

INTRODUCTION

to the Proceedings of the Writing and a Sense of Place Symposium

For four exhilarating days in August 1996 scholars from five countries, Canada, Denmark, Norway, Scotland and the United States met in Tromsø to participate in the Writing and a Sense of Place Symposium. Although they have backgrounds in a variety of fields, they share a common interest in the symposium theme. In August we had the opportunity to engage in lively discussions due to ample time allotted for this purpose. Now that the twelve papers appear in print both the participants as well as a larger audience have the opportunity to read the fruits of our efforts to elaborate on what a sense of place means and the implicit and explicit consequences this sense of place has for how we write about and live in places.

We have presented the papers in this collection in the order that they were given at the symposium. Anniken Greve's essay "Community and Place" is an appropriate opening to this collection, just as her oral version was an appropriate tone-setting opening to the symposium. Greve's reflections on the distinction between the given and the made in her understanding of the term place pave the way for an evaluation of the pros and cons of a constructivist notion of place. She discusses place as a lived space in which there exists a "tension between on the one hand the role of the community in bringing the place into being, and on the other, the role of the place in bringing about the community." Greve wraps up her discussion by citing the critical work of Seamus Heaney in order to illustrate how a poetic sense of place recognizes this reciprocal role and "acknowledges the pressure on us from the place itself, as the shared ground that we are embedded in."

While Greve revalues the inherent identity of the place and its ability to contribute to "constituting the 'we' that we are" and even to hold the community together, Jens Kristian Steen Jacobsen, in his "Transience and Place: Exploring Tourists' Experience of Place," revalues the often underrated tourist encounter with places as nothing less than "an important modern ritual." Jacobsen arrives at this evaluation through an examination of several scholars' theories of various terms such as adventurer, stranger and tourist. It is precisely the tourist's detachment from local community that

allows an unmediated contact between sightseer and place which may result in "a love at first sight" sensation. Jacobsen cites Victor Shklovsky's remark that "people living at the seashore grow so accustomed to the murmur of the waves that they never hear it" to point to a difference between native and stranger in which the stranger has a tourist's polysensual objectivity which allows "the possibility to hear the murmur of the waves."

David Nye's "De-Realizing the Grand Canyon" moves the reader's focus from Jacobsen's tourist's sense of place to one major site of tourism. Nye takes us on a chronological tour of the making of an American cultural icon from the nineteenth-century cult of the canyon in painting and photographs as a national sublime site through twentieth-century mass tourism to the present imminent transformation of the canyon into a virtual web site. Nye's examination gives a poignant example of how a place can be "de-realized" or transformed into a "social-construction" by several generations of human efforts to interpret that place. In this sense, Nye's essay is a good illustration of Greve's critique of the limits of a constructivist notion of place, a notion which, in its refusal to allow the place to project its placeness onto us shuts the door to the possibility of, in Nye's terms, "therapeutic renewal" of the tourist.

When Nye says that "leaving the real canyon behind would mean leaving our bodies behind as well, abandoning the kinetic knowing of the object and the synesthesia of its aromas, textures, sounds, and vistas," one is reminded of Jacobsen's argument that polysensualism is an essential part of experiencing a place. And it is precisely kinetic knowing, or place-based knowledge, that is the subject of Sylvia Bowerbank's "Telling Stories About Places." "Story-telling is a cultural technology of connectivity and groundedness" she says, adding that "stories are told in the flesh, on the ground, by a body in a specific place." By using examples from her local community, the Bay Area in Hamilton, Ontario, Bowerbank illustrates how people's stories about their home places are narratives and testimonies which are forms of "bioregional knowledge" crucial to the survival and healthy future of places. To respect and act on this knowledge, Bowerbank stresses, is to practice "green civility" and hence provide needed alternative solutions to pressing local problems. Since the Sense of Place Symposium in August 1996, Bowerbank's essay has been published

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Henning Howlid Wærp's "The Poetry of the Romantic Garden" was an appropriate pivotal talk to round off the first day of the symposium as it both echoed some of the concerns of the papers that preceded it and pointed forward to those that followed. Wærp's analysis of the aesthetics of the Romantic garden reveals to what extent the English landscape garden which evolved in the eighteenth century as a model for nature at its best was in fact a constructed space marked by a formulaic language. Through a close reading of the Norwegian Romantic poet Andreas Munch's "Nattlig Fart" ("Night Gallop"), Wærp illustrates how the seemingly genuine experience of nature in the poem is in fact "determined by a limited set of experiential codes: the landscape is at the mercy of ego....the sensitive soul in his own codes. And these codes correspond to those of the Romantic garden."

While Wærp problematizes the notion of the Romantic garden place as nature as its best, Anne Wallace, in "*Inhabited Solitudes: Dorothy Wordsworth's Domesticating Walkers*," problematizes the Romantic view of the natural world as place with domestic space as its antithesis. Wallace says that "by walking, we come to know landscape, to have and make sense of place, and to be able to say that sense to others in writing." Wallace's essay is an exploration of the writer and walker Dorothy Wordsworth's aesthetics of place, an aesthetics which challenges our received view of the "house-place as non-place." Through a reading of Wordsworth's journals and some poems, Wallace illustrates how she rhetorically fuses the conventionally split domestic and exterior spaces by revaluing domestic work and indoor scenes as interior landscapes and by domesticating natural landscapes through the use of metaphors of sheltering and home. Reading Wallace's treatment of the Wordsworth household members who celebrated walking as poetic labor, one is convinced that to overlook Dorothy Wordsworth's rich sense of place is indeed to "impoverish our senses of place."

Anka Ryall's "A Vindication of Struggling Nature: Mary Wollstonecraft's Scandinavia" moves the focus from the walking writer to the travelling writer. Ryall traces how Wollstonecraft's sense of place in her travel narrative *Letters Written during a Short Residence in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark* (1796) is closely

linked to her interest in natural history. By placing Wollstonecraft's writings in the context of the influential natural historians of the eighteenth century, Ryall demonstrates how she simultaneously pays homage to and challenges these authorities. In her *Letters*, then, Wollstonecraft asserts her own credentials as a natural historian based on her keen observations which are cast in the light of her own personal circumstances. Ryall's essay reveals how Wollstonecraft's natural history is not only valid, but also embraces an affirmative sense of place in which the author "endows her northern landscapes and organisms with an almost emancipatory potential that is analogous to her feminist vision of social change and personal empowerment."

Clara Juncker's "Writing in the Contact Zone: Kate Stone's *Brokenburn*" also examines a woman writer whose sense of place is nearly inextricable from her personal circumstances. But unlike Mary Wollstonecraft's positive rewriting of natural history, or Dorothy Wordsworth, whose rhetorical strategies in some works challenge received views of domesticity, Kate Stone, the diarist Juncker examines, is caught up in a tension-filled place which ultimately leads her to conform to "ideological and linguistic practices that contained southern women within domesticity." Juncker describes Kate Stone's nineteenth-century American South as a "contact zone," Mary Louise Pratt's term for social spaces where cultures meet and clash. Juncker illustrates how writing from within this zone was no easy task for Stone who "inadvertently maps the intricate social and racial relations of the antebellum South" despite her rhetorical attempts to "glue together the South" and erase the slave presence from her writings.

Fredrik Chr. Brøgger's "Do You Love Nature If You Fear Her Body?: Style, Narrative Perspective, and the Southern Wilderness in Faulkner's 'The Bear'" moves us to the twentieth-century South when the legacy from Kate Stone's era lived on in all its tense complexity in the work William Faulkner. Like Kate Stone, whose perception of the Southern landscape is filtered through the ideological discourses of her time and place, in "The Bear" Ike McCaslin's "own perception of the wilderness is torn between different discourses which he has inherited from the culture and the time of which he is a part." Through an examination of the narratorial strategies in this story, Brøgger illustrates how its

apparent pastoral mode is in fact saturated with irony. Brøgger's attempt to answer the disturbing questions raised by the text is approached in a number of ways, including by applying Barry Lopez's distinction between exterior and interior landscapes; between the landscape's "indigenous rythm," its given dimension, and what we project onto it.

Sandra Lee Kleppe's "The Vertical Sense of Place in the Fiction of Barry Hannah and Flannery O'Connor" explores a peculiar type of space which two Southern writers consistently construct in their works. Kleppe's essay applies Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of the vertical chronotope to illustrate how both Hannah and O'Connor develop an aesthetics of place which "enables a literary use of time and space which spreads the world out along a vertical axis, blotting out linear time and twisting horizontal space into a right angle with the earth." Although Kleppe's discussion shifted the focus of the symposium from a sense of place which is solidly grounded in the concrete world to one which is more abstract, it is implicit in her essay that a vertical sense of place is the result of the authors' exposure to the soil of the American South. The three texts by Juncker, Brøgger and Kleppe are all engaged in different ways with the moral space which accompanies writers from a region with a turbulent history and an intimate bond to the land, for better and worse.

As a contrast to such charged moral space, the poet John Burnside emphasizes that lyric poetry of place can carve out a "metaphysical space, which is essentially empty, a region of potential in which anything can happen." In his essay "Poetry and a Sense of Place," based on his symposium talk and poetry reading, Burnside offers insights into the aesthetics of the place-poem, a poem which is not created in a contact zone but rather in the magical space between boundaries. By citing passages from his own and other writers' poetry, Burnside explores how "poetry of place, while it appears to concern itself with landscape, is often about identity and community," a statement which, reviewing the essays in this collection, seems applicable to the wider theme of writing and a sense of place. We are privileged to be able to print eight poems from Burnside's recent sequence *Epithalamium* which he has appended to his essay.

While Burnside extends an invitation to enter the space carved out by the writer, Laura Dassow Walls' essay "Chains of Translation: On Being a Pacific Thoreauvian" discusses the complex process involved when a reader takes up the invitation to occupy such space. In an intensely personal account of her engagement with the writer Henry David Thoreau, Walls weaves a theory of "the way in which metaphor negotiates meaning from place to place, braiding together 'word' and 'world' through chains of translation." Walls elaborates on Yi-Fu Tuan's statement that "Objects anchor time" and links this to her own discussion of why objects do not exist in nature yet it is paradoxically through objectification that we connect ourselves to nature, places, people and texts. For anyone who has experienced the loss of a beloved person or place, Walls' essay can be read as a therapeutic exercise in healing the wounds left by absence and accepting the new sense of place which arises out of displacement. There could be no better conclusion to the Proceedings of the Writing and a Sense of Place Symposium.

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Sandra Lee Kleppe