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The Limits of Environmental Writing: Thirlmere Lake, Hetch Hetchy Valley & Storm King Mountain

Abstract I: "Is then no nook of English ground secure/ From rash assault?" Con questo verso si apre il sonetto di William Wordsworth "On the Projected Kendal and Windemere Railroad", pubblicato nel 1844, anno in cui fu insignito del titolo di poeta laureato. La protesta di Wordsworth contro la ferrovia non fu efficace ma fu d'ispirazione per una successiva compagna degli anni '70 del 1800 contro la costruzione della diga di Thirlmere Lake nei pressi della città di Manchester per incrementare la fornitura idrica. Neppure questo tentativo ebbe successo ma divenne un elemento di coesione per la tutela dell'ambiente in Inghilterra. Stesso discorso può essere fatto per il tentativo fallito – ispirato dal formidabile naturalista John Muir – di bloccare la costruzione della diga di Hetch Hetchy Valley nel 1913 progettata per la fornitura idrica nella California meridionale. In entrambi i casi, l'incontro tra letteratura e natura è stato cruciale per la lotta ambientalista, ma in ciascun esempio il risultato fu deludente. La scrittura e la cultura letteraria ambientali non si accordavano con il razionalismo politico ed economico. Come mai, dunque, lo sforzo di bloccare le forze congiunte dalla Consolidated Edison, del US Army Corps of Engineers e della Federal Power Commission – e il loro progetto di fornire alla città di New York energia idroelettrica a danno della Storm King Mountain nel 1965 – alla fine ebbe successo? La risposta a questa domanda ci dice molto sull'efficacia della scrittura e dell'organizzazione ambientale, e solleva interrogativi sui limiti e le possibilità della letteratura.

Abstract II: "Is then no nook of English ground secure/ From rash assault?" So begins William Wordsworth's sonnet "On the Projected Kendal and Windemere Railroad", published in 1844, the year he became Poet Laureate. Wordsworth's protest against the railroad was ineffectual but his resistance inspired a later campaign in the 1870's against the damming of Thirlmere Lake by the city of Manchester to increase its water supply. That effort, too, failed but it became a rallying point for environmental conservation in England. Much the same can be said for the unsuccessful attempt – led by the formidable naturalist John Muir – to stop the damming of the Hetch Hetchy Valley in 1913 for purposes of supplying water to southern California. In both cases, the intersection of literature and nature was crucial to the conservationist struggle, but in each instance the result was disappointing. Environmental writing and literary culture were no match for political and economic rationalism. Why then did the effort to stop the combined forces of Consolidated Edison, the US Army

Corps of Engineers, and the Federal Power Commission – which were bent on supplying New York City with hydroelectric power at the expense of scenic Storm King Mountain in 1965 – finally succeed? The answer to that question tells us much about effective environmental writing and organizing, and opens up questions about the limits and possibilities of literature.

1. Thirlmere Lake

On the Projected Kendal and Windemere Railroad

Is then no nook of English ground secure
From rash assault? Schemes of retirement sown*
In youth, and 'mid the busy world kept pure
As when their earliest flowers of hope were blown,
Must perish; – how can they this blight endure?
And must he too the ruthless change bemoan
Who scorns a false utilitarian lure
'Mid his paternal fields at random thrown?
Baffle the threat, bright Scene, from Orresthead
Given to the pausing traveller's rapturous glance:
Plead for thy peace, thou beautiful romance
Of nature; and, if human hearts be dead,
Speak, passing winds; ye torrents, with your strong
And constant voice, protest against the wrong (October 12, 1844).

This sonnet by William Wordsworth, while not numbered among his best work, nonetheless does useful work for us in trying to understand the process and dynamic of organized resistance to modern instances of environmental degradation and exploitation. I will look at three case studies, beginning with the Thirlmere Scheme – as it was called in the 1870 s in the Lake District of England – but before I do that I want to look more closely at the Wordsworth poem because it identifies a number of key issues that will recur in my discussion.

The poem was published in the *Carlisle Journal* on October 26th, 1844, to protest the proposed railway that was to link the villages of Kendal and Windermere in the Lake District, where Wordsworth, famously, had long resided. Wordsworth had been appointed Poet Laureate on April 6th, 1843, and he used his new position to lobby against the railroad, sending letters to W. E. Gladstone, then President of the Board of Trade, and to the *Morning Post* (Ritvo 2007: 468). His interventions were ineffectual and belated, since the planning was too far advanced to be undone, even by a poet. The sonnet, with its ringing opening – "Is then no nook of English ground secure/ From rash assault?" – identifies six entities: England, as a place to be defended; local residents native to the district; a utilitarian blight on the landscape; Orrest Head, a hill on the eastern shore of Windermere; a traveler walk-

Fig. 1. *Raven's Crag* by Elijah Walton

ing there; and Nature, with its winds and torrents. These six components – national interest, local residents, a utilitarian proposal, a special locale, visiting tourists, and Nature idealized – mix repeatedly in environmental controversies, in different ways and to different degrees. The little room of the sonnet turns out to be quite capacious.

While Wordsworth failed in his endeavor, he succeeded in establishing the notion that industrial progress in the Victorian era might be challenged not only when it contravenes the interests of stakeholders – landowners and people directly affected by large-scale enterprises – but also when it runs counter to aesthetic considerations, the "beautiful romance/ Of nature". That was a novel idea, one without any cultural or legal precedent, for it was an invention of the Romantic period and largely depended on Wordsworth's biocentric ecological vision. For Wordsworth, and for many of his subsequent readers, Nature, in the words of Geoffrey Hartman, "entices the brooding soul out of itself, toward nature first, then toward humanity" (Hartman 1970: 308). Keeping that in mind, we can now move three decades ahead to 1877 and the formation of the Thirlmere Defence Association (the TDA).

As a burgeoning center of textile manufacture, the city of Manchester desperately needed additional sources of clean water, both for the cotton industry and for consumption by the quickly growing population of workers. It constructed reservoirs in the 1840s but they soon became inadequate and the city was forced to look further afield for its needs. The Waterworks Committee identified Thirlmere in the Lake District 100 miles away as the ideal place for the construction of a dam. The lake had clean water; it was penned in by high cliffs that would contain the reservoir; it was at a high elevation, thereby enabling the use of a gravity-fed aqueduct; and there were comparatively few landowners to negotiate with and buy out. The Victorians were already used to large public projects, especially water works and railroads, and authorities were well versed in dealing with the opposition such projects spawned: it was simply a matter of compensating landowners and reassuring the public that the work was necessary for their welfare and that the money was being properly spent. Parliament authorized these projects through legislation but there was rarely any difficulty in getting approval; progress was unstoppable. So it was with some surprise that the city fathers of Manchester suddenly found themselves confronted with an organized resistance to their scheme.

About fifty landowners in the vicinity of Thirlmere banded together to stop the alteration of their land (Ritvo 2007: 461). Through newspapers, pamphlets and even a three-act

Fig. 2. *Thirlmere Bridge Looking North, Cumberland* by Thomas Allom

play they attacked the proposal primarily on aesthetic grounds. On the one hand, it was a desecration of nature – and the language here suggested a religious violation or sacrilege as well – and a despoiling of the beauty that was a national heritage, since harming any part of the Lake District was to degrade the whole of it. These arguments gained considerable traction amongst an influential segment of the population (including writers such as Ruskin and Carlyle, lawyers, educators, and bishops) and, in 1878, they were able to block the necessary legislation for the project.

The historian Harriet Ritvo, who has studied this controversy, notes that the key to the argument the TDA was making was the assertion that Thirlmere, and the Lake District in general, was an utterly natural and relatively pristine locale that needed to be protected for the enjoyment and edification of the English people. As she puts it:

> The virgin or natural condition of the Lake District seems to have become not only a major component of its aesthetic and patriotic value, but almost a necessary precondition to its defense (Ritvo 2007: 469).

This was a powerful and attractive idea but, unfortunately for the TDA, it wasn't true, and demonstrably so. Human habitation of the Lake District went back almost ten thousand years and the landscape was altered radically through deforestation, mining, grazing, farming, the building of houses and villages, the construction of roads and bridges; in short, it was neither pristine nor an unoccupied wilderness. This contradiction was exploited by the proponents of the Thirlmere Scheme, who went further to argue that, in fact, by damming the river and increasing the size of the lake, they would be saving Thirlmere from further human encroachment and making it more available to tourists who would benefit from

Fig. 3. Thirlmere Lake before the dam

Fig. 4. Thirlmere Lake flooded

visiting it in precisely the ways the TDA was advocating. The inherent weakness in the argument against the project served to doom the resistance and the legislation was passed the following year and the entire undertaking completed in 1894, to great fanfare.

To many of the proponents of the Manchester scheme, the opposition seemed sentimental, narrow-minded and elitist. The domestic and pecuniary needs of over a million people were being ignored in favor of a nebulous notion of beauty that could only be enjoyed by a few wealthy landowners and a limited number of tourists. Utilitarianism was far more egalitarian and it drove the expansive progress that was making Britain the wealthiest nation in the Western world. The counter-arguments thereby looked trivial and finally of no account. And yet a new idea had taken root. Land owned privately could nonetheless be claimed as the property of the nation as a whole because of its aesthetic and historic value (Ritvo 2003: 1510). This would give impetus to the idea of setting aside land for public use and recreation, and it would strengthen the resolve of environmentalists to fight for the preservation of areas of unusual beauty or cultural significance. An age of environmental activism had begun.

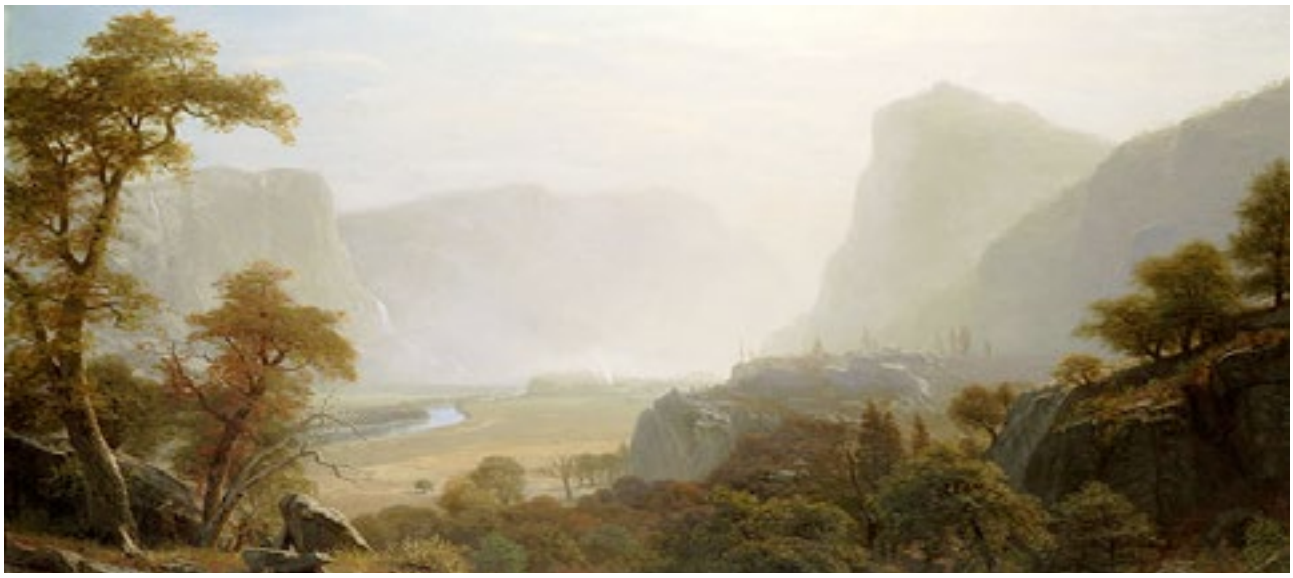

Fig. 5. *Hetch Hetchy Valley* by Albert Bierstadt (1874-80)

2. Hetch Hetchy Valley

"Dam Hetch Hetchy!" exclaims John Muir in 1908, "As well dam for water-tanks the people's cathedrals and churches, for no holier temple has ever been consecrated by the heart of man" (Muir 1908: 220). The Hetch-Hetchy Project is one of the most infamous environmental controversies in American history, and John Muir the most prominent naturalist of the nineteenth century. When Muir threw himself against the project it was clear there was going to be a fight. By the end of the nineteenth century, the City of San Francisco needed new sources of water, especially after the devastating earthquake and fire of 1906, and the high mountains of the Sierra Nevada range were an obvious place to look. There were a number of possibilities but the engineers quickly settled on two spots for reservoirs, Lake Eleanor and Hetch Hetchy Valley, both of which were located within Yosemite National Park, then managed by the US Department of the Interior. The park was part of the Yosemite Grant (signed into law by Abraham Lincoln in 1864), and was the first land to be preserved for public use. The Yosemite Valley (a small part of the entire Grant) was given by the government to the State of California to manage as a park (in effect, creating a state park surrounded by a national one). In 1890, at the urging of John Muir, the Yosemite land (minus the state-owned Valley) was further protected by the federal government and finally made into Yosemite National Park in 1906 (Fields 1936: 591), by which time Muir had convinced Theodore Roosevelt, during a camping trip in 1903, to include the Yosemite Valley as part of the new National Park.

And that, one would have expected, should have been the end of any possible incursion into Yosemite. But San Francisco was a city thirsty for drinking water and hydroelectric power and it continued to take measures to secure the sites it coveted. Crucial to this effort was the passage of a bill in Congress in 1900 (introduced by a California Representative), that provided for the municipal use of National Parks.

Fig. 6. President Theodore Roosevelt and John Muir at Glacier Point, Yosemite, May 1903

Thus began a series of petitions from San Francisco to the national government to allow it to convert Hetch Hetchy Valley into a reservoir. The protracted legal and political battle, which involved many people, organizations and agencies, took place over the next thirteen years and ended finally with the passage of a bill allowing San Francisco immediate access to Hetch Hetchy in 1913. John Muir, who vigorously opposed the project – as did the Sierra Club, which he helped found – died the following year.

What Roosevelt said of Muir is worth noting, that "he was also – what few nature lovers are – a man able to influence contemporary thought and action on the subjects to which he had devoted his life. He was a great factor in influencing the thought of California and the thought of the entire country" (Roosevelt 1915: 27). Muir had won many contests on behalf of environmental preservation. Like Wordsworth, he saw Nature as a sacred presence, for "In God's wildness lies the hope of the world – the great fresh, unblighted, unredeemed wilderness" (Teale 2001: 315). This, of course, echoes Thoreau's famous (and often misquoted dictum), "In wildness is the preservation of the world," and, like Thoreau, Muir often takes a jaundiced view of his fellow man: "fresh" is a trope for "pristine" and "natural"; but what "blights" Nature is man; and "unredeemed" can only be ironical, as wilderness, in Muir's view, needs no redemption except when seen through the dogmatic lens of a regnant Protestantism. The rhetoric of Romanticism is fully blown in Muirm – as it continues to be in the publications of the Sierra Club – and it was from this position that he advocated preservation, particularly in the face of what he saw as the profane desires of benighted capitalists.

At the beginning of his defense of Hetch Hetchy, Muir writes, "it is impossible to overestimate the value of wild mountains and mountain temples as places for people to grow in, recreation grounds for soul and body. They are the greatest of our natural resources, God's best gifts, but none, however high and holy, is beyond reach of the spoiler". Muir goes on to extoll the extraordinary character of Hetch Hetchy as every bit as sublime and beautiful as the better-known Yosemite Valley:

> The correspondence between the Hetch Hetchy walls in their trends, sculpture, physical structure, and general arrangement of the main rock-masses and those of the Yosemite Valley has excited the wondering admiration of every observer (Muir 1908: 215).

Fig. 7. O'Shaughnessy Dam at Hetch Hetchy

Fig. 8. *Hetch Hetchy Valley* by Isaiah West Taber, 1908

Having established, in considerable detail, the features of Hetch Hetchy, Muir turns to his main agenda, opposition to the dam:

> Sad to say, this most precious and sublime feature of the Yosemite National Park, one of the greatest of all our natural resources for the uplifting joy and peace and health of the people, is in danger of being dammed and made into a reservoir to help supply San Francisco with water and light, thus flooding it from wall to wall and burying its gardens and groves one or two hundred feet deep (Muir 1920: 255-256).

At this point in the piece, any sympathetic reader is likely to read that sentence with incredulous alarm; Muir follows it up with a larger statement about the true utility of Nature:

> The making of gardens and parks goes on with civilization all over the world, and they increase both in size and number as their value is recognized. Everybody needs beauty as well as bread, places to play in and pray in, where Nature may heal and cheer and give strength to body and soul alike (Muir 1920: 255-256).

He calls this "natural beauty hunger" and sees it as a universal tonic – interestingly, recent research has, in fact, corroborated his claim[1]. "Nevertheless," he says, "like anything else worthwhile, from the very beginning, however well guarded, they have always been subject to attack by despoiling gain-seekers and mischief-makers of every degree from Satan to Senators" (Muir 1920: 217). To align Satan with Senators is a move Americans of all stripes – and at all times – seem to entertain. Muir, though, follows through on the implications in this instance:

[1] See, for instance: Shanahan, Danielle F. *et al*. 2016. Health Benefits from Nature Depend on Dose, *Scientific Reports* 6, Article number: 28551, http://www.nature.com/articles/srep28551 (consulted on 16/8/2017).

> Ever since the establishment of the Yosemite National Park, strife has been going on around its borders and I suppose this will go on as part of the universal battle between right and wrong, however much its boundaries may be shorn, or its wild beauty destroyed (Muir 1920: 217).

To couch the controversy in terms of "the universal battle between right and wrong" is about as uncompromising a stance as one could take. It is not dissimilar to what the Thirlmere Defence Association proclaimed: faced with a choice between a utilitarian good and an aesthetic experience, they chose the latter without hesitation. Muir's extreme rhetoric did give some of his supporters pause and it helped bring about a split within the Sierra Club over the issue. It also pitted Muir against the formidable Gifford Pinchot, Chief of the United States Forest Service and the primary advocate of what he called the "conservation ethic" that allowed for the controlled and profitable use of public lands. Gifford was instrumental in keeping San Francisco's bid for Hetch Hetchy alive, though it had widespread support in any case. In looking at the detailed report supporting the reservoir, *The Hetch Hetchy Water Supply for San Francisco 1912*, put together by the engineer John R. Freeman, we can see that the Thirlmere experience was very much on the minds of the advocates. In citing the Thirlmere case, Freeman writes:

> There was a great popular outcry in newspapers and elsewhere, in which bishops, baronets, actors and literary artists joined with great fervor, about the desecration of this beautiful lake for such a utilitarian purpose, merely, as it was said, to save the city the extra cost involved in going to some less beautiful spot (Freeman 2005: 46).

This is exactly what opponents of the Hetch Hetchy dam were claiming as well. Freeman goes on to say:

> But in the course of their works the Water Board completed a beautiful macadam road encircling the lake, and giving along its westerly shore many beautiful views of Mt. Helvellyn, from points to which there had previously been no good road. The roads about this reservoir have come to be one of the most popular holiday routes in England (Freeman 2005: 46).

It's clear Freeman and others studied the Thirlmere Scheme with an eye to seeing just how Manchester managed to succeed in thwarting the activists of the TDA. The dam advocates used the same tactics and strategy, and got the same result: the dam was built. Once again, it appears, utilitarianism vanquishes environmentalism. I want to come back to this conclusion later, but first, we will consider a very different story that takes place in the Hudson River Valley of New York in the 1960s.

Fig. 9. Storm King Mountain, looking west

3. Storm King Mountain

September 22nd, 1962, seemed an auspicious day: Rachel Carson published *Silent Spring* while Consolidated Edison Company of New York, the nation's largest electric and gas company, announced plans to build a hydro-electric plant at Storm King Mountain in the Hudson Highlands sixty miles to the north. Both intended to address ecological problems: Carson, the spread of harmful chemicals, and Con Ed the air quality of New York and the need for a non-polluting solution to the city's burgeoning energy requirements. This need became all the more urgent after the massive blackout in New York in 1965 that affected twenty-five million people. Con Ed had already put on line the Indian Point nuclear power plant and had plans for two more in the near future, but it desperately wanted a pumped-storage plant that could generate power during off-peak periods. Con Edison, it should be noted, was a powerful entity used to getting its way. There was no reason to suppose the Storm King project would be problematic: as an engineering solution it was elegant, efficient and cost effective. They simply needed to line up the appropriate landowners and local authorities of Cornwall, NY, and make sure they profited too. In fact, much of this work was done quietly beforehand with a good deal of forethought.

What Con Ed didn't anticipate, however, was that six private – and tenacious – individuals would ban together to stop the project by forming a group called Scenic Hudson Preservation Conference to rally support for taking on the goliath Con Ed. Initially Scenic Hudson was no more than a gnat to be swatted away, especially once permits had been granted and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers was brought in, but the story quickly becomes interesting when, in 1972, the U.S. Court of Appeals, 2nd Circuit, rules, in *Scenic Hudson Preservation Conference v. Federal Power Commission*, that contrary to what the federal regulatory commission held, the individuals represented by Scenic Hudson had legal standing to challenge the government. As the judge put it:

> In order to insure that the Federal Power Commission will adequately protect the public interest in the aesthetic, conservational, and recreational aspects of power development, those who by their activities and conduct have exhibited a special interest

Fig. 10. *Storm King of the Hudson* by Sanford Robinson Gifford (1865)

> in such areas, must be held to be included in the class of "aggrieved" parties under […] We hold that the Federal Power Act gives petitioners a legal right to protect their special interests (Hays 1971: 20295).

This was a new and extraordinarily wide-ranging decision that has had implications for environmental activism ever since. In the first place, it established that citizens and citizen groups have the legal standing to litigate in environmental matters; and secondly, they can do so for non-economic reasons. As the court noted:

> The Storm King project is to be located in an area of unique beauty and major historical significance. The highlands and gorge of the Hudson offer one of the finest pieces of river scenery in the world. The great German traveler Baedeker called it "finer than the Rhine". Petitioners' contention that the Commission must take these factors into consideration in evaluating the Storm King project is justified by the history of the Federal Power Act (Hays 1971: 20294).

In the same year, building on the example of Storm King, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that "Aesthetic and environmental well-being, like economic well-being, are important ingredients of the quality of life in our society" (Stewart 1972: 735), thus opening the way to further activism by environmentalists.

There is little doubt that the Court of Appeal was swayed by the many astonishing encomiums to Storm King and the Hudson Highlands, which ranged from praising its natural scenic beauty to underscoring its historical importance during the Revolutionary War. The famous Yale art historian, Vincent Scully, had this to say when asked why he thought Storm King was "one of the most valuable and unusual natural formations and scenes in the United States":

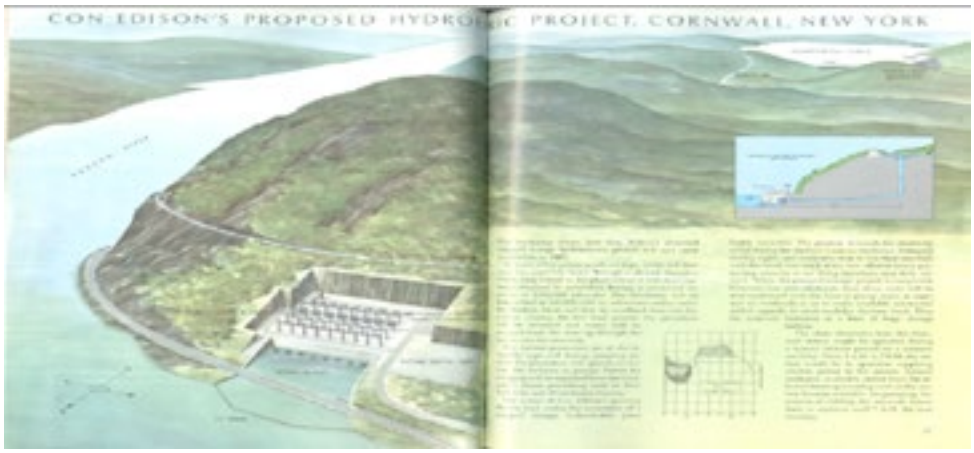

Fig. 11. Con Ed artist's rendering of the proposed hydro-electric power plant on Storm King Mountain

> Storm King […] is a mountain which should be left alone. It rises like a brown bear out of the river, a dome of living granite, swelling with animal power. It is not picturesque in the softer sense of the word, but awesome, a primitive embodiment of the energies of the earth. It makes the character of wild nature physically visible in monumental form. As such it strongly reminds me of some of the natural formations which mark sacred sites in Greece and signal the presence of the Gods; it preserves and embodies the most savage and untrammeled characteristics of the wild at the very threshold of New York. It can still make the city dweller emotionally aware of what he most needs to know: that nature still exists, with its own laws, rhythms, and powers, separate from human desires (Scully in Dunwell 1992: 220).

Meanwhile, Con Ed called its opponents "misinformed bird watchers, nature fakers, land grabbers and militant adversaries of progress" (Dunwell 1992: 223). Despite efforts to discredit it, Scenic Hudson was able to amass a formidable array of supporters from around the country and from fourteen foreign countries. Con Edison attempted to counter this rising tide by producing a full-color brochure with a dramatic and impressive rendering of the proposed facility against the backdrop of the Hudson Highlands. It's a beautiful picture but for that very reason it backfired: for the first time people could visualize just what the pumped storage complex would look like and they were appalled: a huge chunk of the mountain would be carved out and an enormous steel and concrete edifice take its place. The artist simply did too good a job.

The Storm King case did not end quickly; Con Ed continued to try to find ways to build at Storm King but finally, in 1980, after seventeen years of litigation, the company gave up and furthermore agreed to undertake remedial work at its other power plants in order to reduce fish kills. It was a resounding success for Scenic Hudson, but not for them only: Storm King is often referred to as the birthplace of the modern environmental movement in the U.S.

While I have glossed over a lot of the detail surrounding this case, I think we are in a position now to ask why there was success at Storm King but failure at Thirlmere and Hetch Hetchy. The question, of course, is a bit naïve because there are so many complex factors to

take into account, including the historical development of environmental thinking in general and the peculiar contingencies surrounding each case. But I think the question is useful because certain overlapping considerations were at the forefront for all three, and that commonality, in itself, calls for some reflection.

4. Conclusions

If we recall the Wordsworth sonnet that we began with, we noted six interwoven elements: a utilitarian proposal, a special locale, national or patriotic interest, local residents, visiting tourists, and an idealized view of Nature. In the three case studies we have looked at, all six of those considerations play a part to varying degrees. It is virtually a recipe for environmental activism. But when we ask why two prominent and celebrated struggles failed and one succeeded, we have to look at differences rather than similarities. Accordingly, I would like to suggest four interrelated reasons for the favorable outcome at Storm King (though I believe there are others too), and, also, two caveats by way of conclusion.

First, *demographics*.

Both Thirlmere and Hetch Hetchy are located at a considerable distance from a metropolitan center. In 1871, the county of Westmoreland, in which Thirlmere resided, had less than 65,000 people, as compared to Greater Manchester, which had one and a half million. Yosemite lies within Maraposa County which, in 1900, had less than 5,000 people in it, while San Francisco at the time had almost 350,000. The village of Cornwall is nestled next to Storm King, with a population of about 8,000, but the Hudson Highlands is bounded by the cities of Newburgh, Beacon, and Peekskill, with the entire Mid-Hudson region having over 500,000 in 1970, and another eight million in New York City, sixty miles away. As Con Edison discovered, there were a

Fig. 12. Lower Hudson River Valley (showing the Hudson Highlands)

lot of citizens interested in what was going on in their backyard, especially once the people of New York City turned against Con Ed. The sheer size of the opposition became overwhelming. For all the support that Thirlmere and Hetch Hetchy garnered – and it included many prominent and even famous people – the activists had to rely more on rhetoric than numbers. On the surface, this does not bode well for environmental campaigns in more remote places, though I think it's reasonable to argue that the Internet can now offset such deficits.

Second, *sense of place*

This is related to demographics, but it's really a separate issue to proximity. Much has been written about sense of place but, as the geographer Yi-Fu Tuan points out, we're really talking about the relationship between space and place, and the way a space becomes an experiential place, a lived reality (Tuan 1977: 6). The Hudson Valley has been inhabited continuously for a long time, first by Native Americans and then by settlers, first the Dutch and then the English, and then, it seems, the rest of the world. When I referred a moment ago to people's "backyard", I had in mind the fact that the inhabitants of the region were deeply connected to it and *interested*, in all senses of the word. Another word for this might be *loyalty*, an emotional register that is untouched by utilitarian concerns; loyalty is what moves people to sacrifice themselves or, at least, to put themselves on the line. Storm King became a symbol of a certain love of place, and once that was activated, activism followed.

Third, *imaginative texture*

This is connected to a sense of place and is one of its causes. The Mid-Hudson has a rich history of aesthetic production. Americans, and New Yorkers in particular, are well aware of this texture, be it the stories of Washington Irving ("Rip Van Winkle" and "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow") or the gorgeous paintings of the Hudson River School (by Thomas Cole, Asher B. Durand, Frederick Church, Albert Bierstadt and others). Even the singer-activist Pete Seeger and his *Clearwater* sloop are part of that cultural history. This creates a deep pool of emotional reserve that can be drawn on when the region is perceived to be under threat. There was something similar happening in the Thirlmere Scheme, where the storied lives of Wordsworth and his circle played a role in the desire to preserve the lake as it was. But in 1870 that texture was not as thickly woven as it is now, and I suspect that any plan to dam one of the Lakes at this point would be met with fierce and general resistance. The same is clearly true for Hetch Hetchy, which is why there is a contemporary movement, Restore Hetch Hetchy, that advocates removing the dam.

Fourth, *environmental impact*

The Thirlmere opposition was mainly motivated by aesthetic considerations on the one hand and the desire to avoid disrupting the local community on the other. Hetch Hetchy was seen as a fight to preserve a unique and remarkable place as it was (and as it was being used), so it, too, engaged in polemics that had an aesthetic basis. All of this was true for

Storm King as well, but with one very crucial difference: the fate of striped bass. No matter how Con Edison revised its plans to make them palatable, it could never solve the problem of devastating fish kills that would occur in the river. The striped bass, in particular, was a rallying point for fisherman and conservationists. Emotions on this ran high, stoked in part by smart and eloquent articles by Robert Boyle, writing in such venues as *Sports Illustrated*. This was not a trivial issue; striped bass fishing was a forty-five million dollar a year industry and the Storm King project would eviscerate it. But it wasn't just fishermen who were concerned; the certainty that the project would do irreparable harm to the ecology of the river and the region was a crucial motivating factor in the campaign's effectiveness. Neither Thirlmere nor Hetch Hetchy had a similar issue as a rallying point. The lesson here seems to be that opposition to ecological damage per se remains a potent force in the movement for environmental remediation and justice.

There are undoubtedly other factors we might consider as well, but I want to leave these suppositions at this point and turn to my two caveats.

First, *aesthetics is universal*

What I mean by this is simply that the aesthetic arguments common to all three cases were not limited to the environmentalists or their point of view. Such environmental struggles are usually cast in the light of either/or, of good and bad. A rapacious utilitarianism is pitted against a virtuous ecological concern. In his study of Hetch Hetchy, Robert W. Righter came to understand how distorting the normative view of the controversy was. Wilderness preservation, he writes, "was not an issue in the Hetch Hetchy fight":

> The defenders of the valley consistently advocated development, including roads, hotels, winter sports amenities, and the infrastructure to support legions of visitors. The land use battle joined over one question: Would the valley be used for water storage or nature tourism? (Righter 2006: 5-6).

Moreover, when one looked closely, it's clear that one of the reasons the engineers were so keen to select Hetch Hetchy and not some other possibility was because it "seemed to work a magical spell on those who encountered it" (Righter 2006: 52). As the mayor of San Francisco at the time put it:

> The dam site and valley tended to 'completely hypnotize every civil engineer that sees it, and to render him forever after incapable of a rational consideration of the larger problem of public policy relating to it' (Righter 2006: 52).

In other words, aesthetics can cut in two directions; it influences both the engineer and the poet, though it can lead to diametrically opposite actions. It would be a mistake, then, to underestimate the impact of aesthetic responses overall, particularly as it might open up common ground for understanding what's really at stake.

Fig. 13. View from Storm King Mountain

Second, *the rule of law*

All three of my case studies occur within the context of Western liberal democracies where the rule of law is clearly established and largely followed. It is an obvious but necessary point to make, since once we go outside that context, all bets are off. In terms of the risk to cultural heritage, the obliteration of the Buddha sculptures in Bamiyan, Afghanistan, and the systematic destruction of monuments at Palmyra, Syria, are the obvious examples. But, of course, beyond that we face the more dire consequences of environmental degradation worldwide and anthropocentric climate change. Global problems are also local problems, and, as we have seen, solutions at the local level can have much wider repercussions. Storm King tells us that.

Finally, I want to point out that the aesthetic dimension in our three examples extends beyond the physical realm of natural beauty and sublimity. What truly galvanized people was not so much the actual places themselves (relatively few visited them) but rather the representation of them by writers: Wordsworth, Muir, Irving, Scully and others, as we have seen. In both literature and journalism, it was the written word that carried furthest, for all of these cases turned upon the rhetorical strategies employed by both sides, not only in the law courts and but in the court of public opinion as well. There are limits to what environmental writing can do, but it's clear we can't do without it.

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Figure Credits

Fig. 1: "Raven's Crag" by Elijah Walton. In *English Lake Scenery* by Elijah Walton. London: W. M. Thompson, 1876. N. P. From Ritvo, "Thirlmere".
Fig. 2: "Thirlmere Bridge Looking North, Cumberland" by Thomas Allom. From *Westmorland, Cumberland, Durham, and Northumberland, Illustrated* by Thomas Rose. London: Fisher and Son, 1833: 117. From Ritvo, "Thirlmere".
Fig. 3: "Thirlmere: Before the Enlargement of the Lake" from *Cumberland* by John Edward Marr. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1910: 46. From Ritvo, "Thirlmere".
Fig. 4: "Thirlmere at the Present Day" from *Cumberland* by John Edward Marr. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1910: 47. From Ritvo, "Thirlmere".
Fig. 5: *Hetch Hetchy Valley,* Albert Bierstadt (1874-1880). Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford (CT).
Fig. 6: President Theodore Roosevelt and John Muir at Glacier Point, Yosemite, May 1903. National Park Service.

Fig. 7: O'Shaughnessy Dam at Hetch Hetchy, 2006. Inklein at Wikipedia.
Fig. 8: *Hetch Hetchy Valley* by Isaiah West Taber. *Sierra Club Bulletin*, VI, 4 (January) 1908: 211.
Fig. 9: Storm King Mountain. Photo credit: Robert Rodriguez Jr. From Guenther, n. p.
Fig. 10: *Storm King of the Hudson* by Sanford Robinson Gifford (1865). Private Collection. Public domain.
Fig. 11: Rendering of proposed hydro-electric power plant on Storm King Mountain. *Annual Report 1962*: Consolidated Edison (16-17). Image later published in the *New York Times*, spring 1963. In Talbot, 82.
Fig. 12: Map of the Lower Hudson River Valley, http://www.explore-hudson-valley.com (consulted on 14/06/2017).
Fig. 13: View from Storm King Summit. Photo credit: Nick Zungoli.

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