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Modern American Nature Literature

The Mother Earth Archetype in Nature Writing

Several years ago on a morning in early June, I found myself facing a very painful personal crisis. The nature of the problem is not important—well, okay, I'm sure you've already guessed that a man was at the heart of it. But what is significant—and curious—is how I chose to respond: I borrowed a friend's camping gear and drove 300 miles to Sequoia National Park, a place I'd never been before. Even then I thought it was a goofy idea. I'd gone camping only once or twice in my life, years before, and with people who knew what they were doing. I had no clue how to pitch a tent or light a Coleman lantern or start a fire, as it turned out, in the rain. Normal women in my situation, I thought, get a room at the Holiday Inn. Later I would record in a journal my reactions on that June morning: "I needed trees," I wrote. "I'm not sure why I needed them, but since I grew up under the fir and pine forests of the Great Northwest, maybe trees suggested the security of the earliest part of my childhood. Maybe a trip to the woods was my version of 'going home to mother'... I was escaping back into the womb."

More recently, I have examined accounts of the wilderness experiences of others, most notably the experiences of many celebrated modern-American nature writers, and now I don't just wonder why I needed my trees, but why so many of us find sanctuary in the wilderness, why these writers and others so persistently draw a sense of peace and security, courage and strength, from an intimate attachment to the natural world. More specifically, I wonder why this sanctuary is so often identified with mother images, why mother-child themes pervade nature literature, and what significance can be found in this passionate identification of the human "child" with Mother Earth.

We've heard the psychologists tell the story over and over, how we never quite get over the trauma of being born and never really recover from that ultimate separation from our mother. In the book *Necessary Losses*, the psychotherapist Judith Viorst describes just what it is we are forced to give up when, like it or not, we leave our mother's womb and then her arms:

> [B]efore we begin to encounter the inevitable separations of everyday life, we live in a state of oneness with our
> mother...[an] ideal state...[a] state of boundarylessness, this I-am-you-are-me-is-she-is-we, this "harmonious interpenetrating mix-up," this floating "I'm in the milk and the milk's in me," this chillproof insulation from aloneness and intimations of mortality. (24)

Life may be a glorious investment, but when the price is Paradise, this delicious internal Eden, it's no wonder that we are born with a painful, incurable case of buyer's remorse, that we spend the rest of our days searching for union, <u>the</u> union, and that we are perpetually trying to regain what Viorst calls "the ultimate connection" (24). For many of us, that search for union takes place, curiously, in the wilderness. We find a profound connection there, a merging, a oneness that suggests our original connection. Edward Abbey senses this union as he and his friend Ralph Newcomb float in a rubber raft down the Colorado River during their exploration of Glen Canyon:

> My anxieties have vanished and I feel instead a sense of cradlelike security, of achievement and joy, a pleasure almost equivalent to that first entrance--from the outside--into the neck of the womb.
>
> We are indeed enjoying a very intimate relation with the river: only a layer of fabric between our bodies and the water. I let my arm dangle over the side and trail my hand in the flow. Something dreamlike and remembered, that sensation called déjà vu--when was I here before? (176)

Earlier, Abbey suggests that he is essentially swaddled in Arches National Monument:

> I go outside and close the switch on the generator. The light bulbs dim and disappear, the furious gnashing of pistons whimpers to a halt.... Now the night flows back, the mighty stillness embraces and includes me; I can see the stars again and the world of starlight. I am twenty miles or more from the nearest fellow human, but instead of loneliness I feel loveliness. Loveliness and a quiet exultation. (15)

The mother-child images in these two quotations are patent: "cradlelike security," "womb," "whimpers," "embraces and includes me," "an intimate relation," and the suggestion of floating in an amnion.

In *The Snow Leopard*, Peter Matthiessen talks similarly about his quest through the Himalayas: "I feel at peace among these looming rocks, the cloud swirl and wind-whirled snow, as if the earth had opened up to take me in" (169). Later Matthiessen says:

> Bidding goodnight, I bend through the low doorway and go out under the stars and pick my way around the frozen walls to my cold tent, there to remain for twelve hours or more until first light. I read until near asphyxiated by my small wick candle in its flask of kerosene, then lie still for a long time in the very heart of the earth silence, exhilarated and excited as a child. (218-19)

Of course, one might argue that some images in the selections above are not references to the womb but are instead sexual allusions, that the connection is sexual rather than maternal (i.e., “take me in,” “embraces and includes me,” “intimate relation,” entrance--from the outside--into the neck of the womb). Of course, the images are sexual in a sense, but they go much deeper than that. First, sexual union may be, in part, an attempt to return to the oneness that was lost (Viorst 25), so even if the image is sexual on the surface, mother is at its foundation; second, all children and parents are sexually drawn to one another, whether they consciously acknowledge it or not (Viorst 112), so a sexual reference may include mother in any case.

Loren Eiseley also experienced a merging sensation as he floated on his back down an isolated stretch of the Platte River:

> I <u>was</u> water.... and as I was finally edged gently against a sand bar and dropped like any log, I tottered as I rose. I knew once more the body's revolt against emergence into the harsh and unsupporting air, its reluctance to break contact with that mother element....(19-20)

Annie Dillard claims that she experienced this same kind of feeling while watching shiners feed in Tinker Creek on a sunny, summer evening: 1!1 was the lip of a fountain the creek filled forever; I was ether, the leaf in the zephyr; I was flesh flake, feather, bone" (34).

Matthiessen, Eiseley, and John Graves all expressed this intimate union with nature by assigning to the earth a sort of giant cardiopulmonary system, which evokes images of the reassuring breath and heartbeat that we've all heard in our mother's womb.

Matthiessen: "To be right among the sheep like this is stirring. I lie belly down, out of the wind, and the whole warm mountain, breathing as I breathe, seems to take me in" (220-21). Earlier Matthiessen had described his experience in a storm at sea:

> I was alone for eight hours in a maelstrom of wind and water, noise and iron; again and again, waves crashed across the deck, until water, air, and iron became one. Overwhelmed, exhausted, all thought and emotion beaten out of me I lost my sense of self, the heartbeat I heard was the heart of the world, I breathed with the mighty risings and declines of earth, and this evanescence seemed less frightening than exalting. Afterward, there was pain of loss—-loss of <u>what</u>, I wondered.... (43)

Eiseley: "...I, too, was a microcosm of pouring rivulets and floating driftwood gnawed by the mysterious animalcules of my own creation. I was three-fourths water...a minute pulse like the eternal pulse" (20).

Graves: "[O]ut alone for a time yourself, you...hear the big inhuman pulse" (84).

In the beginning of our lives, we primarily demand the physical sustenance, safety, and affection that are suggested in the excerpts above, but beyond the womb and early infancy, we search for additional tools that we will need to become happy and functional human beings, tools that will help us to develop a healthy self-esteem. Viorst explains just how we go about this search that takes place in the early stages of childhood:

> [T]here is a time in our life when we need to strut our stuff and groove on grandiosity, when we need to be viewed as remarkable and rare, when we need to exhibit [ourselves] in front of a mirror that reflects our self-admiration, when we need a parent to function as that mirror....
>
> There is also a time in our life when we need to participate in the perfection of another...when we need to enlarge [ourselves] through our connection with some flawless omnipotent being, when we need a parent to function as that ideal...[when we need] calmness and confidence.... [and when we need] a parental infusion of glory and power and strength, a protectiveness that says, in effect, "I am here--you don't have to do it all by yourself...." (54-55)

These esteem needs, as Viorst outlines them, fall into two distinct categories that could be called (with apologies to M. H. Abrams) the mirror and the lamp. The "mirror" group suggests that mother simply reflects the child's inner light, the qualities that he innately possesses: She recognizes that he is a unique being, she accepts him, she acknowledges that he is special, important, and rare. The "lamp" group stands for the resources that are projected from mother, the qualities that a helpless child would lack: power, strength, energy, courage, confidence, competence, security. The element common to these two groups is, again, connection, the reassurance through these reflections and projections that the child is not alone. Of course, it isn't just children who have these esteem needs. No matter how old or well-adjusted we may be, we can always use a little recharge. What is significant here is that

the nature writers draw from the wilderness the same esteem-builders that they once sought from mother. It is evident that they all feel connected to the wilderness, to that "flawless omnipotent being," to that ideal, who says, as mother once did: I'm here; take my hand; I am powerful and grand, and so are you, because you are a part of me. Wendell Berry, Peter Matthiessen, and Annie Dillard, for example, all illustrate how the wilderness functions as their mirror and reassures them that they are recognized, accepted, important, and rare:

"Now it is only in the wild places," says Berry, "that a man can sense the rarity of being a man. In the crowded places he is more and more closed in by the feeling that he is ordinary--and that he is, on the average, expendable" (42).

Matthiessen: "At the snowfields depot there is nothing but snow and silence, wind and blue. I rest in the warm sun, enveloped in the soft shroud of white emptiness; my presence in such emptiness seems noticed, although no one is here" (175-76).

Dillard:

> [O]ne day I was walking along Tinker Creek thinking of nothing at all and I saw the tree with the lights in it. I saw the backyard cedar where the mourning doves roost charged and transfigured, each cell buzzing with flame. I stood on the grass with the lights in it, grass that was wholly fire, utterly focused and utterly dreamed. It was less like seeing than like being for the first time seen, knocked breathless by a powerful glance. The flood of fire abated, but I'm still spending the power. (35)

Henry Beston, Aldo Leopold, Joseph Wood Krutch, and Henry David Thoreau, all illustrate how nature's powerful lamp infuses them with energy, courage, and strength.

Beston:

> Dwelling thus upon the dunes, I lived in the midst of an abundance of natural life, which manifested itself every hour of the day, and from being thus surrounded, thus enclosed within a great whirl of what one may call the life force, I felt that I drew a secret and sustaining energy.... I think that those who have lived in nature, and tried to open their doors rather than close them on her energies, will understand well enough what I mean.... [T]he life force may mingle with the individual life as a billow of fire may mingle for a moment with a candle flame. (95-96)

Leopold:

> It is in midwinter that I sometimes glean from my pines something more important than woodlot politics and the news of the wind and weather.... [M]y pines each with his burden of snow, are standing ramrod-straight, rank upon rank, and in the dusk beyond I sense the presence of hundreds more. At such times I feel a curious transfusion of courage. (93)

Krutch, too, "draw[s] courage and joy...from the acute awareness of a natural phenomenon" (214-15):

> I have experienced it sometimes when a rabbit appeared suddenly from a bush to dash away to the safety which he values so much, or when, at night, a rustle in the leaves reminds me how many busy lives surround my own. It has also come

> almost as vividly when I suddenly saw a flower opening or a stem pushing out of the ground. (216)

Thoreau, as well, found renewal from his Walden connection:

> We can never have enough of Nature. We must be refreshed by the sight of inexhaustible vigor, vast and Titanic features, the seacoast with its wrecks, the wilderness with its living and its decaying trees, the thunder cloud, and the rain which lasts three weeks and produces freshets. We need to witness our own limits transgressed, and....the strong appetite and inviolable health of Nature. (339)

"I came to love my rows, my beans," Thoreau said earlier. "They attached me to the earth, and so I got strength like Antaeus" (219). Thoreau's mythological allusion was an apt choice. Antaeus, a giant wrestler, was invincible as long as he touched the earth. If he was thrown to the ground, the contact allowed him to rebound with even greater strength. Antaeus's mother was Gaea, known in the Roman version as Terra--Mother Earth. Antaeus, then, was invincible as long as he remained connected to his mother, Mother Earth. But Hercules strangled Antaeus while holding him above the ground (Hamilton 167). Clearly, these earth-as-mother-as-power-source themes were surfacing even in antiquity.

Dillard, Matthiessen, and Leopold can hardly contain the exhilaration they feel over nature's power:

Dillard: "It has always been a happy thought to me that the creek runs on all night, new every minute, whether I wish it or know it or care.... I can hardly believe that this grace never flags, that the pouring from ever-renewable sources is endless, impartial, and free" (70).

Leopold: "[M]y tamaracks are growing so lustily that my spirits soar with them skyward."

Matthiessen imagines that the earth's power magnifies himself and everything that he holds dear:

> At sunset yesterday afternoon, far overhead, a rock turret cast a huge semblance of my silhouette on the high walls. This morning, I find a great round rock split clean as an apple, and in the split as on an altar, a stone orb has come to rest, placed so strikingly by elements and cataclysms that its perfection stops me in my tracks in awe of the wild, murderous, and splendid power of the world.
>
> I cross a bridge where the torrent swings from the east wall to the west, digging ever deeper into stone to form its gorge, and continue down the mountain in long bounds, carried on waves of gratitude and mirth. My life and work, my children, loves and friendships, past and present--all seem marvelous, full of marvels. (295-96)

Of course, for all these writers, nature is their vocation or serious avocation, but we shouldn't assume that there is some kind of naturalist chauvinism at work here. These people are not glorifying the wilderness simply because it's their territory, their life's work. Lay people with little knowledge of nature seem to have similar experiences. Bonnie Collins, a psychotherapist, and Lou Rutledge, an artist, are two women who gained more than they expected from wilderness trips:

Collins: "I began to feel more powerful as a person, and ever since the journey, I feel I'm never alone. The environment furnishes me with something special. I can go out for a walk alone and still feel I have company" (Doheny V, 4).

Rutledge: "Before the trip, I didn't have much faith in myself. I came back feeling stronger and more beautiful than I ever imagined" (Doheny V, 4).

My own reactions to the giant sequoias, in fact, were uncannily similar to Leopold's feelings about his pines and tamaracks. This is what I wrote in my own journal:

> I was surrounded, in terms of sheer bulk, by the biggest living things on earth, and by some of the oldest. The giant sequoias are so formidable that some individual ones have names of their own. The General Sherman tree is the biggest of the big, standing 272 feet high with a trunk diameter of 36.5 feet at the base. He took root about 2500 years ago during the lifetimes of Buddha and Confucius; by the time Sophocles had written Oedipus Rex and the Peloponnesian Wars had broken out, General Sherman had been a sentinel in the High Sierras for more than half a century. One could feel insignificant, I guess, in the presence of such strength and dignity, but I didn't....I was one of them--tall, sage, invincible. They gave me energy. They lifted me into the sky like the flurries of snowflakes swirling around my head. Only my problems seemed to diminish when I was among the giants.

And it seems I am not the only one who has gone to the sequoia groves to absorb some of their healing energy. Edwin Way Teale shares a poignant memory of a visitor he once saw there, "an elderly man bundled in robes and sitting alone in the back of a limousine driven by a liveried chauffeur" (354). Even Teale himself had experienced the restorative powers of natural phenomena:

> The next day in ninety-six degree heat, I rode the interurban to Chicago to have a balky camera shutter repaired. White and brown and red and gray, the steel mill smoke at Gary poured toward the sky. Sulphuric acid polluted the stagnant air.... Returning in the afternoon, I was depressed, deadened, left limp and half-conscious by the great city. At sunset we drove down a dusty back road and I suddenly came alive. For there, with the sundown light upon it, still green all along its upper half, was the spire of the old cedar tree that still stood where once my grandfather's gate had led to Lone Oak Farm. And in the darkening bushes all around, the calling of katydids linked the present with those summer nights long ago. (78)

Here, again, nature's representatives, the cedar tree and the katydids, serve as connectors to childhood and the well-being and protection that it signifies. And here, too, we see how a mistreated environment destroys the spirit.

But recently there appeared an even more timely and tragic example of the powerful influence nature has on those who subconsciously seek a motherly comfort and protection. Hank Koehn is a nationally respected corporate futurist and chairman of his own consulting group. He is also a victim of AIDS. Suffering from a brain infection that was running virtually unchecked, Koehn described how he responded:

> I...developed an unexplained but insatiable urge to visit the ocean. The need was so real that my lover, Jim Hill, and I went to stay in a Laguna Beach hotel directly

> overlooking the surf. As I sat in a lounge chair staring down at the water, the pattern of the waves slowly began to relax my mind and I realized why I had wanted to come to the sea. My mind began to float and I recalled a long-forgotten thought from early childhood: how abandoned I had felt as an only child who was separated from his parents at a young age. (V,4)

As an infant develops and begins to realize that he can't be mother or be a part of mother, then the next best thing is to possess her--entirely, exclusively, for all time. We want "a love that is ours alone, a love that is all-encompassing and indivisible.... [I]n the beginning we want exclusive possession of our treasures, including the first of our treasures--our mother's love. And we don't want anyone else to either be given, or to take, the goodies which belong to us alone" (Viorst 83-85). Yet, says Viorst, "It doesn't take long...to begin to realize that the love we receive is not exclusively ours, that there are other, rival claims upon our true love's love, that we crave what we cannot have--that we crave the impossible" (83). Therefore, Viorst goes on to say, "Angrily and painfully, and with more or less success, we learn to relinquish that wish--to let it go" (85).

Still, our desire for complete possession of mother is deep and passionate, and it appears that this craving is reflected in our relationship with Mother Earth--we want to possess her, to be the center of her attention, to be the focus of the universe, to be the most important being in existence. Abbey describes the depth of his desire for possession: "Standing there, gaping at this monstrous and inhuman spectacle of rock and cloud and sky and space, I feel a ridiculous greed and possessiveness come over me. I want to know it all, possess it all, embrace the entire scene intimately, deeply, totally..." (6). Arches National Monument, says Abbey, is "mine by right of possession, possession by right of love, by divine right..." (300).

Leopold, too, freely admits that his claim on nearby lands far exceeds what his deed guarantees:

> One hundred and twenty acres, according to the County Clerk, is the extent of my worldly domain. But the County Clerk is a sleepy fellow, who never looks at his record books before nine o'clock.... Books or no books, it is a fact, patent both to my dog and myself, that at daybreak I am the sole owner of all the acres I can walk over. It is not only boundaries that disappear, but also the thought of being bounded.... Like other great landowners, I have tenants. They are negligent about rents, but very punctilious about tenures. Indeed at every daybreak from April to July they proclaim their boundaries to each other, and so acknowledge, at least by inference, their fiefdom to me. (44)

Beston, as well, is unashamed of his covetousness: "Should any ask how I endured this isolation in so wild a place and in the depth of winter, I can only answer that I enjoyed every moment to the full.... [H]ere at last, in this silence and isolation of winter, a whole region was mine..." (91-92).

Some of these naturalists are so possessive that they react like jealous siblings at the thought of intruders who might threaten their claims. "Keep the tourists out," cries Abbey (283). Graves comes across a couple fishing in the Brazos River: "[T]he man tossed his head in resentful greeting. They were alone and liked being alone and hadn't liked my crazy shout. I resented their being there, too, and so respected his right..." (45). Matthiessen graphically sums up his own feelings about those who violate his sanctuary: "This is what it's all about.... [t]o be able to go up into a valley, and not come on a pile of human dung" (165).

But the wilderness, like mother, can't be possessed; we can't look only to it for our strength; we can't remain forever in its arms or its womb. Yet, we were there once before, at the conception of all life, when the first bacteria and blue-green algae sprang from the earth's oceans three billion years ago. And we remained there until "between about five hundred thousand to one hundred fifty thousand years ago, [when] man acquired the essential features of a modern brain" (Eiseley 118). We have no conscious memory of being there, of course, just as we have no conscious memory of our life as a fetus or infant. But Jung would say we were unconsciously influenced by that primordial existence and by the separation that came when our new, large brains compelled us to consider the questions of good and evil, truth and untruth, life and death. And the effects of those early experiences remain in our collective unconscious and surface in the forms of these Earth Mother images and motifs. Our passionate filial relationship, then, does not rise only from the nurture that the earth provides during this lifetime--the air and water and food and shelter--but also from an Original Conception long ago. Eiseley understood what this means while floating in the Platte:

> Once in a lifetime, perhaps, one escapes the actual confines of the flesh. Once in a lifetime, if one is lucky, one so merges with sunlight and air and running water that whole eons, the eons that mountains and deserts know, might pass in a single afternoon without discomfort. The mind has sunk away into its beginnings among old roots and the obscure tricklings and movings that stir inanimate things. (16)

Would we have remained in Paradise or risked it, if we'd been given the choice? Well, how did Adam and Eve handle it? Teale, for one, had he been there, would evidently have eaten the apple:

> [S]urely, better a single moment of awareness to enjoy the glory of the senses, a moment of knowing, of feeling, of living intensely, a moment to appreciate the sunshine and the dry smell of autumn and the dust-born clouds above--better a thousand times even a swiftly fading, ephemeral moment of life than the epoch-long unconsciousness of the stone. (88)

Dillard says we can return--if we like: "We can leave the library then, go back to the creek lobotomized, and live on its banks as untroubled as any muskrat or reed. You first" (182).

No thanks. In fact, there aren't any takers in the group, as far as I can tell. In the final analysis, all our subjects who have journeyed into the wilderness come back: to family, friends, jobs--to the world of human beings and "civilization." Leopold, for example, admits that he is only a weekend farmer: "Thus, come Sunday evening, one must go back..." (in his case, "back" meant to his teaching duties at the university). Thoreau left Walden for Concord; but he'd never been far from home in the first place--Walden was only about a mile from town (7), and he visited there daily as it was (Edel 49). "I left the woods," said Thoreau, "for as good a reason as I went there. Perhaps it seemed to me that I had several more lives to live, and could not spare any more time for that one." Teale became homesick for civilization less than two thirds through his autumn trip:

> There swept over me a fierce hunger for books, for libraries, for all the worn favorites on my shelves at home, for the commingled smell of old paper and glue and ink that surrounds the stacks of every public library. I longed for Keats and

> Shakespeare and Conrad and Thoreau and Hudson. I had, for that day, enough of wilderness, enough of remote and inhospitable land. (214)

Beston lived out his year happily, it appears, on the Great Beach, yet he noted, "It is not good to be too much alone..." (94). "[F]or man," he said, "is a gregarious creature...and in utter solitude odd things may happen to the mind" (92). Beston was married only months after leaving his "outermost house."

And no matter how much contempt Matthiessen might feel for his brothers' excrement, he, like all the others, chooses at the end of his quest to come back:

> And so I, too, prepare to go, though I try hard to remain. The part of me that is bothered by the unopened letters in my rucksack, that longs to see my children, to drink wine, make love, be clean and comfortable again--that part is already facing south, over the mountains. (256)

Abbey, it seems, is the only one who entertains reckless fantasies of crossing the threshold:

> I am here...to confront, immediately and directly as possible, the bare bones of existence, the elemental and fundamental, the bedrock which sustains us. I want to be able to look at and into a juniper tree, a piece of quartz, a vulture, a spider, and see it as it is in itself, devoid of all humanly ascribed qualities, anti-Kantian, even the categories of scientific description. To meet God or Medusa face to face, even if it means risking everything human in myself. I dream of a hard and brutal mysticism in which the naked self merges with a nonhuman world and yet somehow survives still intact, individual, separate. Paradox and bedrock. (6)

Yet, by the end of his stay, all his efforts toward a complete merger fall short:

> The wind stops, completely, as I finish my lunch. I strip and lie back in the sun, high on Tukuhnikivats, with nothing between me and the universe but my thoughts. Deliberately I compose my mind, quieting the febrile buzzing of the cells and circuits, and strive to open my consciousness directly, nakedly to the cosmos. Under the influence of cosmic rays I try for cosmic intuitions--and end up earthbound as always, with a vision not of the universal but of a small and mortal particular, unique and disparate...her smile, her eyes in firelight, her touch. (256)

And so, Abbey, as well, comes back: "I, too, must leave the canyon country," he says (297). "I grow weary of nobody's company but my own" (298).

We all come back, but when we do, we come back renewed, refreshed, more positive and confident, and as Dillard says, "still spending the power" (35). Although most of us cannot and will not remain alone in the wilderness, and in fact, will live most of our lives apart from it, we draw from its power just by knowing that it's there, available to us when we are lonely or hurt or frightened. We gain a sense of peace and security and joy in the knowledge that, as Krutch says, there is "somewhere else to go," somewhere beyond the limitations of our own world where we can rest a weary spirit (220).

Again the relationship sounds eerily maternal, reminding us of the young child who can find the confidence to venture out alone knowing that mother is there to go back to:

> [Mother's] available presence hovering somewhere in the background is what permits this elated breaking away. And although there is a distance now between us and our mother, we regard her as ours in some appendage-like way. (Viorst 38)

The implications of our strong filial connection to the earth could be far-reaching, particularly since this connection relates significantly to self-esteem, because "low self-esteem is at the root of virtually every social problem: chronic drug and alcohol abuse, crime and violence, welfare dependency, teenage pregnancy and more.... [Furthermore, the] government pays for the results of a society that doesn't have much respect for itself" (Krier VI,I).

Recognizing the critical importance of a positive self-image, California State Assemblyman John Vasconcellos persuaded the State of California to establish the "Task Force to Promote Self-Esteem and Personal Responsibility." Recently Mr. Vasconcellos praised Governor Deukmejian for supporting the funding and "noted [that former Governor Jerry] Brown was not known for championing interpersonal issues and was far more intrigued with such topics as the environment..." (Krier VI, 11). But Mr. Vasconcellos and the task force and the public, too, must understand that physical environment significantly affects self-esteem, and the task force members must consider the following points as they begin their daring battle with our society's most serious social problems:

First, exposure to the wilderness has been shown to be therapeutic; in fact, people who come in close and prolonged contact with any natural setting, such as a peaceful garden, often report gains in esteem factors, including power, strength, energy, courage, confidence, security, recognition, and acceptance.

Second, contact with an abused environment, particularly a natural setting that has been spoiled, can have the opposite effect.

Third, the environment, contrary to Mr. Vansconcellos's inference, is not extrinsic to interpersonal issues but is intimately connected with them; the task force must consider the possibility of a relationship between the ravaging of the earth (through pollution, destruction of the wilderness, etc.) and the rise in social problems.

Fourth, when it comes time for the task force to make its recommendations, environmental factors should be strongly emphasized.

Environmentalists have argued, with eloquence and courage, that the land and seas and wildlife must be protected and that this wholesale destruction of the wilderness must end. They can't persuade us more effectively that our physical survival depends on a healthy environment, that if we continue to strip our forests and arable lands, to pollute our air and oceans and water supplies, and to destroy the wildlife, we will indeed perish. But what this examination of wilderness experiences shows is that nature is just as important to our emotional survival, and that our spiritual connection to the earth is profound, innate, and unbreakable. We don't really fly to the wilderness, as some say, in hopes of "getting away from it all," but in search of intimacy. We are drawn to nature not, as many believe, merely for a love of its superficial beauty but because we have with it a deep and everlasting bond. And if we fail to recognize and cherish and preserve that bond, we not only sentence ourselves and our descendants to an eternity of spiritual poverty, but we commit, in the deepest and most horrifying sense of the word, matricide.

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