the literature, it is the mastery over the unknown that leads us to water, and keeps us from drinking. Within those eerie depths might lie an easy six incher, or a crafty, intelligent six pounder. Human kind, again the eternal egoist, cannot know whether the big fish has had a six incher lodged in its gullet for the last week, and only that day decided to eat again, or whether the angler's presentation, fly and stealthy techniques are what tricked the beast into eating. However, when it comes to telling the story, all pieces of the angler's fishing came into place.

Many fishing writers have discussed the obtainment of spirituality on the stream. We especially have seen in Maclean's and Duncan's works. The river is where they claim to find their oneness with God; the streambed is their church, the river water their baptismal fluid, and a large trout the communion. Others argue that their iced sixer of microbrew is their wine and Pringles their communion, but streamside is where they connect. Of course, this is common within the past 200 years of discourse surrounding the West. That Nature is a source of rejuvenation is nothing new to this writing; even the use of this communion and connection as a sales tool for marketers of all sorts of products is old hat. What have changed are the products themselves. At one time abundant land, religious freedom, and escape from the urban were for sale. Now million dollar ranches in parcels and elbow room for the soul are for sale. The product, then has

changed in some ways, but in many is exactly the same offering. What has changed drastically, then, is our perception of the resources as something vital to a lifestyle. We can no longer extract everything from the earth to obtain and spend wealth. In the twenty first century, preservation of the resources is essential for profit.

Interestingly enough, to sell this spirituality, this space for the soul, marketers need the big fish. Montana is known as Big Sky country, but some have nicked it as Big Guy country, and this includes the fish. Perusing any number of fly fishing web sites or magazines leads one to believe that every guide service, lodge, and stream in the west holds big trout. Guides, advertisers and anglers define good fishing as catching those fish over 16 inches, and a trophy is over 22 inches. Granted, these fish are in the river, but pimping them out as the norm raises the bar for guides and average anglers as well. What the advertisers have established is a fishing environment in Montana better known as Big Lie country.

Anglers, magazines and fiction, has then, glorified the trout as its link to wildness, nature, mastery over nature, spirituality and its connection with God. Many anglers now practice the act of catch and release, which gives them the opportunity to act God-like. They accomplish this by knocking the fish over the head and condemning it to fish heaven or hell. Conversely, in a constructed act of grace, we might place the fish back into the stream from which it came to be caught another day, reproduce more babies, or sadly, fall prey to an osprey because the extended photo op critically damaged essential neurons necessary for survival in a harsh liquid environment left the fish gasping topside. Either way, to transcend the surface and lure a trout from its living room is what provides

us our human abilities to act beyond ourselves, or indulge in our basest human quality to kill and eat.

The trout itself, at least the most popular species, are as foreign to western streams as is the angler to the trout's environment. The West Slope Cutthroat *Oncorhynchus clarki lewisi* and the Yellowstone Cutthroat *Oncorhynchus clarki bouvieri* are native to western states. By native, like the use of the term with American Indians, they were here first, and arguably always were. The rainbow trout *Oncorhynchus mykiss* and the brown trout, or German brown trout *Salmo trutta* are introduced species to the ecosystems of the west. The rainbow trout "were introduced from numerous hatchery stocks into virtually every suitable habitat in the state, beginning in 1889" ("Animal Field Guide).

Settlers introduced the brown around the same time. MFWP states on their website that the rainbow "evolved in Europe and western Asia and were introduced to North America in 1883 and to Montana in 1889 in the Madison River." According to the website, "Scientists believe that only the rainbow trout of the upper Kootenai River drainage are native to this state" sharing river space with species of Cutthroat throughout western and southwestern Montana. At the same time the state was expanding its mining, railroad and logging practices, engaging in its displacement of Native Americans and its importation of European Whites, these new settlers also thought they should improve Nature by importing non-native species. The parallels between humans and animals are obvious, and are the less told stories now. The important story currently is of the importance of the rainbow as "Montana's number one game fish" ("Animal Field Guide").

When anglers, then, discuss trout, they must make the distinction between native species, and wild species, as well as non-native species. Because the rainbows and browns in the streams of Montana reproduce healthy generations without the aid of humans or hatcheries, MFWP considers them a wild population of fish. The Cutthroat species do the same, and FWP considers them native, as noted above. MFWP and the National Park Service offer some paradoxical approaches to other non-native fish, such as the Lake Trout, which is a Char that grows to enormous size, and is a good fish to catch and to eat; however, it has invaded the politically protected Cutthroat habitat in Yellowstone Lake. Like a lakeside holocaust, officials demand that anglers catch and kill all Lake Trout. If an angler chooses not to keep the fish, he must puncture the air bladder of the fish with a knife and sink it in Yellowstone Lake. In a report to the director of the NPS, Paul Schullery and John D. Varley analyze the “invasion” of the Lake Trout, including, and most important here, the “Socioeconomic Values Associated with the Yellowstone Cutthroat Trout” in relation to the invasion.

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The discourse surrounding the trout, then, is symbolic, rife with irony, and much of the story is the contradiction of the New West. Obviously, the rainbow name came from its coloring. Some places in some fisheries, depending on climate and diet, the rainbow is dark emerald green on its back, and the irradiance of color transcends down the sides of the fish through purples, oranges and reds, usually ending in silver or white underbellies. The under flanks of some brown trout have yellows the color of sunflowers, and a caramel to chocolate color on their backs. Hatchery trout most often are dull silver, and the pink stripe of a hatchery rainbow is faint. Some fishermen claim the meat of

hatchery fish is pale and mushy, compared to the wild pink and orange flesh of the naturally reproducing trout. The catch and release anglers deny the desire to taste the fish, and emphasize the colors, craftiness and strength of the wild fish. In any sense of this discourse, Baudrillard's notion of *simulacra* is apparent here. The reproductions of original space, big fish, and wildness are disguises for an ever growing over crowdedness, a dependence and reverence for a rainbow trout that is an imposter, but economically profitable, and the false image that every fish in Big Guy country is a whopper.

What complicates the discussion of the Rainbow trout even more is the carp. Yes, that bottom sucking gold fish relative that spans the globe, is known as a delicacy and a pond ornament in Asia, and a turd sucking trash fish in the states is a compelling illustration of the *construction* of the wildness and angling challenge. This scaly fish further perpetuates Baudrillard's notion of the false simulation, and contributes to our paradoxical retreat hypothesis.

The United States Fish Commission introduced the common carp during the 1870s as an alternative to expensive chicken and beef prices²⁸ ("Introduction of Carp to North America"). Once the prices returned to normal, farmers released the fish from ponds, and the carp's adaptability spurred a spawning sensation that covered the United States in four years (Reynolds, Befus and Berryman 14). To all trout fans, the carp is ugly. It has extended, soft white lips that are near the underside of the carp's head, making it adaptable to bottom feeding. It has large eyes, even bigger goldish scales, and a fat, stocky body. However, here is where the differences end.

Like the trout, the carp is very wary of predators.²⁹ The carp too, is an introduced species like the brown and rainbow. The sense of smell for the carp is far superior to the trout, most likely because it feeds in sandy, cloudy water where its visibility is limited. It eats crayfish, aquatic insects, minnows, and terrestrials like beetles, grasshoppers and ants. Although known as a bottom feeder, it will eat food off the surface of a lake or river; experts know that the trout eats 90% of its diet underneath the surface. What is exciting for anglers that have discovered the secret is, the carp will eat flies, and fights as hard as or harder than any trout. Equally as exciting is that the carp does not stay small long (Reynolds et. al 14-30). On average, an afternoon of fishing for carp on the Missouri can lead to average catch weights of 4-6 pounds. An angler in Montana might be lucky to catch one trout that size in a summer. They are selective, too, and because of their sense of smell, it is rumored they can tell what flavor chips an angler ate for lunch.

Why, then, is the gentle, challenging carp such a bane to the average trout fisherman? I argue it is because of the perpetual myth expounded in literature and media. As a kid, catching a carp is a thrill. As an adult, it is slumming. The aristocratic, intellectual traditionalist of fly fishing like H2O would never stoop to release a carp from its line. Therefore, the trout remains in the log cabins and glossy pages of magazines, and the carp leads its solitary life in the warm waters of most of the country. It is a survivor like the cockroach, and adaptable to all types of water qualities and temperatures.³⁰ On a hot August day when the trout are susceptible to low oxygen levels and increased fatigue, the carp is at its most active. Maybe it is the elusive and exclusive nature of the trout that leads wealthy white men to chase them. Maybe it is the constructed ideal of nature where trout lie, that is the draw. A farm pond or a mucky slow moving river in August is the

habitat for the carp; fast flowing, cool, clear streams nestled in the forest like the Gallatin River (the site for the filming of *A River Runs Through It*) is the habitat for trout. To the idealist, thriving on the images of the pristine wild experience, the latter is the place of rejuvenation. Therefore, the angler's desire to catch trout stems from intellectual fantasies pertaining to setting and aesthetics within the natural environment (Cronon, Buell 1995, Oates 2003, Phillips 2003), rather than the level of challenge possessed by any given quarry. This is of primary emphasis to the literary analysis of the novels presented here, but the Nature/Culture division is important to identify in regards to the trout and the carp.

Bozeman's very own Greg Keeler, poet, musician, painter, professor and fly angler acknowledged the distinctions in his poem "Ode to Rough Fish." The very title of the poem suggests the distinction between the "quick thin-meated trout / darting his pretty life in the rare rocks of high streams (4-5) and the "scumsuckers of the stagnant / reservoirs and sludge-filled rivers" (9-10).

Keeler is strongly aware of the adoration the fishing culture has placed upon the trout. Consequently, "Ode" mocks that adoration in its poetic language and inclusion of man-made disasters, comparing the trout fishing experience, noting how the trout will "live up to a size 20 Coachman on a 7x tippet" (16) but the carp jumps "for nothing but air / through the filth and oil slicks" (22-23). Whereas the trout worshiper idolizes the flesh of the trout, for the carp, "Mud is your guts; thus your guts are always distended / in thick slabs of carp meat—sucker meat" (30-31). Within those rare guts are stuffed "worms, offal, whatever / he can turn up without himself turning up" (7-8) whereas the trout is written about time and again as a delicate eater of "the thin wings of a fresh /

hatched caddis” (21-2). Why this poem strikes the lover and scholar of both fish, is the notion of lifting the veil, to see each fish for what it is, and, conversely, how literature has depicted it.

Whereas the trout has the beautiful names of the west, of hope and riches, the “rough Fish” is merely a carp. Embodied in that name, Keeler writes, is “You and your wallowing, blubbery truth. / You and your truth that has made a heaven of sewage.” 32-3). For if one man’s hell is another’s heaven, so too is one fish’s death another’s life. Most species of trout cannot live where the carp does, but this tank, this Hummer of the river, can live in most waters throughout the world. Therefore, Keeler asks, “Why didn’t they call *you* rainbow or golden, for if God gave a promise and warning in one fell swoop, you are it” (34-7).

The perception of carp fishing is changing as the magazines dig for new ways to discuss fishing. In the last year, fly fishing magazines have begun to honor the carp as a worthy foe, and the availability of the fish might become its greatest asset. The 2006 “Fly Fishing” edition of *Big Sky Journal* has an article on carp fishing, and the cover of *Fly Fish America* for September 2005 has a caption that reads, “CARP, The Other Trash Fish.” This title is interesting, playing on the “Pork, the other white meat” commercials, implying that it is as good as anything else is, just forgotten. Consequently, the carp is regaining status, but now as a fish worth fishing for, but still only an alternative to a good day of trout fishing. It still maintains its industrial, metropolitan, polluted, “trash” status.

Conclusively, the trout/carp dilemma, as I have illustrated here, is one of wild against civil. The carp is adaptable to all the manufactured disasters we brew in the name of production, while man threatens the trout’s very existence. Dams, irrigation

recirculation, dewatered streams and even high levels of toxins make excellent carp habitat. To reinforce this, Keeler opens his poem in Whitmanesque style yawping “I speak for the carp, fat on mud-bloat / and algae, orange-lipped lipper of algae surfaces, / round rotter of the banks of hydroelectric rivers” (1-3). However, in the quest to find, worship, and explore the God-given nature within and outside anglers, carp habitat is what we already live in. It is as if the carp is us, and the trout is beyond us, merely because of what we choose to escape. Anglers want that experience of purity for which they race to, via jet and SUV. What I have attempted to show here is that the jet and SUV, the importation of the rainbow and brown trout, and the innovations in gear and marketing techniques have all lead the purist to take the civilization she flees with her. Good trout fishing is a vehicle’s drive away in Bozeman. Near New York City, it is an hour away. In Portland, Oregon it is three hours away (remember U.S. Grant Creek). To enjoy the wild we need the tame. Any person seeking retreat is living the paradox because to retreat we have to take what we are leaving with us. Then, once we get there, the very animals we are seeking have contrived classifications like native and wild, as if the name denotes the level of spiritual experience.

CONCLUSION: WHERE WATERS MEET

The activity of fly fishing and all of its surrounding regalia work theoretically to explore and illustrate the proposed paradoxical retreat hypothesis. Just as it takes an artificial fly presented like a natural insect to deceive a trout into the take, so too does it take an artificial construct of retreat to sell the viewer on the myth of the New West. The current conditions of this region are where old perceptions of Nature and Culture are not distinct, and arguably never were. In the twenty first century, theorists shift from describing them as separate entities, to Nature/Culture as Oates does, to an intertwined blanket of ideas that form new space, and new terms; essentially abandoning these dichotomies is the most effective perception of the West. Authenticity, for so long an important term in the discourse of the West, is now a term tossed around like dry flies during the May caddis hatch on Western streams. An authentic fly is only as good as its original. However, an authentic Westerner is difficult to find; even if sought for, the criteria are as ambiguous as the title.

Consequently, the shift from viewing the West as a land of opportunity, to a land of complication and conflict, resembles the same shift of the American Dream as it was represented in early American literature forward to the lament for that unattainable quest in late American texts such as *The Great Gatsby* and *Fight Club*. None of the propaganda has manifested itself as true, and therefore, much of the literature expresses the sense that all is in regression, that the declension narrative is king. In some respects, this is true. In some respects, even as a theoretical writer analyzing aspects of this loss of what was so

great, a quandary surfaces in how exactly to write about the West without succumbing to the same trap. It might be impossible.

This impossibility of escaping the trap is the story of the West. The paradoxical retreat is braided into Westerners' own fibers. To leave one space and enter another, whether it is to enter socially constructed spaces such as wilderness, metropolis, or national park, is a seamless journey imbricated with notions of economy, politics, and conflict. Therefore, complicity in all aspects is the status quo, and only by acknowledging that complicity can one transcend it. Through a transcendence different than Thoreau's, the contemporary Westerner and those who claim to adore that region, can see the landscape beneath the veil; they can explore the terrain while understanding that the characteristics of that landscape make it what it is, as well as the Culture they bring to it. Conflict surrounds the region, and no one is immune from contributing to those disputes. Therefore, by comprehending their own complicity, citizens of the West can identify their own roles in shaping, or destroying, what they dearly love.

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ENDNOTES

¹ Again, according to many *native* Montanans, it is the arrival of non-native tourists that continually threaten the quality of life in the Big Sky state.

² *The American Adam*, R.W.B. Lewis. Lewis analyzes the west through this Edenic lens, describing how the west offered “the image of a radically new personality, the hero of new adventure” (5).

³ This hypothetical fall seems to vary according to when the writer first encountered an area, and the time between then and when he or she is writing.

⁴ This western revitalization sounds like Pfizer’s cure for masculinity.

⁵ As a clairvoyant motion, the references above to wool and bells ringing are contextual in two ways. The old nostalgic view of fly anglers is that of tidy men wearing wool sport jackets. The bells are reminiscent of the New West migrant that performs hostile takeovers via cell phone from his fishing guide’s drift boat.

⁶ “these trout [*NB: caught in the falls*] are from sixteen to twenty three inches in length, precisely resemble our mountain or speckled trout in form and the position of their fins, but the specks on these are of a deep black instead of the red or gold colour of those common to the U.' States. these are furnished long sharp teeth on the pallet and tongue and have generally a small dash of red on each side behind the front ventral fins; the flesh is of a pale yellowish red, or when in good order, of a rose red.”

[http://libtextcenter.unl.edu/examples/servlet/transform/tamino/Library/lewisandclarkjournals?&_xmlsrc=http://libtextcenter.unl.edu/lewisandclark/files/xml/1805-06-](http://libtextcenter.unl.edu/examples/servlet/transform/tamino/Library/lewisandclarkjournals?&_xmlsrc=http://libtextcenter.unl.edu/lewisandclark/files/xml/1805-06-13.xml&_xslsrc=http://libtextcenter.unl.edu/lewisandclark/LCstyles.xsl)

[13.xml&_xslsrc=http://libtextcenter.unl.edu/lewisandclark/LCstyles.xsl](http://libtextcenter.unl.edu/lewisandclark/LCstyles.xsl)

⁷ The *Bozeman Daily Chronicle* and local news continued throughout the winter of 2005-2006 to report on the hazing and slaughter of Bison leaving Yellowstone in their instinctual move to migrate. Local ranchers want them slaughtered because of a threat that the Bison carries Brucellosis.

⁸ *Bozeman Daily Chronicle* states that eight university freshmen were nabbed in an undercover investigative sting at the beginning of March, 2006.

⁹ The EPA maintains this site, so the objectivity must be scrutinized. However, this article is an acknowledgement of the Super Fund status and reclamation efforts. <http://www.epa.gov/region8/superfund/sites/mt/silvercd020326.html>

¹⁰ <http://www.blackfoot.org/>

¹¹ The river to the south is the Gallatin. It is one that I fish quite often. It parallels highway 191 and north from Yellowstone National Park and forms the Missouri near Three Forks, Montana. Burke http://grayssportingjournal.com/stories/020304/exped_ariver.shtml.

¹² For more information on John Bozeman and the history of Bozeman, Montana, read Phyllis Smith’s *Bozeman and the Gallatin Valley: A History*.

¹³ Maclean mentions wands several times in the closing pages with reference to Paul: “He was a man with a wand in a river, and whatever happened we had to guess from what the man and the wand and the river did” (105). “I could see where in the distance the wand was going to let the fly first touch water” (106). “the tip of his wand bent like a spring” (106).

¹⁴ Kitses, in *Horizons West* makes it clear that the director has the ultimate authority in the creation of the film. He may work within screenplays, but that he captures on film is what the public sees, and he can sway public perception by incorporating his own vision, politics and social perspectives into the film. Redford is accused of doing this in several of his films.

¹⁵ Where is this “place” except for a creation on paper and internet of new commercial space?

¹⁶ I worked for Dave Corcoran for three years. On days when the business was slow, he, and company representatives would joke that “we need another movie.” I interviewed Dave on this matter via telephone June 1, 2005.

¹⁷ I e-mailed Ms. Riding and received a straightforward response that contained information about her operation, 18 May 2005.

¹⁸ Email interview. 10 May 2005.

¹⁹ “‘What the hell do you care?’ he asked. ‘We don’t pay for flies. George is always glad to tie more for us;’” (46). From Maclean’s work, this is a reminder that at one time, sharing and trading locally tied flies was the norm. It still happens today, but we are definitely in a transition where purchased flies are the norm, and personally tied are an anomaly.

²⁰ A comical counter, with a bitter ironic truth, is on the jacket of Paul Arnold’s book *The Wisdom of the Guides*. In it is says “He offers the following advice for those poised to move to Montana: ‘The winters are horrible, the whirling has killed off all the trout and the place is so crowded you can’t find a place to stand at the bar; probably best if you stay where you are.’” His attempt to counter the hyperreality of Montana living.

²¹ Ken Owens provides an excellent ad analysis in his article. He discusses a Simms ad used for several years that has contains “three genuine fly fishing guides posed at what is humorously called the Drive-In Hole...every detail is accurate and authentic”. Again, with use of the guides, Simms message is “wear Gore-Tex...by damn...Right now” (118). Simms waders range from \$199.00-\$425.00.

²² The Winston BIIIX took fly shops and R.L. Winston Rod Company by surprise. They were behind weeks because of the demand, and shops that ordered early and deep reaped the benefits. The rods retail for \$595.00.

²³ <http://www.rubyvalley.com/news/winstonrodeployment.htm>

²⁴ Backus, Perry “Casting jobs overseas? - Former Winston Rod owner upset over possible outsourcing.” Montana Associated Technologies Roundtable. April 13, 2004. 11 May 2005. <<http://www.matr.net/article-10573.html>>.

²⁵ Backus also notes the irony between the catalog and the business practices.

²⁶ According to a 1999 statistic, Americans purchased \$1.1 trillion dollars on credit cards attests to that <<http://www.feel-free-debt-counseling-service.com/debt-consolidation-stats.html>>.

²⁷ The perceived value of a healthy population of Yellowstone Cutthroat includes “viewing value” according to the report. Statistics show Cutthroat “attracted more than a third of a million visitors, about 10% of the total annual park visitation (Gresswell and Liss 1995) at Fishing bridge and LeHardys Rapids. <http://www.nps.gov/yell/planvisit/todo/fishing/laketroutroutweb/varley.html>

²⁸ The original shipment of 345 live fish were released in ponds in Druid Hill Park in Baltimore, Maryland. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carp>

²⁹ In fact, I once watched a cow elk, 10 feet above a pod of carp stomp her hoof. The vibrations from that stomp spooked a lazy pod of over 200 carp out to the middle of the river.

³⁰ Reynolds, et al. claim the carp can survive from 39-96 degrees F.