Learning the Land: Survival of the Self in a Hostile World

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Learning the Land:  
Survival of the Self in a Hostile World

An Exploration of Emersonian Resonance
from *Nature* and "Self-Reliance"
in Four Novels about Poor White Women:

*The Time of Man* by Elizabeth Madox Roberts

*Weeds* by Edith Summers Kelley

*Call Home the Heart* by Fielding Burke, and

*Barren Ground* by Ellen Glasgow

by

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Learning the Land:
Survival of the Self in a Hostile World
by
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Introduction

An accepted tenet of the history of English language literature is that the Romantic writers, most notably William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, dramatically broke with their British literary past in their choices of subject matter and imagery. For the first time, the internal workings of the individual self became a suitable literary subject; for the first time, its workings could be validly expressed in terms of its responses to the natural world. A major figure of American literary history, Ralph Waldo Emerson, was born within a decade of the publication of Wordsworth's and Coleridge's *Lyrical Ballads* (Parker 819). Ample documentation exists of his exposure to these writers (Parker 820-22); in fact, a contemporary reviewer "stressed the influence of Wordsworth's *Immortality* ode and of Coleridge's *Dejection: An Ode* in [Emerson's] concept of Nature" (Parker 821). Still, while we recognize these and other European influences in Emerson's work, a more significant influence is his American citizenship, the simple fact of his birth into an early generation of a new nation dedicated to the individual's rights to "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness."
The democratic values cherished by America's founders made it possible for individuals to transcend the limits of class and gender set by the accident of birth, so that one's communal standing, at least theoretically, was the result
of individual aspiration and accomplishment.

One critical difference between American and British cultures at least partially explains the development of the peculiarly American ideology later called "Transcendentalism," to which Emerson contributed so greatly. The emphasis on the self which began with the British Romantic writers was, to some degree, a response to the industrialization and subsequent commercialization of their culture. Industrialization increased the isolation of the individual self by removing it from any definition derived from traditional, meaningful work, and substituting for that work boring, frequently repetitive tasks which disconnected the individual from the final outcome of his or her labor. The void left by the removal of meaningful work in the individual self was replaced by the acquisition of individual wealth which, in turn, supported the commercialization of the culture. An individual's sense of self-worth no longer came from the production of single items for sale or from the planting-growth-harvest cycles of the land; self-worth came, instead, from the possession and consumption of material wealth. Additionally, industrialization and commercialization dramatically changed the structure of British society by allowing the acquisition of wealth to become, at least partially, the measure of an individual's communal worth. However, although the power which material wealth brought to a new entrepreneurial class increased its social influence, it did
not supplant the aristocratic class system. Individual worth continued to be limited by birth class status. This continuity gave British society a measure of stability which the new American society was only beginning to seek during the decades when Emerson began to think and write. America's culture was formed during the period of industrialization and commercialization, and its democratic principles allowed theoretically unlimited reward for individual aspiration and accomplishment. As acquisition became the primary aspiration valued in the new nation, material wealth became the dominant gauge of individual worth.

Quentin Anderson, in "The Emergence of Modernism," explains that Whitman, Thoreau, and Emerson actively rejected the acquisition-based values which American culture came to revere during their lifetimes in favor of the belief "that each individual was potentially capable of fashioning himself and building a total conception of the world. This was the social meaning of what we call 'transcendentalism'" (699). Anderson further explains that, because the formation of this concept was essentially a solitary task, the individual became isolated from family and community. However, both cultural history and common sense demand that we ask if American women, bound by strictures set at birth to other-centered marital and maternal roles, could participate in the experience of transcendence. Anderson addresses that
question; he claims that Emerson, especially, understood the disenfranchisement of women inherent in transcendental ideals:

Since Emerson could not conceive of women except as bound to the reciprocal duties imposed by motherhood and the care of the household, he saw them as fatally immersed in the society and incapable of self-reliance. This denial of a full humanity to women sometimes embarrassed him, as his journal shows. (701)

Examination of Emerson's journals reveals the accuracy of Anderson's assertion. Emerson repeatedly displays his deep respect for women, as well as his concern for their economic dependence:

**Woman.** It is the worst of her condition that its advantages are permissive. Society lives on the system of money and woman comes at money & money's worth through compliment. I should not dare to be woman. Plainly they are created for the better system which supersedes (sic) money. But today,— In our civilization her position is often pathetic. What is
she not expected to do & suffer for
some invitation to strawberries &
cream. Mercifully their eyes are
holden that they cannot see. (9: 108)

Obviously, Emerson sensed the ramifications of economic
dependence, that it stifled the development of full person­
hood by forcing women to find "money & money's worth through
compliment." In another entry, written just four years
before "Self-Reliance," Emerson reveals his awareness of
women's inability to separate themselves from social inter­
action, together with his assumption that the socially
mandated rôle of "wife" is the only fulfilling one available
to women:

In conversing with a lady it
sometimes seems a bitterness & unneces­
sary wound to insist as I incline to,
on this self sufficiency of man.
There is no society say I; there
can be none. 'Very true but very mourn­
ful,' replies my freind; we talk of \( m \)
courses of action. But to women my
paths are shut up and the fine women
I think of who have had genius & cultiva­
tion who have not been wives but muses
have something tragic in their lot &
We are forced to admire the intellectual honesty of Emerson's recognition that his paths are "shut up" to women. As much as he revered and supported women—he advocated the expansion of their legal rights, including suffrage, in a lecture to the 1855 Women's Rights Convention—he recognized that the ideal of transcendence he espoused was essentially unavailable to women because of social pressures imposed on them. The very notion of self-reliance, with its necessarily stringent emphasis on the self as final arbiter of the world, was unavailable for women because they could not "shun father and mother and [husband] and brother" ("Self-Reliance" 892). Additionally, the relationship with the natural world which Emerson describes in Nature was impossible for women to achieve because they could spare neither the time nor the focus away from the family to properly develop it. So, while Emerson was clearly sympathetic toward women, he believed his ideas were unsuitable for use in self-definition by his female contemporaries, including women writers.

However, his concepts were so thoroughly based in universal human experience that they can be identified in much good writing which features substantial human interaction with nature, and in many self-reliant characters. Each of the four women writers examined here owes some debt to Emerson, primarily in her portrayal of an individual self entwined in relationship with nature. Elizabeth Madox Roberts'
protagonist in *The Time of Man*, Ellen Chesser, uses nature as the primary tool for self-formation. The protagonist of Edith Summers Kelley's *Weeds*, Judith Pippinger, is cut off from the natural world in which she obviously flourishes and, consequently, begins losing her authentic self. In Fielding Burke's *Call Home the Heart*, Ishma Waycaster clearly sees her relationship with nature as secondary to her quest for self-fulfillment; still, she turns to nature for replenishment of her inner self at critical points in the novel. And Ellen Glasgow's Dorinda Oakley, from *Barren Ground*, deliberately develops a relationship with nature in her quest for self-fulfillment. Clearly, something shifted in the culture between the era of Emerson's observations of women's plight and the writing of these novels eighty or so years later.

Fifty years after Emerson's lamentation for their plight, women's assertion of individuality had led to the 1890's phenomenon of the "new woman." Cecilia Tichi, in "Women Writers and the New Woman," describes this woman as "a powerful social-literary figure by the late nineteenth century. She both embodied new values and posed a critical challenge to the existing order" (589). The primary changes Tichi outlines in "new woman" characters are their search for fulfillment through work instead of marriage and their practice of sexual autonomy. Writers who contributed to the phenomenon, Tichi says, "charted the regions of women's lives, regions both without and within the self" (598).
She specifically includes Glasgow among the writers who were affected by the phenomenon and briefly examines Barren Ground's Dorinda within that context, particularly noting Glasgow's revolt against the cultural expectation of female dependence as expressed through Dorinda (603-04).

That writers who "charted the regions of women's lives" might be a fit topic for formal literary criticism did not become an accepted tenet of critical thought until long after our writers mapped out the characters examined here. Consequently, their literary achievements disappeared from the recognized history of twentieth century American literature almost immediately after the authors' deaths. Only recently, with the rebirth of the women's movement more than twenty years ago, have these writers been rediscovered and reexplored. That exploration has been conducted within a framework of feminist criticism, developed in recent decades, which demands a reevaluation of critical criteria applied to women's writing. This criticism has multiple voices, some of which must be mentioned. Mary Eagleton's Feminist Literary Theory: A Reader provides an overview of the problems being explored by feminist critics. Its most helpful chapter, "Finding a Female Tradition" (1-39), is a collection of excerpts from well-known feminist pieces which discuss the various problems inherent in identifying a female literary tradition. Josephine Donovan's Feminist Literary Criticism is a collection of essays advocating the creation of a new type of criticism. Cheri
Register's "American Feminist Literary Criticism: A Bibliographical Introduction" and Marcia Holly's "Consciousness and Authenticity: Toward a Feminist Aesthetic" suggest new standards for critical valuation of a text. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar have published their three-volume history, *No Man's Land: The Place of the Woman Writer in the Twentieth Century*, in which they examine the interplay between social and literary history in the latter half of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and emphasize the ramifications of that interplay for women writers. While no one of these critics' pieces is directly applicable to any of the writers examined here, they cumulatively demand an examination which poses intriguing new questions. What, for instance, does it mean that Roberts compresses years of Ellen's adult, married life into noticeably fewer pages than she gives to the youthful, unencumbered Ellen; could the married woman have a less intriguing internal self to explore? How can Kelley create the strikingly joyful, powerful Judith and then destroy her by degrees after the advent of her maternal role; after motherhood, are some women doomed? Why does Burke engineer the death of Ishma's demanding toddler; is Ishma's adult life worth more than motherhood? Why does Glasgow have Dorinda marry a man who physically repels her; is a sexless marriage superior to the notion of romantic love? Viewed from a feminist perspective, the noteworthy point is
not that the authors provide answers, but that they ask the questions at all. Any criticism of these works that fails to take into account feminist ideology fails to examine significant aspects of the texts. While an Emersonian debt accrues to each author, the debt can only be accounted for through an examination of the author's understanding of women's cultural limitations as elucidated in her text. Each author creates a dynamic, authentic self for her protagonist, and then entwines that self with nature. The result in each case is illuminative because new facets of meaning reveal themselves in Emerson's concepts once they are refracted through the prism of female experience. At the same time, these facets allow us to further appreciate Emerson's ideas by pointing out, beneath the gender-based differences, their obviously accurate descriptions of human behavior.

However, in order to arrive at these new meanings, a feminist approach must be taken to the novels. Toward that end, one critical piece stands out: Elaine Showalter's "Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness," from Writing and Sexual Difference, provides an excellent introduction to the multiple directions feminist literary criticism has taken; Showalter establishes the term "gynocritics" for criticism which focuses on women as writers (14-15). She also advocates the use of a "theory of culture" as a valid approach to women's literature.
She says this theory "incorporates ideas about women's body, language, and psyche but interprets them in relation to the social contexts in which they occur" (27). While the application of this theory would appear to be a simple matter of implementing common sense, a thorough examination of any text using it would require substantially more historical and cultural research than can be attempted here. However, what we can do is, in Showalter's words, "distinguish between the roles, activities, tastes, and behaviors prescribed and considered appropriate for women and those activities, behaviors, and functions actually generated out of women's lives" (28). Notably, a crucial determinant in each novel is the protagonist's self-reliant behavior, which generates her rebellion against social strictures; obviously, such behavior reveals Emerson's influence on the authors. Upon reflection, we can imagine that these writers' use of self-reliance, as well as of Emerson's emphasis on nature as a means of self-connection, would delight Emerson, since it publicly poses questions about women's lives which he himself raised privately.

But why Emerson at all? A case could be made for a purely feminist approach to these novels--surely their rapid slide into obscurity, because it reveals a lack of traditional critical interest, would alone justify consideration of these authors from a new point of view. In other words, if no one has applied "traditional" literary criticism to them, including
an examination of Emersonian influence, why not consider them purely from a feminist perspective? The answer is simple: if we decontextualize these works from the mainstream of literary culture during their era, we cannot fully understand them. Although an examination of the feminist issues these women raise separates them from that mainstream tradition, it enhances our understanding of their place in their own, equally valid, tradition as twentieth century American women writers. However, just as Emerson's influence is seen in mainstream works, so it is found here. An examination of that influence connects these women with the mainstream tradition of their era, where they also rightfully belong.

Sadly, only one critic has treated these novels as a group. Although Sylvia Jenkins Cook fails to uniformly apply feminist critical thought to these works, she does recognize their rarity within the American literary tradition as novels written by women containing portrayals of poor white heroines. In her *From Tobacco Road to Route 66: The Southern Poor White in Fiction*, Cook traces the literary history of the lowland tenant farmers and mountain dwellers who comprise "poor whites," and gives significant treatment within that tradition to each of the novels discussed here. Of *The Time of Man*, she notes Roberts' ability to illumine Ellen's "exceptional" consciousness so that it "intensifies her responses to the world around her and [so she] thrives
on all the accidents of existence" (24). Cook offers a successful interpretation of Kelley's Judith in *Weeds*, and touches on the underlying feminism of the work when she writes of her:

Her sex, her imagination, and her love of beauty are all qualities which in her world foredoom her to failure, since that world is circumscribed by the ugly, ill-smelling sharecropper's cabin and the duties of wife and mother, in which she takes no joy and for which she had no natural aptitude. (21)

Of Glasgow's Dorinda in *Barren Ground*, Cook accurately notes that she is "not sustained by the beauty or the permanence or even the provender of nature but by its incessant demands on her mind and body; it is a sublimation that she willfully forces to suffice after the failure of religion and love" (25).

For Burke's *Call Home the Heart*, Cook notes the feminist questions Burke raises. In her Critical Afterword to the 1983 edition of the novel, she also examines Burke's feminism, particularly the issue of the conflicting demands between female nurturance and human fulfillment as delineated through Ishma's daughter, Vennie. The child's physical demands, Cook points out, entirely thwart Ishma's potential accomplishments, and her accidental death represents a release from confinement for her mother (456). Within this context Cook says
that Burke's plotting is consistent "with the Emersonian refusal of the novel to accept any conventional obligations without first examining their worthiness" (456). It is from that remark that this exploration is generated.

However, before any discussion of the two Emersonian pieces to be applied to these novels can progress meaningfully, a brief examination of the work that has been done which touches on women writers' use of nature is necessary. Ellen Moers contributes to this discussion via her chapter on women's metaphors in Literary Women, particularly in her comments on bird imagery and women's treatment of landscape. However, none of the authors discussed here uses bird metaphors as Moers delineates them, and their landscape descriptions bear only superficial resemblances to Moers' description of landscapes that are "good for women . . . open lands, harsh and upswelling, high-lying and undulating, vegetated with crimped heather or windswept grasses, cut with ravines and declivities and twisting lanes" (262). Annette Kolodny explores the American culture's relationship with nature in The Lay of the Land: Metaphor as Experience and History in American Life and Letters. She recognizes the American cultural experience of the land as metaphorically female, in maternal and virginal senses, and finds that metaphor historically present in American thought and, consequently, art. She identifies the need to join passively with the
land-as-mother, as well as to capture actively the land-as-virgin, as the central conflict comprising the heart of the American pastoral impulse. She notes that Emerson understood the American need to experience the land maternally, since he equates "infancy" with the "return to paradise" (154) in Nature. Although Kolodny's theory is generally sound, she unfortunately oversimplifies and decontextualizes Emerson's remarks. He states:

The lover of nature is he whose inward and outward sens[es] are still truly adjusted to each other; who has retained [sic] the spirit of infancy into the era of manhood. . . . In the woods too, a man casts off his years, as the snake his slough, and at what period soever of life, is always a child. In the woods, is perpetual youth. (Nature 826-27)

Emerson recognizes and advocates a return to innocence, not infancy, here. The innocent delight of a child, stripped of adult sophistication and cynicism, allows a "return to reason and faith" which, in turn, allows "[t]he currents of the Universal Being [to] circulate" through an individual, which, in turn, leads to transcendence: "I am part or particle of God" (827). While Emerson's subliminal impulse may indeed be toward the maternity of nature, his stated
interest is in the integration of the adult self with nature via childlike innocence, not in returning to the refuge of a womblike paradise; to imply otherwise is to disregard his text.

While both Moers and Kolodny provide interesting insights, neither of them sufficiently explores women writers' use of nature. For that, Annis Pratt's "Women and Nature in Modern Fiction" offers significant help. In order to understand Emerson's influence on the novels examined here, we must recognize the writers' departures from, as well as their adherences to, Emersonian thought. Pratt's work with nature ultimately leads her to address this issue. Pratt begins by comparing treatments of nature in male and female Bildungsromans. She points out that male protagonists experience women as a part of nature, a subordinate part of the world over which they dominate, while female protagonists experience men as separate from nature, which leaves them free to develop a separate relationship with it (479-80). She also claims that women in male works represent phases that must be passed through on the quest for identity, while "there are heroines enough in the female genre who perceive love and men as phases in their quest for self-determination and less important to them than the 'reality' of nature" (483). She goes on to delineate characteristics of female protagonists' relationships with nature; she draws from Sarah Orne Jewett,
among others, when she refers to examples of characters who experience epiphanic moments in nature as young girls and, consequently, come to know the self as not particularly bound by romantic biological destiny (480-81). They also develop intimate relationships with nature in which nature exists in its own right rather than as a vehicle for transcendence (482). She points out that the youthful, naturistic epiphanies provide an experience of the self which "becomes a touchstone by which [the protagonist] holds herself together in the face of destructive roles proffered to her by society" (488).

Pratt then specifically discusses women's use of nature for transcendence:

In this naturism she does not grow backwards, as it were, to some childhood nostalgia about fields and flowers . . . [t]here is an elision from naturism into something that it contains, a spirit indwelling in the natural object but part of a continuum extending through and beyond it. The natural object does not, however, "point" from what is below to some metaphysical "above" in Joyce's manner; Jewett's pointed firs, for example, indicate less of an overspirit than an underspirit, an immanence . . . [T]he immanence
sought by the heroine of the female
Bildungsroman, although an attribute of
the biological or vegetal cycle of
existence, carries her through its restric-
tions toward its opposite, a transcendence.
This "transcendental naturism," as I have
termed it, differs from transcendentalism
in that it tends to be more particularistic
than systematic, more existential than
essential. It is less capable of abstrac-
tion than transcendentalism into a Goethian
idealism or practical scheme of economics
like the philosophies of Emerson and
Thoreau. (489)

If it is "particularistic" and "existential" rather than
"systematic" and "essential," then it is an accurate
reflection of the reality of women's lives: people who
are incapable of the self-imposed isolation requisite for
Emersonian transcendence, whose lives are inextricably
entwined with others, cannot indulge in the habitual
mental discipline which Emersonian transcendence requires.
Distraction, in the forms of maternal function and wifely
duty, penetrates even the most focussed of women; in this
sense, our authors write from female realism. The best
that can be had is what Pratt delineates: the moment alone,
cut away from the demands of life, in which the authentic self experiences brief connection with the spirit intuited through nature. An adolescent Ellen Chesser shouts, "Here I am!" to an empty field; a bitter, enraged Judith Pippinger finds peace in the bleakness of a winter horizon; a disillusioned Ishma Waycaster releases her spirit to soar in the brilliance of a forest fire; and a mature, deliberate Dorinda Oakley intuits her land as her "permanent self." Each of these characters seizes a moment with nature to connect with her authentic self; each can take only a moment because of the demands of her daily life. None has the luxury of contemplative time or the freedom of extended solitude in which to connect with her authentic self; all must fight cultural constrictions to keep that self alive.

These protagonists' inner selves are at least nurtured, and in Ellen Chesser's case outright formed, by the natural world in which they work. While human interaction constrains them into limiting roles, the very land they walk and work allows these women characters to expand their inner resources, so that, through working with nature, they are better able to deal with the constrictions forced upon them. This entwining of nature and the self via work creates the crux of Emersonian influence in each novel. Ellen Chesser's self forms as she experiences nature, and crucial moments of self-realization occur while she works on the land. Judith
Pippinger is instinctively attuned with the outdoor world as a child and thrives on outdoor work; when maternity makes her housebound and unable to work with land and animals, her inner self begins to deteriorate and ultimately dissolves. Ishma Waycaster is schooled as a child in nature-as-nurturer; as an adult, she initially works the land for fulfillment, and only after her dreams fail does she turn to communist ideology. Dorinda Oakley deliberately pursues a work-based relationship with nature that finally fuses her inner self with the land. Thus, each woman character's dealings with the land resound strongly the Emersonian advice to "[d]o your work, and you shall reinforce yourself" ("Self-Reliance" 893).

Because these protagonists' lives demand that they work the land in order to survive, the novels they inhabit form a significant group in which to examine Emersonian influence during the first decades of the twentieth century. These women's rarity is their status as poor white female heroic protagonists; this same status requires each of them to form a working relationship with nature. Thus, we can trace Emerson's influence into a world very different from the one in which he conceived his works; in this world, we find not so much a clear Emersonian influence as we hear echoes of Emersonian concepts resounding through a markedly different environment. To state the obvious, the cultural sophistication of mid-nineteenth century New England, as well as
Emerson's financial freedom via inheritance, creates a strong contrast to the barely-literate ignorance of poor whites who subsist on cyclically depleted land. Notably, the first law in these poor white women's worlds is that they bow their will to the land so that, in good harvest or lean times, they understand that nature controls their fates. Although they may rebel against social constraints, they cannot rebel against nature and must accept her beauty or her barrenness as she chooses. This subservience to sometimes capricious natural forces runs contrary to the benevolent spirit which Emerson optimistically describes in his chapter on "Commodity" in *Nature*:

> Nature, in its ministry to man, is not only the material, but is also the process and the result. All the parts incessantly work into each other's hands for the profit of man. The wind sows the seed; the sun evaporates the sea; the wind blows the vapor to the field; the ice, on the other side of the planet, condenses rain on this; the rain feeds the plant; the plant feeds the animal; and thus the endless circulations of the divine charity nourish man. (828)

The benevolence with which Emerson imbues "the divine charity"
of nature is not always present for our characters. For Ellen Chesser and Judith Pippinger, periodic uprootings of home and family must occur because of soil depletion; for Ishma Waycaster, the determination to clear and plant unused farmland in soybeans ends when first cows and then a forest fire ravage her crop; for Dorinda Oakley, economic success at farming entails years of struggle against cyclical poor weather and spoiled crops.

Just as Emerson's notion of nature's benevolent commodity is transfigured into the real world of poor white women by these authors, so are a number of his other ideas from *Nature*. But before they can be properly discussed, a brief discussion of some aspects of that essay is relevant. Its major assertion is that both nature and humankind, which mirror each other when properly aligned, are manifestations of the universal spirit. Thus, a natural phenomenon gives meaning to a human emotional or spiritual state, as the human state gives meaning to the natural "fact." When the union of human response and natural fact is approached as a discipline and striven for, the eventual result is transcendence, i.e., the changing of one's life via the perception of one's union with spirit. Additionally, Emerson states that nature is a discipline to be sought on two levels: first, it teaches us to use our faculties to structure our world, and second, our examination of its changing face leads to our awareness of the universal spirit behind all
physical phenomena. For present purposes, we must also take note of Emerson's belief that nature can be benevolently dominated by humankind: "More and more, with every thought, does his kingdom stretch over things, until the world becomes, at last, only a realized will,—the double of the man" (Nature 841). All of our protagonists must attempt such benevolent domination in order to survive. While only Dorinda Oakley meaningfully changes the land she owns, Ellen Chesser, Judith Pippinger, and Ishma Waycaster exert their will over their land at the level of minimum survival, albeit with varying results. However, all four protagonists' interactions with nature manifest more than this relatively simple concept. To some degree, each character responds to the beauty of the land around her. Emerson says, "[T]he primary forms, as the sky, the mountain, the tree, the animal, give us a delight in and for themselves; a pleasure arising from outline, color, motion, and grouping" (Nature 829). While Emerson's education in aesthetics was undoubtedly greater than any of our protagonists', and colored his thought accordingly, each of the women characters appreciates natural beauty: Ellen Chesser's most powerful realization of her inner self occurs in a specifically detailed scene of physical beauty; Judith Pippinger's fondest memory is of shadows cast by a full moon on a fall night; Ishma Waycaster pauses before beginning work to watch the dawn unfold; and
Dorinda Oakley's response to physical beauty is so acute that she flees it for much of her adult life. Additionally, all of these women experience nature as physically restorative, which echoes another of Emerson's ideas about natural beauty: "To the body and mind which have been cramped by noxious work or company, nature is medicinal and restores their tone" (Nature 830). Ellen Chesser returns to the scene of her powerful self-realization when rejected by a suitor; Judith Pippinger, stressed and confined to her house by motherhood, finds patience with her children after working in her garden; Ishma Waycaster walks for miles on Sundays to sit by a mountain waterfall and replenish her inner self; and Dorinda Oakley, when traumatized by a lover's betrayal, finds calm in the delicate play of leaves against her face.

But these Emersonian notions regarding nature's beauty are hardly his most complex. More difficult to understand, but for our purposes, more fascinating, are his ideas about nature's emblematic power, particularly as they affect the descriptions of key natural scenes in our texts. As previously noted, the use of imagery which reveals an individual's response to nature was a relatively new literary phenomenon in Emerson's day. His understanding of the phenomenon shows in his clear, eloquent description of the human response to nature:

For, nature is not always tricked in
holiday attire, but the same scene
which yesterday breathed perfume and
glittered as for the frolic of the
nymphs, is overspread with melancholy
today. Nature always wears the colors
of the spirit. (Nature 827-28)

With relatively few words, he both encapsulates a significant facet of the human experience of nature, and reinforces the legitimacy of the use of nature imagery as an authorial method for depicting human emotional response. In fact, Emerson so clearly illuminated this facet of our response to nature that this concept echoes through much literature that uses natural settings, including the novels examined here. But our writers, in some cases, take their use of nature imagery a step further, and so echo Emerson's concept of nature's emblematic power. In his chapter entitled "Language," he establishes the roots of language in nature: "Every word which is used to express a moral or intellectual fact, if traced to its root, is found to be borrowed from some material appearance" (834). Then he connects the emblematism of words and objects with the spiritual realm:

It is not only words that are emblematic;
it is things which are emblematic. Every natural fact is a symbol of some spiritual fact. Every appearance in nature corresponds to some state of the mind, and that
state of the mind can only be described by presenting that natural appearance as its picture. An enraged man is a lion, a cunning man is a fox, a firm man is a rock, a learned man is a torch. A lamb is innocence; a snake is subtle spite; flowers express to us the delicate affections. (834)

From this passage we can begin to glean the opportunity for a reciprocal relationship between natural phenomena and human experience as it creates an emblem, or symbol, in literature. Just as nature forms an emblem of the spiritual world, so the spirit of the universe sends energy and/or information back through nature, and so a specific natural scene can inform a character or foretell a piece of fate to the reader. Emerson understood this intuitively: "[a]n enraged man is a lion" is a two-way image which, by invoking a phenomenon found in nature, both forms and clarifies meaning for a human phenomenon. Emerson's ability to understand and clearly express this connection makes an astonishing gift to the study of literature: although literary symbolism based on the human response to nature would have occurred in any event, he gave it philosophical underpinnings which lent legitimacy to the new phenomenon. In other words, Emerson created a methodology to apply to
literature involving nature, based on the authenticity of human response.

Several generations later, our authors echo this concept in their use, at crucial points, of nature as emblematic, or symbolic, of their characters' plights. As the young Ellen grows into maturity, Roberts consciously elevates her to mythic status in a detailed scene emphasizing her connection to nature, in which Ellen becomes "the dispensing spirit of the swine" (124). That Roberts imbues Ellen with mythic status as she approaches adulthood allows us to view Ellen as an everywoman and indicates that Roberts is writing an oblique commentary on all women's plights in the succeeding events of the novel. On a night when Judith Pippinger lies sleepless after recognizing her family's inevitably dismal fate, Kelley creates a scene in which a "ghostlike dawn" finds Judith, her husband, and her baby "lying . . . like corpses" (281). The futility of Judith's fight to preserve her self is obvious here, as well as a symbolic foreshadowing of her spiritual death, which proceeds rapidly from this point forward in the novel. Ishma Waycaster deliberately seeks a merger with nature in the form of a forest fire after her dreams of fulfillment through love and meaningful work have been abandoned. She loses her inner self into the fire, achieving momentary transcendence into a natural phenomenon of incredible beauty and incredible
destruction. When Dorinda Oakley takes up her father's emo-
tional legacy and deliberately begins a work-based relation-
ship with the land, she stamps an image of the solitary pine
tree she associates with him on her dairy products. In doing
so, she identifies her work on the farm as a covenant of
endurance with the land, a promise to give her self to it.
In all these instances, use of symbolic natural imagery is
reminiscent of Emerson's notion that natural objects are
emblematic of the universal spirit in the sense that, in
specific cases, the objects accrue meaning from the larger
contexts of the characters' lives. If we understand that
each of these novels contains a feminist critique of the
patriarchal structure within which each protagonist strug-
gles, then the emblems the authors construct offer a conduit
of meaning for these critiques. Ellen as Everywoman comments
on all women's lives; the personified "ghostlike dawn"
channels information about Judith's fate in her constricted
culture; Ishma's cleansing merger with the fire occurs only
after a dichotomization of love and work as routes to ful-
fillment fails; Dorinda's identification with the pine indi-
cates a positive valuation for work as a means of fulfillment.
The critiques inherent in these emblems focus our attention
on our authors' awareness of women's cultural constrictions;
as such, they stand for a larger, unseen world beyond the confines
of individual characters and plots. In their use of natural
emblems as conduits of meaning, then, these authors echo Emerson's idea of nature as a conduit to the world of spirit.

The critique which each author incorporates into her protagonist's story gains weight from the capacity for heroism found in each protagonist's personality. At some point in each novel, each protagonist performs an act requiring extraordinary courage: Ellen Chesser saves her husband from death by walking into a circle of men who whip him; the child Judith Pippinger rescues a kitten from torture by threatening to "cut" the perpetrators with a kitchen knife; Ishma Waycaster saves a black union worker from lynching by confronting the gun-armed men who have kidnapped him; and Dorinda Oakley overturns virtually every role restriction in her culture to return life to her family farm. These acts are reminiscent of Emerson's belief that human heroic action is the highest manifestation of the universal spirit found in all nature as he expresses it in the chapter of Nature entitled "Discipline." After establishing that the universal spirit is present in all natural forms, Emerson establishes humankind's position as the highest form of natural reality and, therefore, the one through which the universal spirit speaks via words and, more perfectly, via actions. "A right action," Emerson says, "seems to fill the eye, and to be related to all nature" (Nature 843). Earlier in the essay, he states it more poetically: "In private places, among sordid objects, an act of truth or heroism seems at once to draw to itself
the sky as its temple, the sun as its candle" (832). Since each of these characters develops an important relationship with her natural world, her courageous action not only echoes Emerson's concept of heroic action as a manifestation of the universal spirit, but also underscores her alignment with nature.

In addition to these echoes of Nature, each author inadvertently addresses some of the concepts Emerson presents in "Self-Reliance." Each gives her protagonist the innate capacity to act according to Emerson's simply-stated definition of what he perceives to be a universal capability: "Trust thyself: every heart vibrates to that iron string" (890). Yet each author creates situations in which her protagonist struggles with the primary barrier to self-reliance—the cultural expectations of women. A brief examination of Emerson's text will further illuminate our authors' use of self-reliance. Emerson sets forth specific limitations on human interaction, advocating "isolation" that is "spiritual" and leads to "elevation" ("Self-Reliance" 901). He contends that enmeshment in family affairs discourages this necessary isolation and, thus, advocates against it: "Why should we assume the faults of our friend, our wife, or father, or child, because they sit around our hearth, or are said to have the same blood?" ("Self-Reliance" 901). Obviously, as Emerson himself acknowledged in his journals, the social
demands placed on women require that they assume at least the welfare, if not the faults, of their families, and thus forego any opportunities for sustained experiences of transcendence. Because these characters rebel, to a greater or lesser degree, against the social strictures placed on them, their experience echoes another statement from "Self-Reliance": "For non-conformity the world whips you with its displeasure" (894). Furthermore, these characters' self-reliance is formed to some degree by their environment, but is primarily innate in their personalities. At their best, they embody Emerson's eloquent definition of instinctive self-reliance:

No law can be sacred to me but that of my nature. Good and bad are but names readily transferable to that or this; the only right is what is after my constitution, the only wrong what is against it. (892)

Additionally, that each of these protagonists necessarily works the land to survive, and in the process forms a relationship with nature which in some way feeds her inner self, echoes yet another of Emerson's statements from "Self-Reliance": "Do your work, and you shall reinforce yourself" (893). Their relationships with nature form, to varying degrees, the primary route of connection these women find with their inner selves, since cultural role expectations
require them to focus on others. The tension between their innate self-reliance and the culturally expected roles they must assume forms the wellspring of dramatic tension in each novel, as well as the basis for the feminist cultural critique found in each work.

In point of fact, the persistent conflict between self and others limits these characters' abilities to transcend reality. Emerson gives us a specific portrait of the transcendent moment:

Standing on the bare ground,—my head bathed by the blithe air, and uplifted into infinite space,—all mean egotism vanishes. I become a transparent eyeball. I am nothing. I see all. The currents of the Universal Being circulate through me; I am part or particle of God. (Nature 827)

The contemplative stilling of the inner self which this transcendence requires is, quite simply, impossible to achieve for our protagonists. These women cannot ignore the cooking, the washing, the feeding of families, in order to experience elevation. The best they can hope for is emotional fulfillment through other means, perhaps through human love, perhaps through loving the soil they work. The search for emotional fulfillment formulates the journey
each woman takes in these works. By one means or another, each woman grapples with the same basic issue: how does the self find fulfillment when social conventions inhibit freedom and lead, instead, to disillusionment? This is the whispered question at the heart of each book, buried beneath the machinations of the plot, and murmuring Emersonian echoes. Although the question is spoken aloud now, some seventy years after these women wrote, their quiet answers form a wise legacy from which all women can learn.

Note: In the individual chapter on each novel, all page references are to the edition cited in the bibliography; after the initial reference to each, the author's name is not cited again except where clarity requires it.
Nature Forms the Self:
Elizabeth Madox Roberts' The Time of Man

Elizabeth Madox Roberts was born in 1881 in Kentucky, where she lived most of her life (McDowell 17). She learned a good deal about the poor whites of Kentucky, particularly when she taught in and around Springfield in her youth (McDowell 24). She attended the University of Chicago beginning in 1917, when she was thirty-six years old, and graduated at forty with honors and membership in Phi Beta Kappa (McDowell 17). Her academic work stimulated her to begin writing poetry seriously, and her first book of verse was published in 1922, the year after her graduation (McDowell 17). That same year she began work on The Time of Man, which was published in 1926 to great critical acclaim, particularly noted for its beautifully poetic style (McDowell 26). She went on to publish six more novels as well as books of poetry and short stories, despite chronically poor health which culminated in her death at age fifty-nine (McDowell 17-19). During her lifetime she achieved a substantial literary reputation, which was validated by her election to the National Institute of Arts and Letters in 1940, the year before her death (McDowell 18-19). Unfortunately, that reputation has faded so that today she is not well known in academic circles and virtually unknown else-
where; this represents a surprising development, since her fiction often focuses on her protagonists' inner lives, as does so much of modern fiction.

Roberts' ability to depict psychologically formative moments in her first protagonist's inner life is so extraordinary that she is able to sustain book-length interest in an unlikely subject, the daughter of an itinerant, poor, white farm couple. Ellen Chesser, as an only child, spends most of her time alone and a great deal of it outdoors. Much of the novel's plot concerns her growth to maturity in nature; indeed, by the time Ellen reaches marriageable age and begins sustained peer interaction, her core self has been firmly established through her interactions with nature, and her positive self image sustains her through the everyday trials and greater tragedies that happen in a poor white woman's life. The events of the novel are relatively few and usually commonplace--the lonely child runs in a field with a colt; she instinctively calls out to a living, breathing, but quite empty field; as a young woman, she walks home from a dance and observes the stars; she is jilted by a young man and, later, marries another. Once she is married, her inner life slowly submerges beneath her concerns for her family, as she trades the sustained connection she developed with nature for human connection. Still, she experiences moments of connection with herself and, occasionally, with nature.
Importantly, Roberts portrays Ellen's growth to maturity with a strong emphasis on apparently ordinary moments powerfully experienced by the character's sensitive self. A fascination with such moments informed much of her work. Robert Penn Warren, one of her admiring critics, accesses her unpublished journal in an article to illustrate this point:

Somewhere there is a connection between the world of the mind and the outer order—it is the secret of the contact that we are after, the point, the moment of union. We faintly sense the one and we know as faintly the other, but there is a point where they come together, and we can never know the whole of reality until we have these two completely. (38)

Roberts' "moment of union" carries a distinctly Emersonian ring. "The lover of nature," Emerson says, "is he whose inward and outward sen[s]es are still truly adjusted to each other; who has retained (sic) the spirit of infancy . . ." (Nature 826). Roberts' search for inner and outer connection—"the world of the mind and the outer order"—clearly echoes Emerson, as does her emphasis on Ellen's years of childhood, a time when the character possesses, if not quite "the spirit
of infancy," then at least the spirit of youth. No available critic has yet explored the degree of Emersonian influence found in The Time of Man; while not overt, Roberts' Emersonian debt is strong, particularly in her use of "moments of union" throughout the novel. These moments, especially the ones which occur in nature, illustrate Roberts' use of nature as the primary tool for Ellen's self formation. The only critic who has even cursorily linked Roberts and Emerson is Sylvia J. Cook, who notes that Roberts' focus on Ellen's discerning consciousness, particularly on her perceptions of nature, provides a beautifully realized example of what Cook calls, "the tradition of Emersonian optimism in celebrating the life of the mind . . ." (Critical Afterword 461). However, Roberts' Emersonian influence is much greater than Cook suggests, and clearly worthy of exploration. Emerson's emphasis on "the life of the mind" obviously informs Roberts' text: it is through Ellen's mind, at conscious and semi-conscious levels, that we find a relationship with nature of such intensity that, as she grows, she learns to merge with her natural surroundings. Roberts uses nature as a tool for Ellen's growth; furthermore, by using nature as the primary tool for the formation of Ellen's core self, Roberts also uses nature to form her character's self-reliance.

However, the degree of Ellen's self-reliance is substantially less than the other characters presented here.
Ellen is by far the most conventional and, thus, the most easily satisfied of our protagonists. While she certainly knows hardship and emotional pain, she accepts these experiences rather than rebelling against them. In fact, among our characters, she possesses the least developed feminist sensibility. Nonetheless, examining her story through the lens of feminist criticism provides an enlightening view of Roberts' work: after forming Ellen's self via her relationship with nature, Roberts fashions Ellen into a kind of Everywoman just as she reaches marriageable age, and so provides an oblique commentary on cultural expectations for women in the succeeding events of Ellen's life.

But long before Roberts enhances her character with a mythic dimension, she provides a great deal of information about the process of Ellen's individuation, by focusing almost exclusively on Ellen's consciousness. Indeed, most of our information about Ellen's world comes directly through her mind, so that the novel lends itself well to psychological interpretation. Two critics, Nancy Carol Joyner and Anne K. McBride, apply Bachelardian theory to Ellen's world, and in the process explicate Roberts' use of indoor space in houses, as well as of dreams, to elucidate Ellen's maturation process. Although both these scholars make compelling cases for Bachelardian interpretation, neither explores the setting in which Ellen most frequently grows, the world of nature. By
looking closely at her developmental moments in nature, which are among the most compelling moments in the novel, we find that Ellen's resoundingly Emersonian relationship with nature is the single most important tool for her self formation. Furthermore, once that self is formed; its strength sustains Ellen through hardship; even after it submerges beneath the other-focused roles marriage demands, it remains strong, as is evident when Ellen performs an Emersonian "natural act" of heroism at the novel's climax.

Of course, the obvious meaning of Ellen's status as a member of the poor white class is that she works the land to survive, so that Emerson's comments about the simple commodity of nature, previously discussed, are transfigured in Roberts' text, as in all the texts discussed here. But Roberts' descriptions of Ellen's farmwork barely scratch the surface of her full relationship with nature. For one thing, as a child, Ellen is capable of rejoicing in nature, as Emerson says is necessary to fully experience it:

To speak truly, few adult persons can see nature. Most persons do not see the sun. At least they have a very superficial seeing. The sun illuminates only the eye of the man, but shines into the eye and the heart of the child. The lover of nature is he . . . [for whom] a wild delight runs through . . . in spite of real sorrows. (Nature 826-27)
Emerson's emphasis here is on childlike innocence as a prerequisite for the proper understanding of nature. While Ellen is a child when we meet her and possesses this innocence, she also has a capacity to experience nature joyfully, as we see in the following passage in which she meets a colt on a Sunday afternoon walk:

She was walking down the upper pasture, bending back and stepping high, her feet cringing at the hot stones but her body setting them down without heed or mercy. She played a short while with one of the colts in the enclosure, making friends with him easily, for she knew the ways of horses. She knew why he kicked up his heels and ran a little way, and she knew what his soft muzzle meant in her hand and what his soft biting lips and his tossing forelock. She kissed his forehead with her forehead, pushing hard. She ran with him down the pasture, screaming and jeering a wild man-animal talk, forgetting her fear of fences which enclosed land. When she remembered and went back to the brush, the colt followed her there. (Roberts, *The Time of Man* 12)
Her parade to the colt's pasture, "bending back and stepping high," reveals a comfortable assertion of her presence on her surroundings. Her bonding with the colt is instinctive and her delight in him so strong that she forgets "her fear of fences," the symbols of ownership which bar her from sections of her natural world.

Emerson's description of people who can learn to experience nature properly echoes in Ellen's meeting with the colt, but is not the only echo found in this passage. Her "wild man-animal talk" indicates her ability to invent language to communicate with elements in nature, and thus sounds an echo of Emerson's discussion of the origin of language. He says, "Words are signs of natural facts" (Nature 834), and goes on to explain that the roots of our language are in physical nature. He also notes that children's language sometimes retains a strong connection to the physical world. In Ellen's language we hear her attempt to connect with an animal, a creature more familiar to her than people, to ease her loneliness; her success comes from her "wild man-animal talk." This connection via language with nature is more profoundly demonstrated a little later during that same afternoon when Ellen sits by a creek contemplating the theft of an egg:

Presently a snake came out from under a white rock, making a sigh in a tuft
of water grass. It went off downstream, flowing more quickly than the water. Your hand would hardly know when it happened, she thought, and then the egg would be running down your throat. She watched the gray water bugs walking in the sandy mud under the still pool. They floated more than they walked and they made faint trails in the slime. Where the water ran over a stone it made a low purring sound like children talking far off, like children saying

I found one.

I found one too.

Look at mine! (13)

The snake's quickly gliding body obviously reminds Ellen of her hand's ability to quickly dart into a hen's nest for an egg. Thus, a natural phenomenon suggests an image to her mind, in a clear echo of an Emersonian statement:

A man conversing in earnest, if he watch his intellectual processes, will find that always a material image, more or less luminous, arises in his mind, cotemporaneous (sic) with every thought, which furnishes the
vestment of the thought. (Nature 836)

Although Emerson goes on to link this process with "brilliant discourse" (Nature 836), Roberts echoes it in the creation of a moment of psychological reality for her protagonist. She continues echoing Emerson in her method when she has Ellen make up words to fit the running water. Ellen's fitting of "language" to the sound she hears reveals her attempt to connect with it, in the same way her "wild man-animal talk" had connected her with the colt. Emerson's assertion that "[t]he use of the outer creation is to give us language for the beings and changes of the inward creation" (Nature 834) resounds strongly here, as the water suggests words to Ellen which she assigns to humans, for whom she yearns.

Some critical attention has been paid to Ellen's use of language. The character's strong yearning for connection is recognized in Linda Tate's "Against the Chaos of the World: Language and Consciousness in Elizabeth Madox Roberts's The Time of Man." Tate provides an interesting analysis of Ellen's use of names, and of various types of conversations in which she participates, to track Ellen's developmental process via her growth in language. However, Tate does not deal with Ellen's relationship with nature, in which so much of the character's growth occurs. Stephen Bernstein, in "Comprehension, Composition, and Closure in Elizabeth Madox Roberts's The Time of Man," focuses on Ellen's comprehension
and composition in their broadest senses, as her means of ordering her world, rather than on the specifics of language as a tool for growth. Like Tate, Bernstein focuses on Ellen's interactions with people rather than on her relationship with nature, even though he recognizes the developmental primacy of that relationship:

But for Ellen the landscape will increasingly be the only education she knows, a point hammered home by Roberts's projected six-part form for the novel, excerpted below:

I. A Genesis. She comes into the land, but the land rejects her ...

II. She grows into the land, takes soil or root ...

III. Expands with all the land.

IV. The first blooming.

V. Withdrawal—and sinking back into the earth.

VI. Flowering out of stone. (23-24)

As Roberts' outline reveals, the formation of Ellen's self intentionally occurs in nature. The author uses what Frederick P. W. McDowell in Elizabeth Madox Roberts labels as "[t]he subjective approach to nature--the assimilation of natural phenomena by the mind before their objective
existence can be established" (24) to create both the setting and the means for the character's growth. McDowell briefly links this approach to "the transcendentalism of nineteenth-century nature poets" (24), but goes no further. An exploration of Emerson's impact on the work appears sensible, especially since it was begun just the year after Roberts completed college, where we may assume she read Emerson. Certainly, his comments on the spirit present in nature are echoed in Ellen's developmental process; he says, "[B]ehind nature, throughout nature, spirit is present; that spirit is one and not compound; that spirit does not act upon us from without, that is, in space and time, but spiritually, or through ourselves" (Nature 852). For Ellen, who cannot find the human connection she seeks, the growth process becomes entwined with nature, and the spirit of nature becomes, for her, an animated force with whom she develops a reciprocal relationship.

Within weeks of her assignment of language to flowing water, she begins to experience nature as intensely alive, so alive that she hears plants speak:

In a few days the corn had slim grass-like leaves that bent in the sun and waved lightly, and she thought that she could see how much the plants grew from one day to the next. She ran to the gar-
den eagerly each day to watch for
the changes, and her pleasure in the
growth of the corn was very real. The
beans in their rows seemed to be a crea-
ture, one, brooding in stillness in
all hours of the day and growing rank
and full and lush in a few weeks. They
said, "I'll be you; you wait and see. . . ."
The tomato vines with their strong sour
odors coming from leaves and stem cut
into her skin. She felt them before she
came near them for they were strong and
piercing. They laughed, big bold rank
things, ugly and jeering and strong.
She strutted and jeered when she came into
the tomato patch, her head jerking to one
side: "You sting my skin. You think I'm
trash. You lied, you lied, you lied!" (23-24)

Obviously, Ellen animates the garden plants. She assigns
them personalities—"brooding" beans and "jeering" tomatoes—
and understands their "speech"; this assignment of human
traits to plants reveals the intensity of her relationship
with nature. Notably, she imbues the tomatoes with a negative
myth about her class and uses them to refute the myth about
her individual self; thus, she uses the plants to define a
particular part of herself. This act reveals the reciprocal quality in her relationship with nature, as she projects human characteristics onto natural phenomena and then defines herself in terms of these characteristics.

Ellen's self grows rapidly during this period of her life; her intense connection with nature both causes and mirrors her growth, but it is not satisfying. She still yearns for human connection, for an end to loneliness, and cannot find it. Consequently, she decides on one of the few actions in her life which is outside social convention: she decides to leave home in search of Tessie, the only human with whom she has ever felt connection. Fourteen-year-old Ellen intuitively recognizes Tessie as family; she calls her "my folks" in response to a query from a stranger (54). Her decision to act on her own authority makes her disregard traditional authority: without parental permission, she simply leaves home one night and walks toward town alone. Once she has sent a message to her friend, she willingly returns home with her father when he finds her. To reach her destination, however, Ellen risks her physical safety and endures hunger and cold (43-56). Her inner core, grown strong through her connection with nature, self-reliantly ignores traditional authority and echoes Emerson's assertion that "[n]o law can be sacred to me but that of my nature" ("Self-Reliance" 892). However, her self-authorized decision
rises not from honor, which forms the context for the citation above, but from her yearning for connection. This yearning is again revealed when, as she stands on a river bridge during her journey, she experiences her surroundings:

She stood on the bridge high above the water and watched the stars above and below. There were frogs and crickets singing, and katydids crying their flat notes. The black shadows of the black trees pushed into the water, overlapping. She stood very still at the rail of the bridge, scarcely breathing, leaning lightly on the wooden structure. Her own want was undefined, lying out among the dark trees and their dark images, and she reached for it with a great wish that shook her small body. (49)

Clearly, Ellen's desire for human connection is powerful; additionally, her placement of her "want" within the landscape once again reveals her inner self's connection with nature. Her only tool for self-definition is the world around her, as she demonstrates when she instinctively equates her inner needs with a natural scene.

Ellen's most powerful need is for belonging, for a stronger human connection than she has with her parents,
and for which she intuitively searches among the people she meets. In addition to her search for Tessie, Ellen's search for belonging is further demonstrated in her attempts at conversation with passers-by on the road near her home.

In one of these episodes, her response to nature changes based on her interaction with passers-by; in this incident Roberts uses nature to reflect Ellen's mood. Prior to the passage of a young couple, Ellen has been so connected with nature that she feels its beauty reflected in her own:

She plucked a few clover blossoms and laid them on her skirt, placing them with care. Feeling could not take words, so melted in and merged it was with the flowers of the grass, but if words could have become grass in Ellen's hand: "It's pretty stuff, clover a-growen. And in myself I know I'm lovely. It's unknowen how beautiful I am. I'm Ellen Chesser and I'm lovely." (64-65)

After the couple snub her as they pass, her changed mood is reflected in her experience of her surroundings:

She heard a mockingbird singing in the bushes out toward the lane, singing a futile song which reiterated its uselessness and changed its hollow phrases from
moment to moment. The sound fell
flat upon a flat air.

"That old mock-bird. I wish he'd
shut up," she whispered. (65)

This incident clearly echoes Emerson's notion that our
experience of nature is colored by our mood. In fact,
Ellen's changed response closely resembles the process
he describes:

For, nature is not always tricked in
holiday attire, but the same scene
which yesterday breathed perfume and
glittered as for the frolic of the
nymphs, is overspread with melancholy
today. Nature always wears the colors
of the spirit. (Nature 827-28)

Obviously, rather than taking a full day to change her
response, Ellen takes only moments to do so; the speed of
the change indicates the depth of her longing for human
connection: nature, which has formed her self, is less
beautiful when that self is rejected by humans. Clearly,
then, human connection is preferable to connection with
nature. But this changes, as we see in another passage
in which nature reflects mood. Soon after the episode
above, Ellen travels with her parents to a new farm. Her
sadness at leaving her home lessens as she observes the
land she travels past and listens to the sounds made by the horsedrawn wagon; they make "a gay accompaniment to the clatter of the hoofs and her lips repeated merrier phrases, merry nonsense jargons out of old remembered songs" (71-72). Her natural surroundings cheer her and, eventually, she actively begins to cheer herself. Once again, she creates a language, but this one reaches inside, to comfort herself. A subtle shift has occurred: she works to change her mood because she intuitively understands that no human creature can do this for her; at a subconscious level, she has stopped seeking human connection.

As a result, the new land Ellen works in her new home becomes even more intensely alive for her than the previous land had been; this increased intensity in Ellen's experience both reflects and enlarges the growth of her core self. One passage exemplifies the new level of intensity with which Ellen experiences the land, as well as presaging the inner growth she will experience through it; in it, she carries stones off a new field that her father is clearing:

Wondering and wondering she laid stones on her altar.

"Poppy, where do rocks come from?"

"Why, don't you know? Rocks grow."

"I never see any grow. I never see one a-growen."
"I never see one a-grown neither, but they grow all the same. You pick up all the rocks offen this-here hill and in a year there's as many out again. I lay there'll be a stack to pick up right here again next year."

"I can't seem to think it! Rocks a-grown now! They don't seem alive. They seem dead-like. Maybe they've got another kind of way to be alive." (79)

That rocks grow is obviously untrue; however, Ellen's belief in the fact underscores the intensity that she brings to her experience of anture. Roberts' use of "another kind of way to be alive" suggests the unity of all physical phenomena as exempla or spirit which Emerson describes in Nature: "There seems to be a necessity in spirit to manifest itself in material forms . . . . A Fact is the end or last issue of spirit. The visible creation is the terminus or the circumference of the invisible world" (838). The "fact" of growing rocks in Ellen's world brings nature to life for her, and so allows her to experience it more completely than she has before. With her increased ability to sense the life in her surroundings comes a powerful intuitive experiencing of Ellen's core self, when she returns to the same field:
She gathered stones from the plowed soil and piled them in her neat mound, and the wind continued to blow off the hilltop. She found spotted ladybugs hidden under the leaves and the twigs; they shone out like jewels in the brown and black of the earth. Far away toward MacMurtrie's cedar trees doves were crying, singing on the wing. To the northeast the hills rolled away so far that sight gave out, and still they were fading down into blue hazes and myths of faint trees; delicate trees stood finer than hairlines on a far mythical hill. She piled stone after stone on the mound, carrying each across crumbled earth that the plow and hoe had harried. The rocks fell where she laid them with a faint flat sound, and the afternoon stood very still back of the dove calls and the cries of the plovers, back of a faint dying phrase, "in the time of man." The wind lapped through the sky, swirling lightly now, and again dashing straight down from the sun. She was leaning down over the clods to gather a stone, her shadow making an arched shape on the ground. All at once
she lifted her body and flung up her
head to the great sky that reached over
the hills and shouted:
"Here I am!"
She waited listening.
"I'm Ellen Chesser! I'm here!"
Her voice went up in the wind out of
the plowed land. For a moment she searched
the air with her senses and then she turned
back to the stones again.
"You didn't hear e'er a thing," she
said under her breath. "Did you think you
heared something a-callen?" (80-81)
The sadness of her isolation at the quotation's end is offset
by what has gone before: Ellen's ability to experience
herself at a new, powerful level, while responding to nature's
beauty, reveals a transfiguration of the Emersonian idea of
the union of self and nature yielding transcendence. Here,
Ellen's attendance to nature leads to a new level of self-
recognition, which in turn will lead to a new, higher value
on her individuated self. While barred from Emersonian
transcendence by circumstances of poverty and ignorance,
Ellen can intuitively experience herself as a part of the
life present in nature. This "moment of union" is Roberts'
echo of Emersonian transcendence: Ellen may not be capable
of cultivation of the intellectuality which Emersonian
transcendence presupposes, but she can join intuitively with
all of nature once its spirit of growth is made known to her.

Her strengthened relationship with nature leads her
to perceive her place in it with heightened awareness, as
is clear when she calls turkeys into the farmyard at dusk:

She would take the turkey bread
in her hand and go, bonnetless, up the
gentle hill across the pasture in the light
of sundown, calling the hens as she went.
She was keenly aware of her figure rising
out of the fluttering birds, of all moving
together about her. (87)

We are reminded here of Pratt's descriptions of young girls
who experience epiphanic moments in nature and, consequently,
come to know their inner selves as separate from romantic
biological destiny (478-81). Ellen's consciousness of
herself as the center of the birds, as the influence which
causes their behavior and as a part of them, a "figure
rising out of" them, indicates her awareness of her self
as a separate entity, and gives her a sense of that self
as a part of nature rather than only as a potential wife and
mother. Lacking human interaction which would create a
standard by which to measure her individuality, Ellen increas-
ingly turns to nature for definition of her self. This
process intensifies in the following passage:

She went over a water gap where
a little willow grew, swaying down into
the heart of the willow tree with a sweep
of bent branches. Emerged from that she
walked on gravel and rank creek grass
and frightened the snake doctors away
from a still pool as she pranced quickly
by.

"Not a-goen anywheres, just a-goen . . . ."
She crossed the creek on a sandy bar,
murmuring a little to herself as she
went. "You're spiderwort. You're tansy.
I know you. I'm as good as you. I'm no
trash. I got no lice on me." (91)

Ellen's measurement of herself in relation to the plants
reveals her use of nature as a device for self-definition.
Additionally, her symbolic disappearance into "the heart"
of the tree reveals full merger with nature; although it
is subconscious for Ellen, the merger indicates the further
intensification of her relationship. That it bears positive
results is apparent shortly afterward when Ellen walks through
a cemetery and spies the tombstone of a local judge whose
power and wealth are renowned. She places him in her world
by meticulously reciting all the facts she has been told
about him, and finally comes to the realization that she is
his superior because: "I'm a-liven and he's dead. I'm better. I'm Ellen Chesser and I'm a-liven and [he's] Judge James Bartholomew Gowan, but all the same I'm better. I'm a-liven" (94). Ellen's use of the natural world as a measuring stick for her self-worth allows her to develop a positive self-image. Consequently, despite her membership in one of the lowest social classes, she has learned to value her own existence so highly that she can ignore this man's power and success; she knows herself as his "better" simply because she is alive. Thus, we see her positive self-image growing because of her relationship with nature. Despite the poverty and ignorance which underpin and limit her existence, Ellen has learned to value herself and her life highly.

Once Roberts has given this positive core self using nature, she uses it again to elevate the character to mythic stature just as she reaches marriageable age. In the following passage, Roberts not only merges Ellen with nature, but also gives her symbolic power over it:

Ellen helped Ben make a hot slop for the sows, carrying pails of it up the pasture hill to the pens behind the mule barn. Her head was tied in an old black head-shawl and her feet were in large high overshoes. A faded brown coat, marked by sun and rain and wind, flapped loosely about her. Blown by the wind, the color of
the earth, standing on the rails of the pigpen high above the great sows,—
the dispensing spirit of the swine had risen out of the brown wallow. (124)

Roberts' deliberate emphasis on Ellen's anonymity here, on her blending with the colors of earth and loss of individual shape through carefully selected garments, makes clear that the girl has experienced a change, and is now part of her natural surroundings in a more intimate, although unconscious, way than previously. The words "dispensing spirit of the swine" add a mythical dimension to the character; not only has she fully merged with nature, but she has also been elevated in stature to become a goddesslike creature who represents all women, a kind of Everywoman. This point has been noted before; McDowell says, "[Ellen] is the primordial human being set against the primordial reality of earth. She is ... an Everyman figure: she represents what is most basic in humanity rather than what humanity may, under the best circumstances, achieve" (38). While McDowell's condescension is lamentable, it is minor in comparison to his major misreading of Roberts' text as displayed in his comments on The Time of Man's structure:

If Ellen's inner growth is the most significant aspect of The Time of Man, the framework provided for her destiny by the omnipresent earth gives strength and body
to her ventures. . . . The analysis of Ellen's psyche in the early chapters is, however, too inclusive and minute for our interest in her as a child. Though the book is taut, such formal excellence does not, in all respects, compensate for flatness of subject. There are too many separate, unrelated incidents in the early part of the novel, whereas the most momentous phase of Ellen's life, her marriage to Jasper and her life with their family, is somewhat sketchy. Fifteen years or so of Ellen's career are compressed into the last three chapters . . . . (47)

McDowell's sexism is obvious here. Had he surveyed the text through a lens other than that of patriarchal convention, he would have been unable to conclude that "the most momentous phase of Ellen's life" is her marriage. Roberts' deliberate emphasis on Ellen's early development makes her choice clear: Ellen is fascinating for Roberts while she grows and maintains autonomy; once she is married, Roberts is less interested in the character, as is evident in her dedication of only about one hundred twenty pages, out of nearly four hundred, to Ellen's adult life. Despite the fact that Roberts never married, common sense indicates that she
had seen the result of social acculturation in women around her. Her depiction of a female consciousness like Ellen's, focused on the self and using nature as its tool for and mirror of growth, necessarily had to end as the character reached adulthood. By making Ellen into an Everywoman as she reaches marriageable age, Roberts begins an oblique feminist commentary, which continues in the novel's succeeding events, on the effects of the acculturation process on women. While the author may not have consciously intended this commentary, her text leaves no doubt about her perceptions of women's cultural limitations, as will be seen. However, up to the point of Ellen's surrender of autonomy via marriage, Roberts' focus remains on the character's inner process.

As noted, by the time Ellen has become "the dispensing spirit of the swine," she has also reached marriageable age. As she finally begins to interact with other people, nature provides an important setting: on the way home from a local dance, she walks under a starlit sky with young people she has just met. She observes their formation of couples and groups as they walk; in Roberts' words, Ellen watches them "drifting into forms like those the stars made in the sky. It was here that she felt them become six, herself making part of the forms, herself merged richly with the design" (122). Clearly, Ellen's initial understanding of social interaction
patterns itself after the world of nature she knows so well; immediately, however, she shifts her focus from this world to the human world, seeking the merger that will end her loneliness. However, this attempted merger does not diminish her sense of her core self; rather, it enhances her awareness of that self. At the end of a summer of courtship leading to marriage, and its subsequent social limitations, for many of her friends, Ellen considers herself in relation to them:

Her hair kept its [recently dressed] graceful poise and the ribbon at her throat set a beauty upon her thinking and upon herself. Dorine was gone. It was not the same between them. Rosie was gone. Elmer was gone; he would never come back. They had all been around her, but now they were gone. She had bound a blue ribbon about her throat, about herself. She had thought it would last forever but it was gone from them, whatever it was, but not from her. (195)

What has not gone from her is her strong sense of self. Something as small as a throat ribbon imbues "a beauty upon her thinking and upon herself," and so reveals her connection with her core self. Still, her need to connect with others is powerful, and she has voluntarily merged a portion of
her self with a man whom she has come to love. He leaves her to find work and becomes involved with another young woman. When Ellen hears rumors about it, she plans and carries out a visit to her rival to ascertain the truth (196-200). Subsequently, she decides to visit the young man, even though he works far from her home (203). She violates a major cultural restriction here: she acts directly by seeking out the truth instead of accepting rumors. The cultural expectation for women is passivity, but Ellen chooses action. Furthermore, she chooses self-reliant action, which she demonstrates by discussing her fears and her plans with no one. When she discovers that the young man has married her rival, Ellen is badly shaken. She chides herself, asking, "[H]ow did she, Ellen Chesser, ever come to such a state of need that a person outside herself, some other being, not herself . . . should hold the key to her life and breath in his hand?" (211). She slowly decides to "be what she was before . . . . She would make her breath come quietly in and out, for she was still herself, Ellen Chesser" (219-20). She begins healing by walking through the field where she had so strongly experienced her inner self as she laid her altar of stones (221); in so doing, she echoes one of Emerson's statements from Nature: "To the mind and body which have been cramped by noxious work or company, nature is medicinal and restores their tone" (830). Although Emerson intends, within his context, to comment on the human capacity to relax in nature's
presence and thus be restored, Roberts enlarges nature's medicinal capacity, giving it the ability to heal Ellen's emotional wound. Even as she suffers depression from the loss (222-23), her positive self-image penetrates her dreams as "a sweet quiet voice [which] would arise, leisured and backward-floating, saying with all finality, 'Here I am'" (223), in an echo of that earlier experience in nature. Pratt's comment on the role of the early nature relationship in an adult woman's life applies here:

Communion with the authentic self,
first achieved by the heroine in early naturistic epiphanies, becomes a touchstone by which she holds herself together in the face of destructive roles proffered to her by society. (488)

Obviously, the dream-voice recalls the epiphany at the altar of stones and, deep in Ellen's subconscious, heals the wounded self.

Because that self is very strong, Ellen survives the loss, and assimilates it into her experience of another epiphanic moment in which Roberts most clearly echoes two of Emerson's ideas. She reminds us of his assertion about a change in natural perspective that reveals the stability of the self:

What new thoughts are suggested by seeing a face of country quite familiar,
in the rapid movement of the railroad car! . . . . Turn the eyes upside down, by looking at the landscape through your legs, and how agreeable is the picture, though you have seen it any time these twenty years! . . . [A] low degree of the sublime is felt from the fact, probably, that man is hereby apprized that, whilst the world is a spectacle, something in himself is stable. (Nature 846)

Roberts also echoes his idea that natural phenomena mirror spiritual phenomena: "Every natural fact is a symbol of some spiritual fact" (Nature 834). The incident, which occurs as Ellen drives a cow along the road in the process of relocating with her parents, results in a new awareness for the character of her spiritual self:

The mountains grew more definite as she looked back to them, their shapes coming upon her mind as shapes dimly remembered and recognized, as contours burnt forever and carved forever into memory. With the first recognition of their fixity came a faint recognition of those structures which seemed everlasting and undiminished within herself, recurring memories, feelings, responses, wonder, worship, all gathered into
one final inner motion which might
have been called spirit; this gathered
with another, an acquired structure,
fashioned out of her experience of the
past years, out of her passions and the
marks put upon her by the passions of
others, this structure built up now to
its high maturity. (226-27)

Obviously, Ellen's changing perception of the mountains as
she walks leads her to recognize the "contours burnt forever
and carved forever into memory" which form her inner self.
Her recognition of the mountains' "fixity" enables connection
with her core self, which Roberts labels "spirit." Thus,
Roberts uses newly perceived nature to underscore the
stability of Ellen's self, and allows the physical "fact"
of the mountains to mirror that self's strength and solidity;
in so doing, she clearly echoes Emersonian thought. Addi-
tionally, the new level of awareness which Ellen achieves
here indicates Roberts' deliberate deepening of her charac-
ter's relationship with nature. Ellen can now voluntarily
and consciously merge into nature; her first moment of con-
scious merger occurs during this scene, as she studies the
cow so intently that "[s]he was herself identified with
the beast" (225). In her new home she finds herself unable
to care about her physical appearance because her internal
focus has changed:
Her mind [was] one with the wants of 
the fields, with the beasts and the 
plowed trenches. In the fields she wore 
the faded dresses of the summer before, 
and there, seen distantly, her figure 
blended evenly with the turned soil or 
sank into the corn rows . . . . In the 
pale washed-out dress she drifted all 
morning up and down the lines of the to-
bacco, the tobacco flower come before its 
season, as the pale flower of the tobacco 
come to tend its young. (247-48)

Her merger with nature, overtly stated at the beginning of 
the passage, raises Ellen's relationship with nature to a 
higher level, one in which she semiconsciously identifies 
with it. She also retains the mythic stature of her earlier 
description as "the dispensing spirit of the swine" (124) 
when she becomes "the pale flower of the tobacco"; while 
Roberts' language lacks the overt goddesslike reference 
of the earlier description, Ellen's faded colors and nurtur-
ing activity echo that earlier status.

Once Ellen has attained this combination of maturity 
and mythic status, Roberts presents her with a new suitor; 
this one she meets, not at a social event, but by virtue 
of his proximity on the farm adjacent to hers. This man, 
Jasper, is intended as Ellen's husband, as Roberts makes
clear when she stages their meeting in a natural setting, while Ellen is in a state of merger with nature. At a moment when Ellen has been feeling her previous loss but has forgotten it, when she focuses on hoeing tobacco, when "[h]er body and her mind were of the earth, clodded with the clods," Jasper enters her field and impresses her with his kindness by taking over the harsh work of hoeing (250). Later, they become further acquainted in work settings, and Ellen's eventual realization that she fears losing him occurs as she hoes the family garden:

She dropped the hoe in the patch and went across the two fields, set upon her path by her thought in the garden. She moved across the ground, more quick than any growing thing her feet passed or trampled, and when she left the two fields behind she climbed the stony way beside the quarry cliff and went over the rim of the high pasture where her cow grazed. Jasper was at work in Wingate's field beyond the distant fence, and as she stood at the crest beside the cow, her hand along the animal's shoulder, the land seemed to reach endlessly away, pasture and thin woodland and stone-crowned hills, until the length and width of it cried back at her. The land surrounded
Ellen not only merges with nature here, but is also overwhelmed by its primacy, recognizing the land as "never to be measured" in its power to "obliterate." Significantly, Jasper is included as a part of the scene which causes this experience; importantly, Roberts reveals Jasper's suitability as Ellen's mate by the fact that his proposal of marriage immediately follows this experience. Furthermore, Ellen intuitively understands that she will marry Jasper when a bird sings outside her window the following morning (267). By using these elements of nature, Roberts indicates that Jasper is Ellen's rightful mate, one with whom a strong and largely harmonious union can occur. However, theirs is a traditional marriage; for whatever reason, Roberts does not overtly critique that institution. She chooses, instead, to present a realistic picture of a union which survives various hardships, including Jasper's unwarranted reputation as a barn-burner, his infidelity, and the death of one of their children. At times, Ellen momentarily senses the futility of her wifehood, and especially of her motherhood, but she chooses to remain with Jasper to keep her family intact. Her well developed self, formed in her youthful relationship with nature, provides the strength she needs to survive hardships. Pratt's delineation of the "authentic
self" as the "touchstone by which she holds herself together" (488) is clearly evident in Ellen's married life, as Ellen's self submerges beneath the roles of wife and mother, but is never entirely lost.

Ellen's focus away from herself and toward others begins its shift soon after she accepts Jasper's proposal, as she begins merging with him and finding relief from her loneliness. When Jasper is accused of barnburning, she tries to enter into his emotional experience: "She tried to assume his chaos of anger and his confusion and to bring her more ordered knowing to it" (280). Later, as marriage and childrearing progressively demand more of her energy, Ellen finds herself with none to spare for her own needs. However, her inner core remains intact, as we see when the adult Ellen performs the simple task of making cornbread and, in the rhythmic stirring of dough, hears an inner voice say, "Here ... I am ... Ellen ... I'm here" (319-20). Nonetheless, she feels the incessant draining of her inner self by the nurturance of others, particularly through motherhood. Soon after marriage, her ignorance of birth control methods imprisons her in a cycle of successive childbearing and rearing that leaves her neither time nor energy to connect with the self who merged with nature so dynamically in her youth. During her fourth, unwanted, pregnancy, she momentarily realizes the draining of her life into motherhood:
One day she saw the children, the three born and the one unborn, as men and women, as they would be, and more beside them, all standing about the cabin door until they darkened the path with their shadows, all asking beyond what she had to give, always demanding, always wanting more of her and more of them always wanting to be. She took up the bucket and went down the hill to the spring, walking quickly as if she were pursued. "Out of me come people forever, forever," she said as she went down the hill-path. (321)

Obviously, Ellen understands that she is doomed "forever" to repetitive motherhood. While it is not further underscored in Roberts' text, we see here another aspect of her commentary on women's societal constrictions. Because Ellen is an Everywoman figure, her realization of her powerlessness over her biological fate, together with her understanding of the inner drain of repetitive motherhood, allows us to perceive Roberts' recognition of these twin forces as diminishers of women's lives.

Additionally, this passage echoes Emerson's concept of nature as "medicinal" (Nature 830) when Ellen's instinctive response to her realization is to go outdoors. This action reveals her retention of the link with nature that she had
developed in her youth. While her opportunities to experience nature have become limited, she still turns to it for healing. In fact, Roberts makes nature an overt healer when, after the death of Ellen's fifth child, she has the character merge with nature while digging a garden. The incident is the only depiction of such a merger from Ellen's adulthood; its significance is in Ellen's deliberate seeking, during it, of the most powerful force of her youth:

Breaking the soil her mind would penetrate the crumbling clod with a question that searched each new-turned lump of earth and pushed always more and more inwardly upon the ground, a lasting question that gathered around some unspoken word such as "why" or "how." Thus until her act of breaking open the clay was itself a search, as if she were digging carefully to find some buried morsel, some reply. (350)

Ellen's turning to the soil for answers allows her to heal; more importantly, it shows her deliberate connection with the natural world after suffering tremendous loss. Her relationship with nature remains real to Ellen, whether or not she pursues it as an adult; Pratt's assertion that an early relationship with nature "becomes a touchstone by which
she holds herself together" is most profoundly evident in Ellen's search for healing in the earth.

However, this merger is the only one Ellen makes once she becomes a wife and mother. Roberts' last comment on women's constrictions is found in Ellen's momentary realization of her diminished self; this occurs after a family meal:

Clearing away the food and the dishes while Nannie put Melissy to bed and Hen mended a tool under the light she heard them all, going, ordering, calling, hurrying in and out, quarreling, snarling back, defending each other, laughing, making jokes she would never have thought to make, and it came to her that these were of her, these people, but that they owned her somehow more than she owned them. (360-61)

Eventually, then, even a strong inner self like Ellen's can be submerged beneath the other-focused drudgery of motherhood, so that the woman is "owned" by her children. This development in Ellen's character is consistent with the psychological realism Roberts has given us throughout the novel, but it is also saddening. Just as the intimate portrait of Ellen's self as it blossomed in relationship with nature has awed us with its beauty and realism, so the
submersion of that self beneath the needs of others seems our loss.

Fortunately, however, submersion does not equal complete obliteration. Ellen's core self remains intact, as we see in the climactic scene of the novel. Here, that self emerges in a moment of profound crisis and, in so doing, gives us one final look at Roberts' skill in psychological portraiture. Jasper, once again unjustly accused of burning a building, is dragged from their bed by a vigilante mob and whipped. After an initial moment of fear, Ellen's outrage at this injustice takes over:

She walked out of the house, her bare feet sinking into the cold mud, her night garment limp against her body as she went swiftly through the damp air. She walked into the circle and stood in the bare space left for the whips and her coming was so headlong that blows fell upon her shoulders and on her breast before she was seen. She came with hard words and a deep malediction, laying curse on curse, speaking into the black rag faces without fear, careless of what came to her for it. "You get offen him," she said. "You white-trash! Rags on your faces!"
Take off your whips. You dirty low skunks! You hit him again now if you dare. Get back. I know you. I know the last one. I could call out your names. Lay your whips on me; you already hit me. Hit more. You skulken low-down trash!"

She cursed them with a blasting prediction that they would never forget this night, that they would remember it in dying, and she called out their names. But they went quickly. The lashes that had fallen upon her were the last, for while she was speaking they leaped to their horses and rode away in a hard gallop. (375-76)

Ellen's action is heroic; furthermore, it is powerfully self-reliant. She acts from her self, on no authority but her own, courageously facing down a group of men who characterize the worst elements of the patriarchal society which structures her world. The force of her core self shows here: she can willingly accept the constriction of her energy into traditionally female roles; she can unquestioningly accept her economic powerlessness as a poor white; but she cannot accept the destruction of her family by mob violence. Her
heroism in this, the most courageous scene of the novel, reveals the entwinement of nature with self-reliance in Ellen Chesser's core self. Roberts here gives us a portrait of power; interestingly, this power emanates from an ordinary woman leading a conventional life who in no way stands out among her peers or earns the world's attention. She is Everywoman, whose fate we share and whose power we celebrate. Her strength emanates from a self formed in relationship with nature, one so solid that, even when diminished, it exhibits the twin gifts of nature, permanence and power. And this ordinary woman repels mob violence in what can truly be characterized as a natural act in Emersonian terms. He says, "[A]n act of truth or heroism seems at once to draw to itself the sky as its temple, the sun as its candle" (Nature 832), and "A right action seems to fill the eye, and to be related to all nature" (Nature 843). Ellen's confrontation of the whipping party is both heroic and right in its motivation: she fights for her husband but, more than that, she fights against the injustice of a cowardly, night-riding mob. In this one moment of power, she reveals the self which nature formed and aligns that self, once more, with nature. Soon afterward, Ellen and her family move on to new land, and we do not doubt that she will retain her power, wherever she goes.
Among the forgotten writers grouped here, the most tragic loss to literature is Edith Summers Kelley's failure to find the energy and the audience for her work. The circumstances of her life prevented her from developing an obvious talent to its fullest. She wrote little and published less because of financial and familial constraints; accordingly, relatively little is known about the circumstances under which she labored. Matthew J. Bruccoli, when he reprinted *Weeds* in 1972, included in his Afterword the only biographical information available at that time, a 1923 newspaper article which said that Kelley was a Canadian who, after graduating from the University of Toronto, moved to New York to become a writer ("Author" 337). She worked as Upton Sinclair's secretary, and then lived in Greenwich Village for several years, until she married Fred Kelley, a sculptor who had been raised on a farm ("Author" 336-38). To support their family, the Kelleys became farmers and managed a tobacco farm in Kentucky, where Edith lived the farm wife's life she describes so vividly in *Weeds* ("Author" 339). However, this was far from Kelley's last relocation with her husband. They periodically changed residences in search of financial stability: they ran a boarding house in New
Jersey, failed at vegetable and chicken farming in San Diego, and moved to several other California towns in search of a living (Goodman, Afterword 359-63). Her necessary participation in farming, along with caring for three children, took the bulk of her creative energy. Kelley said the novel was written "at the rate of about three hours every morning after the children had been packed off to school" ("Author" 339). She requested a five-hundred-dollar advance from Harcourt Brace so that her husband could raise chickens at home, saying:

[M]y husband would be near at hand
to keep the children out of the way
while I worked. Indeed I hardly see
how I can revise the book unless he is
at home; for the writing of the book
under the circumstances in which we
live was a supreme effort which I now
feel incapable of repeating. (Letter to Alfred Harcourt)

When the novel was published in 1923, her literary friends, notably Sinclair Lewis, helped the process substantially (Bruccoli 339-40). But in the years following Weeds' commercial failure Kelley became disheartened; consequently, she wrote little and published no more novels during her lifetime. By the time of her death the book was forgotten, condemned to utter obscurity until Bruccoli's rescue of it. Weeds' resurrection is largely due to Bruccoli's advocacy; he calls
it "a quiet masterpiece" (Afterword 335).

And well he might, since Kelley's depiction of her protagonist, Judith Pippinger, reveals a creature instinctively aligned with nature who, once forced into maternity and housework, is destroyed by degrees. As a child she escapes housework to revel in outdoor farm chores; as a young married woman she works as an equal in the fields with her husband; but as a mother she is housebound, more so with each consecutive pregnancy. Consequently, her spirit shrivels; despite several rebellious attempts to avoid its death, she ultimately acquiesces in her own fate. Kelley's portrait of a woman whose soul is dying by degrees is both controlled and compelling; by the end of the novel we are aware of the tragedy of Judith's acquiescence, as well as of its inevitability. Because she lacks the intellectual capacity to discern her options, and thus can create no avenue of escape for her self, Judith is virtually predestined to be destroyed. Cook, in her treatment of Weeds in From Tobacco Road to Route 66, succinctly summarizes the character's life:

Her sex, her imagination, and her love of beauty are all qualities which in her world foredoom her to failure, since that world is circumscribed by the ugly, ill-smelling sharecropper's cabin and the duties of wife and mother, in which she takes no joy and for which she has no natural aptitude. (21)
Cook's recognition of Judith's biologically predetermined life strongly echoes one of the major challenges to women identified by feminists, biology as destiny. Kelley's use of it as the central organizational principle in *Weeds* makes the book the most profoundly feminist among the novels discussed here. In fact, a birth scene excluded by editorial mandate from the original edition of *Weeds* underscores Kelley's point; in it, Judith is clearly betrayed by her natural bodily functions, dehumanized by the pain, and cut off from her experience of nature. This scene, published as an addendum to the Feminist Press edition of *Weeds*, is chronologically included in our interpretation, since Kelley clearly intended it for publication and was upset by its exclusion (Goodman, Afterword 361). Charlotte Goodman, who catalyzed the Feminist publication, says that the scene likely belongs between the eleventh and twelfth chapters (Afterword 361); accordingly, it is interpreted at that point, and textual citations from it are preceded by an "F" to indicate Feminist's pagination. The birth scene provides a clear beginning for Kelley's feminist theme: simply stated, the destruction of Judith Pippinger begins with the onset of her biological function as a childbearer, and is completed when she is finally forced by circumstances to accept the conventional roles of mother and housewife. The process of this destruction is the heart of the novel.
Kelley subordinates nature and self-reliance to her major feminist theme: Judith's self-reliance consists of an instinctive self-trust which requires that she indulge her love of outdoor nature; once confined in a housebound role, she disintegrates and ultimately loses her self-trust. Interestingly, Kelley inserts a duality into Judith's relationship with nature: when the character acts according to her own instincts, she experiences nature as a nurturing, healing force; but when she is forced to act against those instincts, nature becomes destructive. Still, although Kelley subordinates this relationship to her major feminist theme, the novel resonates with Emersonian concepts.

Kelley's depiction of Judith as a person of absolute and instinctive self-trust begins early. She explains that Judith is a genetic throwback, physically superior to her peers and bearing the pioneer spirit of her ancestors (Kelley, Weeds 13). Her spirit dooms her to failure in her culture, as even her father recognizes when he says she has "'life enough for a dozen sech--too much life, too much life for a gal!'" (14). Her self-trust leads her to instinctively eschew the domestic training offered to her in favor of her fascination with animals; she loves them all, domestic and wild (15-16), and is moved to outrage by the torture of a kitten by neighborhood boys. Both the force of her personality and her alignment with nature show in her response to the kitten's cries, when she brandishes a kitchen
knife and threatens to "cut" the boys if they continue to torment the creature (18-21). Importantly, Kelley describes her as "an avenging Fury" in her outrage (18); this language clearly invokes goddess imagery, revealing Judith's innate power as a child of nature. The timing of its occurrence, in her childhood, shows that she begins her life as a child of nature in an important Emersonian sense, as we are reminded of his assertion that "an act of truth or heroism" aligns the self spiritually with nature (*Nature* 832). Shortly afterward, Kelley explicitly portrays Judith as nature's child in the following passage, which describes the character's response to the death of animals she loves:

> Without putting the thought into words or even thinking it, but merely sensing it physically, she knew that in the life of nature death and suffering are merely incidentals; that the message that nature gives to her children is "Live, grow, be happy, and obey my promptings." The birds and chickens and grasshoppers all heard it and Judith knew they heard it. Judith heard it too. . . . [N]ature kept whispering these words in her ear. It is given to few civilized human beings to ever hear this message. Perhaps in that generation Bill Pippinger's
girl was the only human being in the whole of Scott County who heard and heeded these words:

"Live, grow, be happy, and obey my promptings." (22)

Because Judith does not think deeply, but rather follows her instinct, she is not capable of gleaning intellectual meaning from nature as Emerson would have us do. However, her instinctive understanding of nature, particularly as displayed in the above passage, clearly echoes one of his statements:

A life in harmony with nature... may come to know the primitive sense of the permanent objects of nature, so that the world shall be to us an open book, and every form significant of its hidden life and final cause. (Nature 838-39)

Because Judith responds to the world instinctively rather than thoughtfully, she does not understand nature's emblematicism in an Emersonian sense; however, her instinctive ability to decipher nature's universal spirit makes her outdoor world "an open book" which she reads daily.

Her identity as a child of nature includes a keener perception than that of the other members of her community, which she expresses when she draws "usually comic, satirical or derisive" pictures of humans and animals which reveal "great vigor and clarity of vision" (25). Her native self-reliance shows when she continues drawing them despite the fact that they are "universally condemned"; she tells her father, "'I see things; an' when I see 'em I want to
draw 'em'" (26). These pictures are an expression of her core self; she implicitly and completely trusts her vision of the world around her and, consequently, refuses to change it. During one harvest season, this perception makes of an ordinary evening of play with her siblings a powerful memory:

Once, as they were playing a ring game by the barn, a big red moon rose over the brow of the hill and showed their dancing figures silhouetted sharply in black on the barn wall. The weird little shadow figures seemed like a troup of goblin companions that had come to join their play. The more wildly they pranced and threw their arms about, the more reckless and drunken grew the little shadow figures on the wall, stimulating them in turn to a still greater frenzy of abandon. The wind blew in their faces and brought subtle whiffs of fragrance from the big tobacco barn down the ridge. The other children soon forgot this evening; but to Judith it remained always as one of the exalted moments of her life. (36)

Clearly, Judith's exaltation in a common childhood experience emphasizes her status as nature's child, as well as
her heightened perception. Additionally, her experience loudly echoes one of Emerson's passages:

To speak truly, few adult persons can see nature. . . . The sun illuminates only the eye of the man, but shines into the eye and the heart of the child. The lover of nature is he whose inward and outward senses are still truly adjusted to each other; who has retained (sic) the spirit of infancy even into the era of manhood. . . . In the presence of nature, a wild delight runs through the man . . . . (Nature 826-27)

Judith's "wild delight" in the presence of the "big red moon" is obvious; thus, so is the alignment of her inner self with the outer world. Clearly, she looks here like the universal child Emerson describes, whose perception of the natural world is both true and intuitive. However, Kelley reveals Judith's eventual fate by echoing another Emersonian statement: "Particular natural facts are symbols of particular spiritual facts" (Nature 834). Her choice of imagery is notable: the moon casts shadows that appear to be "goblins," creatures associated with death and the dark; this choice presages the death of Judith's self at the novel's end. In addition to this Emersonian resonance, Judith's dance before the moon provides the "touchstone" experience Pratt discusses:
Communion with the authentic self, first achieved by the heroine in early naturistic epiphanies, becomes a touchstone by which she holds herself together in the face of destructive roles proffered to her by society. (488)

Sadly, as Judith's spirit deteriorates, the remembered joy of this experience becomes a touchstone by which she can sense her own destruction.

The seeds of that destruction are rooted in her instinctive self-reliance. Judith's faith in her own instincts leads her to reject conventional female behavior at an early age. When her twin sisters force her to do housework she rebels so strenuously that they abandon the effort; she, in turn, begins doing the outdoor chores because "she [is] not lazy and [takes] a deep interest in the farm animals . . ." (56). Her unconventionality also shows when she defends her use of bad language to one of her sisters:

"Well, Craw talks that way, an' the Blackford boys does, an' dad does too when he's with other men. I ain't no diff'rent from them."

"In course you're diff'rent; you're a gal."

"Well, anyway, I don't feel like one," Judy would answer unrepentantly.
If she could have put into words what she vaguely felt, she would have said that the language of the barnyard was an expression of something that was real, vital and fluid, that it was of natural and spontaneous growth, that it turned with its surroundings, that it was a part of life that offered itself to her. The prim niceness of the twins, suitable enough to them in the world they were making for themselves, was for her a deadening negation of life. (57)

Her sister's "prim niceness" indicates their appropriate socialization; notably, it is "deadening" for Judith. Importantly, Kelley points out that the fate of all conventional women in Judith's culture is spiritual death when she comments on their "pinched, angular features and peculiarly dead expressionless eyes." (85). She overtly explains Judith's difference from them during a party which marks the arrival of marital eligibility for her protagonist:

Judith in red and white shown in her dark loveliness like a poppy among weeds. Something more than her beauty set her apart from the others: an ease and naturalness of movement, a freedom from constraint, completeness of abandon to the fun and merrymaking, to which these daughters of toil in their most
hectic moments could never attain. Somehow, in spite of her ancestry, she had escaped the curse of the soil, else she could never have known how to be so free, so glad, so careless and joyous. (88)

Kelley illuminates Judith's spiritual as well as physical beauty in this passage, making the character's superiority once again clear. Allowed to live on her own terms in the world of outdoor nature, Judith flowers "like a poppy among weeds." For her, the soil is not a curse but a necessity of life; to be cut off from nature, as a wife's and mother's duties demand, would bring disaster. Unfortunately, her culture allows her no other option than marriage, and this party begins her progress toward it. Characteristically, Judith has little patience for formal courtship, and teases Jerry Blackford when he is too shy to speak to her directly (95). At this point, Jabez Moorhouse, an older neighbor who later becomes her friend, reveals his understanding of Judith when he advises Jerry to "go to meetin' her accidentally when she's a-drivin' up the caows or a-stalkin' them turkeys over the hills an' hollers . . ." (100). By advising Jerry to court Judith in natural surroundings, Jabez ensures the young man's success in what becomes "a speedy, simple, natural courting, like the coming together of two young wild things in the woods" (102). Judith ignores convention
and is sexually intimate with Jerry before their marriage (103). To his credit, Jerry finds most of her unconventional behavior refreshing: he tells her, "'You're the only woman I know that's got a man's ways, Judy. You haven't spoiled'" (103). Thus Judith has chosen the best mate available for her in her culture, and their marriage begins well.

During its first months Judith proves Jerry's point about her "man's ways" when she works as hard as he does: she helps in the fields, particularly with tobacco plant setting where she works past the point of collapse but refuses to stop because "she scom[s Jerry's] male assumption of superior strength and endurance" (129). Of course, she also raises turkeys, chickens, and a vegetable garden, and does the cooking and laundry (123-24). As she had in her childhood, she escapes as often as possible into outdoor work; one day she even forgets to make dinner while she is busy mending chicken coops. At this point, Kelley details Judith's preference for us:

She had always disliked the insides of houses. The gloom of little-windowed rooms, the dead chill or the heavy heat as the fire smouldered or blazed, the prim, set look of tables and cupboards that stood always in the same places engaged in the never ending occupation of collecting dust
both above and beneath: these things stifled and depressed her. She was always glad to escape into the open where there was light, life, and motion and the sun and the wind kept things clean. (116)

During this period Judith is happy. Her ability to "escape into the open" is unfettered by marriage, and so she remains a joyous child of nature. Kelley tells us this when she compares Judith to "a plant that has sucked in the life-giving rain and was preparing to raise its blossoms to the sun" (125) and, again, when she says her character "was not much more given to thinking than was the mocking bird in the hickory tree over the house; and she enjoyed her life even as he" (140). Judith's sharp perception of her world, which had caused her to draw her childhood pictures, also remains intact, as evident in her detailed comparison of her father's mule to one of her neighbors (126).

But her joy comes to an end with pregnancy: smells nauseate her, especially kitchen smells (142), and she is depressed (147). Her frank nature is revolted by other women's secrecy about pregnancy, as well as by their "archness and playful levity which seemed to Judith the very soul of lewdness" (153). Eventually, she hides in her bedroom to avoid women visitors and their interference (153-54). The portrait of Judith's discomfort with pregnancy introduces
Kelley's major feminist theme, the effect of forced motherhood on a nonmaternal woman. Even in childhood, Judith's maternity had been "an instinct which rarely showed itself in her" (18); when motherhood is forced upon her and she is compelled to enact a conventional and, for her, unnatural role, her life changes for the worse. Two critics, Charlotte Goodman and Fran Zaniello, have addressed Kelley's feminist theme. Goodman's piece, "Widening Perspectives, Narrowing Possibilities: The Trapped Woman in Edith Summers Kelley's Weeds," acceptably introduces the issues but fails to examine them fully. Zaniello, in her "Witnessing the Buried Life in Rural Kentucky: Edith Summers Kelley and Weeds," extracts the threads of pregnancy, childhood, and motherhood from the text and gives them a coherent feminist reading; then she parallels Judith's isolation from her female community with that which she believes Kelley endured as an educated feminist working a tobacco farm. Although both these critics make acceptable points, neither goes far enough: neither sufficiently traces Judith's withering under forced maternity and, of course, neither recognizes Kelley's use of nature to mirror her character's decline.

Indeed, Kelley's use of nature during the birth scene she intended for the book marks a change from her earlier usage. While the episode is not physiologically graphic about the birth, it is emotionally graphic about the effect
of labor pain on Judith. Kelley uses natural imagery to track the character's progress through her pain and to emphasize its dehumanizing effect on her:

All the time Judith paced up and down the kitchen floor like a wild tigress newly caged. When the terrific spasm of pain would grind through her body, she would grasp the nearest object and utter, again and again, the strangely unhuman shriek, a savage, elemental, appalling sound that seemed as though it could have its origin nowhere upon the earth. (F338)

The "wild tigress newly caged" becomes further dehumanized in later stages, when Kelley describes the disfigurement of both Judith's face and her voice while Jerry watches:

[H]e heard her stirring and was on his feet and listening terrified to a sound that he had never heard before, a deep-toned, guttural, growling sound that ended in a snarl. It was not like that of an ordinary dog; but more as Jerry imagined some wild, doglike creature, inhabitant of lonely waste country, might growl and snarl over its prey. Could it be Judith who was making this savage sound?
He was at the bedside looking at her. The veins in her forehead were purple and swollen. The muscles of her cheeks stood out tense and hard. Her eyes, wide open, stared at the ceiling with the look of eyes that see nothing; and her gums were fleshed in the snarl like the gums of an angry wolf. (F343-44)

Judith's disfigurement and dehumanization via savage animal imagery reveals the unnaturalness of maternity for her. Clearly, she is experiencing nature as destructive: "Nature . . . from her childhood had led her kindly and blandly through pleasant paths and had at last betrayed her . . ." (F344). This betrayal is underscored when, for the first time in the text, Judith is unable to appreciate nature's beauty because of her pain (F345). Later, Jabez Moorhouse overtly states the point: "'[Babies] hain't fit work for a gal like you. . . . You'd otta be out over the hills . . . jes' a-runnin' wild with the res' o' the wild things . . . '" (F350-51). Obviously, the episode provides a clear beginning for Kelley's forced maternity theme, as well as the clear beginning of change in Judith's relationship with nature. From this point forward in the novel, her experience of nature will reveal its duality as healer and destroyer; this experience will also become the mirror in which we view her progressive deterioration.
She begins this progress almost immediately; although she loves her child, Judith becomes "daily more irritated and harassed by the constant small cares that his presence demand[s] of her" (159). For the first time, she is bored, and seeks relief from it in visits with relatives (159-60), in borrowed magazines which seem "only flat, silly, and unreal" (161), in neighborhood gossip (161), and even in a neighbor's flirtation with her (164). While she draws as much as she can to alleviate the boredom (161), drawing supplies represent an extravagant expense which cannot be regularly met in her household. Her changed attitude toward her life most clearly shows during the lean food time of winter when, for the first time ever, she "continually long[s] for something new, something different to eat, not so much from starvation of body as of spirit" (160). This early period of motherhood also changes her attitude toward her husband. In the months following the birth, her platonic attraction to Jabez Moorhouse begins; she enjoys his unpredictable behavior and her ability, in his presence, to feel that "the pulse of life had grown simultaneously strong and full" (167). Her affinity for him is clear when she wishes, while travelling to a nearby town for market day, that she travelled with Jabez rather than Jerry (170). Their growing friendship occurs as her marital relationship grows slightly distant: when Judith insists on going to town with Jerry, he is "disturbed and annoyed" (168), marking
a change from their former closeness. Indeed, as Jerry becomes rolebound within cultural expectations of male behavior, their marriage disintegrates because Judith can accept neither the role expected of her nor his acquiescence to convention. The clear beginning of their estrangement occurs on market day, when she is enraged by Jerry's disclosure to his peers of their premarital sexual history (182); for the first time, she turns her vision inward: "That spirit in her which gave her eyes their level, searching look, which made her see through the flimsy shams and hypocrises and self-deceptions of the people about her, forced her to look at her own situation with the same undeviating gaze" (183). Although she cannot leave her marriage, the betrayal opens a rift between Judith and her husband, one which she will not close with forgiveness (184).

As the rift between the young couple slowly deepens, Judith's relationship with nature changes: as she begins to understand her unhappiness, she turns increasingly to nature for comfort. Initially, however, the only shift in her behavior is a small one: while the year before she had been glad to escape the fierce toil of setting tobacco, this year she welcomes it as an escape from her housebound life (187). This second year of marriage is also the year of her second pregnancy, and "[w]ith something of the feeling of a creature of the woods, she [seeks] to shut herself up with her weakness and misery" (189). In this instance,
Kelley's animal imagery reveals nature as a protector: nature is positive when Judith acts instinctively; although unhappy, she has not yet lost herself. Nonetheless, she will be defeated by her housebound maternity because it forces her to abandon the outdoor work she loves in favor of monotonous, unnatural toil. In a passage almost universally cited by critics, Kelley specifies the work Judith performs:

Families must be fed after some fashion or other and dishes washed three times a day, three hundred and sixty-five days in the year. Babies must be fed and washed and dressed and "changed" and rocked when they cried and watched and kept out of mischief and danger. The endless wrangles among older children must be arbitrated in some way or other, if only by cuffing the ears of both contestants; and the equally endless complaints stilled by threats, promises, whatever lies a harassed mother could invent to quiet the fretful clamor of discontented childhood. Fires must be lighted and kept going as long as needed for cooking, no matter how great the heat. Cows must be milked and cream skimmed and butter churned. Hens must be fed and eggs gathered and the filth shoveled out of henhouses.
Diapers must be washed and grimy little drawers and rompers and stiff overalls and sweaty work shirts and grease-bespat-tered dresses and kitchen aprons and filthy, sour-smelling towels and socks stinking with the putridity of unwashed feet and all the other articles that go to make up a farm woman's family wash. Floors must be swept and scrubbed and stoves cleaned and a never ending war waged against the constant encroaches of dust, grease, stable manure, flies, spiders, rats, mice, ants and all the other breeders of filth that are continu­ally at work in country households. (195)

The feminist thinking which informs Weeds stands out here in Kelley's exact detailing of the repetitive drudgery that consumes Judith's energy and substitutes for her life. Importantly, Kelley mentions "older children," which Judith does not yet have; the inclusion of this detail dramatizes the universal drudgery of such work for a nonmaternal woman. Ultimately, this drudgery deadens Judith. The tragedy of her story lies in her absolute inability to avoid the process. As a child, she had unconsciously followed Emerson's advice to tell her family, "O father, O mother, O brother, O friend . . . . [H]enceforward I obey no law less than the eternal law" ("Self-Reliance" 902). As an adult,
The only law Judith can follow necessitates survival for her family; her ultimate abidance by it demands the price of conventionality, and destroys her self.

The process of destruction truly begins during the following winter, her first as a mother. After only eighteen months of housewifery and motherhood, "the life spirit in the still young body ha[s] grown tired" (197). Judith begins losing hope, and nature begins to mirror the loss:

The bitter, dust-laden wind seemed to suck the moisture from her skin and from her very bones. She felt as bleak, dry, desolate, and soulless as the landscape. (207)

This passage contains an echo of an Emersonian assertion: "[p]articular natural facts are symbols of particular spiritual facts" (Nature 834). Although the landscape clearly reflects Judith's mood, Kelley's construction makes it "soulless" independently of Judith's experience of it. This "fact" both mirrors the character's situation and foreshadows her doom; it is the first time Kelley steps outside of Judith's experience to use the natural world to comment on her plight. Still, Judith's winter depression does not survive the spring; once she is able, postpartum, to return to outdoor work, her seasonal tasks improve her spirits:

Judith spent all the time that she could spare from the babies and the house
working in her garden, chopping out the weeds while they were still young and tender, hilling up the potatoes, hoeing the rows of lusty beets and beans and turnips, training the pole beans to climb on their poles and tying up the tomato vines to stakes. She likes this work. She likes the feel of the hot sun on her back and shoulders, the smell of the damp, warm earth. Some magic healing qualities in sun and earth seemed to give her back health, vigor, and poise. When she had hoed in the garden for an hour or two, she felt tired from exertions, for her strength had only partly returned after the birth of the baby. Yet, in spite of the ache in her muscles, she was refreshed and in a way invigorated, more able to cope with the washtub and the churn, with the baby when he cried and refused to be pacified and with little Billy when he danced up and down and choked and grew purple in the face with rage. (212)

Nature's "magic healing qualities" are obviously medicinal for Judith, and as such echo Emerson's idea of nature as physically restorative; however, while Emerson writes about repose in the beauty of nature as medicinal (Nature
Kelley's portrait of her child of nature transmutes his concept, changing it from rest-as-restorative to work-as-restorative. This transmutation is appropriate within the boundaries of a realistic novel about a poor white woman. Additionally, Kelley's feminist treatment of Judith's entrapment within her social role is evident, at the end of the passage, in her carefully cataloged details of the character's housebound life. Because Judith cannot spend enough time doing work which she instinctively enjoys, that life begins to toll heavily on her: as a nonmaternal woman, she begins to feel badly about losing patience with her children (215), and questions her own instincts when she resents the children's constant demands on her (217); as a hater of housework, she begins to see herself as a failure because she abhors the tasks which chiefly comprise her duty (216). Eventually, she begins losing touch with her core self, as is evident during the following fall, when we see only remnants of her youthful artistic vision: the unconventional caricaturist is reduced, because of her ability to discern color, to "the best tobacco stripper of them all" (219).

This reduction of the self continues, and Judith's deepening unhappiness widens the rift between herself and Jerry. She has understood for some time that she loves him less than before (215), and has come to feel "years older than he" (225). But the depth of her alienation from him is evident when, while comforting him on the loss of a good
tobacco price, she agrees that "'things'll come out all right, so long as we have each other,'" and knows herself a liar (228). The onset of her third pregnancy makes matters worse. Plagued by constant nausea, she resents Jerry's freedom to do men's work. While Jerry looks forward to hog butchering as an opportunity for a day's socializing with a friend, Judith is left only to "run guts" for lard, a task which involves handling warm intestines. When she refuses, overwhelmed by the sight and smell of the steaming intestines, Jerry decides not to bother with them (236-39). Her anger at being left with "the only part of the job that [is] tedious and hateful" (240) causes her to impulsively flee her task, her house, and her children, into the open countryside where she walks rapidly to burn off anger. Her experience of nature during this walk is specifically detailed:

Her eyes, instinctively reaching out for freedom, sought the long view that sweeps from the top of the ridge to the horizon. It lay bleak and bare under a gray winter sky. Its bareness and monotony of tone made it more far-reaching than in summer. It seemed endless, as she imagined the ocean might be. Out of its calm and magnitude a sense of peace welled up and gradually enfolded her. Her step slackened into a measured, meditative pace. She
half forgot the things that she had fled
from and in a little while felt almost happy
with a happiness that comes of peace and
solitude and wide spaces. It was more than
three years since she had been by herself
in the open country. It was like meeting
an old lover who has not lost his power
to charm. The cold air smelled good in
her nostrils. She breathed deep and rested
her eyes with a sense of quietness and calm
on the long, dun stretches of winter fields. (240)

Here, Judith experiences nature as medicinal in an obviously
Emersonian sense: her mind finds peace, an equivalent of
the "restored . . . tone" Emerson notes as a result of experi-
encing natural beauty (Nature 830). Furthermore, Judith's
focus on the horizon clearly echoes Emerson: "The health
of the eyes seems to demand a horizon. We are never tired,
so long as we can see far enough" (Nature 830). This solitary
walk represents a turning point for Judith. Because she
impulsively follows her instinct to seek out nature's healing,
some conscious understanding of her situation begins. When
she has time to consider it, she realizes she doesn't want
another child:

Her flesh cringed at the thought and her
spirit faltered. "And when the child was
born it was only the beginning. She loathed the thought of having to bring up another baby. The women who liked caring for babies could call her unnatural if they liked. She wanted to be unnatural. She was glad she was unnatural. Their nature was not her nature and she was glad of it. (240)

Obviously, a simple outdoor walk restores enough of Judith's instinctive reliance on her own authority to make her defiant of the social norm; obviously, she is still at least partially nature's child, a person most alive in outdoor nature. However, because solitude in nature is unavailable to her daily, the simple gift of thought she has found during her walk curses her with knowledge of her confinement but no escape from it. Consequently, she becomes bitter and unsupportive of Jerry (245), as well as "more and more shiftless and slatternly about the house" (246). Her eyes, which had so recently found healing on the horizon, are "glazed and turned inward or looking out upon vacancy with an abstracted stare" (246). Only one positive event slows her decline, a move to a new house with greater exposure to nature:

It was open to the wind and sky. From the tiny windows she could see far off. In the morning the first ray of sunlight brightened the top of the ridge, and at the end of
the day the sunset filled the house like a presence. (244)

In this setting, as a very hard winter passes into spring, Judith's mood lightens. Still, she is no longer a happy young woman, as Kelley deliberately details:

She never sang or romped anymore.
She could not rejoice or be glad with these things of nature. But out of her calm torpor she looked at them as through a thin mist and they sank upon her spirit like healing on a wound. She grew very fond of sitting on the doorstep. (252)

The medicinal effects of nature are once again evident here, but so is a reduction of Judith's ability to experience herself as fully alive in a natural setting: her once keen vision now comes "through a thin mist."

However, one final opportunity to feel fully alive presents itself, in the person of a visiting evangelist. Initially, she seizes the opportunity to hear him speak simply to obtain an evening away from her routine, and understands it as "an adventure, this coming out into the warm, soft, fragrant night" (258). But she is attracted to his religious fervor, to his "darkly glowing eyes and darkly vibrant voice" (262), and while returning home experiences nature as reflective of her mood: the peaceful setting of
her earlier walk is overwhelmed by "a whiff from the flowering alfalfa field, not clover nor heliotrope, but a mixture of the intensest sweetness of both, subtle, and disquieting" (262-63). The Emersonian idea that "[n]ature always wears the colors of the spirit" (Nature 828) is evident in her shift in perception. This perception heightens during her sexual liaison with the evangelist, to which Judith yields after a revival meeting in which he has sung so passionately that "[a]n aura of ecstasy welled out of him" (271). In his embrace Judith knows "an ecstasy transcending anything she ha[s] ever felt in her life . . . " (272). Accordingly, her relationship with nature is relegated to secondary status behind her enlivening liaison.

However, it is still important: only in natural settings can she fully experience her awakened emotions, and on two occasions during the affair she is moved to tears by natural beauty. The first is on her discovery of a magnificent rose blooming on the almost dead bush in her yard (273), and the second is on the rare occasion of a mockingbird's singing at night (275). During these incidents, she experiences nature differently from before. For the first time it brings sorrow, not joy. At some intuitive level, Judith sees the rose and the mockingbird as symbolic of her own fate: the rose is her self, blooming beautifully on a bush that will not sustain it; and the mockingbird's nightsong, while beautiful, is unnatural, just as Judith feels unnatural in her
world. Nature reflects the colors of Judith's spirit in these phenomena; her intuitive identification with them reveals that she is not fully alienated from the natural world and, by extension, from her self. Still, her affair with the evangelist marks her last period of happiness in the novel. When she indiscreetly begins seeking him out, he warns her of the consequences; she finds his attitude cowardly and ultimately ends the affair (276-77). Before doing so, she confronts him with his hypocrisy, for which he calls her a "scarlet woman"; her response is characteristically direct:

"Huh, I reckon I hain't no scarleter
'n what you air. An' anyhaow I don't feel scarlet, an' you do. I don't do things
I'm ashamed o' doin', an' I hain't a bit
askairt o' hellfire neither." (278)

In addition to her refusal to accept the evangelist's hypocritical standards, Judith's response reveals her continued trust in her own authority: she instinctively knows that "scarlet" is in the feeling, not the acting. After leaving the evangelist, she "delight[s] in the sun and the clean air, feeling clean, sound, and whole" as she walks home "like some primal savage woman . . ." (279), and thus reveals that the affair has reconnected her with her deepest self. Using female imagery from times prior to acculturation, Kelley links the child who fought like "an avenging Fury" for a kitten (18) with the woman who moves through her world
as a "primal savage." However, the character's decline is evident in the status reduction in the imagery: removed from the instinctive alignment with nature she had experienced as a child, Judith no longer possesses sufficient stature to deserve the mantle of reverence connoted by the goddess concept; instead, she is simply a primitive possessed of great energy. She will direct this energy, henceforward, toward her own inner life, to attempt to save a self being slowly killed by social forces she cannot fully understand. Sadly, she will lose, and she will intuitively know the loss because of her reawakened perception.

She understands this reawakening as feeling "broad awake" (279), and suddenly she sees her family as it really is. At supper that night, her sons have "the faces of those who for generations have tilled the toil in solitude, a heavy, settled, unexpectant look" (279); her daughter has "a puny, colorless, young-old face," and eyes of "a dead even slate color . . . [that hold] the accumulated patience of centuries" (280); Jerry's face has "the heavy look of toilworn despondence that merge[s] his features into a dull sameness" (280). This new, crystalline vision of her family is so alarming that she flees the kitchen, moved to clandestine tears (280-81). Later that night a storm blows up, symbolically mirroring Judith's turmoil. But this time it does more, as she lies listening to the night sounds:
The baby in the cradle by the bedside, also lying awake, talked to herself, making soft, cooing little noises, delicate like purling sounds as sweet as flower petals. Jerry slept heavily.

Lying between her husband and child, she felt alone, cold and dismal, alone yet inextricably bound to them by something stronger than their bonds of common misery. Their future lives stretched before her dull, drab and dreary, and there was nothing at the end but the grave. She began to cry into the pillow, repressing her sobs so as not to wake Jerry. For a long time she cried in a stifled, bitter, despairing way. As she wept the baby's babblings ceased and she fell into the sleep that in puny children seems closely akin to death. Toward morning Judith, too, fell mercifully asleep, pale from tears and bitter thoughts; and when the ghostlike dawn peered into the little window it saw them all three lying stretched and pallid like corpses. (281)

This time, nature is personified as a "ghostlike dawn"; this time, nature not only reflects Judith's emotions but,
through Kelley's use of personification, becomes a force of its own, affirming the truth of Judith's intensified level of perception. The "ghostlike dawn" is one of Emerson's "[p]articular natural facts [which] are symbols of particular spiritual facts" (Nature 834). However, Emerson presents this concept as illustrative of the universal spirit alive in nature; eighty-odd years later, Kelley transmutes it, making nature both harbinger and mirror of her character's spiritual death.

But before spiritual death for Judith comes an attempt at physical death, self-inflicted and designed to rid herself of an unwanted pregnancy, even at the cost of her life. Kelley's forced maternity theme is evident in her detailing of Judith's various attempts to induce abortion, first with a mule ride at "breakneck speed" (283-85), then by the vaginal insertion of a knitting needle (285), and finally through the sipping of "nasty smelling decoctions" of various herbs reputed to cause spontaneous abortion (286). After these failed attempts, she tries to drown herself in the horsepond, yet comes up swimming (287), unable to overcome her instinctive grasping for life. Notably, she still feels "a sense of power and triumph as she realize[s] that she [is] master of the water" (287), and so demonstrates that her instinct for self-assertion remains alive, despite her growing intuitive understanding of its futility. Her various attempts ultimately succeed in a spontaneous abortion, which nearly
costs Judith her life (291). It also further isolates her by creating gossip for the neighborhood women who have pointedly comprehended all her actions since her first "berry-picking" expedition with the evangelist (288-90). In their gossip can be heard an Emersonian echo: "For non-conformity the world whips you with its displeasure" ("Self-Reliance" 894). For breaking the social stricture against marital infidelity, Judith's neighbors punish her. While they have only their tongues with which to whip her, they wag them mightily, at once punishing her and forcing her into further isolation from the potential comfort of their friendship. In fact, the only friendship Judith retains is with Jabez Moorhouse, whom Kelley clearly portrays as a kindred spirit. His response to seeing Judith as she lies ill underscores the price of forced maternity for the young woman: he had seen her "fresh, gay, and rosy" after her first childbirth; now he sees her "ready for the grave," and as he walks away "the weight of his great shoulders seem[s] to be dragging them to the earth" (291). He is the only person in the novel who understands that forced maternity is killing Judith, both physically and spiritually.

Unfortunately, Jabez cannot remedy the situation for his friend. For her part, Judith understands that her rebellion against maternity has brought her close to death, and that her physical survival, as well as that of her core self, depends on her avoidance of further childbearing. Intuitively,
she also knows that she will ultimately fail: she knows nothing of any birth control method except abstinence, which will cost her marital happiness. She can see no escape from her biological destiny and, depressed, becomes fascinated by death (297). During the winter following her recovery, she watches buzzards circle over the site of a dead horse's carcass, and studies them intensely:

For days they hung in the air over the gully. From the kitchen window Judith could see them moving on widespread wings. They would circle a while in one spot, then fly off a little distance and circle again, as though loath to give up their habits of search. The motion of these silent creatures, slow and steady, with no perceptible vibration of the sweeping, horizontal wings, was as beautiful as the flight of sea gulls. When they tilted, the sunlight caught the underside of the black wings and turned them gleaming silver. Watching the stately grace, the balanced dignity of their movements as they circled alone in the wide emptiness of the winter sky, Judith felt herself enfolded in a deep sense of calm, as though Nature had laid upon her a firm, soothing hand and told her to be at peace. The flight of the
birds added beauty and dignity to the thought of death; and for the first time in her life it seemed a thing to be looked upon with calmness. She was affected as she might have been by a Greek tragedy or by Bach's coldly austere music. She felt no sense of shrinking, but rather a solemn uplift of the heart in the thought that someday she too would return to the ground; and that always, when she was no longer there to see it, sunshine in winter would be a lovely thing, and other buzzards, foul smelling birds though they were, would soar and tilt with incomparable grace and stateliness over other dead horses and dead dogs that like her had had their day. (295)

Just as Judith had learned the cycles of life as a farm child, so now she discerns through nature her preference for death over life. And as she realizes this, the natural world becomes emblematic of a larger world for her, the peaceful world of escape through death. We have here another transmutation of Emersonian thought: Judith's sole transcendent experience involved sexual passion which, because it led to forced maternity, cannot be risked again. Furthermore, her affair heightened her perception of the hopelessness of her situation. She knows her own entrapment and intuitively understands that the only escape is through death.
Although Emerson counsels us to escape the mundanities of life through peaceful transcendence, Judith's experience with transcendence eventually leads her to understand that her only escape is into peaceful death.

However, Judith is not yet ready to give up. During that same winter, her desperate fight to save herself fuels her refusal of Jerry's sexual advances: "[S]he would be a tool no more of man's lust and nature's cunning. She would see her path and choose it. She would be mistress of her own body" (299-300). The self-reliance of this attitude is striking; just as striking, however, is the reference to nature's "cunning." Judith attempted to save herself through infidelity and was rewarded with a pregnancy which, if left uninterrupted, would bear another child, a proven means of destruction for that self. Thus, the forceful and instinctive expression of Judith's self is betrayed by nature, despite the character's instinctive alignment with it as she acts on her own behalf. Ultimately, nature will completely abandon Judith to the spiritual death which comes with the fulfillment of her biological fate. Although Judith will continue to learn from nature, her lessons will increasingly assist in her acquiescence to that fate and, eventually, will cease altogether. From this point forward, Kelley will more often portray nature as a destroyer than as a healer. Although this portrait is clearly opposed to
Emerson's ideology, it probably grows from the naturalist influences found in American literature during Kelley's formative years as a writer. Certainly, her intention to create lifelike consequences for her protagonist shows in the result of Judith's decision regarding sexual abstinence: her rift with Jerry considerably widens and they quarrel bitterly, becoming physically abusive to each other (305). Judith's will prevails, but her hard-won sexual independence has a higher price than the loss of marital felicity: prior to the quarrel, she had retained a vestige of her artistic vision, finding pictures "that beguiled the eye and inspired the imagination" in rain-streaked newspapers hung on her walls for insulation (301); afterward, she becomes "indifferent to her surroundings" (307), an indication that depression is another result of her refusal. This depression comes from her absolute isolation: she has estranged her husband and thus lost her only source of comfort. Her loss of vision is not a punishment, but a realistic consequence of her decision. She stands now with only her native self-trust for company in a harsh and uncaring world.

Instinctively, she turns to nature and, despite its demonstrated destructive capacity, finds some healing: she is "able to draw comfort out of the sunset and the late twitter of birds . . ." (309). Still, such comfort does little to assuage her isolation and bitterness; for them she finds no cure until one afternoon when she and Jabez Moorhouse acci-
dentally view a magnificent sunset together:

It seemed as if no color could be warmer, deeper, richer. And yet incred-

ibly as they gazed it grew before their eyes richer, warmer, deeper, more vivid
and intense, more full of living fire, until Judith involuntarily held her breath
in sympathy with nature in this her supreme moment.

Short-lived it was, like every other supreme moment. A second after it had
reached the height of its intensity it began to fade and fall away into ashes. As if a cold breath had passed over them, the little tendrils of spun gold in the zenith turned almost instantly to gray. Lower down the deeper colors lost their glow more slowly, melting back into the surrounding purple. Soon there was nothing left but a somber interweaving of purple gray and dull magenta.

"It's a heap like a man's life, hain't it," said Jabez . . . . (309)

Judith's breathless response to this sunset reveals that she is still capable of enjoying nature. Jabez's remark reveals his acceptance of nature's cycles and his understanding of the futility of their lives. Just afterward,
he becomes Judith's mentor by advising her about the use of nature to avoid despair, even through the bitterness of life (309-14). She heeds his advice and, during the following spring, begins to once again take pleasure in tending fowl and rabbits in the barnyard; she is even attuned to her children for the first time (314). Yet, the consequences of her self-preserving celibacy destroy her peace: the next summer she discovers Jerry's sexual liaison with a neighbor (316-17). Thus, the rift between Judith and her husband becomes an unbridgeable chasm, leaving her more profoundly isolated than before, and as the following winter approaches, not just depression but "oppression" falls on her (319).

Her emotional state is worsened by her daughter's nearly fatal bout with pneumonia. Even as she carefully tends the illness, Judith's understanding forces her into inner conflict when she contemplates the child's life:

[Her daughter] would live only to endure, to be patient, to work, to suffer; and at last, when she had gone through all these things, to die without ever having lived and without knowing that she had never lived. . . .

As [Judith] struggled with these bitter thoughts, w'th moon, which had passed the full, looked palely into the lamplit room through the tracery made by a dead grapevine
against the uncurtained window and saw her sitting gaunt and hollow-eyed, her sharp elbows propped on her knees and her chin in her hands. Again she restlessly paced the floor or stood by the window looking out and taking no comfort from the dumb stretch of hills and valleys that lay dark and lonely under the waning moon. (322)

Obviously, Judith finds no comfort in nature while in the throes of conflict over her daughter's possible death. Importantly, Kelley's personification of the moon functions here as had the dawn earlier: the portrait the moon sees through the window is of a woman "through the tracery made by a dead grapevine," an image of housebound imprisonment. Just as the dawn affirmed Judith's perception of her family's fate earlier in the novel, so now the moon affirms her perception of her daughter's fate, as well as of her own. Once again, an Emersonian echo resounds, as a "natural fact" symbolizes the "spiritual fact" of Judith's and her daughter's imprisonment within poverty and social constraints; this time, the "natural fact" also underscores Kelley's feminist theme, as the grapevine traces symbolic "bars" across Judith's face.

However, Judith's accurate perception of their fate does not negate her love for her daughter. Her conflict
dissolves into relief when the child lives, and leads to her recognition of her own maternal love. In the moment of relief, Judith reconciles with Jerry (323): what comfort they share she knows she must have. After this crisis, Judith knows the world as harsh, "stark now, bold and bare . . ." (327), but she retains her ability to draw peace from her natural surroundings. Eventually, she learns acceptance from watching the farm animals:

Standing wrapped in the growing twilight she felt herself like these humbler creatures an outgrowth of the soil, its life her life even as theirs. Quiet, peace and calm, these things belonged to them, a part of their heritage. These things in less measure her own life had to offer. These things at last she was ready to accept. . . . Peace was better than struggle, peace and a decent acquiescence before the things which had to be. At the thought her sunken chest rose a little and the shoulders fell into less drooping lines; and there was a certain dignity in the movement with which she threw a long wrung sheet over her shoulder and stalking with it to the line spread it out to
flap in the March winds.

Now, as she stood watching the pale sunset melt into darkness and listening to the distant bleating of the sheep, she told herself again that she was through with struggle and question, since for her nothing could ever come of them but discord. Henceforth she would accept what her life had to offer, carrying her burden with what patience and fortitude she could summon. She would go on for her allotted time bearing and nursing babies and rearing them as best she could. And when her time of childbearing was over she would go back to the field, like the other women, and set tobacco and worm and top tobacco, shuck corn and plant potatoes. . . .

She felt that she would never again seek estrangement from Jerry. Divided, their life was meaningless, degrading and intolerably dismal. Together there would be if not happiness at least peace and a measure of mutual comfort and sustaining strength by virtue of which they might with some calm and self-respect support the joint burden of their lives. (330-31)
Judith's reduced power shows in Kelley's use of animal imagery: the young woman who fought childbirth pain savagely, like a tiger and a wolf, learns to emulate the docility of domesticated farm beasts. Her choice to accept her fate is tragic, but realistic. Optionless by virtue of economic circumstance and gender, isolated by virtue of her own innate difference from her peers, she fastens on the socially acceptable fetters of marriage to reconnect with human companionship. The tragedy of Judith's situation, which allows a young woman whose nature lacks maternal instinct to be destroyed by forced maternity, has been delineated by Barbara Lootens in "A Struggle for Survival: Edith Summers Kelley's Weeds." Lootens examines the elements of Sophoclean tragedy present in the work. Although she ignores the Emersonian resonances found in the text, her obvious appreciation for it makes her argument compelling and, consequently, enhances our understanding. Among other things, she points out that Judith's final acceptance of her plight is not mere acquiescence, but a realization that her agreement to fulfill her social role can bring her a measure of dignity. And, in truth, that will be all Judith has: her poverty and her culture slowly strip of her joy, her individuality, her health and, finally, her self. With acceptance of her plight comes the death of that self, mirrored in Jabez's death: news of his solitary death from influenza quickly follows Judith's decision (331). Until this moment, Judith has not recog-
and Jerry is the man who not only brings news of Jabez's death, but who believes himself responsible for negligently failing to check on the old man a few days before (332). Thus, the boy who was vanquished by a girlchild of goddesslike power vanquishes her into lifeless isolation as an adult, and Kelley's point about the ties between female biology and female fate is driven home. Emerson's statement about the yielding of self-reliance to another, "[n]o man can come near me but through my act" ("Self-Reliance" 901), rings aloud with irony as Judith walks compliantly into her husband's house: when she finally accepts Jerry's comfort and companionship, Judith discards her self. Kelley's title for this work is Weeds, a pointed image of futility. Early on, she tells us that most of the farm on which Judith was raised is unusable because it had been "left to grow up in weeds" (7). From an Emersonian viewpoint, the image is a natural fact which mirrors a spiritual fact: Judith's superior intelligence, perception, and instinctive self-reliance are wasted and ultimately destroyed by the lifestyle Kelley describes. But, just as importantly, Kelley's image symbolizes her feminist theme: the tragic waste of a woman's life when she is forced to grow into roles which are, for her, unnatural.
Nature Nurtures a Powerful Self:  
Fielding Burke's *Call Home the Heart*

Olive Tilford Dargan, at age sixty-three, used the pen name Fielding Burke to disguise her authorship of *Call Home the Heart*, her first novel (Cook, Critical Afterword 447). But she had been writing for decades prior to this publication; after attendance at Peabody College and Radcliffe, the young Olive Tilford produced poetry and plays which won critical acclaim (Shannon 435-36). Her marriage and eventual move to a North Carolina farm forced a six-year hiatus in her literary career because her husband refused to provide her with a working space (Shannon 436). In her late thirties, Dargan gave birth to a premature daughter who died; importantly, she spent the summer of her recovery with friends who entertained radicals like Emma Goldman and Margaret Sanger (Shannon 437). Several years later, in 1911, she left her marriage to spend three years in England; she promptly began publishing poetry and plays again, but the prominence of her social commitment in these new volumes cost her critical approval (Shannon 437-38). Her husband's 1915 death freed her for an autonomous life on her farm, where she continued to write and publish with substantial critical recognition (Shannon 438). Dargan worked her farm for years among the mountain people she vividly describes in *Call Home the Heart* (Shannon 439); during this period she also brought into her...
home young women who had accepted the cultural concept of romantic love and marriage, and who had "found afterwards no escape from poverty and incessant childbearing . . ." (Shannon 440). She was also sympathetic to the communist cause for years, although she never joined the party; as late as 1941, she lent her cabin to party leaders for training (Shannon 442). However, she carefully shielded her direct connections with communists, and destroyed her own papers on several occasions as a self-protective measure; two of her remaining letters bear "cautionary postscripts to destroy them . . ." (Shannon 443). Given her political beliefs and familiarity with mountain people, it is not surprising that the Gastonia cotton mill strike of 1929 fascinated Dargan. The Gastonia strikers were predominantly mountain people with "a reputation for both individualism and ready violence" (Cook, Critical Afterword 453); the strike's duration and violence "had a profound impact on those who followed it and observed its lurid reporting in both the conservative and radical press" (Cook, Critical Afterword 454). Dargan, who visited Gastonia during the strike, was moved to begin a novel based on what she saw (Shannon 441), under the name of Fielding Burke. Burke's protagonist, Ishma Waycaster, is a mountain woman transplanted to a mill town, where she embraces communism and union work as a means to self-fulfillment.

But Ishma is substantially more than a union activist;
she is a quester, an instinctive seeker of self-fulfillment which she imagines to come from dedication of her self to an ideal. She spends much of her youth searching for an appropriate ideal to which she can commit, as events in the novel reveal. When we meet her, she is determined not to marry and give her substantial energy to a life of childbearing and rearing on a poor mountain farm. Instead, she plans to escape to the mill town in the valley. This plan is thwarted by her brother-in-law's unethical sale of the calf which she has reared for cash. The man whom she loves, Britt Hensley, rescues the calf for her; as a result, Ishma finally stops resisting her love for him and agrees to marriage. Her initial happiness evaporates after several years of misfortune, exacerbated by her enmeshment in familial obligations; at a moment of crisis, she instinctively flees the trap of mountain life for the town with another man. However, her freedom is postponed by the birth of a child, Vennie, who demands literally constant maternal care. Eventually, the child's accidental death allows Ishma to work in the mills, where she finds personal autonomy and a political ideology, communism, strong enough to deserve her commitment. For some time, a cause big enough to contain her energy brings fulfillment, as she deeply involves herself in union activities surrounding a long, violent mill strike. However, her sympathies instinctively rest with the poor white mill workers whose lives are
destroyed by the strike and, ultimately, she begins to question her commitment to communism. After heroically thwarting the lynching of a black union activist, she rejects his wife's intimately physical expression of gratitude by pushing the woman away; her shame at her own racism forces her to flee. She returns to the mountains, where she eventually reconciles with Britt and constructs a compromise between her need for commitment to a higher cause and her need for personal happiness.

Ishma's actions throughout the novel reveal her powerful self-reliance; additionally, her early struggle depicts a conflict between familial duty and individual fulfillment which resonates with Emersonian concepts. Sadly, little critical work exists about Call Home the Heart, and that little barely touches on its Emersonian debt. Sylvia Jenkins Cook gives the novel extended treatment in her From Tobacco Road to Route 66: The Southern Poor White in Fiction, tending to its feminist and Marxist ideology as well as to its place in the history of literary portrayals of poor whites. And in her Critical Afterword to the 1983 edition of the novel, Cook notes its "pattern of feminist thinking that forms one of the strongest bridges between the rural and urban sections of the book" (455). She also acknowledges that Burke's work deals with birth control and confronts the question of female nurturance versus human fulfillment through Ishma's daughter,
Vennie. The child's physical demands, Cook notes, entirely thwart Ishma's potential accomplishments, and her death represents a release from confinement for her mother (456). Within this context, Cook says that Burke's plotting is consistent "with the Emersonian refusal of the novel to accept any conventional obligations without first examining their worthiness" (456). But this teasing assertion obviously fails to reveal the full extent of Emersonian resonance found in the novel. Rather, it serves as a beginning point for exploration.

An examination of Call Home the Heart reveals that Ishma's self-reliance is the most powerful among the women characters dealt with here. As the novel's plot suggests, she cannot be confined by conventional familial duty or by romantic love, but must follow her instinctive quest for self-fulfillment. Her relationship with nature is clearly secondary to this self-reliant quest. Still, nature acts as a positive and negative motivator for her. Because she has been taught to highly value nature's beauty as a child, Ishma uses it as a spiritual panacea; on several occasions this curative ability, which clearly echoes Emersonian medicinal concepts, allows her to delay the quest for self-fulfillment. On other occasions, however, natural phenomena become "signs" for Ishma and, as such, both rejuvenate and propel her toward the quest; the Emersonian concept of physical nature as
emblematic of the spiritual realm resonates in these episodes. In ordinary terms, her relationship with the natural world provides both a blessing and a curse for Ishma, since it alternately helps and hinders the quest. Always, however, it is secondary to her sustained use of self-reliant thought and behavior.

This relegation of the nature relationship to secondary status is surprising, given that nature acts motivationally for Ishma; one contributory factor to its secondary rank is Burke's writing style, which excludes psychological portraiture. She often tells us about Ishma's character rather than showing us facets of that character in the subtle ways that have become identified with fine writing. For instance, a comparison of Ellen Chesser's epiphanic moment in the stony field (Roberts 80-81) with Ishma's climactic witnessing of a forest fire (Burke 422-25) reveals the former episode as more powerful for contemporary readers. While some portion of Roberts' greater power undoubtedly comes from her writing style, the fact that we have watched Ellen's growth and understand the meaning of this moment from inside her consciousness enhances our knowledge of and compassion for Ellen. In contrast, we learn about Ishma from outside her consciousness, often through the opinions of other characters; we are not allowed to experience Ishma's feelings, but are simply told what they are. However, this does not necessarily denigrate Burke's
skill as much as it points out that her writing has roots in a different tradition. Recent research has led to a renewed interest in the oral traditions of literature. (See Walter J. Ong's *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* for one well organized look at this subject.) Burke's style can be appreciated for its alignment with oral traditions: see "Edisode" (155-77) for the formational process of a mountain ballad which orally preserves the tale of a momentous fistfight in this predominantly illiterate culture. As noted, however, this style does not lend itself well to the exposure of psychological states, or the intimate revelation of emotions, so that Burke's handling of such matters often seems heavy-handed and not entirely credible.

Nonetheless, Burke establishes a credible source for both Ishma's self-reliance and her love for nature in the form of her maternal grandmother, Granny Starkweather. Granny's personality is forcefully self-reliant, and she recognizes in the child Ishma "a strong resemblance to herself" (Burke 6) as well as to Ishma's father, who had been "'[a]lways seekin', an' no name fer it'" (22). Consequently, Granny schools her granddaughter in deliberate self-reliance, since she recognizes it as the only hope for happiness that Ishma can have, given her class status and familial obligations. From Granny Stark, Ishma learns to examine all authority, even the Bible, as the following passage reveals:
Ishma's familiarity with the Bible had not enslaved her mind. Granny Stark had taken care of that. From the time that Ishma had begun to stumble through the sacred chapters for Granny's pleasure, she had been interrupted with such comments as "That's not decent!" "I don't have to believe that, thank God!" "They've got things mixed up there, the heavenly an' the airthly." "Mark that fer skippin', darter. We'll not read that twict." But the old lady's most frequent dissent was, "They're tellin' lies on Him now. God ain't like that. I know him."

She was no less free with comments of approval whenever the text coincided with her own ideas of right and wrong, or induced an elevation of spirit. "That's the truth, darter. Don't fergit that." "Stop right now, darter, an' git that by heart." "That makes a body want to fly. I'd trade these old feet fer the wings right now." (65-66)

Granny teaches Ishma in this manner to judge external authority against her own personal values. Obviously, this echoes Emersonian thinking; in fact, the passage above can be used to concretely exemplify Emerson's general assertion of the self's final authority:

No law can be sacred to me but that of my
nature. Good and bad are but names readily transferable to that or this; the only right is what is after my constitution, the only wrong what is against it. ("Self-Reliance" 892)

We can safely assume that if Granny has taught Ishma to judge for herself the worthiness of the highest authority available in their culture, then she has also made all lesser authorities, including the culture's conventions, open to question as well.

However, the habitual consideration of her self as final authority is not Granny's only gift to Ishma. She also teaches her granddaughter to love and understand nature (6). Her success is evident at the beginning of the text, when Ishma's relationship with nature is revealed in a description of one of her Sunday walks:

High on Lame Goat Ridge Ishma had earth to herself. This was the eastern and highest part of Dancer Ridge, the long line that meandered and dipped and curved between Dancer and Wimble counties. The top of Lame Goat gleamed bonily with cliffs and rocks, but the sides were thickly wooded, enclosing her in a world of tumbling waters and wild odors. In summer there were strange flowers trembling higher than her head, and birds innumerable; creepers, warblers of all kinds;
thrushes, chewinks, wood-doves; and sometimes an
unknown visitor with a cry thrillingly new.
If she went far enough around the mountain on
the north-east side she would come to a "bench"
big enough for the dashing stream to gather itself
into a great pool before creeping to the edge of
the bench and shooting a thousand silver arrows
downward. She could sit by this pool for hours
not wanting to move, feeling within herself a
leisurely flow of activity that made her both
contented and eager. The fount was filling up. . .
[O]nce when the child came rushing in towards
night, saying she had been to Moonfeather Falls,
hers mother grumbled. "Fer the land's sake, Ishmalee,
the strenth ort to be dreened out o' ye, cruisin' so fur, but you look like you could heave a hoss!" (1-2)
Ishma's use of nature for spiritual restoration is clearly
stated here in Burke's image of her "fount" being refilled,
and her physical restoration is evident in Laviny's comment.
The passage echoes one of Emerson's assertions about the
beauty of nature: "To the mind or body which have been
cramped by noxious work or company, nature is medicinal
and restores their tone" (Nature 830). It also recalls Pratt's
comment on women's use of nature for self-definition: "Com-
munion with the authentic self, first achieved by the heroine
in early naturistic epiphanies, becomes a touchstone by which
she holds herself together in the face of destructive roles proffered to her by society" (488). Clearly, the physical and spiritual restoration Ishma achieves in the presence of nature indicates an intuitive connection with her authentic self during her weekly walks.

This self exhibits an exceptionally high degree of self-reliance, as shown in her consistent refusal to passively conform to her culture's expectations for women. Even Lavin, Ishma's mother, recognizes her daughter's lack of conventionality: "Ishmalee's as much like [her brother] as a gal child dare to be. You kain't go too fur with her" (24).

The comparison to a man reveals Ishma's assertiveness and independence, so that we easily accept her statement that she will never marry (27). Indeed, she has learned from Granny Stark's example that nurturance need not equate with maternity: Granny had mothered seventeen children from two marriages to widowers, but only one of those was her own (4). And from her sister Bainie, whose yearly births add mouths to feed as they drain their mother's resources (4), Ishma has learned the trap of biological destiny contained in marriage. What Ishma wants most is to go to work in a mill and, thus, financially support both herself and Lavin, but she annually loses her resolve to leave the farm when faced with the prospect of Bainie's children starving (14). Consequently, as the story opens, Ishma plans to use her prized possession, a thoroughbred
dairy calf she has raised herself, to remedy the family's poverty (40) and, thus, facilitate her own escape. The calf pleases Ishma because it is physically beautiful and because she views it as "'a sign of what's coming'" (40), a ray of hope. When her brother-in-law unethically sells it, she decides to leave the mountain, and stops only when her favored suitor, Britt Hensley, rescues the calf for her. Her joy at its return, together with her genuine love for Britt, overwhelm her good sense, and Ishma impulsively agrees to marry him (56-57). Obviously, Britt's return of the calf, which signifies hope to Ishma, motivates her to deny her perception of marriage and the mountain life as entrapment.

Her decision eventually proves to be a bad one, as Burke foreshadows via a carefully chosen symbol, a forest fire. As a child, Ishma experienced a memorable fire:

She had broken away from her father and the other men [fighting it], and had run to a high knob. From there she could see an ocean of flame rolling and twisting in the valley below. That was when Dark Moon had been burnt over. She thought that she had floated high in the air above that fire. Night after night her ecstasy was repeated in her dreams, making it harder to doubt that she had flown over that flaming ocean. (25)
The freeing of her inner self which Ishma experiences when overwhelmed by a display of natural beauty is as close to Emersonian transcendence as she can come. Despite her sensation of "floating," what she intuitively responds to is the fire's vastness and undeniable force, its absolute power to change its surroundings. In such an event, this child can immerse her self; in so doing, she forms an emotional touchstone for stilling the questing restlessness of later years. And, because she knows the cycles of nature, she understands that this powerful death will lead to rebirth.

On the night of her calf's sale a similar fire rages, and Ishma plans to see it before she leaves the mountain. But she falls asleep, physically and emotionally exhausted; she awakens to find her calf returned to her and subsequently agrees to marry Britt. These events keep her from seeing the fire; her failure to re-experience immersion of her self mirrors her turning away from self-authorized autonomy toward conventional marriage. However, she freely chooses this route to self-fulfillment because she believes herself strong enough to avoid the entrapment marriage can entail.

Her marriage to Britt, because it is dominated by her familial obligations, clearly depicts a conflict between the needs of the self and the needs of the family which resonates with Emersonian thought. Regarding family, Emerson counsels us to disregard the conventional ties: "Why should
we assume the faults of our friend, or wife or father, or child, because they sit around our hearth, or are said to have the same blood?" ("Self-Reliance" 901). Together with her husband, Ishma works toward the goal of starting a separate household but, because they continue to support her family financially, their goal becomes unreachable. Had they moved away from Ishma's family, Ishma might have found fulfillment in her life with Britt; eventually, however, the drain of familial obligations erases her initial happiness with him and, thus, closes off the conventional avenue of romantic love as a means of fulfillment for her. Through this development we see further evidence of her inability to conform to cultural expectations when they conflict with her own needs.

However, this situation does not initially occur, undoubtedly because Britt is a fine mate for Ishma; he works as hard as she does to obtain a separate household and, notably, he shares her love for nature, as the following passage reveals:

The sun would be up in a moment, but before they began work they had to stand together and look over the mountain world, feeling the air whose balm though sweet with promise was not yet wholly free of winter. In the hollow below the field the tall poplars had begun to "cloud"; which meant that the high boughs were tipped with misty, yellow buds. Down under the poplars they could hear the tinkling
hesitations of the stream that had its beginning in the Birch spring and was fed from the ferny sides of the hollow. At the other end of the long valley stretching away from the foot of their mountain, the hills began to climb again, and on their slopes lay a dark-blue cloud like a meadow lake. Soon the sun would be upon it, and heavy with gold it would sink down, pinning itself in the tree tops. The far, circling peaks lay almost black in the east against a peach-blow heaven; violet-tipped in the south and west, and gold-green in the north. Looking upward, they saw a sky creamy white, and tender as a blessing.

"We'll never leave Cloudy Knob," said Ishma, and Britt's echoing "never!" was as certain as her own. (96)

In the couple's response to the mountain scene we hear the echo of an Emersonian assertion about beauty: "[T]he primary forms, as the sky, the mountain, the tree, the animal, give us a delight in and for themselves; a pleasure arising from outline, color, motion, and grouping" (Nature 829). More importantly, in Ishma's declaration to "'never leave Cloudy Knob,'" we hear the blessing and the curse of her relationship with nature. Its beauty so completely pleases her that she can imagine, particularly in loving partnership with Britt, contentedly feasting on it forever. The blessing
of her response is in the contentment it brings; the curse is also this contentment, which allows her to settle for a conventional role in which she necessarily disregards herself.

But she cannot forever turn from her own needs, despite her happiness with Britt. For one thing, with sexuality comes maternity in Ishma's culture, and her faith in her ability to obtain her own home weakens after the birth of her first child, when she begins feeling "mentally clamped down" (78). And even before the birth, her family has been steadily spoiling her chance for owning a home with Britt. Her brother-in-law has an accident while firefighting; his medical bills take all of her savings (61) and the prized calf (63). The cash for the first year's harvest buys a cow and pays off the general store bill (77). An ox team and the store bill take the second year's cash (80-81). During her third year of marriage, the crop is ruined because her family fails to tend it while she and Britt are ill; this time, only half the store bill is paid, and medical bills remain outstanding (87). These events resonate loudly against Emerson's admonition not to "assume the faults" of our family ("Self-Reliance" 901). They also eventually cause Ishma to refocus on her own needs, and thus revive her quest for self-fulfillment. Love alone is not enough for her; once her goal with Britt becomes unattainable, she must seek elsewhere.
But before this happens, Ishma creates one final opportunity to achieve their goal: ever free from conventional restraints, she suggests planting soybeans, a crop new to their mountains. When first they see the leafy plants, she and Britt recognize them as "a part of themselves— that green abundance— flowing out of their bodies" (101). Emerson's concept of the world as a "realized will" echoes in their success with the new crop; he says:

Nature is thoroughly mediate. It is made to serve. . . . It offers all its kingdoms to man as the raw material which he may mould into whatever is useful. Man is never weary of working it up. . . . More and more, with every thought, does his kingdom stretch over things, until the world becomes, at last, only a realized will,—the double of the man. (Nature 841)

Obviously, Ishma is bending nature's will to her own by planting this, or any other, crop. Still, this crop, because it is experimental, represents a risk: with success can come attainment of her goal, but with failure, loss of status in her community; thus, self-reliance again comes into play. Importantly, so does another Emersonian assertion about the manifestation of spirit in nature:

There seems to be a necessity in spirit to manifest itself in material forms;
and day and night, river and storm, beast
and bird, acid and alkali, preëxist in
necessary Ideas in the mind of God, and
are what they are by virtue of preceding
affections, in the world of spirit. A
Fact is the end or last issue of spirit.
The visible creation is the terminus or
the circumference of the invisible world. (Nature 838)

Superficially, the soybeans are symbolic of Ishma's chosen
goal; spiritually, they are emblematic of her need for
self-fulfillment. She pours her energy into the soybeans
to achieve her quest. This energy can be seen as a mani-
festation of Ishma's spirit as it joins with the spirit of
nature--"a part of [herself]--that green abundance--flowing
out of [her body]"--to change reality in a soybean field.
The "Fact" of the growing soybeans is the emblem of Ishma's
quest; and if it succeeds, she will change not only her
own world, but also the world of mountain farming by proving
the worth of new methods. Thus, the fact of Ishma's soybeans
becomes her gift to her community; on a new level, then,
we understand her as a hero.

But she does not succeed. The soybeans grow only to
be attacked by nocturnally marauding cows (102-05). Ishma
goes alone to save her field, climbing the mountain path to
it without stopping for a lantern. There, at the top of the
mountain, in a pitchblack night, she chooses self over nature. The cows destroy not just her plants but also her future, in Burke's words "her foundations" (103). They must be stopped and, when gentler methods prove futile, Ishma "let[s] a murderous blow fall on the [bell cow's] rump" (104) and gives chase, "beat[ing] that cow inhumanly" (103). In so doing, she reveals her priority: if nature will not cooperate, Ishma will reject it in favor of her self. As we might expect, the price of her choice is high: for the first time, she despairs and questions her own ability to attain her goal (105). Never before has she lost faith in her personal vision. At this crucial moment Ishma remembers one of Granny Stark's stories, the tale of Goodman, whose calamities ultimately saved his life (106-08). She recalls Granny's voice reciting the tale's moral: "'Yer worst trouble may be yer best luck'" (108). Just moments afterward, a natural phenomenon occurs:

A falling meteor lit up the woods and turned all the black night into a transparent cool flame. . . . Her meteor! Right at her feet from millions of miles away. It had come so suddenly, winding her in such wonder that at first she didn't know what it meant. When she understood, her exaltation leapt higher. She had seen
every leaf and twig and rock about her,
every fern and bit of moss, every rain-pearl
like a tiny seed in the air. It had been
a cool light like the moon's, but it had
seemed brighter than the sun; and it had
bathed everything . . . . For the tenth of
a minute she had been all-seeing. Now she
could believe that someday a light would come
into the world of her mind making everything
clear . . . . If a stone, a rock, could come,
how much more easily a thought! She needn't
worry about not being ready for it. With its
power it would kindle hers. (109-10)

Obviously, the memory of her grandmother bolsters Ishma's
confidence, so that she can continue to engage in self-
authorized behavior. Additionally, remembering her mentor's
teachings about nature allows Ishma to interpret the
natural phenomenon as a "sign" for her future. After
seeing the meteor, she intuits that she must continue
her quest and have faith in its ultimate success. Thus,
Emerson's concept of nature's emblematism echoes: "The
world is emblematic. . . . [T]he whole of nature is a
metaphor of the human mind. The laws of moral nature answer
to those of matter as face to face in a glass" (Nature 837).
Here, the lighted night, notably similar to the nocturnal
brilliance of a forest fire, burns away doubt and thus
becomes emblematic of her quest. Ishma understands the sign: as the meteor lights the world around her, so she seeks to light her own world in the process of fulfilling her self. Significantly, after this episode she again begins to think of leaving the mountains, this time with Britt (110). The self is again first for her, and Britt's refusal to leave seals the fate of their marriage.

The hopeful message of the meteor fades from Ishma's mind when, several months later, she discovers she is pregnant with her fourth child and "a paralyzing pall settle[s] down upon her . . . " (114) which even nature's beauty cannot penetrate. Her depression is relentless, and so is her intellect: she recognizes that she will never have an autonomous household (134), and seriously considers leaving the mountains alone. Toward that end, she insists on taking what cash will come from the remaining soybean hay (132). Then, another forest fire occurs and, because of her pregnancy, she fails in her attempt to climb the mountain and once again see Dark Moon burn (134). Her inability to see the fire because of her pregnancy underscores the stunting of her personal growth by her mountain life, where active sexuality and maternity, together with familial obligations, twine together to entrap her. Forced to turn away from her mountain trek to the fire, Ishma suddenly, intuitively, knows the futility of her life, and decides to leave the mountains.
with the soybean money (135-36). That decision made, she can once again experience nature's beauty as she sits by the farm's spring:

It was always this way with Ishma.

Whenever she got out of the house and sat alone, her mood, after the first few breaths of release, became self-accusing. She had the sky, the woods, the winds, the stars; all so clean and mighty. How could she let anything that happened in a little house bother her? She ought to bring it help—to be to the house what the sky and the woods were to her. Yes, that was the way she ought to stand in life. Not forget that the winds and the stars were behind her—that she could lean against their clean strength. (146)

Emerson's comment about the medicinal effect of natural beauty (Nature 830) resonates here, as the outdoor world acts as a balm for Ishma's troubled spirit, and reveals the blessing that comes to her via nature. Consequently, she begins questioning her decision. Once again, the curse inherent in her love for nature reveals itself by pulling her back toward the husband and the family, and away from the needs of the self. Her contentment entwines with acculturation here, and nearly overwhelms Ishma until her brother reminds her of reality. He also plans to leave the mountain
that night, but will not allow her to join him, saying:
"'A woman's a woman. She's bound to carry the baggage in
this life. They's no gittin' out of it for her. A man can
walk off anytime, but a woman kain't'" (149). This realistic
presentation of her gender-based restriction strikes a deep
chord in Ishma, one which resonates against the self-reliant
core of her character and contributes to her most rebellious
act in the novel. When she learns, a little later, that the
remaining soybean hay has been destroyed by the fire, she
flees the mountain at once with an old suitor, Rad Bailey,
simply because he provides the means of getting to the mill
town (155-56). To point out the self-reliance inherent in
this action seems almost facile. Simply stated, it is the
most strikingly unconventional act committed by any of the
protagonists discussed here and, although Emerson himself
would likely have disapproved of it, he would also have
understood that it particularly exemplifies the following
passage from "Self-Reliance":

What I must do, is all that concerns me,
not what people think. This rule, equally
arduous in actual and in intellectual life,
may serve for the whole distinction between
greatness and meanness. It is the harder,
because you will always find those who think
they know what is your duty better than you
know it. (893)

Ishma's choice of self over social convention obviously conflicts with her culture's expectations of female duty; despite the condemnation she knows she will face, she courageously, if desperately, continues her pursuit of self-fulfillment. However, just as important as the Emersonian resonance of Ishma's decision is its inherent feminism. With this act, the feminist undercurrent which has shaped Ishma's response to marriage, and particularly to motherhood, becomes a powerful channel for Burke's feminist beliefs. Beginning here, she creates a new means of fulfillment for her character, one independent from romantic love and maternity.

First, however, Burke fully delineates her point about the thwarting of selfhood by forced motherhood through Ishma's relationship with her fourth child, Vennie, after her birth in the mill town. The girl has a nervous disorder which requires literally constant attention from her mother (192). Ishma's reaction to her situation is typically straightforward:

Ishma felt that fate had struck once more. "Just a little scrub of a kid," she told herself. "That's all I'm living for." She pressed the small head to her bosom, and loved it dearly, but she didn't let her affection deceive her. (196-97)
Vennie's doctor and Ishma's eventual mentor, Derry Unthank, understands the waste of energy which this motherhood entails: "[H]e looked at Ishma and knew the pain of her inward chafing. A war-horse pulling a toy sled. Good job if the kid would croak!" (198). His cynicism comes from lengthy practice among the mill workers in Ishma's community; Derry has watched many women die unnecessarily because their bodies were weakened by serial pregnancies and constant childcare. Consequently, he passionately advocates birth control and instructs men in its practice. As soon as Ishma learns about it, she engineers Rad's instruction (194-96) so that she need no longer fear pregnancy; when confronted with the notion that such practice might be sin, her response is: "'I don't care whether it's sin or not'" (194). For Ishma, a much greater "sin" is to act against her own instincts by having another unwanted child. Burke's insertion of the subject of birth control, controversial in her era, again reveals her strongly feminist stance. She clearly advocates for an end to forced motherhood through Ishma's confinement with Vennie, as well as through her detailing of other women's plights in Ishma's community. While she does not reveal specifics of birth control techniques, her treatment of the controversial subject is courageous and clearly feminist. It also underscores the conflicting Emersonian impulses she depicts between the needs of the family and the needs of the self for women. Emerson's admonition to
shun the faults of our family ("Self-Reliance" 901) is simply impractical for women, particularly in terms of maternity. Pratt states this case extremely well:

The either-or attitude toward selfhood and marriage, the conviction that one cannot develop fully as a woman in a love relationship and also develop as a human being, derives largely from a specific bio-historical context, namely the lack of widespread and effective birth control. The sentiment that indulging one's sexual nature constitutes self-sacrifice is not exaggerated for a woman when the aftermath of sexual initiation consists of an endless or at best lengthy series of childbirths and miscarriages, infants to raise, corollary illnesses, dependence upon men, waste of one's prime years, and early death. (490)

The conflict between self and family which underpins *Call Home the Heart* is most clearly evident in Ishma's entrapment within the mothering of Vennie, but this entrapment is not the only one; she is very much confined within her relationship with Rad because of her financial dependence on him. Ironically, she runs from the mountains to the town in search of freedom, and finds greater confinement in motherhood
and financial dependence than the mountains ever imposed. She is aware that motherhood yields her no "sense of self-completion" (231), and that her life is purposeless (219) but, notably, she is guiltless about her lack of maternal feeling; this lack of guilt indicates the degree of faith she places in the authority of her own instincts.

Still, that authority is thwarted within a completely confining life which lacks even the joy of natural beauty which had previously sustained her. Ishma literally sees no open grassland or woods for two years after Vennie's birth. Finally, she walks the long distance to the nearest park and, there, with "the feeling of green life about her" (232), is able to cry. Thus, she reveals the retention of her nurturing relationship with nature. The unlocking of her emotions leads to a freeing of memory, and she remembers an incident from her childhood:

She thought of a time when, as a girl of ten years, she had gone for a long climb up a mountain trying to reach a grey spur from which she knew she could see the far world. She remembered the hot, eager blood that was in her as she scrambled up over rocks and squeezed through thickets. Near her goal, she found herself between a cliff and a jutting boulder. Climbing up between them, she sat down with her eyes shut. She hadn't looked back for the
last mile of the climb, saving her emotion for what she would see from the top. Safely on her ledge, she turned and opened her eyes. There in front of her, growing out of the cliff, was a stunted loblolly. Its roots bored into the crevices below, but its bushy little top reached up until she couldn't see over it. Wedged in between boulder and cliff, she could go no higher. She could do nothing but look into the branches of that poor little pine that hid the far valleys, the sunlit peaks, the long, dreamy ridges, and the pale path of rivers. Later she scrambled down to a lower ledge and her eyes found what they sought, but ecstasy could not be reborn. (231)

Obviously, Ishma sees Vennie as an obstacle to her pursuit of self-fulfillment: as the pine blocked her anticipated vision of beauty, so the child impedes her ability to search for meaningful work or any other means of self-fulfillment. Additionally, the pine-blocked view becomes not only symbolic of the circumstances of Ishma's life, but emblematic of her spiritual starvation as well; thus, it resonates loudly with Emerson's assertion that "[p]articular natural facts are symbols of particular spiritual facts" (Nature 834).

Her questing spirit, which demands involvement in the outside world, is stunted by its confinement within the role of
traditional motherhood.

Burke's depiction of the conflict between Emersonian self-reliance and the primary cultural expectation for women is strongest here: romantic love leading to motherhood is expected to fulfill all women, but the reality of serial childbearing and daily childrearing confines non-maternal women. The culture offers few fulfilling alternatives to this expectation, and so abandons the woman who, following her own instincts, feels trapped within maternity. After fully delineating this belief in Ishma's relationship with Vennie, Burke engineers a solution: she kills off the child via an accident during this same outing in the park (232-33). When she tries to save her daughter from an approaching automobile, Ishma is badly injured and, subsequently, hospitalized. Although she had previously decided to return to the mountains because of her love for Britt (219), she determines to help Rad pay off her hospital bills; she makes this new decision "for herself[her] mind, her peace, her self-respect" (264). Clearly, she acts according to Emerson's conception of honor:

Honor is venerable to us because it is no ephemeris. It is always ancient virtue. We worship it to-day, because it is not of to-day. We love it and pay it homage, because it is not a trap for our love and homage, but is
self-dependent, self-derived, and therefore of an old immaculate pedigree, even if shown in a young person. ("Self-Reliance" 896)

Ishma's "pedigree" shows in her refusal to abandon Rad to his indebtedness. Childless, she can return to the mountains or begin creating a new life for herself, as she chooses, but because Rad has provided a home for her during the confinement of Vennie's life, she will not abandon him to years of indebtedness after the child's death. Instead, she continues their cohabitation and finds work in one of the mills, then gives half her pay to settle her debt (277).

Even with half her earnings dedicated in this fashion, Ishma has more money to spend than she has ever had. However, the freedom to spend this money is the only one she gets initially; she remains responsible for their household and, more importantly, for Rad's sexual needs. Although she no longer fears pregnancy, she dreads sexual contact and so avoids it; sometimes, however, it cannot be avoided without dishonoring one of the tacit conditions of her arrangement with Rad. On one such night, Ishma turns to nature for comfort and, for the first time, it fails her. While he waits for her in the bedroom, she goes outside:

Out in the yard she looked up at her old friends, the stars, for strength to go back into the room. They put
her in her place. Agony that filled to the brim one entire human life seemed a small matter when she thought of the worlds out there. And her life held much besides agony—much that should make her happy. She had health, work, home, friends—a good man—Oh, if he would beat her and let her get away! If he would cut her to the bone! Again the hot thoughts were tumbling through her brain. The stars couldn't help. All their unfeeling magnitude meant less than one drop of warm, aching blood. (279)

Obviously, nature's beauty brings no comfort as Ishma confronts the prospect of unwanted sex. When she is compelled to abdicate her own authority in favor of undesired, although honorable, sexual compliance, her loss of connection with nature presages her deliberate abandonment of her self via this compliance. Nature becomes cold and "unfeeling" rather than beautifully overwhelming; obviously, to indulge in sexual contact without intimacy, even for honorable reasons, betrays her own autonomy so deeply that she cannot take comfort even from nature. So, we see again that Ishma's relationship with nature is secondary to her recognition
of her self as final authority. Still, the incident marks growth for her: although her relationship with nature is devalued and she no longer feels its blessing, so she will no longer feel the curse of its sedative effect. She is free to establish a new means of feeding her self, and will eventually establish a new relationship with nature. Not long afterward, the hospital bill is charitably released and Ishma quickly manipulates Rad into marriage with another woman (299-303). Freed, finally, from all constraints, she begins to feed her self through a new source, union work.

Ishma's belief in the union and its communist philosophy springs directly from her understanding of and sympathy for the millworkers whose lives she has observed for more than two years. Under Derry Unthank's tutelage, she has nursed many of them through illnesses caused by malnutrition and exhaustion, and has seen firsthand the physical devastation consequent to years of work in the mills. Because of her evident sympathy for the workers, she has been approached by a union activist who wants her help in recruitment. The activist has recognized Ishma's potential, along with her dissatisfaction, and then addressed it:

"What you been doin' is just patchin' around, an' you'll soon find it out. This 'll be main business. You'll be
where what you do counts. An' it's a
shame fer a woman like you not to count."

Ella's words seemed to twist
around Ishma's buried desire and bring
it to light. Of all things, what
she wanted most was to count, to be
part of something real, as everlasting
at least, as humanity. (227.)

The urge to find a larger purpose is central to Ishma's
quest for self-fulfillment. In the decade following the
Communist revolution in Russia, when Ishma's story takes
place, communism contained the hope of empowerment for
millions of poverty-stricken workers. Burke clearly pre-
sents this view in a lengthy speech from a travelling speaker
which Ishma attends (283-91). The union is run by communists;
their philosophy, with its potential for worker empowerment,
becomes the light in her mind which the meteor had earlier
signified, and offers Ishma the larger cause to which she can
dedicate her energy and her self. Only in a broader arena
than socially prescribed marriage and motherhood can her
questing spirit hope to find self-fulfillment. Cook has
noted this point in her Critical Afterword to the novel:
"Ishma gains the rewards of a questing mind by finding
a system of thought and action that gives a public purpose
to her life . . ." (450). This "public purpose" translates
into tireless recruitment for the union inside the mill, followed by successful procurement of donations for its members once their strike forces her outside. That this work fulfills her is clear:

Every day she went to the mill and walked up and down in her alley from six to six, with an hour at noon spent on her feet as she talked "union."

Communication was cautious and disguised under the big roof, but it was understood. She learned how to talk to a worker's back and shoulders, making apparently casual words carry a hot stream of meaning. She ate her lunch drifting and talking. Aching feet did not matter. . . . Ishma looked in the mirror at her weary eyelids and smiled. Weariness meant nothing to youth and the hope that was hers. That greater part of herself, meant to march with the racial entity, was out of its prison. Her body might grow cold and rot with death, but there was something of herself that would go as far as mankind. . . . She was upheld by that supreme ecstasy,
the consciousness of transmuting daily life into an ideal. She was part of the creative gesture, building a brighter world; a world so near that she could stretch her hands over the border and feel them tingling with its sun. (305-06)

Burke echoes Emersonian transcendence in Ishma's "supreme ecstasy, the consciousness of transmuting daily life into an ideal" and in her sharing in "the creative gesture," but with a significant difference. While Emerson counsels us to join the universal spirit found in nature and so mentally shape our individual experience, Burke gives Ishma "ecstasy" by entwining her in a cause that potentially benefits all humankind. By reaching out to other people with a potentially life-enhancing gift, Ishma transcends the harsh reality of her daily existence. This action is distinctively feminine in its echo of the human connectedness traditionally required of women in her culture; it is also powerfully feminist in its reliance on Ishma's individual autonomy. Her nurturance is no longer limited to an individual child or family, but reaches multitudes with potentially world-changing results.

This mass nurturance via union activism provides growth for Ishma: not only can she believe in an ideal which potentially allows her to transcend the limitations of her
social class and gender, but she also finds fulfillment for her nurturing instincts, as we see when Burke links her with goddess imagery. During Ishma's hospitalization, just after her release from individual nurturance via Vennie's death, someone describes her as "'Mother Eve'" (241). Later, just before she gains freedom from Rad, Derry Unthank calls her "'the great Earth-mother'" (294-95). Recent archaeological study reveals the existence of a dominant female deity, revered as the giver of life, in the pre-literate era of history; it also confirms the link between this deity and the first woman, Eve (Stone 216-23). Although any assertion of Burke's knowledge of the great goddess is speculative, her imagery clearly connects Ishma with the ancient life-giver, with positive results. After she matures into the role of nurturer for the masses, Ishma's power to help individuals improve their lives is demonstrated through an incident in which she restores communication between a farmer and his wife. During a trip to the Beasleys' farm in search of food for starving strikers, Ishma and Mrs. Beasley watch a beautiful, snail-shaped cloud form and fade. Subsequent conversation reveals that Mrs. Beasley had seen such beauty only once before, on the day she and her husband married, but had been too shy to mention it to him (340). Later, Mr. Beasley tells Ishma that he and his wife have had to work so hard for so many years that "'right now it seems to me
like we've never really got acquainted'' (344). When he remarks, a few minutes afterward, on the similarity between the snail-shaped cloud and one he had watched on their wedding day, Ishma extracts his promise to ask his wife about "'the loveliest thing she ever saw in her life'" (347). Thus, she sets up circumstances in which the couple can discuss a beautiful experience, thereby opening a passage to greater intimacy than they have ever had. Her act reveals her stature as goddess-nurturer: fulfilled by work in a broader arena than individual motherhood, she gives the life-enhancing gifts of communication and emotional intimacy to a couple who previously lacked them. These intangibles feed the spirit rather than the body; Ishma's gift of them to the Beasleys reveals her capacity for nurturance of the human spirit, and so aligns her with Goddess. And this alignment, which results from her self-fulfillment through union work, echoes Emerson's admonition regarding the necessity of self-reliance: "Do your work, and you shall reinforce yourself" ("Self-Reliance" 893). Although within his context he counsels us toward strict preservation of the individual intellect, the remark is literally true regarding Ishma's growth resulting from work. Moreover, despite her distinctly feminine involvement with others in the expression of her self-reliance, the radicalism of the ideal she espouses and focuses her life around reveals her maintenance of intellectual self-authorization and nonconformity.
Nonetheless, the same intellectual honesty and human sympathy which compels Ishma toward union activism demands that she recognize the destructive reality of the strike. When workers living in company houses are evicted, she narrowly saves a woman from giving birth publicly (321-22), and attempts to comfort another whose shock at the loss of her home has stolen her sanity (322). The protagonist's ideals are tested by her witnessing of picket line atrocities:

The days flowed by in an ugly dream for Ishma. With unbelieving eyes she saw women prodded in the back, their arms cruelly twisted, children with bleeding legs, Grandma Swithin with a two-inch [bayonet] cut on her shoulder, harmless pedestrians scattered into yards and climbing banks for safety. She saw a woman of nearly sixty years beaten over the head until her eyes were closed and blackened, a woman who was not even a picket-line offender. A boy was stuck so deep that he was rushed to a hospital instead of jail. Later came rumors of blood-poisoning. Leaders of the line were daily seized, thrown into cars and carried to prison,
where they were denied water and tortured with vile fumes. (316-17)

Eventually, such horrors weaken Ishma's belief in victory for the strikers (347); her belief disintegrates further because of her racism. She has struggled against the engrained racism of her society--"Mountain people are always white," she says at one point (353)--because of its opposition to her egalitarian communist philosophy, but cannot bring herself to consider African Americans her equals. The social strictures against racial equality are so deeply etched in Ishma's culture that Burke almost assumes them; in fact, prior to the strike Burke approaches race only once, allowing the offhandedness of her language to depict the pervasiveness of racism. Earlier, before Ishma fled the mountains, Britt had left the farm to earn cash for the needy family:

After a week's search, Britt found work twenty miles away, near Raqcoon Springs, where a lumber company was putting a road through to their timber. He got on the force because they were working negroes, and very few mountain men were willing to work with a black gang. He was to receive two dollars a day, but he proved himself such a handy good fellow with negroes and
mules that his pay was secretly raised
fifty cents before a week was out. (111)
The deliberate pairing of "negroes and mules" here reveals
the pervasive assumption of racial inferiority by mountain
people, and Burke's statement that "few mountain men [would]
work with a black gang" reveals the atmosphere of discrimination in which Ishma was raised. Until her conversion to communism, she has never questioned her racial attitudes. But the union's insistence on granting African Americans membership forces her to examine her beliefs, even though she cannot change them easily. In a conversation with Derry Unthank, she reveals her belief in racist stereotypes—"'They wouldn't make as good workers'" (352)—and comments positively on one African American union organizer because he is fair-skinned and educated, while denigrating his choice of a very dark-skinned wife (352). This prejudice, more
anciently rooted in Ishma than her belief in worker solidarity, creates a conflict which she cannot resolve. Artistically, it is problematic: Burke presents it both suddenly and late in the novel, which makes credibility difficult. As a character trait, it contradicts Ishma's remarkably consistent self-authorization: she has accepted no other cultural convention before this point, so how is it that she allows the culture's racist attitudes to influence her so heavily? We wonder if Burke's background as a playwright led her to give
her character a tragic flaw; if so, it is presented too late and too conveniently for credibility and, instead, reads as a mechanical device aimed at manipulating Ishma out of her situation.

However, before that happens the character tries valiantly to overcome it; toward that end, she commits a powerfully valorous act by saving the African American activist from lynching. When she hears the lynching is imminent, on a night when most union members attend a meeting out of town, she goes alone to save the man. She confronts the activist's five kidnappers, calling several by name (377). When they threaten to whip her she turns a gun on herself and threatens suicide; her death, she explains, would appear a better choice than the rape which other people would assume she died to avoid (378-79). Because even the assumption of rape involving a white woman would mean dire consequences for the kidnappers, they abandon their plan and turn the unconscious activist over to her (380). Notably, her use of the cultural stricture against the rape of a white woman to circumvent the culturally condoned murder of a black man underscores her female status and the African American's minority status; it also creates an ironic paradox in which representatives of white patriarchal culture are defeated by members of disenfranchised groups using the dominant culture's own standards against it. But, more importantly, the incident carries another
echo of Emersonian thought. In *Nature*, he asserts that natural beauty enhances a heroic act, which in turn enhances natural beauty:

In private places, among sordid objects,
an act of truth or heroism seems at once
to draw to itself the sky as its temple,
the sun as its candle. Nature stretcheth
out her arms to embrace man, only let his
thoughts be of equal greatness. (832)

Although Burke gives us minimal natural description during this episode, we know that Ishma has already ascended to goddesslike stature via the self-fulfillment she finds in union work. That done, she not only gives spiritual gifts; she also gives life itself to a man about to be murdered. In so doing, she elevates her relationship with nature to a new level by performing a heroic act, one aligned with nature in Emersonian terms. Importantly, her impulse to heroism springs from the authority of her self-reliant core, and so intersects her nature-aligned outer act with her self-authorized inner impulses. Obviously, while Ishma cannot transcend in Emersonian terms, she does ascend here to a new level of power: finally fulfilled, she acquires life-giving power in her new status as an earth-mother goddess.

But, as noted above, her racism prevails. When she
takes the unconscious man home, his wife is loudly and
profusely grateful, and throws her arms around Ishma:

The fleshy embrace, the murky little
room, the smoking ashes, the warm stench,
the too eager faces shining greasily at the
top of big, black bodies, filled Ishma with
uncontrollable revulsion. She thought of a
high, clean rock on Cloudy Knob, half covered
with sweet moss and red-tipped galax. She shut
her eyes and saw a cardinal flying over snow.

The rolling arms lay heavy on her neck.
The fat bosom shook against her own. The
sickening smell of disturbed animal sweat
rose and fell with the black body. Gaffie
could not see Ishma's blazing eyes, but she
felt the white arms stiffen. Before she
could release herself voluntarily, Ishma had
thrust her off with a wild blow, followed by
another. The first struck Gaffie's face;
the second fell terrifically on her shoulder,
and she went over backwards. . . . Ishma looked
at the prostrate woman and saw the blood spurting
from her temple. She looked over the smoking
lamp and met the eyes of Derry Unthank. There
was shock in them that merged in a holy patience.
His lips half smiled with his high forbearance. The smile brought Ishma to her senses. With unutterable horror of herself she pushed through the door and stumbled away. (383-84)

Obviously, Ishma finds the limits of her power here. Although she can give life in a heroic act which vanquishes her racism in service of her belief in worker solidarity, she cannot overcome her revulsion at an unsolicited embrace by an African American woman. Emotionally overwhelmed by sensory unpleasantness, her deeply engrained old belief overpowers her new one. Importantly, Burke describes Ishma's inability to find relief in the memory of a beautiful natural scene; only once before has this happened, when she faced unwanted sex with Rad. We can only imagine her revulsion during his lovemaking, which she could not honorably avoid. This later embrace, consequently, cannot be accepted, even within the bounds of honor or ideals; this embrace must be repelled. In so doing, Ishma demonstrates the value she places on the maintenance of her physical integrity—no ideology can persuade her to relinquish the integrity of her body in a situation to which she does not agree. In this single moment, albeit at the cost of her ideals, Ishma respects the integrity of her own self above all.

However, she interprets the incident solely in terms of her failed ideological adherence, and immediately flees to Cloudy Knob. En route, she once again reveals her trust
in her own instincts as she mulls over her rejection of the woman's embrace:

"I know what I am now. I'm an animal. I haven't got a little Neanderthal woman in me. She's all of me. I'm nothing else. That's clear. And I'm not going to do a thing about it. I didn't make myself. I'll be as I was made. I wanted to slap that woman and I slapped her. I want to get back to Britt, and I'm getting back..." (385)

Although she has intended to return to Britt and the mountains for some time, her dedication to her work has intervened; when released from that responsibility, she automatically turns toward home. Once there, she finds that Britt's improvements to the farm, together with her sister's family leaving, have made life much easier (386-95). When Ishma tells Britt that she has returned because she is "craving" mountains (399), what she means is she craves him, although a series of plot manipulations delays their reconciliation. However, she also instinctively craves nature's healing; that healing begins when a forest fire coincidentally spreads over Dark Moon, the same land that had burnt so beautifully in her youth. Her initial response to this news reveals the depth of her disillusionment: "'I'd like to die looking into Dark Moon full of fire'" (399). A little later, she
explains further:

"I want to see the fire rolling up from
Dark Moon. Rings and rings of fire rolling
and climbing. I want to look at something
that is not a muddle. Something going ahead
and going big." (412)

Indeed, that is what she finds; the fire's enormous beauty
and power allow her to release her spirit into it:

She didn't go up to the top of the last
cliff, but stood in a gap that looked out
over Dark Moon. What she saw held no
disappointment. At last life was kind.
Here was invincibility, and beauty was
its breath. Looking at it, she herself
became fire, power, beauty. Like plumed
boughs the burning curves rose upward,
and she rose with them. Light raced around
the horizon, and she was the light. An
ocean of white smoke sent its rolling waves
against heaven, and she too glided upward
to beat at the doors of the sky. In the
waves were fiery bits, like splintered
stars, and she was those swirling, dancing
bits, going to mad, ecstatic death.

Down the steep slope below her, the
Ishma leaned to the precipice, with upward poise, motionless before flight. . . .

[She said,] "Oh, there was never anything so wonderful! It's like an ocean of pearls rolling up the sides of the coves, and the fire making it look as if the sun had got under it." (422)

As Ishma sends her spirit soaring above the flames, she transcends her earthbound existence to merge with nature's
overwhelming power. Her attraction to the fire's beauty grows from its invincibility; in this respect, her response echoes an Emersonian tenet: "Every natural fact is a symbol of some spiritual fact" (Nature 834). The beauty of the fire's invincibility; as well as its spectacular display of destruction, becomes emblematic for her of the coming worker revolution which she believes will change the world. Additionally, its unstoppable energy becomes a sign for her own energy: "She must carry that power and fire with her back to her work" (424). Thus, the natural fact of the fire becomes first a healing force for her beaten spirit, and then the emblem of the work which her spirit requires to feel complete. Although she has returned to the mountains for healing, she understands now that she must renew her quest for self-fulfillment by returning to meaningful work, particularly if she cannot reconcile with Britt. However, although Ishma ascribes her own interpretation to the fire, we understand it in one additional dimension: ultimately, the forest fire becomes an emblem of Ishma's renewed acceptance of her self. Its lighting of the night appears unnatural, just as Ishma's restless quest is unnatural in her culture; yet as she accepts as natural the occurrence of a lighted night, so she reaffirms the natural urge to quest which she feels within her self.

But she does not return to union work. Whether to avoid alienation of her audience or for some other reason, Burke
chooses a melodramatic plotting sequence in which Britt saves Ishma, he believes, from suicide, and they reconcile (424-28). Afterward, Ishma privately admits the depth of her need for Britt: "Denied her love, her man, she had been blind with hurt; as dead to vision, as a panther on Blackspur tearing the midnight with a cry for her mate" (432). Yet her need for self-fulfillment must also be met, and so she creates a plan with Britt which will combine work and love: she will bring malnourished children and adults from the mill town to the mountains each summer for healing and renewal in nature's beauty (430). Freed, we may assume, from compulsory maternity by her knowledge of birth control, she thus uses her greater talent for mass nurturance; in the process, she intensifies her relationship with nature by making it the setting for and means of accomplishing her work. And as the purveyor of healing and renewal to the physically needy, she retains the goddesslike power she earlier displayed. Obviously, Ishma has learned to recognize her needs for both romantic love and meaningful work. Her combination of love and work represents a compromise which can potentially provide self-fulfillment, and so her long quest ends in a momentary peace which contains the promise of a lasting one. Although her compromise carries the risk of failure, it is realistic in its effort to meet all of Ishma's needs; she gives up the intensity of immersion in a powerful cause in favor of
helping the cause indirectly in a setting that brings her personal peace. And as always, she is her own woman: despite the social censure she will undoubtedly face among her mountain neighbors, she chooses to return to Britt; and despite the disapproval which her racist response will cause among her ideological counterparts, she chooses to reconnect with them toward the end of helping workers. Ishma is easily the most self-reliant character among those dealt with here, which yields her a particular reward: her consistent heeding of her own authority leaves her, at story's end, in a position to find fulfillment through both love and work. No other character shares that position, but then, no other character possesses such deeply instinc-tive and persistent self-reliance.
Ellen Glasgow was born in 1873 into a conservative Southern family (Wagner 3). Although she received little formal schooling (Wagner 6), her vast and varied reading during adolescence has been well documented (Wagner 18). She wrote her first story at the age of seven (Wagner 5), published her first novel at twenty-six, and went on to publish nineteen novels as well as several other significant works during a career that lasted nearly fifty years (Wagner 135-36). Beginning with her mother's death in 1893, Glasgow struggled with a major hearing loss and periods of depression which culminated in a suicide attempt in 1918 (Wagner 8-10). While her bouts of depression were triggered by other events, they were undoubtedly fueled by the ongoing conflict which Glasgow felt, and which Linda W. Wagner identifies, as "the conflict between being aggressive in order to write, and passive in order to exist, [which] was intensified by living in the South" (5). This conflict, which can also be seen as between cultural expectations and self-fulfillment, can be observed beneath the facts of Glasgow's life. Although she was engaged to be married several times, she never actually married (Wagner 4). The last of her engagements was to Henry Anderson, with whom she was involved for nearly thirty
years; the first ten years of that relationship formed what Wagner calls "the prewriting period" for *Barren Ground* (9-10). During this period Glasgow wrote short stories about strong, unconventional women; during this same period she battled the notions of romantic love and female dependence as they were embedded in her relationship with Anderson (Wagner 8-11). According to Wagner, Glasgow later admitted "that the roots for the novel and the character of Dorinda grew from that relationship . . .:" (78).

Whatever their roots, we are fortunate to have both the novel and its protagonist. In *Dorinda Oakley*, Glasgow gave us a new kind of woman character, a heroine whose overwhelming ambition to rebuild her family farm, even at the cost of fulfilling personal relationships, yields autonomy and success on her own terms. However, Dorinda's unconventional choice is difficult and conflicted, as the events of the novel reveal. She chooses autonomy only after rejection by Jason Greyloch, a young man whom she loves and by whom she becomes pregnant. His betrayal and marriage to another woman strike Dorinda with catastrophic force, causing her to flee her native Virginia for New York. A few days after her arrival, she is involved in an accident which leaves her hospitalized and forces her to miscarry. After physically recovering, she works for several years for the surgeon who treated her; during these years, she deliberately seeks new scientific information about farming. When her father falls ill Dorinda returns home
determined to turn her family's Old Farm into a dairy farm. Success comes largely through her own involvement: she gives the next several decades of her life to the farm, which she revitalizes, makes prosperous, and finally expands. She replaces her youthful need for love with a desire to work the land, to succeed on terms other than the socially conventional. In order to accomplish her goal she eschews personal involvement: not one person in her life, not even her husband, comes close enough to Dorinda to hurt her as she was originally hurt. For her, personal needs are sublimated into backbreaking toil on the land until, years later, her personal fulfillment comes through the land. And with this type of fulfillment comes autonomy, even in marriage. Thus, Dorinda becomes the first of several unconventional female characters whom Glasgow created; undoubtedly, her understanding of them came from her own unconventional autonomy and her own preference for work over love.

By making work paramount, Glasgow achieved a notable literary career which deserves summary. During nearly fifty years of writing, she produced half a dozen best sellers and novels chosen by the Book of the Month Club and Literary Guild; she also received the Pulitzer Prize and the Howells Medal for Fiction, and became the sixth woman named to the American Academy of Arts and Letters (Wagner 12). Her friendships included several notable literary figures, among them
Thomas Hardy (Wagner 4). Yet, despite her success, she remained insecure about her work because of harsh early criticism and her own awareness of her inferior literary status as a "woman writer" (Wagner 12-13). Later in her life, Wagner tells us, Glasgow consciously wrote about her craft in an attempt to "express her aesthetic position" because she knew "her final successes would have to come through acceptance by the male literary lions" (13). Sadly, Glasgow's perception of the inferior status of women writers proved all too accurate. Her reputation and accomplishments dissolved into obscurity with her death; today she is little known and less read, one of the long list of women whose substantial literary careers have passed from the broad arena of popular publication to the narrower confines of academic study.

Indeed, Glasgow's reputation is undergoing an academic resurrection, as is evident by the growing amount of criticism of her work. Wagner's critical biography, Ellen Glasgow: Beyond Convention, is one of several available. In it, Wagner examines the links between Glasgow's life and art, and places Barren Ground as a watershed novel within the body of Glasgow's work. She primarily values the book for Glasgow's portrayal of Dorinda as a woman character looking for new and unconventional emotional fulfillment. Other critics also examine Dorinda from varying perspectives, as will be seen. But none disputes one fact: Dorinda's deliberate develop-
ment of a relationship with nature, via her revitalization of the family farm, is a conscious effort to redefine the options for female fulfillment in her culture. Particularly after she begins searching for alternative fulfillment, Dorinda rigorously practices self-reliance; this practice leads to a new relationship with nature, replete with Emersonian resonances, in which nature ultimately becomes her "permanent self" (Glasgow 524).

This relationship comes, however, only after Dorinda turns to other avenues of fulfillment to escape her parents' fates. In fact, her eventual decision to work the farm differently from them forms a deliberate rejection of their unhappy lives. Her mother, who owns the farm, has been depleted by it: "Like the land, which took everything and gave back nothing, the farm had drained her vitality without altering its general aspect of decay" (39). Mrs. Oakley lost her youthful romantic dream through a suitor's death, and later married into the poor white class (43); she has suffered dreadful nightmares which have made her run from the house at night (44). As we meet her, she has subdued her unhappiness through incessant work, but has lost the ability to enjoy anything in life (45). Mr. Oakley is described as exhausted and defeated by the land, to which he has become a "slave," whose "features, browned and reddened and seamed by sun and wind, appeared as old as a rock embedded in earth" (40).
He is compared to a farm horse, a "dumb plodding creature" whose patience and resignation Dorinda recognizes (40), but cannot emulate. Both parents' lives have clearly been overwhelmed by the "immutable and everlasting... poverty of the soil" (11); their obvious unhappiness catalyzes the rebellion against societal expectations which eventually brings Dorinda to transform the land.

However, Dorinda's impulse when we meet her is much simpler than transformation: it is to escape the life that has depleted her parents' emotional resources. Her innate inability to accept a similar fate is revealed in the first paragraph of the novel, as Dorinda gazes out a window: "Though she watched there, without moving, her attitude, in its stillness, gave an impression of arrested flight, as if she were running toward life" (3). Additionally, her capacity for rebellion shows in an early description of her face, "too stern, too decisive," and of her chin, which reveals "too much determination" (10). Her strength of character mandates escape from her parents' fate, but her acculturation narrows the paths she may take to one: romantic love leading to marriage. Because she naively accepts the cultural notion of romantic love and consequent marriage as a path to female fulfillment, she seeks love, and finds it early in the novel in a chance meeting with Jason Greylock (12-13). During her romance with Jason, Dorinda is sufficiently overcome by emotion
to experience love as the central fact of her existence. This emotion is so strong that her experience of nature's beauty becomes subordinate to her experience of love, as we see overtly in the following passage:

In May and June, for a brief season between winter desolation and summer drought, the starved land flushed into loveliness. Honey-coloured sunlight. The notes of a hundred birds. A roving sweetness of wild grape in the air. To Dorinda, whose happiness had come so suddenly that her imagination was still spinning from the surprise of it, the flowerlike blue of the sky, the songs of the birds, and the elusive scent of the wild grape, all seemed to be a part of that rich inner world, with its passionate expectancy and its sense of life burning upward.

They were to be married in the autumn. (108)

Obviously, Glasgow's description fuses Dorinda's beautiful feelings with the beautiful world around her. However, Glasgow names this section "Broomsedge" to deliberately indicate both the fate of their romance and the futility of the life Dorinda seeks to escape. Because this plant is the first one to grow over abandoned fields, Glasgow makes it significant, as we see in its detailed introduction on the same page on which we meet Dorinda:

[W]hen the sky changed the broomsedge changed
with it. On clear mornings the waste places were cinnamon-red in the sunshine. Beneath scudding clouds the plumes of the bent grasses faded to ivory. During the long spring rains, a film of yellow-green stole over the burned ground. At autumn sunsets, when the red light searched the country, the broomsedge caught fire from the afterglow and blazed out in a splendour of color. (3)

Clearly, the broomsedge is beautiful; notably, it covers "waste places." Later, Glasgow uses Dorinda's vision of the broomsedge just after being complimented by Jason to presage the failure of their romance:

The light changed again and her inner mood was changing with the landscape. A feeling of intimate kinship with the country returned, and it seemed to her that the colour of the broomsedge was overrunning the desolate hidden field of her life. Something wild and strong and vivid was covering the waste places. (64)

But the "wild and strong and vivid" emotion which fills Dorinda is useless since, as Wagner notes, "[b]roomside contribute[s] nothing" (75).

For our purposes, the above passage strikingly illustrates the Emersonian idea that "[n]ature always wears the
colors of the spirit" (Nature 828); indeed, Glasgow loudly, perhaps consciously, echoes Emerson when she states that Dorinda's "inner mood was changing with the landscape."

Pratt points out that Dorinda's awareness of nature increases as she becomes sexually attracted to Jason (483). While this is true, Pratt fails to examine Glasgow's deliberate animation of nature as Dorinda falls in love. On the same day that Dorinda's attraction to Jason begins, Glasgow, writing outside of her protagonist's consciousness, shows Dorinda walking home through "hurrying snowflakes" (28). This animation intensifies as Dorinda's attraction to Jason intensifies; Glasgow reveals it clearly when Dorinda walks alone through familiar country:

Already, as she turned and went on again,
the light was changing, and more slowly, as
if a veil fluttered before it was lifted,
the expression of the country changed with it.
In the east; an arrow of sunshine, too pallid
to be called golden, shot through the clouds
and flashed over the big pine on the hill at the
back of the house. The landscape, which had
worn a discouraged aspect, appeared suddenly
to glow under the surface. Veins of green and
gold, like tiny rivulets of spring, glistened
in the winter woods and in the mauve and brown
of the fields. The world was familiar, and yet,
in some indescribable way, it was different, shot through with romance as with the glimmer of phosphorescence. Life, which had drooped, flared up again, burning clear and strong in Dorinda's heart. It had come back, that luminous expectancy, that golden mist of sensation. (58)

Here, the land's animation not only reflects Dorinda's mood, but actually forms it: her response to the beautiful scene is a renewal of loving emotion. By making nature's beauty the cause of Dorinda's emotional response, Glasgow takes Emerson's "colors of the spirit" idea one step further; she gives nature a living presence of its own. Notably, this animated beauty, while temporarily subordinated for Dorinda to her own emotional state, exists independently of the character: Glasgow deliberately times Dorinda's love to occur during the land's period of greatest beauty, the "brief season between winter desolation and summer drought" (108). By using this timing, Glasgow's assures nature's continuous animation despite Dorinda's reduced ability to experience it, and constructs the circumstances under which her protagonist can completely merge with nature during the emotional crisis of Jason's betrayal.

That merger begins instinctively, as Dorinda walks through open country, to the home of a midwife who might have heard news of Jason's progress during a two-week business trip:

Like a beneficent tide, the loneliness washed
over her, smoothing out, as it receded, the vague apprehensions that had ruffled her thoughts. The austere horizon, flat and impenetrable beneath the threatening look of the sky; the brown and yellow splashes of woods in the October landscape; the furtive windings and recoils of the sunken road; the perturbed murmur and movement of the broomsedge, so like the restless inlets of an invisible sea,—all these external objects lost their inanimate character and became as personal, reserved, and inscrutable as her own mind. So sensitive were her perceptions, while she walked there alone, that the wall dividing her individual consciousness of nature vanished within the thin drift of woodsmoke over the fields. (133-34)

Early in this passage, Glasgow echoes Emerson's notion of nature as medicinal (Nature 830) when she reduces Dorinda's anxiety during the walk. Next, Glasgow has the character instinctively merge with nature, giving up her "individual consciousness" so that her experience of nature is no longer submerged beneath romantic love. It is in this merged state that Dorinda learns she is pregnant (141); it is also in this state, on her way home, that she takes shelter from a violent thunderstorm at Jason's home and learns that he has married another woman. Of this episode, Pratt says, "[W]hen nature
entraps her in unmarried pregnancy the land becomes threaten­
ing" (483). While Pratt's interpretation is superficially
correct, she fails to note the degree of animation with which
Glasgow imbues nature during this episode, as well as Dorinda's
complete merger with it. Indeed, halfway through the following
passage, Glasgow vibrantly animates nature to deliberately
presage Dorinda's learning of Jason's marriage. Notably,
the first paragraph clearly echoes the Emersonian concept of
nature as reflective of emotional state, and the second once
again goes a step further than Emerson, giving nature its
own powerfully alive and emblematic presence:

Presently a few withered leaves fluttered
past her, flying through the narrow tunnel of the
woods toward the clearer vista ahead. Immediately
around her the atmosphere was still motionless.
Like an alley in a dream the road stretched,
brown, dim, monotonous, between the tall trees;
and this alley seemed to her unutterably sad,
strewn with dead leaves and haunted by an autumnal
taint of decay. The fear in her own mind had
fallen like a blight on her surroundings, as if
the external world was merely a shadow thrown
by the subjective processes within her soul.

Suddenly, without nearer warning, the storm
broke. A streak of white fire split the sky,
and the tattered clouds darkened to an angry purple. The wind, which had been chained at a distance, tore itself free with a hurtling noise and crashed in gusts through the tree-tops. Overhead, she heard the snapping of branches, and when she glanced back, it seemed to her that the withered leaves had gathered violence in pursuit, and were whirling after her like a bevy of witches. As she came out of the shelter of the trees, the stream of wind and leaves swept her across the corn-field, with the patter of rain on her shoulders. (144)

Dorinda's perception of nature's fierce animation, in which leaves blow "like a bevy of witches," continues as she seeks shelter at Five Oaks, Jason's home. Here, while waiting for her clothes to dry, she looks out a window and sees a "giant box-bush [which] ha[s] grown into the shape of a hunchback" (148); this natural object symbolically twisted with deformity immediately foreshadows the news of Jason's betrayal (152).

After leaving Five Oaks she waits along the road to verify his marriage. Because she is physically overcome by shock, she sits in seclusion behind "[a] thicket of dogwood and redbud trees [which make] a close screen in front of her" (156). As she rests against a tree stump, she deepens her merger with nature in order to calm her core self:

While she sat there the trembling passed
out of her limbs, and the strength that had forsaken her returned slowly. Removing her hat, she let the branches play over her face, like the delicate touch of cool, moist fingers. She felt drenched within and without. The very thoughts that came and went in her mind were as limp as wet leaves, and blown like leaves in the capricious stir of the breeze. For a few minutes she sat there surrounded by a vacancy in which nothing moved but the leaves and the wind. Without knowing what she thought, without knowing even what she felt, she abandoned herself to the encompassing darkness. (156-57).

Later that day, physically and emotionally agitated, she instinctively returns to the woods. While walking, she once again merges with nature: "Like a wet sheet the twilight folded about her, clinging to her arms and legs when she tried to shake herself free from it" (163). Thus, her perception of the twilight fuses with her emotional pain. Instinctively, she returns to Five Oaks to confront Jason and subsequently recognizes him as a coward (166-70). As she walks home afterward, not even nature can soothe her pain:

She walked in the moonlight without seeing it; past the frogs in the bulrushes without hearing them; through the moist woods without
smelling them. Time had stood still for her;
space had vanished; there was no beginning and
no end to this solitary aching nerve of
experience. (170)

Throughout this portion of her story, Glasgow consistently
portrays Dorinda's emotional state in terms of the character's
response to nature. From the point where she instinctively
merges with nature during her walk to the midwife's, through to
her complete break with nature that night, Dorinda's responses
to the natural world are determined by the particular stage
of crisis she is momentarily experiencing. In Emersonian
terms, nature is not only medicinal, as stated above, but is
also intensely reflective of Dorinda's emotional state; indeed,
the "colors of the spirit" are the only indicators Glasgow
uses to show her character's inner devastation. And, just
as Dorinda had temporarily subordinated her love for nature's
beauty to her love for Jason, so now she subordinates her
experience of nature's beauty to her pain; Glasgow makes this
clear when Dorinda looks at the scene from her back porch the
following day:

There was an unnatural aspect, she felt, in the
familiar scene, as of a place that had suffered
beneath a tornado and yet remained unchanged
on the surface. And this smiling October serenity
appeared to her to be unendurable. (180)
Obviously, nature once again wears the colors of Dorinda's spirit as she suffers an emotional tornado while continuing to function normally. Importantly, natural beauty is now "unendurable," and will remain so for Dorinda. From this point forward in the novel, she cannot return to the simple love for beauty which had marked her earlier experience of nature. She will necessarily develop a new relationship with it; nature's powerful animation during her discovery of Jason's betrayal presages that relationship.

But before Dorinda learns to experience nature differently, she jettisons the illusion of romantic love. Her new circumstances--unmarried, pregnant, and betrayed--force her to understand romantic love as a sham. Additionally, an earlier conversation about marriage, in which her mother counseled Dorinda toward realistic acceptance, has appealed to her inner "vein of iron":

"[Marriage] ain't ever going as far as most women try to make it. You'll be all right married, daughter, if you just make up your mind that whatever happens, you ain't going to let any man spoil your life."

The brave words, striking deep under the surface, rang against the vein of iron in Dorinda's nature. Clear and strong as a bell, she heard the reverberations of character beneath the wild bloom of emotion. (106)
Later, at a point of overwhelming crisis, Dorinda summons strength from her core self, her "vein of iron," to deliberately choose self-reliant behavior. Her choice is born of both disillusionment and necessity: unmarried and pregnant, she faces social ruin for herself and her family unless she again chooses an avenue of escape. Her consequent decision to leave home is the beginning of her deliberate use of her self as final authority; her consciousness of its necessity shows when she regrets that her father will miss her help on the farm (186), but then interrupts her own train of thought with a realization: "Then, because weakness lay in that direction, she turned her resolute gaze toward her own future. There was no hope outside herself" (187). The circumstances of Dorinda's departure present an interesting paradox in terms of Emersonian self-reliance. Because she cannot "shun father and mother and . . . brother" ("Self-Reliance" 892) by burdening them with the social stigma of an illegitimate child, she must shun them physically by leaving them. Because she cannot ask them to "assume [her] faults" ("Self-Reliance" 901), she is forced into assuming full responsibility for her own welfare. Thus, the price of romantic disillusionment and transgression against the social stricture regarding premarital sex is also the price of freedom from traditional familial responsibility. By learning that, as Emerson says, "[w]e must go alone" ("Self-Reliance" 901), Dorinda also learns that "[n]o law can
be sacred to [her] except that of [her] nature" ("Self-Reliance" 892). Consequently, she begins the sojourn to New York which ultimately becomes the sojourn to a new definition of fulfillment, and which allows her to become a hero.

A good deal has been written about Dorinda as a hero, a status she is universally agreed to have, although from differing perspectives. One particularly interesting study is Carol Pearson's and Katherine Pope's *The Female Hero in American and British Literature*, which provides an excellent refitting of the classical male hero myth to female protagonists. It includes an extended treatment of Dorinda in which her journey away from and return to her family farm, together with her dedicated years of work on the land, are explicated in terms of a female heroic role. Mary Castiglie Anderson also traces Dorinda's heroic status in "Cultural Archetype and the Female Hero: Nature and Will in Ellen Glasgow's *Barren Ground*." Anderson uses Jungian archetypes to explain Dorinda's integration of "male" characteristics into herself, and points out the transformational power which this integration gives her. The transformation, Anderson says, allows Dorinda to identify herself with the land and thus create a new archetype for women, one which extends feminine power outward into the world. Another examination of Dorinda's heroic status is by Elizabeth Jane Harrison in *Female Pastoral: Women Writers Re-Visioning the American South*. Harrison traces
the development of an alternative pastoral tradition by twentieth-century women writers. She not only presents a concise and helpful history of the tradition prior to the twentieth century, but also traces Glasgow's contribution to the emerging genre throughout her body of work. Harrison treats Barren Ground at length because in it, as she notes, "Glasgow successfully creates an alternative agrarian myth, launching a female pastoral tradition that centers on woman as hero rather than as passive symbol of either garden or earth" (27). While each of these critics makes excellent points regarding Dorinda's heroism, all fail to comment on the conscious self-reliance which facilitates it, and none writes in detail about the new relationship with nature which comes as its result.

Dorinda's heroic journey is to New York where, faint with exhaustion and starvation, she steps in front of a cab (213-14). The accident leaves her unconscious for two weeks: on awakening, she discovers that she has miscarried (218) and, later, that she is emotionally numb: "'I'm dried up at the core . . .'

(226). Fortuitously, the doctor who treats her gives her work, and for the next two years Dorinda remains in New York. She knows that she will not love again and self-reliantly follows her instinct, refusing involvement even when a desirable suitor is available. When friends mention love she insists, "'I'm through with all that'" (237, 248). During this period, her memories of the broomsedge
on Old Farm are quite vivid: "The broomedge was too much alive. She felt that she hated it because it would make her suffer again" (232). The broomedge equates with Jason for Dorinda, and with her own sexual drive; when asked what she will find to fill her life, she responds, "'With something better than broomedge'" (237-38), revealing her intuition of the necessary sublimation of that drive. She instinctively understands that she must find another focus for her energy:

The hardest thing, she knew, that she had to face was not the wreck of her happiness, but the loss of a vital interest in life. Even people who were unhappy retained sometimes sufficient interest in the mere husk of experience to make life not only endurable but even diverting. . . . "I've finished with love, and until I find something else to fill my life, I shall be only an empty shell. . . ." (228)

Her numbed emotions return to life unexpectedly, during a piano performance, so powerful that she must force herself to remain seated to listen to it (238-40). Afterward, she is clearly aware of the change:

Passion stirred again in her heart, but it was passion transfigured, recoiling from the personal to the impersonal object. It seemed to her, walking there in the blue twilight,
that the music had released some imprisoned force in the depths of her being, and that this force was spreading out over the world, that it was growing wider and thinner until it covered all the desolate country at Old Farm. With a shock of joy, she realized that she was no longer benumbed, that she had come to life again. She had come to life again, but how differently! (244)

Glasgow’s use of the word "recoiling" is significant: Dorinda turns to the land out of fear, seeking refuge from the potential pain of human intimacy in the "impersonal" acres of Old Farm. She decides to revive it through dairy farming and immediately begins educating herself through books and lectures (245-46); she also breaks a family tradition by borrowing money to start her dairy (248-49). What is clear throughout this section of the novel is Dorinda's growing self-reliance, strengthened perhaps by desperation but strengthened nonetheless. Glasgow overtly tells us this when Dorinda returns home: "She looked cool, composed, and competent, the picture of dignified self-reliance, as she stepped between the muddy wheels of the delapidated buggy" (260). However, Dorinda is aware of her own discontent, still symbolized for her by the broomsedge: "Even if she worked her unhappiness into the soil; even if she cut down
and burned it off with the broomsedge, it would still spring up again in the place where it had been" (262). Although she exhibits self-reliance, ignoring her mother's attempt to discourage her plan (269), she does so partially out of desperation, since she understands that revitalizing Old Farm is the only potentially fulfilling option available to her (280).

So begins Dörinda's conquering of the broomsedge, literally and symbolically. As years pass she reclaims acres of the farm long lost to broomsedge, and as she does so she creates a new model for women, one whose self-concept is not bound up in romantic love. The novel's second section, which includes the hardest years of work, is titled "Pine" for the distinctively shaped pine tree which Dörinda has viewed from her bedroom window all her life (51). Our detailed introduction to this tree specifies its prominence on the landscape:

Above the orchard, where a twisted path ran up to it, there was a family graveyard, enclosed by a crumbling fence which had once been of white palings, and in the centre of the graveyard the big harp-shaped pine stood out, clear and black, on the low crest of the hill. It was the tallest pine, people said, in the whole of Queen Elizabeth County; its rocky base had protected it in its youth; and later on no one
had taken the trouble to uproot it from the primitive graveyard. In spring the boughs were musical with the songs of birds; on stormy days the tree rocked back and forth until Mrs. Oakley imagined, in her bad spells, that she heard the creaking of a gallows; and on hot summer evenings, when the moon rose round and orange-red above the hill, the branches reminded Dorinda of the dark flying shape of a witch. (100)

As Dorinda's father lies dying, he focuses his attention on this pine. A massive stroke, the event which catalyzed Dorinda's return home, has taken his speech and, most of the time, his awareness of the world around him. His visual focus on the pine obviously links the tree with his own life, as Wagner notes:

Pa's uncomplaining acceptance of death parallels his stoic attention to the hardy pine outside his window. Emblematic of his own struggle to exist, the tree has somehow grown from the impoverished land: it shows tenacity, fortitude, the ability to thrive . . . . And as Dorinda comes to develop such traits as strength and perseverance, she recognizes that her father too has had strength. (76)
What Wagner fails to note is that Dorinda understands the connection between her father and the pine prior to his death, and she clearly states it to a neighbor: "All the meaning of [Pa's] life has gone into it, and all the meaning of the country. Endurance, that's what it is" (273). A little later in the novel, Dorinda unconsciously embraces her father's emotional legacy:

With her drooping energy, weariness had crept over her; but out of weariness, she passed presently, like the country, into a mood of endurance. She realized, without despair, that the general aspect of her life would be one of unbroken monotony. Enthusiasm would not last. Energy would not last. Cheerfulness, buoyancy, interest, not one of these qualities would last as long as she needed it. Nothing would last through to the end except courage. (296)

Dorinda's "mood of endurance" clearly links her with her father and the pine, as well as echoing an Emersonian assertion: "[I]t is things which are emblematic. Every natural fact if a symbol of some spiritual fact" (Nature 834).

The pine here becomes a symbol for Dorinda of her father and his legacy of endurance; as such, it also symbolizes for her the necessity of endurance in the process of revitalizing Old Farm.
Importantly, not all Emersonian resonance in *Barren Ground* is indirect, as is the pine's symbology. Indeed, Dorinda's understanding of her father as a farmer is enlightened by a direct reference to Emersonian philosophy. Early in the work, Glasgow pointedly describes the neighborhood farmers as they gather in town:

> There was little talk among the white farmers, and that little was confined to the crops or the weather. Rugged, gnarled, earth-stained, these men were as impersonal as trees or as transcendental philosophers... The transcendental point of view, the habit of thought bred by communion with earth and sky, had refined the grain while it roughened the husk. (75)

While Pa is absent from this gathering, his membership among their number is evident later when Dorinda recognizes that he has "kept in close communion with earth and sky" (118). As his death approaches, Dorinda, who has previously sensed the "soul" of the country (11) and has intuited her family's place as "products of the soil" (128), begins to understand "that the land [thinks and feels], that it possess[e]s a secret personal life of its own..." (273). Obviously, she is her father's spiritual heir and, fittingly, chooses the pine as the symbol to stamp on Old Farm's dairy products (311). Thus, Dorinda unconsciously makes the pine a symbol
for her promise to the land: to give it her endurance, to help it live again. Later, as she recalls her father lying in his coffin, she intuits his relationship with the land, and embraces it herself:

"Whatever I give, the farm will always be mine," she thought. That was the way he felt. "The farm isn't human and it won't make you suffer. Only human things break your heart."

... Kinship with the land was filtering through her blood into her brain; and she knew that this transfigured instinct was blended of pity, memory, and passion. Dimly, she felt that only through this fresh emotion could she attain permanent liberation of the spirit. (306)

Her deliberate embrace of "[k]inship with the land" entwines Emerson's concept of self-reliance and his belief that nature, when understood as emblematic of the universal soul, allows humans to transcend reality (Nature 835-52). Dorinda chooses to develop a new relationship with nature, one which adheres to the "close communion" which her father unwittingly practiced. Although she makes this choice because she can exercise no other option, she chooses to search for fulfillment through a route denied to women in her culture, the management of a large farm. Farming will develop for her a new relationship with nature, one in which she will bond with the land and, eventually, attain acceptance and peace. She
will experience moments of transcendent reality as the relationship develops and, finally, will realize the primacy of the nature relationship in her life. Thus, her Emersonian self-reliance will facilitate her redefinition of female fulfillment by allowing her to experience nature according to Emersonian concepts.

Only one recent critic deals specifically with Glasgow's use of transcendentalism in this novel. Catherine Rainwater in "Narration as Pragmatism in Ellen Glasgow's Barren Ground" examines the elements of pragmatic philosophy which underpin the work. Specific to transcendentalism, she classifies Glasgow's understanding of the railroad with Emerson's and Thoreau's (617). Rainwater also credibly explains the writer's reference to farmers as transcendental philosophers:

As [Dorinda] begins to view the land from within a new frame of reference, her self-image no longer alternates wildly between the extremes of victim and controller of circumstance. She invests the land with the traits of a self-refined through thought and experience. Dorinda herself becomes at least a part-time Transcendentalist, for even though she is by nature a sceptic, she cannot deny the power of her sometimes mystical identification with nature. . . . . (680)
While Rainwater's assessment of Dorinda's relationship with the land is superficially correct, it is obviously brief, and fails to specifically examine Emerson's influence on that relationship. Furthermore, what Rainwater calls Dorinda's "new frame of reference" is in fact a new method of being for the character, one in which Dorinda's own interests come first and in which she acts as her own final authority; in other words, Dorinda's reference is framed by Emersonian self-reliance.

Rigorous self-reliance dominates Dorinda's behavior throughout the rest of the novel, with primarily positive results. One virtually immediate result of her self-authorized ambition is her elevated stature in her community. Even prior to her father's death, while purchasing cows from an affluent neighbor, she finds herself on a new, comfortable footing with him:

He was looking at her now with keen, impersonal admiration. Just as if she had been a man, she thought, with a glow of triumph. Though the sensation was without the excitement of sex vanity, she found it quite as gratifying, and, she suspected, more durable. (292)

Notably, the situation creates irony: by eschewing the traditional female role in her culture and making decisions in a traditionally "male" arena, an act which should have
negative results in her community, Dorinda accrues respect from the most prosperous farmer in that community, a male. Additionally, her self-reliant behavior facilitates her resistance to romantic love: when she accidentally meets Jason, she refuses because of "some deep instinct" to recognize him, knowing intuitively that to do so would "restore, in a measure, his power over her life" (297). Later, when he seeks her out after her father's funeral, she resists him again, telling him he means "nothing" to her, even though he calls her "hard as a stone." Her response indicates her self-authorized freedom from romantic illusion: "Her smile was exultant. 'Yes, I am hard. I'm through with soft things'" (308-09). Here again, by casting off the gender-assigned "softness" of romantic illusion and becoming "hard," Dorinda refuses to be diverted from her agricultural ambition and, thus, ultimately finds fulfillment through it; obviously, this result of her self-reliance is positive. As might be expected, Dorinda's "hardness" is most persistently demonstrated in her attitude toward farm work: she insistently and relentlessly oversees every detail of dairy work (311), and makes the farm successful after only six months (312-13). She reveals her absolute trust in her own instincts when her mother chides her for wearing overalls to milk cows: "'I'm going to milk my cows my own way. I've got some common sense,' [Dorinda] added sternly, 'and I'm the only person, man or woman, in the county who has'" (303).
Still, her reliance and focus on self above all others is not without cost, even though the price is to her emotional life. Nothing touches her emotionally; whether from fear of pain or simple numbness, the scars from her initial disillusionment remain, sealing her heart against "poignant emotion" (338). This is clear during the next major event of the novel, her brother's arrest for suspicion of murder and her mother's subsequent perjury to free him. Dorinda's deliberate rejection of culturally-expected feelings, as well as her value of self above all, is evident in the following passage:

After all, why should not Rufus be held responsible for his own wickedness? She was shocked; she was unsympathetic; she was curiously exasperated. Her mother's attitude to Rufus impressed her as sentimental rather than unselfish; and she saw in [his arrest] merely one of the first fruits of that long weakness. Since she had been brought so close to reality she had had less patience with evasive idealism. "I suppose I'm different from other women," she meditated. "I may have lost feeling, or else it was left out of me when I was born. Some women would have gone on loving Jason no
matter how he treated them; but I'm not made that way. There's something deep down in me that I value more than love or happiness or anything outside myself. It may be only pride, but it comes first of all." (324-25)

The self-acceptance Dorinda displays in this passage reminds us of Emerson's conviction that "every man . . . must take himself for better, for worse, as his portion . . ." ("Self-Reliance" 890). However, despite her valuation of her self "first of all," Dorinda still struggles with cultural expectations of female emotionality. When Mrs. Oakley's strength is sapped by the emotional toll of perjury, she becomes bedridden from exhaustion and the doctor calls it "the beginning of the end." On hearing this, Dorinda's awareness is of "the ice in her heart. Would nothing thaw the frozen lake that enveloped her being? Would she never again become living and human? . . . She longed with all her soul to suffer acutely; yet she could feel nothing within this colourless void in which she was imprisoned" (340-41).

Obviously, Dorinda is frustrated by her inability to "suffer acutely" during her mother's illness. However, despite, or perhaps because of, her lack of emotionality in human interaction, she experiences a powerful bonding with the land, precisely because it is her sole emotional outlet. By
this point in the novel, after just a few months of working the land, she understands its harshness, as she shows while restlessly walking near the farm on Rufus' court day:

It was a rich October afternoon, with a sky of burnished blue and an air of carnival in the wine-red and ashen-bronze of the woods. For an instant the brightness hurt her eyes, and when she opened them it seemed to her that the autumnal radiance fluttered like a blown shawl over the changeless structure of the landscape. Beneath the fugitive beauty the stern features of the country had not softened. (333)

Dorinda's perception of the underlying harshness of the land mirrors her own perceived inner hardness. Emerson's idea about nature's reflection of the human spirit (Nature 834) echoes here, and re-echoes loudly further on in the same passage:

Far away, in the direction of Old Farm, the shocked corn on the hill was swimming in a rain of apricot-coloured light. "If only it would last," she thought, "things would not be so hard to bear. But it is like happiness. Before you know that you have found it, it goes."

Turning away, because beauty was like a
knife in her heart . . . . (333)

Dorinda reveals here that her relationship with the land must focus only on its demands; its beauty, which causes her to feel, must be rejected in favor of a work-centered relationship in which emotion is submerged beneath action. Ironically, this inability to appreciate the land's beauty will lead to Dorinda's spiritual awakening, as is presaged when, immediately following the above, she briefly speaks with two passing neighbors:

Standing there, while the two figures dwindled gradually into the blue distance, she was visited again by the feeling that the moment was significant, if only she could discover the meaning of it before it eluded her. Strange how often that sensation returned to her now! Everything at which she gazed; the frosted brown and yellow and wine-red of the landscape; the shocked corn against the sunset; the figures of the two men diminishing in the vague smear of the road; all these images were steeped in an illusion of mystery. (334)

Dorinda's intuited "mystery" is the precursor of her connection with what Emerson calls "the universal spirit" of nature which "speaks to the individual, and strives to lead back the individual to it" (Nature 851). The next year, after
her mother's death and her consequent inheritance of the farm, Dorinda experiences connection with that spirit:

Walking over to the edge of the porch, Dorinda looked across the vague, glimmering fields. Another autumn had gone. Another sunset like the heart of a pomegranate was fading out in the west. Again the wandering scents of woodsmoke and rotting leaves came and went on the wind.

For an instant, the permanence of material things, the inexorable triumph of fact over emotion, appeared to be the only reality. These things had been ageless when her mother was young; they would be still ageless when she herself had become an old woman. Over the immutable landscape human lives drifted and vanished like shadows. (345)

If we understand that "material things" and "fact[s]" represent the permanent features and cycles of "the immutable landscape," then we realize that Dorinda connects here with the universal spirit when she experiences the "ageless[ness]" of the land as "the only reality." Furthermore, Dorinda's work-oriented relationship with her land allows her to develop a strikingly Emersonian relationship with it. Consider this passage from *Nature*:
behind nature, throughout nature, spirit is present; that spirit is one and not compound; that spirit does not act upon us from without, that is, in space and time, but spiritually, or through ourselves. Therefore, that spirit, that is, the Supreme Being, does not build up nature around us, but puts it forth through us, as the life of the tree puts forth new branches and leaves through the pores of the old. (852)

The universal spirit acts "through ourselves," says Emerson, or by our own volition, by using "the pores of the old." Dorinda does exactly this when she values her work on her land as the most important thing in her life. Her constant channeling of physical and emotional energy through her own being into the land, like Emerson's "tree put[ting] forth new branches," allows her to connect with the spirit of the land and, eventually, to experience moments of transcendence despite her pragmatic approach to work and skeptical habit of thought. She also recreates her reality on two Emersonian levels as she channels her energy into the land: first, she recreates the farm as a manifestation of her own "realized will" (Nature 841); secondly, her constant attendance to the land allows her to eventually find fulfillment in the land itself and, in so doing, to create a new definition of,
female fulfillment in her culture, one constructed on the rigorous practice of Emersonian self-reliance.

However, fulfillment is years away for Dorinda. In the meantime, she has only the "courage of desperation" (348) on which to depend. This courage springs from her self-reliance, which on a daily basis permeates all aspects of her operation of Old Farm. She experiments with crop rotation, a practice viewed suspiciously by most farmers in her community, and eventually revitalizes the soil (346); she employs only female dairy workers because of her "firm, though illogical, belief in their superior neatness" (420); she hangs kitchen curtains despite her neighbors' perception of them as frivolous (421). The result of all these behaviors is the transformation of Old Farm into a modern and prosperous concern. Still, while she knows that she enjoys her work (346), Dorinda is not yet fulfilled by her relationship with the land. She periodically experiences her lack of fulfillment as "theblind sense of a purpose in existence which ha[s] evaded her search" (352). Because no role model exists for female fulfillment outside of marriage in her culture, Dorinda finally chooses marriage. However, her marriage to Nathan Pedlar is, characteristically, an unconventional one: it offers Dorinda, not the emotional involvement of love, but rather an escape from loneliness; importantly, it also furthers her ambitions for Old Farm.
The seeds which grow into a fruitful relationship between Dorinda and Nathan are sown in his character, as our early introduction to him reveals:

He was a tall, lank, scraggy man with a face that reminded Dorinda of a clown that she had once seen in a circus. Only the clown's nose was large and red, and Nathan's looked as if it had been mashed in by a blow . . . . Looking at him, she saw clearly his gaunt round shoulders beneath the frayed alpaca coat, his hair and eyebrows and short moustache, all the colour of dingy rabbit fur, and his small grey eyes with blinking lids, but the moment after he passed out of her sight, the memory of him would become as fluid as water and trickle out of her mind. A kind but absurd man, this was the way she thought of him . . . . Though he made a comfortable living out of [his] store, and had put by enough to enable him to face old age with equanimity, he was by nature a farmer, and his little farm near the mill yielded a good harvest. Unlike most Southern farmers, he was not afraid of a theory, and he was beginning to realize the value of rotation in crops at a period when a
corn-field at Pedlar's Mill was as permanent as a graveyard. (18-19)

Dorinda has known Nathan all her life and has dismissed him for nearly all of it. Only after her ambition for Old Farm dominates her life can she appreciate his innovative approach to farming. However, because she cannot tolerate emotional involvement, her decision to marry him is based on her lack of feeling for him, as well as on his utility in her life. An examination of their relationship is productive because it elucidates Glasgow's recasting of the most common female role of her era in accordance with Emersonian principles of self-reliance.

Nathan's utility in Dorinda's life begins when he takes over her mother's funeral arrangements (344). This utility ripens into companionship during years of Sunday afternoon visits when she comes to depend on his farming advice (350). On one of them, after a discussion of Dorinda's desire to own Jason's family farm when it comes up for sale, Nathan proposes marriage, suggesting that they "'throw the two farms into one'" (364), and pointing out "'how useful [he] can be on the farm'" (365). Dorinda rethinks her initial rejection of the idea over the succeeding weeks, aided by the fact that she has "few illusions about marriage" (365). As she considers marriage to Nathan, she understands its compatibility with her emotional limitations:
He was ridiculous; he was uncouth; he was the last man on earth, she told herself firmly, who could ever have inspired her with the shadow of sentiment. Only after she had speculated upon these decisive objections did she begin to realize that absence of emotion was the only appeal any marriage could make to her. Her nerves or her senses would have revolted from the first hint of passion. The only marriage she could tolerate, she reflected grimly, was one which attempted no swift excursions into emotion, no flights beyond the logical barriers of the three dimensions. (366)

As she considers further, she realistically assesses the potential benefits and difficulties of such a marriage:

To be sure, he had habits which she disliked; but, as she told herself with dispassionate realism, one couldn't have everything. It never occurred to her that these habits might be broken by marriage, for she was wise enough to perceive that a man's habits are far more firmly rooted than his emotions. What she felt was that in exchange for his helpfulness she might learn to tolerate the things to which
she objected. . . . Sex emotion, she repeated grimly, was as dead as a burned-out cinder in her heart. But respect she could still feel, and a marriage founded upon respect and expediency might offer an available refuge from loneliness. (372-73)

As always, Dorinda follows her instincts here. Her selection of a mate potentially furthers her ambition for Old Farm; it also ignores love, and so leaves intact her primary emotional relationship with the land. Additionally, while she is keenly aware of the unconventional aspects of the marriage, she also understands that it raises her standing both as a farmer and as a woman in her community, a fact which she enjoys. So an interesting paradox results: Dorinda's marriage to Nathan elevates her position in the community by giving her the appearance of conventional behavior, while allowing her to more actively pursue her unconventional ambition. That the marriage is sexless (373) is another unconventional aspect, but also a necessity because it assures Dorinda's continued ability to pursue her ambition by removing the potential entanglement of motherhood. Obviously, the unconventional aspects of her marriage underscore Dorinda's self-reliance; they also reveal Glasgow's new vision for the primary socioeconomic role designated to women. She re-visions, or revises, marriage into a relationship in which women have options for self-fulfillment other than through romantic
love, and gives this revised relationship several positive implications for Dorinda. She specifies the terms of the new relationship when she comments on the results of Dorinda's continued reliance on her own authority rather than on her husband's:

[Dorinda] held the reins of her life too firmly grasped ever to relinquish them to another; and as she had foreseen on her wedding-night, she possessed an incalculable advantage in merely liking Nathan while he loved her. On her side at least marriage had begun where it so often ends happily, in charity of mind. Though she could not love, she had chosen the best substitute for love, which is tolerance. (387)

Eventually, Dorinda feels substantial affection and respect for Nathan, particularly after he helps her buy Five Oaks, Jason's family farm, when it is auctioned off for taxes.

One of Glasgow's positive implications for her revised marriage is evident in this purchase: Dorinda's economic partnership with Nathan not only allows her to buy Jason's property and thus exact a measure of revenge on him but, more importantly, it also allows her to expand her relationship with nature by providing more land for her to replenish. However, while Dorinda is aware of the economic gains she makes through her
marriage, she is unable to acknowledge, even privately, her attachment to her husband. She is surprised to feel protective of Nathan when she senses Jason's ridicule for him on the day of the sale (401), and that night, as she and Nathan plan the farm's future, she is aware that she values him highly, but is unable to speak (404).

One of the few emotions which Dorinda can acknowledge, even privately, is contentment, which she frequently feels during the nine years of her marriage to Nathan. While she believes her contentment superior to her youthful passion (389), she remains intermittently aware of her "isolation of spirit" (390). She works unendingly through these years, driven partly by habit and partly by choice, and spends minimal time in self-reflection:

This was the secret of her contentment, she knew, breathless activity. If she was satisfied with her life, it was only because she never stopped long enough in her work to imagine what kind of life she should have preferred. While her health was good and her energy unimpaired, she had no time for discontent. If she had looked for it, she sometimes told herself, she could have found sufficient cause for unhappiness; but she was careful not to look for it. (412)
In this passage Glasgow echoes one of Emerson's statements in "Self-Reliance": "Do your work, and you shall reinforce yourself" (893). Obviously, Dorinda finds contentment through her work because she so thoroughly invests her physical and emotional energy in it; just as obviously, she uses her work as an escape from self-reflection. Undoubtedly, this latter fact runs contrary to Emerson's entire body of work. However, the opposition is necessary to meet artistic demands of realism. In order to realistically portray the emotional life of a female protagonist who rejects her culture's expectation of romantic love as fulfilling, Glasgow necessarily changes the character: because Dorinda turns to her work for primary emotional fulfillment and does not find it until late in the novel, she must necessarily also turn to the work for escape from the emptiness she feels at her core. Additionally, in order to maintain her level of contentment, the emotion for which she settles throughout much of the novel, without cultural role models or peer support, Dorinda must leave her emotional life largely unexamined, particularly her attachment to her husband. So fully does Dorinda succeed in this regard that she is surprised, when he leaves for a day, to find that she misses him (424), and even experiences a rare moment of self-reflection in his absence, in which she knows that she has "'missed everything [she] really wanted'" (427). Tragically, Nathan dies that day while heroically
rescuing people from a train wreck (443). As we might expect, Dorinda is "without a keen sense of widowhood. . . . [T]hat thin clear flame which [is] herself remain[s] unshaken . . ." (445). However, she participates in the communal elevation of Nathan's reputation that occurs after his death and, consequently, she re-visions him based on his heroism (455-56). Later, Glasgow tells us that Dorinda finds greater peace in the years following Nathan's death because "the heroic legend ha[s] satisfied" (470). While this manipulation of the plot initially appears facile, it actually reveals another of Glasgow's positive implications for a marriage not based on romantic love: while at a personal level Dorinda is spared trauma by Nathan's death, still she is able to increase her communal stature by virtue of her position as a hero's widow. Glasgow seems to be putting a final imprimatur on her revised marriage when she manipulates events so that her protagonist's marriage, based on personal respect, particularly elevates that protagonist's public stature, and so allows her to find personal peace. While this opposes the Emersonian self-reliance which Dorinda exercises in all other aspects of her life, it accurately reflects Dorinda's culture. Glasgow knew "that a successful woman had to somehow, in some way, have an escort" (Wagner 10). Her portrayal of respect-based marriage provided her protagonist
with an "escort," or the appearance of social success. Heroic widowhood elevates her stature to such a degree that she need no longer concern herself with social success. Of course, she is no longer burdened by any aspect of the relationship and can attend even more fully to the land.

Although Dorinda had never allowed her marriage to interfere with her work, her zeal for farming has increased markedly since her acquisition of Jason's farm:

For the next few years she gave herself completely to Five Oaks. Only by giving herself completely, only by enriching the land with her abundant vitality, could she hope to restore the farm. Reclaiming the abandoned fields had become less a reasonable purpose than a devouring passion in her mind and heart. (409)

The increased intensity with which Dorinda works her land leads, as we can expect, to an intensification of her relationship with it. Still, the relationship does not yet completely fulfill her, as the following passage reveals:

In these years there were brief periods when her old dreams awakened. Beauty that seemed too fugitive to be real was still more a torment than a delight to
her. The moon rising over the harp-shaped pine; the shocked corn against the red sunsets of autumn; the mulberry-coloured twilights of winter;—while she watched these things the past would glow again with the fitful incandescence of memory. But the inner warmth died with the external beauty, and she dismissed the longing as weakness. (412)

In other words, remembered fulfillment from her brief excursion into romantic love still haunts her because she has not yet found its replacement. Nonetheless, her relationship with the land has become so strong that she experiences a moment of transcendence during a snowstorm:

The air was alive with a multitude of whirling flakes, which descended swiftly and sped off into the space beyond the glimmer of her lantern. After the wagon had disappeared the silence was so profound that she could almost hear the breathless flight of the snow-flakes from the veiled immensity of the sky. By the glow of the lantern she could just distinguish the ghostly images of trees rising abruptly out of the shrouded stillness of the landscape. While
she lingered there it seemed to her
that the earth and air and her own being
were purified and exalted into some
frigid zone of the spirit. Humanity,
with its irksome responsibilities and
its unprofitable desires, dropped away
from her; but when she turned and entered
the house, it was waiting in the ashen
light to retard her endeavours. (418)

In chronological time, this moment occurs on the day Nathan
dies, just after he leaves for the train; his imminent death
is obvious in the images Glasgow creates with her "ghostly"
trees and "shrouded" silence. Another moment of transcendence
occurs later that same day, as Dorinda walks out into her
yard after the storm:

Except for the lighted house at her
back she might have been alone in a
stainless world before the creation of
life. A cold white moon was shedding a
silver lustre over the landscape, which
appeared as transparent as glass against
the impenetrable horizon. Even the house,
when she glanced around at it, might have
been only a shadow, so unreal, so visionary,
it looked in the unearthly light of the snow.
While she lingered there it seemed to her that the movement of the air, the earth, and the stars, was suspended. Substance and shadow melted into each other and into the vastness of space. Not a track blurred the ground, not a cloud trembled in the sky, not a murmur of life broke the stillness. (428-29)

Superficially, the landscape's lifelessness again foreshadows the news of Nathan's death. But much more is evident in Glasgow's language: Dorinda "linger[s]" in a "stainless world before the creation of life," outside "the movement of the air, the earth, and the stars," outside of time. Her familiar home becomes "unreal" and "visionary." It is a moment of absolute silence and absolute mystery, of color washed away in white light, of nature washed clean of life. Instinctively, Dorinda lingers, subconsciously fed by the reality she senses beneath the changed landscape. Once again, she enters the "frigid zone of the spirit" for a transcendent moment. Her rigorous embrace of a life free of conventional emotional ties, in which her primary bond is with the land, leads, finally, to a distinctively Emersonian prize: transcendence through nature. However, one crucial point must be made: Emersonian transcendence is not Glasgow's ideal. We know this through her use of cold, colorless imagery
to depict the scene Dorinda transcendently experiences. This world is silent, frozen, virtually lifeless, when Dorinda senses the universal spirit. Through her chosen imagery, Glasgow tells us that such transcendence is not the best that can be had, at least for a woman. To underscore this, Glasgow manipulates Dorinda's sensation so that it crumbles as she turns to the real world of home and work. Another, more realistically fulfilling, relationship with the universal spirit awaits Dorinda, although its occurrence is still years away. For now, she has reached a watershed in these moments of Emersonian transcendence. Notably, these moments occur only after she has replenished all the land she can physically view from her home, the center of her world. That Dorinda literally sees only land which is renewed through her efforts echoes Emerson's assertion that "[t]he visible creation is the terminus or the circumference of the invisible world" (Nature 838). After she has transformed the natural world visible from her porch, Dorinda momentarily experiences this world as a conduit to the invisible world.

These moments of transcendence mark the beginning of a new phase in her relationship with nature, one which ultimately leads to fulfillment. During the intervening years, however, she achieves a greater peace than she has ever known as she attunes her self to nature's rhythms:
At night, lying in bed with limbs that ached so she could not sleep, and a mind that was blank from exhaustion, she would hear the rotation of-crops drumming deliriously in her thoughts. Potatoes. Corn. Wheat. Cowpeas. Clover. Alfalfa. And back again. Alfalfa. Cowpeas. Potatoes. Corn. Wheat. Clover. That was all the seasons meant to her, one after one. Her youth was going, she knew; but youth had brought so little that age could take away, why should she regret it? The hair on her temples had turned from grey to white; her skin, beneath its warm flush, was creased with lines and roughened from exposure; but her eyes were still bright and clear, though the caged look had gone out of them. (460-61)

Later, Glasgow tells us that Dorinda is "more contented than she has ever been" (469) because "at fifty, [her happiness] depended upon nothing but herself and the land" (470). The final section of the novel reveals the fruits of Dorinda's relationship with the land; accordingly, the section is named "Life-Everlasting" for the plant that overtakes barren ground after broomsedge has come and gone. Just as broomsedge symbolizes Dorinda's excursion into romantic love, and pine her embrace of her father's legacy,
so life-everlasting symbolizes the fruition of Dorinda's work. The plant appears repeatedly throughout this section of the novel, often pointedly linked with Dorinda herself: "Riding there in the silver gleams that flashed up from the life-everlasting, she appeared, after the hard years, to have ripened into the last mellowness of maturity" (477).

While Wagner accurately connects life-everlasting with Dorinda's "knowledge of joy through complete dedication" (76) during her discussion of Glasgow's section titles, she, along with other critics, fails to deal with the other facets of Dorinda's relationship with nature during the final section of the novel. Although Dorinda has made the land fruitful and has become content through rigorous self-reliance, she has never completely healed the wound left by Jason's betrayal. This is evident when she accidentally meets him and he tries to justify his failed life to her:

She looked through him and beyond him to the brown solitude of the winter woods. The sunken roads were swimming in melted snow; the bushes were like soaked rags; the trees were dripping with a fluid moisture which was heavier than rain. From the sodden ground a vapour steamed up and floated like a miasma on the motionless air. (467)

Water-saturated imagery obviously symbolizes Dorinda's
long-submerged hatred for Jason here; the passage serves as a striking example of Emerson's "colors of the spirit" (Nature 828). Later, when Dorinda hears that Jason is physically ill and penniless, nature again reflects her response:

The colour had ebbed from Dorinda's cheeks and she looked as if she had withered. There was no distress in her mind, only a cloud of horror through which she could not see clearly. She lifted her hand and drew it across her eyes, brushing away the mist that obscured them. There was nothing there. Nothing but the drooping shadows over the road, the shocked corn against the sunset, the blur of scarlet and gold and wine-colour woods. There was no horror in these things; yet while she looked at them they became alive and struck out at her like a serpent. (481)

Dorinda's experience of nature as "a serpent" is an Emersonian "natural fact" which reveals a "spiritual fact" (Nature 834). Her previously discussed intolerance for physical beauty, itself a remnant of the intense feelings she once had for Jason, goes one step further: nature becomes the traditional emblem of evil and, in the process, reveals the depths of Dorinda's unhealed wound. Additionally, if we recall the
traditional link between the serpent and the primal woman Eve, we understand that nature instructs Dorinda here: nature becomes the first woman, the great mother, whose power through instructive shock and pain forces Dorinda to recognize her unhealed self. Thus, Dorinda's relationship with nature becomes actively reciprocal as nature symbolically indicates her unfinished business.

Dorinda is not fully conscious of this, however. Although Pratt points out Dorinda's "aware[ness] of the exploitative side of her naturism" which she "queêls . . . to nurse Jason through his last illness" (483), the critic assigns greater awareness to Dorinda than the novel actually reveals. For the character, whose unhealed wound has remained submerged beneath work for thirty years, emotional response must be to the superficial. Consequently, when she decides to house the dying man during his final illness, Dorinda recognizes only that "it was the poorhouse and her horror of the poorhouse that decided his fate" (492). When she actually sees Jason, her physical response, a "tremor of weakness" in which "her knees and elbows were shaking" (501), reveals the depth of her emotional response to seeing him decimated by illness; this offers another indication of the wound she carries within. But once the momentary weakness passes, healing begins immediately:

She felt courageous and full of vitality,
as if the rich blood had surged up through her veins. With the return of strength, her self-reliance, her calm efficiency, revived. She was facing the present now, not the past, and she faced it imperiously. (501-02)

The reference to "self-reliance" strikes an obviously Emersonian note, stronger than the echoes more often heard in Glasgow's text; that self-reliance is paired with "calm efficiency" in a moment of "courageous" behavior reveals Glasgow's thorough understanding of Emerson's philosophy. In the process of following her self-reliant instincts, Dorinda has acted so courageously for so many years that courage is literally second-nature to her now, even as she suffers the renewal of emotional pain. The passage is a fine example of Emerson's contention that "[t]he force of character is cumulative" ("Self-Reliance" 896).

As Dorinda supervises Jason's care in her home over the next few weeks, she equates him with her youthful suffering and realizes that "the connection between youth and middle age [is] broken forever" (508). Still, while the connection to a particular man and a particular period of her life dies, her disappointment regarding romantic love is very much alive. The notion of female fulfillment through romantic love, the most deeply engrained in traditional female psychology, has never left Dorinda; while she intellectually rejected it
thirty years before, she has never fully healed her emotional
wound so that another source of fulfillment can take its place.
For this reason, she has settled for contentment rather
than true fulfillment even in her relationship with nature.
But intellectual acceptance does not facilitate healing;
only recognition of pain does that, as Glasgow wisely demon-
strates during Jason's funeral and the night afterward. As
nature had revealed "the colors of the spirit" thirty years
before, so now it does again:

There had been rain in the night,
and the weather was raw and wintry, with a
savage wind which prowled at a distance in
the fields and woods. Over the graveyard,
where the sunken graves were almost obliter-
ated by periwinkle, the dead leaves were piled
in sodden drifts which gave like moss underfoot.
The paling fence had rotted away, and white
turkeys were scratching in the weeks that
edged the enclosure. Dampness floated down
in a grey vapour from the boughs of the trees ... .
The moaning wind plunged down on the dead leaves
and drove them in eddying gusts over the fields,
over the road, and into the open grave. (518-19)

Death imagery is obvious here, as is the violence of the
wind. That night, as Dorinda recognizes "the love that she
ha[s] never known and the happiness that she ha[s] missed" (522), nature mirrors her emotional crisis in the form of a storm with prominent winds:

Lying there in the shadowy firelight of the room, she heard the wind wailing about the corners of the house and rustling in the old chimneys. She saw the crooked shape of a bough etched on the window-panes, and she listened for the soft thud of the branches beneath the throbbing violence of the storm. . . . Outside, the wind grew louder. She heard it now at a distance, howling like a pack of wolves in the meadow. She heard it whistling round the eaves of the house and whining at the sills of the doors. (522-23)

In both these passages nature is malevolent, particularly the wind. Its personification not only mirrors Dorinda's emotions, but also reveals, in its predatory imagery, the depth of her crisis. Just as a serpent revealed Dorinda's old wound, so now "a pack of wolves" threatens to consume her as she wakefully relives the pain of her early loss and its accompanying self-doubt. During the thirty years since Jason's betrayal, Dorinda has known contentment and satisfaction, but she has never been able to fully appreciate nature's beauty, entwined as it has been with her memory of love and her devastation at its loss. Through the decades of her
growing relationship with the land, admittedly the primary relationship of her life, Dorinda has carried the old wound. Her relationship with nature reaches a new, higher level when its reciprocity, through personifications as a serpent and as a pack of wolves, forces her to heal. That done, she can expand her relationship with nature further: in the final pages of the novel, Dorinda's self and nature become one, in a new state of merger. Glasgow clearly states this on the morning after Dorinda's crisis:

Around her the earth smelt of dawn.
After the stormy night the day was breaking, crisp, fair, windless, with the frost of a mirage on the distant horizon. The trees were bare overhead. Bronze, yellow, crimson and wine-colour, the wet leaves strewed the flagged walk and the grass. Against the eastern sky the boughs of the harp-shaped pine were emblazoned in gold.

Turning slowly, she moved down the walk to the gate, where, far up the road, she could see the white fire of the life-everlasting. The storm and the bag-ridden dreams of the night were over, and the land which she had forgotten was waiting to take her back to its heart. Endurance. Fortitude. The spirit of
the land was flowing into her, and her own spirit, strengthened and refreshed, was flowing out again toward life. This was the permanent self, she knew. . . . Again she felt the quickening of that sympathy which was deeper than all other emotions of her heart, which love had overcome only for an hour and life had been powerless to conquer in the end,—the living communion with the earth under her feet. While the soil endured, while the seasons bloomed and dropped, while the ancient, beneficent ritual of sowing and reaping moved in the fields, she knew that she could never despair of contentment. . . . She saw other autumns like this one, hazy, bountiful in harvests, mellowing through the blue sheen of air into the red afterglow of winter; she saw the coral-tinted buds of spring opening into the profusion of summer; and she saw the rim of the harvest moon shining orange-yellow through the boughs of the harp-shaped pine. Though she remembered the time when loveliness was like a sword in her heart, she knew now that where
beauty exists the understanding soul can never remain desolate. (524-25)

Thus, her reciprocal relationship with nature has become Dorinda's "permanent self" which allows her to, finally, experience beauty. No longer does she need to close her eyes to natural brilliance; her healing complete, she can fully appreciate the physical beauty of her world. Despite Glasgow's use of the word "contentment" here, Dorinda's ability to experience nature's beauty is the final step in her journey to heroic redefinition of female fulfillment: the land itself defines her life and, consequently, she finds fulfillment through its beauty.

Dorinda's growth from a strong-willed young woman yearning for romantic love to a powerful middle-aged woman fulfilled through her life with the land is now complete. Her growth as a hero, and particularly her relationship with nature, has attracted notable critical comment. Pratt states that Dorinda's "relationship to nature prevails as the ultimate reality in her life . . ." (483). Pearson and Pope are more specific: they explicate Dorinda's heroism, calling the land "her rescuer and her sympathetic counterpart in the world; she is its product, its conqueror, and finally its mate . . ." (148). However, none of these critics deal with the complexly Emersonian aspects of Dorinda's naturism as demonstrated at the novel's conclu-
sion. Consider two statements from *Nature*: "Nature is the symbol of spirit" (834), and "[Nature] is the great organ through which the universal spirit speaks to the individual, and strives to lead back the individual to it" (851).

Although Emerson equates the universal spirit with God, the reciprocity which he contends is available through a serious examination of nature is clearly echoed in Dorinda's exchange of spirit with the land. Furthermore, Emerson contends that approaching nature as a discipline can teach us to shape our world, until "the world becomes, at last, only a realized will,--the double of the man" (*Nature* 841). While Dorinda's financial status makes physical work imperative and thus demands a substantially more pragmatic approach than Emerson found necessary, the result of Dorinda's consistent self-discipline is her "realized will" as evident in the replenishment of all the land she can see from her family home. And, of course, Dorinda's "permanent self," wholly identified with nature, forms after decades of working the land; its formation clearly echoes another Emersonian statement: "Do your work, and you shall reinforce yourself" ("Self-Reliance" 893). But the most striking example of Emersonian resonance is evident in the following passage from *Nature*:

A life in harmony with nature, the love of truth and virtue, will purge the eyes
to understand her text. By degrees we may come to know the primitive sense of the permanent objects of nature, so that the world shall be to us an open book, and every form significant of its hidden life and final cause. (838-39)

Dorinda's life becomes by degrees more and more dependent on the cycles of nature once she begins the renewal of Old Farm. When she began farming, she worked desperately, almost feverishly, pouring her energy and will into the only outlet available, reviving Old Farm almost by force. Decades later, she has substantially sublimated will and energy to the power of the land, so that the seasons have long beat in her pulse ("Cowpeas. Clover. Alfalfa. And back again" [460.]), forming, year by year, the rhythms of her life. In the process, nature's "text" has been revealed to her, including transcendent moments in a "frigid" world silenced by a blizzard. Ultimately, her relationship with nature has become reciprocal: as she has healed the land, so the land demands she heal herself in order to experience its beauty. At the novel's end, Dorinda stands poised to learn more from nature, to deepen her relationship with it and more fully experience its revelations of "hidden life and final cause." Notably, she has developed this powerful relationship through years of rigorously self-reliant behavior. Both her means and its end reveal Glasgow's thorough understanding of Emersonian thought.
Conclusion

When all is said and done about the heroines who people the worlds we have entered here, we must return to Emerson. As *Nature* closes, he reminds us of the fruits of transcendence:

> Every spirit builds itself a house; and beyond its house, a world; and beyond its world, a heaven. Know then, that the world exists for you.

> Build, therefore, your own world. As fast as you can conform your life to the pure idea in your mind, that will unfold its great proportions. (858)

Each of the heroines in these novels builds her own world. Ellen Chesser constructs a private world of jeering plants and plovers' cries, and then makes it the foundation on which she builds herself. As a child, Judith Pippinger rejects her acculturated role in favor of building her image of herself exclusively in the outdoor world. Ishma Waycaster ambitiously fights to reconstruct the working world to achieve social justice. And Dorinda Oakley truly changes her world by reinvigorating all the land she can see from her porch. Although Dorinda's union with nature is probably the most successful derivative of Emersonian transcendence found
among these characters, the powerful force which all these women bring to the effort to create their worlds makes them memorable. All of them also learn from nature, as Emerson would have us do: "A life in harmony with nature . . .," he says, "will purge the eyes to understand her text" (Nature 838). Ellen learns who she is by interacting with nature; the adult Judith learns to accept her life by watching farm animals; Ishma learns to absorb the power of a forest fire to pour into her union work; and Dorinda learns that her relationship with nature forms her permanent self. Each of these characters, then, gleans a lesson from the land she walks and works; each enhances her selfhood as she learns her land. Theirs is a culture which mandates women into the roles of wife and mother; fortunately, theirs is also a naturism that feeds their individual selves. Each woman's naturism, at least, allows survival of her self and, at best, strengthens that self as she fights for liberation from cultural constraint.

In addition to her naturism, each heroine's story resonates against Emerson's work in specific ways. Ellen's use of language connects her with nature and, in so doing, reveals mentally the stages of her growth; this process underscores Roberts' very Emersonian emphasis on the life of the mind. Judith turns to nature for healing and, as her misery increases, for direction in her search for peace.
More striking, however, is Kelley's use of personification at critical points in the novel to foretell and mirror her character's fate; her animations of the dawn and the moon almost consciously invoke the universal spirit found in nature and, as such, loudly echo Emerson. Ishma's use of "signs" in nature provides Burke's interpretation of Emerson's conception of nature as emblematic. The power of a forest fire and of a meteor each exemplify the universal spirit found in nature; but Burke adds an intriguingly Emersonian dimension to her work when she allows these natural phenomena to be deciphered through the prism of a strong self, and gives them an interpretation which furthers that self's aims. Notably, Ishma's strong self illuminates more passages of "Self-Reliance" than any of our other heroines. Dorinda, after years of deliberately feeding her self into the land, develops the capacity to momentarily transcend her reality. Later, Glasgow consciously moves from transcendence to transfiguration, making her character's relationship with nature so fully reciprocal that Dorinda experiences the land as her self.

The resonance of each of these novels against concepts from Nature and "Self-Reliance" creates new relevance for Emerson's ideas, as they provide the base from which the authors' distinctively female interpretations spring. After examining their texts, it is clear that each of these writers knew Emerson's work; this is unsurprising, since three of them
were college educated and one, Glasgow, read widely in order to place herself in her culture. But, in addition to their specific transformations of Emersonian ideas, these authors also create commonalities among their texts which feminist critical examination reveals. Although some of these commonalities are not addressed here, they should be noted. Despite Emerson's positive imagery regarding an individual spirit's "house," as quoted above, all of these authors use houses as images of female confinement. In Kelley's text this is clearest: her Judith has "never liked the insides of houses." Burke states it less overtly, but pointedly has Ishma escape from the house into nature for respite from her family and, later in the novel, to connect with her emotional self. Glasgow portrays Dorinda's indoor life as almost incidental to her character's outdoor self-development. Roberts' Ellen, the most conventional of the group, has a less interesting life once she is confined to the indoor role of housewife, as Roberts indicates via the lesser amount of space she devotes to that period of her character's life. Clearly, the authors view the conventional housebound role, at best, as secondary to their characters' self-develop ment and, at worst, as outright destructive to the self. Bound into the domestic role is motherhood, of which none of these writers approves. Kelley indicts it, making it the cause of Judith's spiritual death by her novel's end. Burke
deliberately uses it, via Ishma's mothering of Vennie, to make her point about motherhood as a waste of energy for some women. Glasgow, after using unwed motherhood as a means of forcing Dorinda to leave her home, commits the character to celibacy in order to maintain the primacy of her self-development via work. And even Roberts allows her Ellen to realize the draining of her life into motherhood, a role which Ellen accepts without rebellion. All four authors' distrust of motherhood is unmistakable: at best, its portrayal in their work is as a potential threat to the individual self; at worst, it smothers that self.

As we might anticipate in works which question the conventional female roles, the protagonists' displays of powerful behavior contain unusual, remarkable actions. Notable among these is the power to name. Burke has her Ishma, easily the strongest character here, call out the names of a lynch mob in order to disband them, and Roberts has her Ellen do the same when a mob whips her husband, with the same result. Glasgow's Dorinda refers often to her land's name, Old Farm, and to Five Oaks when she acquires it; we understand at novel's end that these farms each have distinctive attributes for Dorinda, and we can imagine that she uses their names to invoke these attributes and, thus, create her merger with them. In fact, the only character who fails to use the power of naming is Judith, whose entire adulthood is spent losing her self.
From these authors' use of naming, we can acknowledge their understanding, at some intuitive level, of the power inherent in a name. Indeed, both Edith Summers Kelley and Olive Tilford Dargan (who used the pen name Fielding Burke only for her novels) clung to their maiden names after marriage, using them as middle names for their published works. From that, we may wonder whether or not, for these intelligent, educated women, the cultural dictate to give up their individual identities after marriage was uncomfortable.

Just as these authors intuitively invoke the power of naming, so they also invoke the power of the Great Goddess long before twentieth century archaeology uncovered her existence. Drawing from their individual wellsprings of creativity, they create an image of female power far stronger than any model available to them during their lifetimes. Kelley portrays the powerful child Judith as an "avenging Fury," and Burke makes Ishma into the "great earth-mother" at the height of her union activity. Roberts transforms her Ellen into a "dispensing spirit" as she elevates the character to her mature, Everywoman status. And Glasgow, while never directly equating Dorinda with a goddess, merges her completely with the land; she does this decades before the archaeological establishment of a female deity as the primary deity in ancient cultures, and as one whose worship was particularly bound into the land's seasonal cycles of death
and rebirth. Whether or not any of these writers knew about the Great Goddess is irrelevant; what is clear is that they all reached for a symbol of power with which to identify their characters: three of them created an image of female deity, and the fourth used the ultimate ancient symbol of permanence, the earth itself. We are reminded again of Emerson here, when he says that the spirit of nature "does not act upon us from without . . . but spiritually, or through ourselves" (*Nature* 852). By their use of these powerful symbols, we know that each of these authors understood at an intuitive level the power of the connection of self with nature. Although each of these women uses that knowledge differently, all echo Emerson in their use of that fundamental relationship.
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