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English 4430
Final Paper-Question 5
12/15/04

Adventure Novel Landscapes

In the later selections of novels, nature becomes an intricate part as the stories unfold, most notably in the adventure novel. It is in these that man is pitted against nature, and these natural forces can either thwart or aid the characters at any given time. In fact, not only does nature serve as an obstacle that man must conquer, but it may also model the characters themselves, thus allowing the reader to gain insight into the characters' minds and actions based on their surroundings. The three novels in question are Robert Louis Stevenson's Kidnapped, Samuel Butler's Erewhon and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's The Hound of the Baskervilles. While the latter of the three may seem all together separate from nature, rest assured nature plays an intricate part in it too. Therefore, it is an inherent quality in the adventure novel that nature be setup as an ever present entity both thwarting and aiding the main characters, depending upon the nature of their surroundings. Furthermore, metaphorically speaking, landscape or nature, as each term will be toggled, may take on a sort of dualism in which it is representative of characters inner feelings, actions, or circumstances. By doing so, as the character emerges victorious over nature, he has overtaken the greatest obstacle of all, both nature and himself, far greater than any enemy, but also these situations of dualism stand out in the reader's mind putting even more emphasis on moments of interest.

Kidnapped serves as an ever present reminder of nature's realism on even the strongest individual's and serves to expose the weakest even more so, making them seem all the more inadequate for the journey that lies ahead. In the case of David Balfour, a man of capable reasoning and decisiveness, nature proves to be a more than adequate foe as it relinquishes him upon the islet leaving him helpless and alone. The ocean serves as an obstacle to David barring him from the rest of civilization and even companionship, trapping him on the Isle of Earraid. "There was no sound of man or cattle; not a cock crew, though it was about the hour of their first waking; only the surf broke outside in the distance, which put me in mind of my perils and those of my friend" (Stevenson 91). Here we see the ocean representative of fear and danger. When he hears nothing but the sound of waves, it is then that he realizes he is truly alone. Up until this point in the novel, David has been shadowed by a man of action, i.e., Alan Breck, who protects David from the other shipmates and therefore danger. Alan therefore served as a surrogate father to David on the ship the *Covenant*, aiding his inadequacy in areas of war and violence. Now realizing he is alone, David no longer has the protection of a father figure, merely the hollow sound of waves crashing upon the rocks. The chapter titled *Islet* in Kidnapped attempts to expose the underbelly of David, but is also representational of his journey into manhood. This isolation signifies he is nearly to the end of his journey into manhood, but the arm of a companion has been quickly taken out from under him and he must learn to walk on his own, and in the most perilous landscape, survive on his own. The closeness to manhood spoken of here is evident by the obstacle that stands in his way on the island. "At first the creek kept narrowing as I had looked to see; but presently to my surprise it began to widen out again. At this I scratched my head, but had still no

notion of the truth;....” (92). The closeness to his journey’s end is therefore, represented by a mere creek, which serves as a sufficient barrier to David and his trek into manhood. He has no notion of the truth because he is trapped on only one side, were he to cross, the truth would then be known to him. Truth is then experience, and experience is growth/progress.

It is therefore clear that David needs help in order to make that leap of growth. When he remembers the yard, the object he floated to the island on, may still be in the Bay, he goes in search of it, rather than simply swimming across the stream, he takes a literal and metaphorical step backwards in search of aide. “As for the yard, I saw it bobbing very quietly some twenty feet in front of me. I had borne up well until this last disappointment; but at that I came ashore, and flung myself down upon the sand and wept” (92). Once, he realizes help is not within reach, he is finally broken and a complete reversion back into childhood takes place as he begins to weep.

It is no surprise that this pitiful state cannot continue, since he is now but a boy, metaphorically of course, and boys usually do not die at the hands of nature, at least in adventure tales. Just as nature attempts to entrap man and thwart his every move, so does it serve as salvation. “The comfort of the sunshine is a thing I cannot tell. It set me thinking hopefully of my deliverance, of which I had begun to despair; and I scanned the sea and the Ross with a fresh interest” (96). The reader can see from this passage that it is sunlight that serves as a comforter in times of need and darkness. Duality between light and dark has been an age old struggle, whereby man can only look upon and enjoy those moments when the light overcomes the dark. The comfort and new outlook light brings to

the character can also be seen in the other two novels of discussion, which will be explained in a short while.

As David gains a fresh new incite into his own situation, it seems as though nature too comes back in turn to aide him. But again he cannot realize this until he is once again guided by another. Of course the two men point out his folly, i.e., that he can cross the gulf to the other inhabited island when the tide is low, and he becomes ashamed at his own short sightedness. At this point in time, though the reader may not realize, David has two options of escape, he can still cross the creek and come to the other side, or can simply walk across at low tide. Unfortunately, he has already rejected the harder of the two, choosing the easy route and therefore, signifying his path into manhood. After this point, it will not be possible for David to achieve true maturity, to survive without the aide of something, whether it be nature or man, unless he is able to overcome another difficult obstacle. This means of escape is also a method used by the writer as critic Graham Tulloch suggests in his work Stevenson and Islands: Scotland and the South Pacific. "The island becomes for a while that ultimate symbol of human isolation, a place where a single human being is cast away without a companion, but when Stevenson wants to end this isolation he can simply reveal that the "island" is connected to the mainland" (Tulloch 71). The easy route is a constant reminder to the reader and possibly to David that he will never cast off the weakness of youth, unless nature tests him again.

While nature may serve as a metaphor to human growth, it may also serve as an enemy and path to destruction. In Butler's Erewhon, the narrator faces perhaps the most rugged terrain on earth for weeks upon weeks, folly awaiting him at every precipice. In this novel, nature serves as the ultimate test of the human spirit. Nature of course, must

be a natural setting in its most severe form of raw power. In fact, nowhere within the three novels of adventure does a man-made landscape serve as an ultimate test or obstacle of defiance. If it did, this would then defeat the purpose of an adventure, i.e., man's encounter with nature, and therefore belittle the actions of the novel's hero. That is why he must face both man and nature in separate states to truly emerge the victor.

In the beginning of his journey the narrator sets out with a companion by the name of Chowbok, and though nature provides many obstacles for the both of them, they are little held back. However, once Chowbok leaves the narrator he is faced with not only the challenge of the landscape but that of isolation as well. It is here that nature becomes almost overwhelming for him; however, it is not a physical exhaustion he faces but that of mental, coming to near wits end. "But I do not believe that any man could long retain his reason in such solitude, unless he had the companionship of animals. One begins doubting one's own identity" (Butler 31). Nature and landscape thus, challenge the human psyche, confronting the individual with loss of identity and even worse: sanity. The narrator must therefore find comfort somewhere else since nature, at least at this point in time, offers no solace. "I remember deriving comfort even from the sight of my blankets, and the sound of my watch ticking—things which seemed to link me to other people" (31). Material goods, those that are tangible, offer comfort to the narrator. This idea seems odd, but supposing that there is no companionship to be had, material goods would offer, just as the narrator suggested, a link to humanity. Of course the sentiment ranges from person to person, as the silver button of David's, his only property when stranded on the island, offers him little comfort but perhaps a constant reminder of civilization. Following this, there is then a relational gap set up between the narrator of

Erewhon, and David Balfour in Kidnapped. On the one hand, in Erewhon the narrator's maturity and manhood do not come so much into question, but rather he has already reached this point in life and must look to other means for, even perhaps in material goods, comfort. In the case of David, because of reversion away from manhood, he is unable to break the link, or better put, function without the link between him and his friend Alan.

As the narrator moves closer and closer to his destination, though he knows not where it is, his spirits are further trampled by the sheer harshness of the natural world around him. His only redemption, like all other heroes of these novels is sunlight. "I got below the level of clouds, into a burst of brilliant evening sunshine. I was facing the north-west, and the sun was full upon me. Oh, how its light cheered me" (48)! Even here, as the narrator and likewise hero of the story, begins doubting his own identity, sunlight is the only remedy of such severe melancholy. The duality of nature thus presents itself, as both malevolent and benevolent, the guardian and destruction of our hero. It seems that all three of these novel's authors play upon the contrast between light and dark, perhaps not as simple as the battle between good and evil, since the narrator's woes are not cured by sunlight, only subdued, but as a shift in state of mind. Only when he is reunited with civilization does the narrator experience a full recovery from his melancholy state. Nevertheless, it is interesting to think that it was nature that nearly drove him mad and nature that also kept him sane.

In the third work of discussion, Doyle's The Hound of the Baskervilles, landscape serves too not necessarily thwart the characters, though it does at times, but rather serve as oppression to their mental faculties. "Over the green squares of the fields and the low

curve of a wood there rose in the distance a gray, melancholy hill, with a strange jagged summit, dim and vague in the distance, like some fantastic landscape in a dream” (Doyle 59). The duality of landscape is once again revealed to the reader and serves as a foreshadowing tool for the events ahead. The green and sunlit hills are slowly overpowered by the ominous landscape of the moor. The moor is the key landscape in the novel because of its ability to evoke such a wide range of emotions. Furthermore, the impressions Watson has during his encounters on the moor directly reflect his level of uncertainty.

At this point in the novel, the reader has not been enlightened to much information but is fairly in the dark. Their impressions can therefore be mirrored in the impressions of Watson. It also suggests why the moor is the stronger of the two landscapes, overpowering the sunlit areas of pasture and green, directly reflecting uncertainty and danger. “Rolling pasture lands curved up on either side of us, and old gabled house peeped out from amid the thick green foliage, but behind the peaceful and sunlit countryside there rose the ever, dark against the sky, the long, gloomy curve of the moor”(60). Suggesting the waning force of light and therefore, good, as uncertainty grows, it is only when the characters find shelter in the Baskerville mansion that their fears are lifted for a short while. Before entering however, there is one interesting point of reference to that of a man-made landscape offering comfort. “It’s enough to scare any man. I’ll have a row of electric lamps up here inside of six months, and you won’t know it again, with a thousand candle-power Swan and Edison right her in front of the hall door”(62). The reference made here to Thomas Edison’s light bulbs acting as warders of darkness is one of the rare moments when a man-made landscape serves to be more

powerful than the natural. One could surmise from this that human endeavor in the hands of capable can subvert any natural landscape. This idea can be traced back to an earlier stage of British Empiricism and man's goal to conquer nature. In fact this view is a primarily Western Societal one as Langdon Winner suggests: "Western culture has long believed that its continued existence and advancement depend upon the ability to manipulate the circumstances of the material world" (Winner 19). Man does this through use of technology, such as lampposts. "Control, after all, is part of the very design of technical creations" (26). Therefore, through use of mechanical devices, man succeeds in achieving certainty and control over the landscape. These technical advancements do not necessarily refer to masses of machinery but can be the simplest alteration in landscape using a man-made tool. "The bright paper and numerous candles did something to remove the somber impression which our arrival had left upon my mind" (Doyle 65). Here even the use of paper and candles is a comfort to Watson, erasing the overwhelming sensations given off by the moor.

As the reader can see in the later of the three novels, even a human presence can serve to alter the landscape in some way. For Watson the impression upon first meeting Mr. Barrymore is similar to the impression after first viewing the moor, suggesting that humans may also serve to represent the landscape. "Already round this pale-faced, handsome, black-bearded man there was gathering an atmosphere of mystery and of gloom" (68). Doyle takes up a metaphor here by referring to Mr. Barrymore in the likeness of atmosphere. Perhaps, similar to dark clouds gathering over the moor, Mr. Barrymore once again brings the air of uncertainty into the characters' midst. Of course after a sound night sleep and a good breakfast, all the while the sun streaming through the

windows, Watson is in better spirits the next morning. He walks along the moor path only to have his solidarity, which is oddly enough comforting to Watson due to the time of day and exposure to sunlight, interrupted by Mr. and Miss. Stapleton. After his odd encounter with these two Watson's view of the moor changes once again to the bleak outlook it was the previous day. "An orchard surrounded it, but the trees, as is usual upon the moor, were stunted and nipped, and the effect of the whole place was mean and melancholy" (77). It is clear that with the introduction of these two new individuals, who Watson cannot trust; a new uncertainty arises thus, altering his entire perception of the landscape once again.

The landscape of the adventure novel is obviously an important aspect, serving to both aide in the destruction and safety of an individual. These three authors paid keen attention to detail when speaking of landscape with respect to everything else. Landscape, and relationally nature, are therefore, pitted against man in an attempt to shed darkness on his path, only until he is able to move around it, overcome it, or control it. After this, its power ceases to be a threat and sunlight trickles down through the clouds.

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