

sight and offered extended commentary that led me to say more and to sharpen. I did not take all of their advice (perhaps foolishly), but I did address each of the problems they pointed to. Jeffrey Burton Russell, my colleague at the University of California, Santa Barbara, also read the manuscript and offered helpful comments, as did students in a graduate seminar in religious studies in the fall of 1988. I remain grateful for the critical acumen and enthusiasm of all of these readers even as I acknowledge that I alone am responsible for any errors that remain.

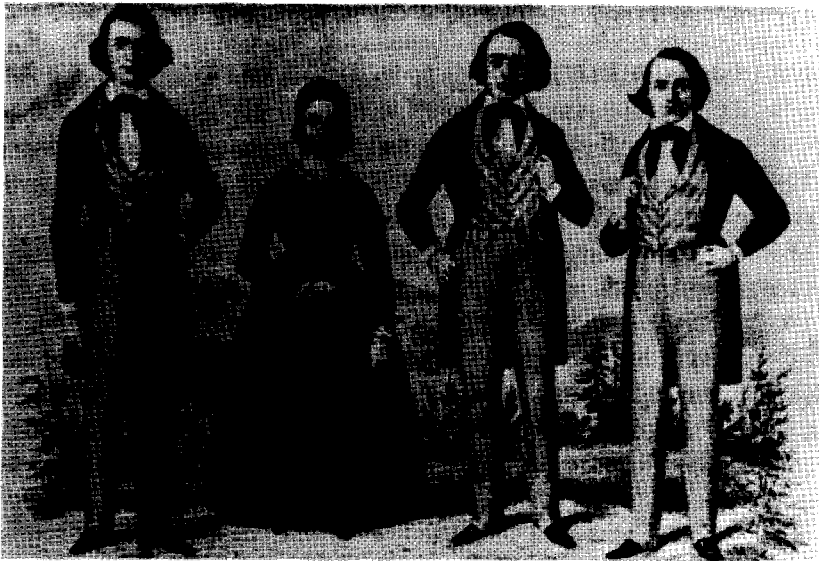
Beyond these, other debts abound. I continue to be grateful to Charles H. Long, who many years ago taught me to think in terms of both ordinary and extraordinary religion, a distinction crucial to the substance of this book. I am grateful, too, to the generous librarians at numerous institutions who worked over the years to make available to me the materials I needed. My gratitude extends to those who supplied photographs for the book and granted me permission to use them. And in a related debt, I owe special thanks to Christopher Vecsey and to Lynne Williamson, who helped me to find suitable illustrations among the sparse Algonkian materials. Finally, I acknowledge a huge debt to my parents, Louis and Theresa Albanese, who, as always, have unflaggingly supported and encouraged my efforts. And I own my debt to Samantha, who—as the outcome of feline leukemia during the summer of 1985—decided to stay and keep on gracing my life. Her animal wisdom and perspective continue to teach me about nature and about the other-than-human persons of the Algonkians and other peoples.

Introduction ❖ THE CASE FOR NATURE RELIGION

The Tribe of Jesse consisted of the eleven grown sons and two grown daughters of Jesse Hutchinson and Mary (Polly) Leavitt of Milford, New Hampshire. Three more Hutchinsons did not survive to adulthood, but David, the oldest who did, had been born in 1803. Abigail Jemima (Abby), the youngest, lived until 1892 but was outlived by her brother John Wallace. Together the Hutchinsons spanned the nineteenth century.

The Tribe of Jesse are better known in American cultural history as the Hutchinson Family Singers, the first popular singing group in the United States. Playing and singing in cities and towns on the East Coast and into the New West, the Hutchinsons followed a pattern of itinerancy already mapped by revival preachers and lyceum speakers. They were signs of a new time in an industrializing, urbanizing America, expressing a nostalgic longing for old and enduring places as well as a seemingly scatter-gun involvement in a variety of contemporary causes and concerns. In various combinations of family members and, most remembered, as a quartet of John, Asa, Judson, and Abby (“a nest of brothers with a sister in it”), the Hutchinsons captivated mass audiences in well-filled houses and, apparently as often, appeared, like nineteenth-century Pete Seegers or Joan Baezes, at antislavery and temperance rallies.¹

N. P. Rogers, editor of the abolitionist *Herald of Freedom*, reviewed their early (1842) singing as “simple and natural.” The Hutchinsons, he said, possessed a “woodland tone” and enjoyed “perfect freedom from all affectation and stage grimace.” A year and a half later, Rogers hailed their singing at a Boston antislavery convention, acclaiming a particularly excited moment that “was life—it was nature, transcending the musical staff, and the gamut, the minim and the semi-breve, and leger lines.” Similarly, George P. Braddock, who participated in the Brook Farm experiment, many years afterward recalled the Hutchinsons’ visit to the farm and the “wild freshness” of their song.² Meanwhile, appearing on temperance platforms with Lyman Beecher and others and continuing to sing elsewhere, the Hutchinsons charmed listeners with their



Hutchinson Family Quartet, 1846. "A nest of brothers with a sister in it." By an unidentified artist, from John Wallace Hutchinson, *Story of the Hutchinsons*, vol. 1 (Boston: Lee & Shepard, 1896), opposite page 142. (Courtesy, American Antiquarian Society.)

family song, "The Old Granite State." It became, in the parlance of the twentieth century, a hit, the perennial favorite of their audiences.

We have come from the mountains,
 We've come down from the mountains,
 Ho, we've come from the mountains,
 Of the Old Granite State.
 We're a band of brothers,
 We're a band of brothers,
 We're a band of brothers,
 And we live among the hills.

David, Noah, Andrew, Zephy, Caleb, Joshua, Jesse, Benny, Judson,
 Rhoda, John and Asa and Abby are our names;
 We're the sons of Mary, of the tribe of Jesse,
 And we now address you in our native mountain song.

Oh, we love the rocks and mountains,
 Oh, we love the rocks and mountains,

Oh, we love the rocks and mountains
 Of the Old Granite State.
 Pointing up to heaven,
 Pointing up to heaven,
 Pointing up to heaven,
 They are beacon lights to man.³

Interspersed among the verses evocative of place and permanence in New Hampshire's granite hills were the Hutchinsons' moral and political commitments. The Hutchinsons were "the friends of emancipation," and they proclaimed to hearers "That the tribe of Jesse / Are the friends of equal rights." They sang that "Every man's a brother, / And our country is the world." As time passed, they included a verse to "Shout 'Free Suffrage' evermore." And, in a striking millennial affirmation, they foretold musically of "the good time's drawing nigher," when "our nation, tried by fire, / Shall proclaim the good Messiah, / Second coming of the Lord."⁴

Nor was this the whole of the Hutchinsons' remarkable catalog of affirmations and commitments. They worshiped Theodore Parker and Henry Ward Beecher, Parker somewhat more. They also made an idol of Horace Greeley, radical editor of the *New-York Tribune*, and, in addition to their trip to Brook Farm, visited his North American Phalanx in Monmouth County, New Jersey. Their millennialism extended well beyond the lyrics of "The Old Granite State," for they had heard William Miller preach in Philadelphia in 1844; and, although never Millerites, they shared the general millennial expectancy of their age. They sang "maddening Second Advent tunes" in the antislavery cause; and, indeed, the verses of "The Old Granite State" were even set to a second-Advent melody. Moreover, the millennial theme continued to be part of Hutchinson consciousness well after the 1840s, so that the post-Civil War suffrage song composed by John Wallace pronounced his "loving, waiting, watching, longing, for the millennial day of light."⁵

Beyond their millennialism, the Hutchinsons as a family epitomized the spiritual trajectory of many New Englanders of their time. Their parents had begun married life in Milford as members of the First Congregational Church, but when still young they turned instead to Baptist preaching. According to church records,

John was “saved” during the revival of 1831; but in time some of the younger Hutchinsons withdrew from the church as come-outers, while almost all of the older brothers and some of the younger became spiritualists. In fact, with Horace Greeley and his wife, probably eight of the brothers had attended a seance given by the Fox sisters in 1851. The Hutchinsons knew Andrew Jackson Davis, the celebrated spiritualist and “Poughkeepsie seer,” and he had visited their home. And, at least for Judson, John Wallace, and Jesse Jr., various forms of precognition had manifested themselves at key moments in their lives.⁶

Still further, the Hutchinsons embraced a series of the health-reform movements of the era. The brothers were familiar with various hydropathic (water-cure) institutes, and at least Judson and Jesse Jr. had entered them as patients, Jesse on his deathbed. Moreover, the Hutchinsons’ song “Cold Water,” written by Jesse Jr. and sung in the temperance cause, was also a clever proclamation of the gospel of hydropathy.

Oh! if you would preserve your health
And trouble never borrow,
Just take the morning shower bath,
’Twill drive away all sorrow.
And then instead of drinking rum,
As doth the poor besotter;
For health, long life, and happiness,
Drink nothing but cold water.

.
Yes, water’ll cure most every ill,
’Tis proved without assumption;
Dyspepsia, gout, and fevers, too,
And sometimes old consumption.
Your head-aches, side-aches, and *heart-aches* too,
Which often cause great slaughter;
Can all be cured by drinking oft
And bathing in cold water.⁷

The Hutchinsons knew Dr. William Beach, who had initiated a “reform system of medicine on botanic principles.” Asa observed in his journal that he loved *Beach’s Family Physician* and found “plain truth with in its covers.” And Beach had liked the Hutchinsons well enough too, telling them he enjoyed their song “Calomel”—an un-subtle attack on orthodox medical practice with its universal remedy of (poisonous) chloride of mercury.

Physicians of the highest rank,
To pay their fees we need a bank,
Combine all wisdom art and skill
Science and sense in Calomel.

.
When Mr. A or B. is sick
Go call the docter [*sic*] and be quick
The docter comes with much good will
But ne’er forgets his Calomel.

.
The man in death begins to groan,
The fatal job for him is done,
He dies alas, but sure to tell,
A sacrifice to Calomel.⁸

Likewise, the brothers used the Thomsonian system of natural herbal healing, taking Thomsonian powders and the perennial Thomsonian cure-all, tincture of lobelia. When Judson lay sick, Asa expressed his gratitude for the ministrations of the Thomsonian physician: “Blessed be his name for it is the helpmeet [*sic*] of our whole Family and ought to be that of the whole Human Family. May its Cause flourish.”⁹

In New York, the Hutchinsons ate at (Sylvester) Graham House, which served only vegetarian food. Jesse must have been vegetarian during part of his life, for once, on the Fourth of July, he made a speech in favor of brown bread. Judson was certainly a committed vegetarian, speaking of the sinfulness of eating flesh or wearing garments that demanded for their construction the slaughter of animals. He himself eventually wore neither boots nor shoes and walked clad only in stockings, and his diet consisted of fruits, cereals, and honey. Meanwhile, Asa pondered the question of vegetarianism and confessed in his private journal: “I eat animal food some of the time.” He had formerly abstained, and he thought his health was as good during his vegetarian experiment as later when he abandoned it.¹⁰

Asa also became absorbed in the works of Orson S. Fowler, the phrenologist, and thought phrenology—the reading of one’s character on the basis of various protrusions of the skull—a “true science.” He knew Fowler personally and considered him a friend. And Judson became heavily involved with animal magnetism, displaying mesmeric powers and, more often, falling easily into trances induced by others. In fact, the brothers worried about

Judson's magnetic susceptibility, for the magnetic state unnerved the moody and temperamental Hutchinson in frightening ways.¹¹

What are we to make of this absorbing list of commitments and concerns by a band of nineteenth-century popular entertainers who sang to common folk and presidents alike? The Hutchinsons surely demonstrated their mass appeal—and, by implication, the appeal of their commitments—even though audiences hedged at times with regard to the group's radical politics. And they certainly presage twentieth-century involvement by entertainment groups in the fads and fancies of their moment. But can we say more about the Hutchinson Family Singers and their unorthodox catalog of affirmations? Are these affirmations merely odd pieces of cultural flotsam strung together by chance and circumstance? Are they a group of ideas and predilections united only by the restlessness of their holders, signals of bored revolt against formal and commonplace culture? Are they simply a celebration of nonnormativeness, a declaration of sociological independence? Or is there some intrinsic relationship between the items in the series, some logic of the symbol that, throughout the list, we can grasp?

This study rejects the thesis of cultural flotsam. It also brackets social scientific explanations (restlessness and nonnormativeness) and, if the qualifiers "only" and "simply" are retained, disclaims the judgments. The book's concerns lie, rather, with the final question. In what follows, I suggest that the Hutchinsons offer one prominent example of a way of organizing reality and relating to it that is consistent and encompassing. Moreover, I call this way of organizing reality and of relating it to a *religion*, and I identify it further as *nature religion*.

Definitions of religion are probably as numerous as the scholars who hold them, and this is not the place to engage in definitional debate. Suffice it to say that I understand religion as the way or ways that people orient themselves in the world with reference to both ordinary and extraordinary powers, meanings, and values. Ordinary powers, meanings, and values are found within the boundaries of human society. They are what cultures are built from—abilities and intuitions that are principles out of which cultural practice comes. Extraordinary power, meanings, and values are harder to name. They are what a given group or society sees, in

important ways, as outside the boundaries of its own community. Extraordinary powers, meanings, and values are what the group owns as objective realities—standing in judgment on its project and practice and also inviting its members across an invisible line to a place of transcendence.¹²

Existing on the boundary as well as in the center, religion points in two directions. It is the ways—the systems of symbols—that orient people inward toward the societal center or, conversely, out toward the less known geography beyond the line. So religion includes belief systems, ritual forms, and guides for everyday living, all working in concert to express relationship to the ordinary and to the extraordinary, as a culture construes them. Nor are ordinary and extraordinary ever completely separated. Looked at one way, what people believe and do reinforces the bonds of their own society. But, looked at another way, what they believe and do is generated by the kind of "center beyond" that Mircea Eliade has called the sacred.¹³ And, like the nucleus of an atom, this sacred center fixes the orbit of the more partial symbols that surround it.

Throughout the history of Western culture, at least, religious reflection has been preoccupied with three great symbolic centers, two of them more persistently, especially in certain forms of Protestantism. The three are the familiar trinity—God, humanity, and nature—and it is, of course, God and humanity that have been more pondered and nature that has formed the third and less noticed center among them. Within the theological speculation that forms the Judeo-Christian tradition, God has been clearly named as the sole and monotheistic claimant to the religious throne. But humans and nature, as creatures of God and objects of loving providence, have shone in borrowed light. Thus, within the structure of the symbols, the way always lay open not so much for a rejection of the monotheistic God as for a more emphatic turn in another direction.

American nature religion, in unlikely and surprising ways, has done just that. First, I must be clear that the term *nature religion* is my own name for a symbolic center and the cluster of beliefs, behaviors, and values that encircles it. If some prescient nineteenth-century person had cornered a Hutchinson and asked him whether he were a follower of nature religion, he probably would have looked astounded and heartily demurred. Like the term *civil religion*, which has become part of our academic language in religious

studies since 1967, *nature religion* is a contemporary social construction of past and present American religion.¹⁴ It is a useful construct, I believe, because it throws light on certain aspects of our history that we have only haphazardly seen—or even failed to see—religiously. By thinking of these manifestations as nature religion, we begin to discover the links and connections among them, we gain a sense of their logic, and we come to a sense of their power.

Here I should add that when I speak of nature religion I do not mean a religious genre that is divorced from human history or society. It is, of course, tempting to subsume the material of this book into familiar comparative categories, to view the practice of nature religion as an example, on American terrain, of the “cosmic” opposite to the Judeo-Christian religions of history. But that is hardly what I have in mind. Nature, in American nature religion, is a reference point with which to think history. Its sacrality masks—and often quite explicitly reveals—a passionate concern for place and mastery *in society*.¹⁵ Indeed, if the book has a “plot,” it is how early, inchoate bids for historic and personal dominance are played out with greater clarity and precision as several centuries pass.

Allow me to return briefly to the Hutchinson Family Singers, to explain what I mean by way of example. The critical acclaim for the naturalness of the Hutchinsons’ performance style is easy enough to acknowledge. So is their proclamation of natural wholeness in their song, “The Old Granite State,” far and away the favorite of their audiences. Here, combining metaphors of nature and fixedness with the familial and biblical piety of the “band of brothers” from the “tribe of Jesse,” the Hutchinsons wove in whole cloth a nature religion that celebrated innocence, permanence, and purity. The power of these metaphors for a people undergoing the pain of cultural transition cannot be doubted.

Similarly, temperance and antislavery involvements suggest the moral urgency of an ethic of purity. Drunkenness and enslavement were social sins that brought corruption and death to the nation, destroying the vital connection with home and land. Drunkenness eroded families, and slavery obstructed the natural relation of men and women to the land in wholesome agricultural work. Besides, slavery obliterated the democratic principle of equality, found in the ideology of the new republic and also found, for American republicans, in nature. As they saw it, the natural world signified the

intrinsic equality of each form or species, displayed in a creation unburdened by rank or privilege. And a “natural” America had moral claims over Europe precisely because it had rejected artificial lineage claims to choose the innate nobility of democracy.

Nature, in fact, offered a model of societal harmony to many pre-Darwinian Americans, who forgot the violence of storm and tornado in the spectacle of nature’s grand cooperation. Like the singing style of the Hutchinsons, in which individual voices were said to merge in an ordered harmony of the whole,¹⁶ forms of social harmony would blend Americans who wanted order for themselves and their relationships. The call to natural concert was also a search for mastery, enabling communities to pursue their goals of control unaware. Thus, utopian communities expressed both the innocence of an Edenic world and its natural, but ordered, harmonies and rhythms. And thus, Hutchinson interest in Brook Farm (which became Fourierist only after their visit) and the Fourierist North American Phalanx was of a piece with their other commitments. Indeed, the Fourierist motto of Universal Unity evoked a central value of nature religion.

The come-outer style of some of the Hutchinsons and the spiritualism of many of them may, at first glance, appear to belong to different worlds of meaning entirely. Signing off from the churches is, of course, predominately a negative expression of one’s values, the statement that I do *not* agree. But, in another sense, signing off complemented values of freedom and spontaneity that were associated with a physical separation from human society—a flight away to nature—but also a “natural” freedom, a dominance over social forms, within it. Likewise, nineteenth-century spiritualism belied its name in some of its theology. It was true that spiritualists sought contact with the departed. But many of them, with Andrew Jackson Davis, grounded their faith in religious materialism, seeing spirit as a higher and more refined form of matter.¹⁷ From this perspective, spiritualists were true lovers of nature, exploring its further reaches and bringing its benefits back to rule disturbances on the present plane. That spiritualists also experienced precognition in dreams and visions only heightened their sense of mastery through the connectedness between this world and the other. One could see into the future because all things and all times were really one. Clairvoyance testified to the unknown powers of nature.

Even millennialism, the hallmark of nineteenth-century evangelicalism, fed freely into the stream of nature religion. Eliade has told us that millennial myths are inverted myths of origin, that in millennialism the paradise of the beginning is transposed to the end.¹⁸ Thus, in millennialism, the locus of nature moves from the settled past to the active pull of the time to come. Significantly, the innocence and perfection of the first creation are posited in a future time; natural and Edenic bliss become the promise of the advent, when lion and lamb will lie down together, universal harmony will prevail, and—in the American version—humans will be in charge.

The various health reforms pursued by the Hutchinsons probably need little exegesis as symbolic and behavioral expressions of the religion of nature. “Cold water” evokes pure and crystalline mountain streams—significantly, the site of many of the water-cure establishments and the legacy of the granite hills of New Hampshire. Drinking water and bathing in it bespeak a preference for nature in place of artifice, i.e., chemically altered substances such as rum or calomel. They also suggest a confidence in one’s ability to control the wayward body when it is ill through the power that nature gives. In the same way, William Beach’s botanic principles and Samuel Thomson’s herbal remedies used the means that nature provided for healing, refusing to be deceived by the synthetic chemical compounds of the orthodox physicians. And vegetarianism, on Grahamite principles, extolled brown bread because of its composition of unbolted (whole) wheat flour, coarse and unrefined, as nature made the grain. For Grahamites, animal flesh was associated with heavy grease and rich condiments, with overcooked and stimulating foods, with pollution of body and mind and the violation of physiological laws that led to the surrender of strength to disease.

Judson Hutchinson’s stocking feet carried the prohibition of animal products as far as it would go. His commitment to the raw was near total, for even the wearing of shoes or boots would bring him too close to the cooked, and then overcooked (rotten—and powerless), state of civilization.¹⁹ Judson would walk *au naturel*, a perpetual child in the Edenic garden. As that perpetual child, Judson was open to magnetic energies, ready to use or to be used by them. In effect, he was subscribing to the belief system of mesmerism, an

essentially physical explanation for the power that one human being could hold over another, with its theory of the ebb and surge of invisible “fluid.” Indeed, mesmerism became one of the controlling metaphors of American nature religion, and it reappeared in numerous forms as the decades passed.

Similarly, Asa’s interest in phrenology signaled the value he put on nature. In essence, O. S. Fowler’s phrenological popularizations presented a physical explanation for character. People were “amative” or “avaricious” because they were born that way, and the bumps on their skulls conformed to the specific character traits they displayed. One could read a person’s soul by looking at the shape of the head, much as a twentieth-century handwriting analyst claims to detect personality traits through graphological scrutiny. And one could master one’s own character, dominate its weaknesses, if one had a clear sense of the harmony between physical shape and metaphysical bent.

Hence, a second look at the various cultural badges the Hutchinsons wore reveals a good deal of continuity among them. The Tribe of Jesse exhibited consistency in the structure of their beliefs, finding power, meaning, and value in nature and in natural forms. They created ritual expression for their natural creed, positively in their songs and negatively in a series of food and medical taboos. And they stood by an ethic of democratic equality that arose from their beliefs, putting themselves on the line in radical causes and ever eager to evangelize their audiences for them. Meanwhile, in more private moments they pursued interests such as spiritualism and phrenology, which enacted and applied their intellectual commitments. Throughout, even as they sought harmony, they struggled for mastery, for a place of freedom and control, within the context of their society.

The Hutchinson Family Singers offer us one coherent example of nature religion. But there are others, and it will be my task in this book to delineate major forms and moments, describing them chronologically insofar as that is possible and showing the complex interweaving and development of motifs among variants. For there *were* variants to nature religion, just as there were variant understandings of nature and variant degrees of intensity with which a particular form of nature religion was held. Indeed, as we trace the

evolution and (to use a more exact term) convolutions of nature religion in the United States, we come to find that in truth there were nature religions. There were not only particular expressions of the religion of nature but even opposing tendencies within the symbolic cluster.

For some, nature meant the physical world, the “cosmic environmentalism”—to borrow a phrase from Clarence J. Glacken—of all that was not fashioned by human skill.²⁰ For others, nature became an abstract principle, an environmentalism so far extruded into the starry skies that it lost the familiar touch of matter. In a related distinction, for some, nature meant the truly real. For others, it became the emblem of the higher spirit.

Similarly, adherence to nature as a central religious symbol could lead to different—though related—injunctions for living. On the one hand, nature religion seemed to encourage the pursuit of harmony, as individuals sought proper attunement of human society to nature and thus mastery over sources of pain and trouble in themselves and others. And yet, nature religion fostered more ambivalent themes of fear and fascination for wildness and, at the same time, an impulse toward its dominance and control. As we will see, this complicated rhetoric of the symbol is most clearly expressed in the alliance of nature religion with the politics of nationalism and expansion. In still another change, the impulse toward dominance expressed itself in movements teaching the power of mind to order—and, some would say, to manipulate—nature. But the impulse to dominate was, in fact, everywhere in nature religion, and the story told here cannot escape the theme.

This book seeks to tell, however, not only how nature was identified and what moral responses it prompted. The book aims to acknowledge also that nature religion had different histories in the land. For some, such as American Indians, primary religious relation to nature was a legacy, a traditional heritage requiring neither deliberate choice nor special comment. For others, such as the New England Transcendentalists, nature religion included a self-conscious quality, an element of chosenness and even contrivance that suggested it was a spin-off of modernity. Still further, as in the case of the Hutchinsons, for many the centrality of the symbol of nature was indisputable. But for other Americans nature sup-

plied a weaker, more diffuse background, offering one kind of religious horizon for thought and act. Certainly in the latter case it is more correct to speak of the natural *dimension* of religion than to speak of nature religion. In any event, the failure of nature religionists to institutionalize well, if at all, means that—for all our longing for precision—we will find them in a somewhat murky world. In many cases spectrums and continuums will be apter maps of their religious landscapes than precise identification.

My book, then, tries to follow a chronology and to suggest a developmental matrix. But the book also tries, era by era, to attend to differences. At one period, I explore one version of the religion of nature; at a second period, another. Unavoidably, I have not been able to trace each theme through all of American history. That said, however, I understand my project as the encouragement of a conversation that I hope will continue, and so my hope is that others will chart paths that I have not been able to track from end to end.

Perhaps as important, I understand what I do here as a version of what Michel Foucault has called “history of the present.”²¹ As faithful historian, I try to report the past in terms that respect its integrity. As citizen of my own time and society, I see a past that helps to explain us to ourselves. This stance should be especially clear in the final chapter, where different forms of nature religion from the American past resonate with themes in contemporary society. And this stance should be especially important when, in the final chapter, new twentieth-century developments seem to bring harmony and mastery into easier, more graceful religious partnerships than at any time before.

But this is to get ahead of the story. In the chapters that follow, we look, first, at two juxtaposed forms of nature religion; the one clear and coherent, the other far more ambiguous. Native North Americans and Anglo-American Puritans set the limits of our inquiry, as, separated by distances of space and time and, still more, by fundamental culture, they stand as classic studies in religious difference. Next, in chapter 2, we examine the ideology of nature in the revolutionary era, as nature is subsumed into philosophical construct and political strategem. We pursue the republican ideology of nature into the nineteenth century, finding paradoxically,

amid manifest destiny and natural law, an ecstatic religion for hunters and warriors, wild men who desert their haunts in European myth for new American frontiers.

Chapter 3 leaves the field of battle for what are seemingly more peaceful landscapes. Here, in the writings of the New England Transcendentalists, it finds the definitive expression of the principal theories—and confusions—that informed so much of later nature religion. Following the Transcendental legacy, we encounter the metaphysical version of nature religion, watching it become so entangled with notions of Mind and Reason that in the end it loses the material base with which it began. Meanwhile, in an opposite and seemingly more “natural” evolution, we follow the physical trajectory of nature religion in movements for conservation and wilderness preservation.

Chapter 4 studies nature religion as physical religion through movements for natural health and healing, tracing metaphors of mesmerism and Swedenborgianism as they were linked to republican and Transcendental themes. Christian physiology, mesmeric healing, Thomsonian herbal medicine, homeopathy, hydrotherapy, osteopathy, and chiropractic all make their appearance here, most of them being, at first scrutiny, surprising candidates for religious treatment. Then, in chapter 5, we think through themes regarding the complexity of nature religion and its relationship to a pluralistic American culture. We find familiar patterns from the past, but we find, too, the insistent mark of newness. We consider a Native American syncretism that works to heal the earth and an enduring Calvinist ambivalence that honors its violent mysteries. We find a politics of “natural” democracy that seeks the greening of America and, as well, a politics of feminism that celebrates the Goddess in a marriage of nature and mind. We notice religious perspectives on nature that arise within the holistic health movement, with its inherited nineteenth-century legacy and its fresh encounter with Eastern forms of healing. Throughout we explore some of the many ways in which contemporary Americans express at least partial affiliation with the meanings and values of nature religion.

Finally, throughout this chapter and all of the others, we look not for the differences between elite Americans and ordinary people but instead for the common that is shared. What I have in

mind here is less the democracy of the elite with the unintelligent or the unattentive than the democracy of those who, sociologically speaking, have not been formally trained to be theologians, ceremonial leaders, or ethical guides for their generation. Nature religion in America has flourished among a cadre of people who, largely without systematic “seminary” exposure to a high religious or academic tradition, have thought and acted for themselves.

I once heard it said that the task of humanities scholarship was to make the strange familiar and the familiar strange. The phrase is apt, and it is a good description of what I hope to accomplish in this book. If, just as Christianity is the religion of the Christ and his followers and Buddhism is the religion of the Buddha and his disciples, nature religion is the religion of nature and its devotees, then we need an uncommon set of glasses to glimpse the analogy. But the framework itself—the category of nature religion—is, in another sense, the set of glasses, lighting up what we might not otherwise have seen. The estrangement is strategic, and if it is successful it holds the promise of fuller vision. The glasses—and the outline—are preliminary guides to a vast and largely uncharted religious world. Putting on the glasses—following the paths staked out by the study—may introduce us to a dynamic in American culture that surprises in its power and pervasiveness. By coming to terms with nature as religion, we may gain a sense of the more-than-rational force that shapes and orients so much of American life. And that knowledge, in its own way, is a form of power.

1 / Native Ground ✕ NATURE AND CULTURE IN EARLY AMERICA

In 1634 the Jesuit Paul le Jeune completed a report on his Quebec mission for his provincial in Paris, including in it a long account of his sojourn—and difficulties—among the Montagnais Indians. In one reconstructed conversation with a native, the Jesuit supplied details of his evangelical effort.

“When thou seest the beauty and grandeur of this world,—how the Sun incessantly turns round without stopping, how the seasons follow each other in their time, and how perfectly all the Stars maintain their order,—thou seest clearly that men have not made these wonders, and that they do not govern them; hence there must be some one more noble than men, who has built and who rules this grand mansion. Now it is he whom we call God, who sees all things, and whom we do not see; but we shall see him after death, and we shall be forever happy with him, if we love and obey him.” “Thou dost not know what thou art talking about,” he answered, “learn to talk and we will listen to thee.”¹

Le Jeune’s catechesis is instructive. In an episodic flash it provides a short tour of the European mind in attempted communication with native North Americans. Implicit in the discourse were French assumptions about thought and world as well as about human response and cultural dynamics. For le Jeune and his missionary fellows, the order built into the universe and revealed in its motions led inevitably to reflections on its creator. Nature pointed the way to the cultural apprehension of God and, in le Jeune’s reckoning, to an assurance of the afterlife. Even more, reflection on nature suggested a creaturely response of love and obedience.

That the Montagnais Indian strenuously disagreed was clear. His “learn-to-talk” intimated that, from the native point of view, at the most basic level of discourse le Jeune was stumbling hopelessly.² Nor was the perception one-sided. Most European men and women could not fathom the “savage” mind and found its expression in belief, ritual, and life-style generally reprehensible. Writing nearly fifty years later of a forced residence among the Narrangansett Indians of southern New England, Mary Rowlandson’s response to her captors was typical.

Now away we must go with those Barbarous Creatures, with our bodies wounded and bleeding, and our hearts no less than our bodies. . . . I asked them whither I might not lodge in the house that night to which they answered, what will you love English men still? this was the dolefullest night that ever my eyes saw. Oh the roaring, and singing and danceing, and yelling of those black creatures in the night, which made the place a lively resemblance of hell. And as miserable was the wast that was there made, of Horses, Cattle, Sheep, Swine, Calves, Lambs, Roasting Pigs, and Fowl (which they had plundered in the Town) some roasting, some lying and burning, and some boyling to feed our merciless Enemies; who were joyful enough though we were disconsolate.³

Shocked profoundly by the first violence of slaughter and seizure, Rowlandson found the Narrangansett ceremonial jubilee at once incomprehensible and demonic. The ritual singing and dancing and the spendthrift appropriation of animal flesh provoked horror and repudiation. As her narrative progressed, Rowlandson’s later perceptions of the Narrangansetts made common cause with her initial one. Cast on the interpretive grid of biblical mythology, the Indians emerged, fixed in ideological certainty, as familiars of the devil. In spite of her cultural immersion in Narrangansett life, Rowlandson learned little of their different human vision: her long misadventure made sense only as temptation and trial according to biblical canon.⁴

Between these juxtaposed incidents—the nature narrative of Father le Jeune with its blanket rejection by the Montagnais and the ritual performance of the Narrangansetts with its condemnation by Rowlandson—lies an unwritten story regarding the place of nature in early American symbol making and experience. In the contact situation, Amerindian and European confronted each other warily, neither comprehending the religious and ideological power that found expression in the lifeways of the other. For both, to be sure, the term *nature religion* is inexact. For Amerindians, nature as such did not exist but rather dissolved in a universe of persons and personal relations. For American Puritans, to whom the Euro-American discussion will be confined, nature religion dissolved in the ambiguities attendant on a complex Christian vision. Even so, for both the term provides a convenient shorthand to describe religious belief and behavior. The concept throws light on the two sides of the cultural divide, illuminating especially the

A
 NARRATIVE
 OF THE
 CAPTIVITY, SUFFERINGS AND REMOVES
 OF
 Mrs. Mary Rowlandson,



Who was taken Prisoner by the INDIANS with several others, and treated in the most barbarous and cruel Manner by those vile Savages : With many other remarkable Events during her TRAVELS.

Written by her own Hand, for her private Use, and now made public at the earnest Desire of some Friends, and for the Benefit of the afflicted.

B O S T O N :

Printed and Sold at JOHN BOYLE'S Printing-Office, next Door to the Three Doves in Marlborough Street.

Title page of the tenth edition of Mary Rowlandson, *A Narrative of the Captivity, Sufferings and Removes of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson* (1773). (Courtesy, American Antiquarian Society.) The original edition, with a lengthy title beginning *The Sovereignty & Goodness of God*, was published in 1682.

disparities between them—the pervading differences that complicated and, in the end, confuted human relationship.

In the pages that follow, we examine, first, Amerindian nature religion as it can be reconstructed largely from late-nineteenth- and twentieth-century data. The chronological jump is helpful—and even necessary—because it was during the period beginning a century and less ago that ethnologists and anthropologists collected much of the repertoire of native myth and custom on which a full account must depend. Then, supported by this reconstruction, we approach the Algonkian cultures of seventeenth-century southern New England. Reading in shards and snippets, mostly from uncomprehending missionaries such as Roger Williams and Daniel Gookin, and in archaeological remains, we discover a nature religion alive and strong, if threatened by severe cultural disorientation. Finally, we turn to the disorienters, the familiar New England Puritans who had so great an impact on the later cultural trajectory of the nation. We explore their ambivalent reading of physical nature, and we conclude by watching the Puritans move, in the shadow of the European Enlightenment, from a wilderness sense of the concept to a more abstract and philosophical one.

Before Amerindians and Europeans encountered one another in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, anywhere from less than four to more than twelve million native North Americans dwelled in the area north of the Rio Grande River.⁵ Using perhaps 550 languages (as different from one another as, say, Chinese from English) and their dialects, Amerindians spoke in tongues that could be traced to nine linguistic stocks, each worlds apart from the other.⁶ Even when scholars attempt to reduce this cultural diversity to manageable proportions, they confront a plethora of Indian nations, each with separate governance and self-understanding expressed in myth, custom, and ritual. Hence, in one way, to speak collectively of native North American tribal cultures is to do violence to the subjective sensibility of many different peoples. On the other hand, cast beside the European invaders, Amerindians and their religious ways shared much in common. Indeed, in southern New England, where Puritan and Amerindian met face-to-face, the underlying unity among a series of Indian cultures was

reflected in their common Algonkian heritage of related language, social structure, and religious mentality.

However, before we examine the nature religion of the southern New England Algonkians, we need to pursue the more general understanding. We need to be clear about how Indians perceived what we, today, call nature, and we need to reflect on major characteristics of Amerindian religions.

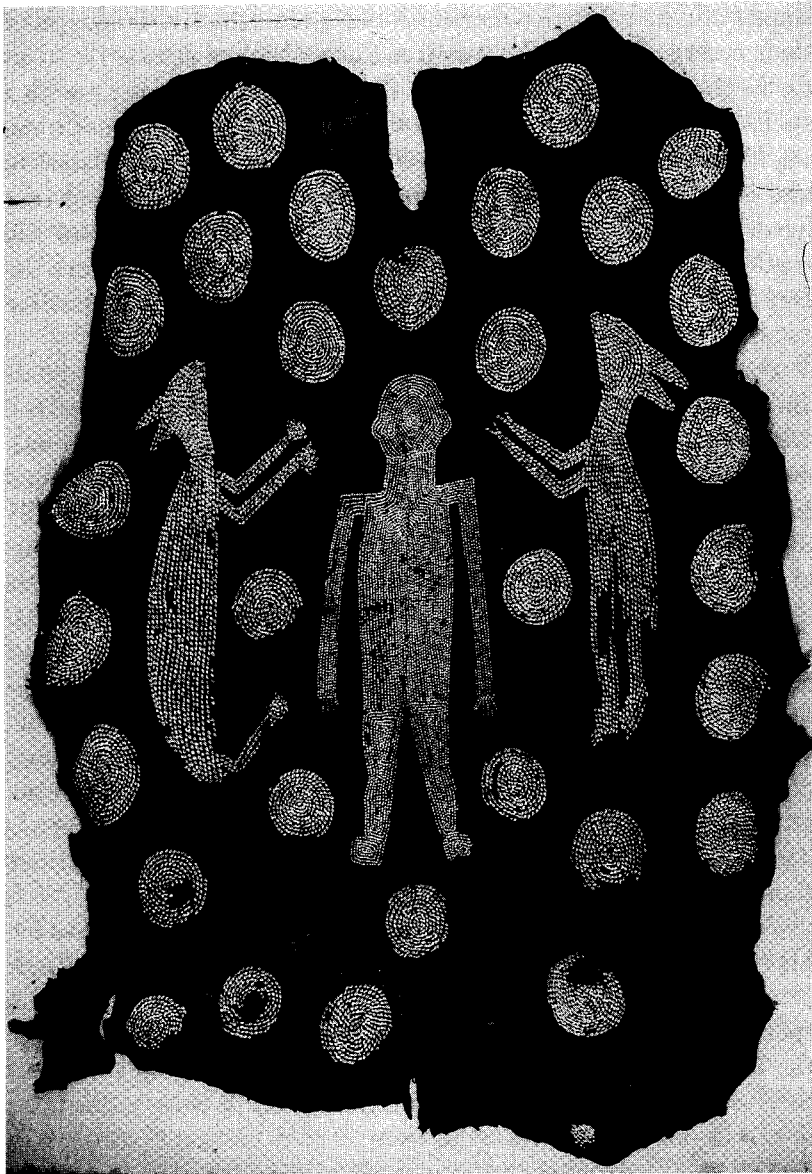
Regarding the first, it is fair to say that the sense of nature as a collective physical whole—an ordered cosmos comprising the animal and vegetable kingdoms on earth as well as the stars and other heavenly bodies—is a product of the European heritage. Filtered through the lens of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment, as we shall see in chapter 2, this understanding of nature grew more systemic and more mechanistic, providing an overarching frame within which humans could comprehend themselves and their cultural pursuits and activities. Amerindian peoples, on the other hand, recognized the nurturing (natural) matrix of their societies, but they sensed at once a more plural and more personal universe. Instead of the abstract and overarching “nature” of Europe, they saw a world peopled with other-than-human persons, often of mysterious powers and dispositions. Not all of what we name nature was identified by the Indians in personal terms, but the presence of persons animating “nature” radically grounded their nature religion. “Are *all* the stones we see about us here alive?” the anthropologist A. Irving Hallowell asked one old Ojibwa man in the 1950s. After reflecting a long time, the man replied, “No! But *some* are.”⁷

If native North Americans saw nature, as we know it, as inhabited by natural persons, that fact already opens the way to a survey of major themes in Amerindian religions. For Amerindians’ view of their world was fundamentally relational. Bound to the sacred by ties of kinship, they could speak of preterhuman beings as Thunder Grandfathers or Spider Grandmothers or Corn Mothers. The Tewa remembered that in the beginning they had lived beneath Sandy Place Lake with the animals and the first mothers, “Blue Corn Woman, near to summer” and “White Corn Maiden, near to ice.” But even beyond their relationship to individual nature beings, the Tewa—as other Amerindian peoples—understood that their relationship was with the earth itself. Sacred origin ac-

counts of native North Americans told, in imaginative language, of their emergence from the womb of earth. Or they detailed how an earth-diving animal had plunged into the waters to come up with a speck of dirt that grew into the world. In the Tewa origin myth, the world above was still “green” and “unripe,” but after an elaborate and ritualized migration the people emerged upon a ground that hardened. Expressing the strength of their relationship to the earth in the way they named themselves, ordinary Tewa were the Dry Food People, not unripe like the early earth but mature like the hardened grains of corn that nourished them.⁸

For the Algonkians in the region of the Great Lakes, the animals embodied the power of the earth. A Great Hare had supervised the creation of the world, floating on a wooden raft with the other animals and taking the grain of sand, which the diving muskrat had found, to form from it the earth. When the first animals finally died, “the Great Hare caused the birth of men from their corpses, as also from those of the fishes which were found along the shores of the rivers which he had formed in creating the land.” So the Algonkians derived “their origin from a bear, others from a moose, and others similarly from various kinds of animals.”⁹ The Winnebago, in turn, could recall the antics and foibles of the Trickster/culture hero Coyote, from the remnants of whose mutilated penis came the crops. And numbers of Amerindian peoples acknowledged a “keeper” of the game, a spirit animal who long ago had made a pact pledging the members of his species to sacrifice themselves that the Indians might eat and survive.¹⁰

For native North Americans the numinous world of nature beings was always very close, and the land itself expressed their presence. Indian peoples created religious geographies in which specific sites were inhabited by sacred powers and persons. Thus, the Eastern Cherokee knew that the spirit Little People had left their footprints within a cave behind a waterfall close to the head of the Oconaluftee River. And they located the game preserve of Kanati, the husband of the corn mother, in a cave on the northern side of Black Mountain, some twenty-five miles from Asheville, North Carolina. The Kiowa recalled the sinister Devil’s Tower of the Black Hills, where a Kiowa boy playing with his seven sisters had unaccountably been turned into a bear, run after his terrified



Powhatan's Mantle. Woodlands, Algonkian. (Courtesy, Ashmolean Museum, Oxford.) Made of deerhide and sinew and 2.13 meters long, the mantle belonged to Powhatan, chief of the Algonkian nations in Tidewater Virginia in the early seventeenth century. With motifs suggestive for the study of nature religion among the Algonkians, the mantle is the earliest example, for which documentation exists, of Native American art from the historic period.

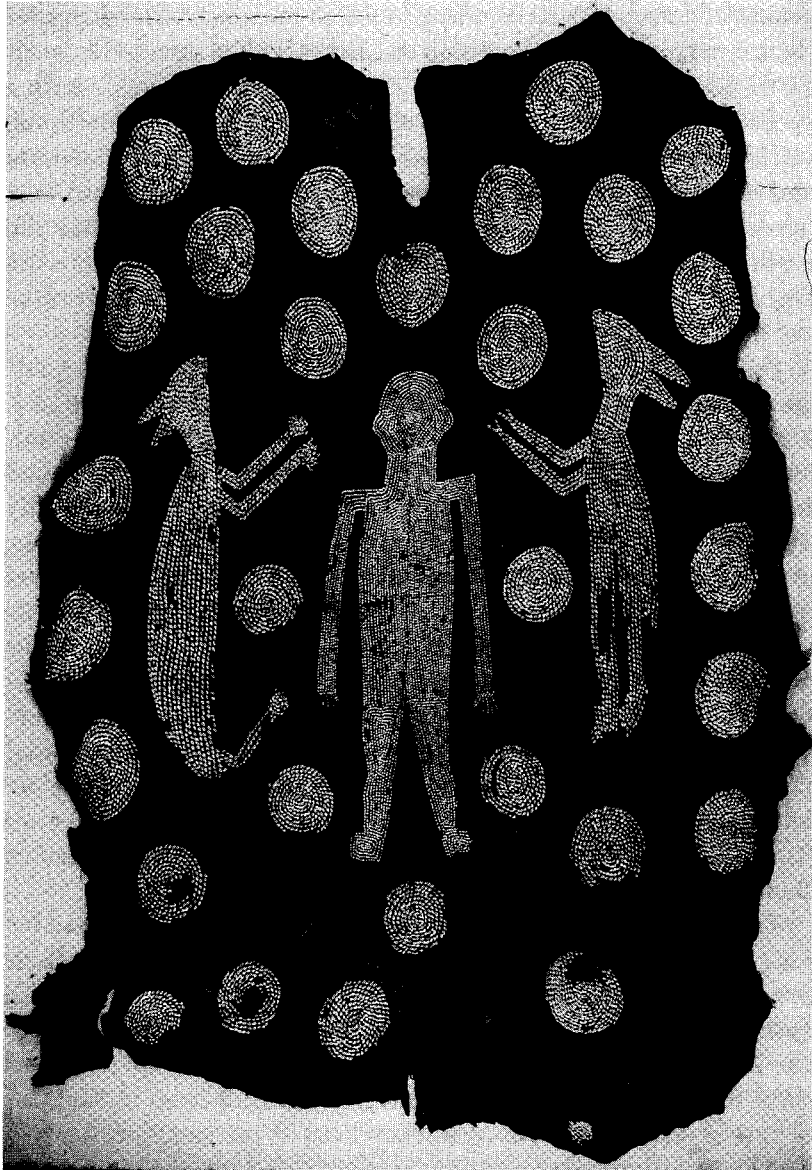
siblings, and scored the bark of a great tree they climbed as he chased them. The sisters had escaped, becoming the stars of the Big Dipper; the remnant of the tree was Devil's Tower.¹¹

The sense of continuity with the sacred—and natural—world that was revealed in this language had its counterpart in a mythic sense of time, in which what we call history was conflated, for Amerindians, with events that had occurred outside of ordinary time. In the Indian view, the present replicated the past, and one could discern the shape of contemporary events by reflecting on the message gleaned from the time of beginning. So the Kiowa, or “coming-out” people, are today a small tribe because once, at the origins of their earthly life, a pregnant woman became stuck while the people were emerging from a hollow log. Fertility had gotten “hung up,” and only those who had come out before it was stopped could constitute the Kiowa nation.¹²

Similarly, in one twentieth-century Hopi account that also includes the founding of the village of Hotevilla, the narrative begins as Hopi Birdmen perform their corn ceremony to help the quarreling people emerge to the earth. In the twentieth century, Hopis had quarreled again—this time about educating their children in United States government schools—and one group, evicted from the ancestral village of Oraibi, made their encampment at the site of Hotevilla. The twentieth-century tale of hostility evokes the time of origins, with conflict a recognized part of Hopi past and present. Ceremony, ordering the tribal life to the natural world, in each case fosters equilibrium.¹³

As this relational view suggests, the well-being of Amerindian peoples depended in large measure on a correspondence between themselves and what they held sacred. The material world was a holy place; and so harmony with nature beings and natural forms was the controlling ethic, reciprocity the recognized mode of interaction. Ritual functioned to restore a lost harmony, like a great balancing act bringing the people back to right relation with the world.

What we, today, would call an ecological perspective came, for the most part, easily—if unselfconsciously—among traditional tribal peoples. Typically, one apologized to the guardian spirit of an animal or plant species for taking the life of the hunted animal or gathered vegetable crop. One paid attention, ceremonially, to the cardinal directions, orienting existence literally by placing



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oneself in space with reference to all of its beings and powers. A person lived by a ritual calendar in which the naming of months and times centered on growing and hunting seasons. And in disease or other illness, a person sought the cause in relational disharmony with a natural form or person—like a Navajo who encountered lightning in the sheepfold and then got sick or like a Cherokee who knew that overpopulation and overkilling of the animals had brought disease. Similarly, one found cure through the healer's—and patient's—identification with natural forms and through the healer's knowledge of herbal lore.¹⁴

Meanwhile, healers, as shamans and seers, worked out of their sense of correspondence with natural forms. They were leaders in communication with other-than-human persons who dwelled in nature, sharers in the mysterious power that made things happen—the wakan of the Sioux, the orenda of the Iroquois, the manitou of the Algonkians.¹⁵ From this point of view, what we call magic and miracle were simply cases of like affecting like or of part affecting whole. United to natural forces and persons, Amerindians thought that all parts of the world—and their own societies—were made of the same material. Since everything was, in fact, part of everything else, it followed that one piece of the world could act powerfully on another, affecting change and transformation.

Such transformation often meant the shape-shifting of animals to human form and, likewise, the change of humans into animals. Amerindian myths are filled with accounts of encounters between humans and the other-than-human world. The Oglala Sioux received their sacred pipe and their full ceremonial panoply of seven rites when a strange wakan woman appeared among them with her gift, then moved around “in a sun-wise manner” and turned into a red and brown buffalo calf and subsequently into a white and a black buffalo. “This buffalo then walked farther away from the people, stopped, and after bowing to each of the four quarters of the universe, disappeared over the hill.”¹⁶ Encouraged by her widowed mother, a Cherokee girl married her suitor, but when he failed to bring home a substantial hunt she followed him and found that, away from her, he changed into a hooting owl. Two Penobscots, in a contest with some Iroquois who had discovered them, changed themselves into a bear and a panther and got away.¹⁷

In this world of animal/human transformations, Tricksters such as Coyote or Raven assumed human or animal form as they chose. Amerindians, who delighted in Trickster tales, also transformed themselves ritually by ceremonial clowning. These ritual clowns were deadly serious figures, like the *heyoka* among the Sioux, contorting the natural and accustomed order by doing things completely backward, saying yes when they intended no, and generally overturning canons of normalcy the more to underline them. In still other ritual transformations, Amerindians, like the Tewa healing Bears, portrayed the animal spirits by their clothing, accouterments, and even behavior.¹⁸

In visions and dreams, too, natural persons appeared to guide Indian peoples. Expressed most explicitly in rituals of seeking for a guardian spirit, the naturalness of sacred things dominated the inner as well as the outer world. In his account of “crying for a vision” given to Joseph Epes Brown, Black Elk explained unequivocally how the powers came. The “lamerter” was required to “be alert to recognize any messenger which the Great Spirit may send to him, for these people often come in the form of an animal, even one as small and as seemingly insignificant as a little ant.” “Perhaps,” Black Elk continued, “a Spotted Eagle may come to him from the west, or a Black Eagle from the north, or the Bald Eagle from the east, or even the Red-headed Woodpecker may come to him from the south.”¹⁹

In short, Amerindian peoples lived symbolically with nature at center and boundaries. They understood the world as one that answered personally to their needs and words and, in turn, perceived themselves and their societies as part of a sacred landscape. With correspondence as controlling metaphor, they sought their own versions of mastery and control through harmony in a universe of persons who were part of the natural world. Nature religion, if it lived in America at all, lived among Amerindians.

Apparently, for all the changes history wrought, this picture drawn mostly from late nineteenth- and twentieth-century accounts applies as well to earlier times. There was a good deal of likeness between later and earlier expression; and, with only fragmentary—and often hostile—evidence from which to reconstruct

seventeenth-century Amerindian lifeways, we can still trace the outlines, among the Algonkians of southern New England, of a fully developed nature religion.

The distinct groups whom the English Puritans first encountered were part of a related family of Indian nations. In the area framed by the Saco River, flowing southeast from present-day New Hampshire through southern Maine to the Atlantic, and the Quinnipiac River, flowing southward through central Connecticut to New Haven Harbor, Algonkian populations probably reached from seventy-two thousand to twice that number by the early seventeenth century. (By a century later the English population had only reached ninety-three thousand.)²⁰ But from 1616 to 1618 and again from 1633 to 1634 epidemics swept through the tribes, decimating native populations by as much as ninety percent.²¹ No doubt caused by microbes from Europe brought first by trans-Atlantic traders, disease ravaged peoples who had no previous immunity and cultures that had no earlier preparation. Thus, the religions that Puritan observers would write about without comprehension were religions confounded by a double crisis—the jolt of foreign invasion and the catastrophe of a biological scourge worse in its relative effects than the Black Death of fourteenth-century Europe.

The four major Amerindian nations in the area—the Narragansett (of present-day Rhode Island), the Massachusett (of Massachusetts Bay), the Pokanoket, or Wampanoag (of Plymouth Colony), and the Pequot (of present-day Connecticut)—spoke related languages of the Eastern Algonkian family. They were united, too, by similar subsistence patterns and governance structures. In a mixed economy, they farmed the land, raising maize, beans, squash, and some tobacco, even as they gathered wild plants and also fished and hunted. With the coming of the English, they engaged in the fur trade. Dwelling in villages, with easy mobility to accommodate seasonal changes in the food supply (at least until the 1630s), these southern New Englanders were governed by sachems, political leaders whose power varied with each unit. On the whole, though, sachems ruled through prestige and moral authority, using generosity and persuasion more than outright coercion to gain their way.²²

Although the personal initiative of Algonkian Indian peoples

has been cited, more striking still was their strong sense of community with one another and with nature.²³ Their small-group life emphasized bonds of kinship. Their collective understanding of land tenure and their equation of ownership with use obviated European notions of private property that fostered individualism. Algonkian labor was often cooperative, as Roger Williams noticed among the Narragansetts: “When a field is to be broken up, they have a very loving sociable speedy way to dispatch it: All the neighbours men and Women forty, fifty, a hundred &c, joyne, and come in to help freely.”²⁴ Still more, the rich ceremonial life of these Amerindians reinforced their sense of mutuality and community.²⁵

Living closely as they did, Indian bands practiced an ethic of harmony within their communities. Roger Williams remarked on the lack of crime and violence among them, and William Wood—another seventeenth-century observer and probably not a Puritan—commented on their hospitality to strangers and their helpfulness. “Nothing is more hateful to them than a churlish disposition,” he wrote, going on to discuss their equanimity, cheerfulness, and calm.²⁶ Perhaps a sociologically conditioned survival tactic, the harmony ethic was also—if we can take later Amerindian experience as an indicator—an expression of their nature religion. A “connected” view of the environment would foster the connection of community.

Connection, however, did not mean amorphousness. The southern New England Algonkians, even read through fragmentary evidence, elaborated a systematic cosmology in which the world and human life were carefully named and ordered. Keeping themselves and their world in balance, which the harmony ethic enjoined, meant an intricate network of exchanges and interactions. And such a network had to be predicated on precise and detailed knowledge of parts of the larger whole. Hence, the unfamiliarity of a concept such as nature and the familiarity of nature persons made considerable sense in the Eastern Algonkian schema. Indeed, Neal Salisbury has rightly argued that the ethos of reciprocity was paramount, and he has noticed, too, the social, natural, and—as he termed it, somewhat problematically—“supernatural” worlds that needed to be maintained in equilibrium.²⁷

The equilibrium began, as in other Amerindian societies, with birth out of nature. Roger Williams told how the Narragansetts

had heard from their fathers “that *Kautántowwit* made one man and woman of a stone, which disliking, he broke them in pieces, and made another man and woman of a Tree, which were the Fountains of all mankind.” “They say themselves, that they have *sprung* and *growne* up in that very place, like the very *trees* of the *Wilderness*,” he noted, just as tellingly, elsewhere. Further north, the missionary Daniel Gookin related the origin myth regarding two young squaws who swam or waded in the waters. “The froth or foam of the water touched their bodies, from whence they became with child; and one of them brought forth a male; and the other, a female child. . . . So their son and daughter were their [the people’s] first progenitors.”²⁸

If the people were themselves the gift of nature, so, too, were their foodstuffs, especially their corn. Stories of the sacred origins of corn run through numerous Amerindian cultures, many of them southwestern and southeastern. And in southern New England, even in an area near the northern boundary of corn cultivation, the mythology of corn thrived with the growing crop. Williams explained the gingerly fashion in which the Narragansetts kept the birds away from the standing corn, citing the tradition “that the Crow brought them at first an *Indian* Graine of Corne in one Eare, and an *Indian* or *French* Beane in another, from the Great God *Kautántowwits* field in the Southwest from whence they hold came all their Corne and Beanes.”²⁹ Corn ritual, too, figured prominently in the ceremonial life of the tribe.

Williams’s references to Cautantowwit (the modern spelling) point to the preeminence of this figure (or Ketan, as he was known to the Narragansetts’ neighbors) among the sacred beings who favored the Indians. Cautantowwit’s home in the southwest was associated with the warm and nurturing wind that encouraged the growth of the corn. His home was also the place to which the people returned at death, and so he was linked to the life force itself, which originated from his house and again returned to it. “Ketan,” wrote William Wood, “is their good god, to whom they sacrifice (as the ancient heathen did to Ceres) after their garners be full with a good crop; upon this god likewise they invoke for fair weather, for rain in time of drought, and for the recovery of their sick.”³⁰ Worship of Cautantowwit, in short, was invocation of a nature deity.

Less distinct but more pervasive than the worship of Cautantowwit was the southern New England orientation toward manitou. In a perception shared with other Algonkians, the word *manitou* carried meanings of wonder and extraordinary power, of a godliness inhering in numerous objects and persons. Williams remarked that at “any Excellency in Men, Women, Birds, Beasts, Fish, &c.,” the Narragansetts would “cry out *Manittóo*, that is, it is a God.” Gookin, linking the manitou belief to Cautantowwit, spoke of acknowledgment of “one great supreme doer of good; . . . Woonand, or Mannitt.” Other colonial New Englanders, such as Thomas Mayhew on Martha’s Vineyard, noted the use of the term. What is clear from the references is that, if Cautantowwit possessed manitou or was manitou or a manitou, the manitou essence could also be found in other nature beings, in humans, and even in marvelous (for the Indians) technological objects such as English ships and great buildings. “The most common experience seems to be that of being overwhelmed by an all-encompassing presence,” wrote William Jones in his classic essay on the subject. Referring to a property (adjectival) as well as referring to an object (substantive), manitou was closely linked to “the essential character of Algonkin religion . . . a pure, naive worship of nature.”³¹

Among the beings who possessed manitou were those whom Williams identified as deities of the sun, moon, fire, water, snow, earth, deer, and bear, some thirty-seven or thirty-eight in all. There were deities of the four directions, and a woman’s god, a children’s god, and a house god as well. On Martha’s Vineyard, Thomas Mayhew likewise found knowledge of thirty-seven deities and noted their relation to “things in Heaven, Earth, and Sea: And there they had their Men-gods, Women-gods, and Children-gods, their Companies, and Fellowships of gods, or Divine Powers, guiding things amongst men, besides innumerable more feigned gods belonging to many Creatures, to their Corn, and every Colour of it.” Daniel Gookin’s testimony, if less extensive, was similar.³²

Moreover, it was clear, as Neal Salisbury has succinctly remarked, that the Indians were not “crypto-monotheists,” conferring on Cautantowwit the role of creator of other gods.³³ Indeed, the entire language of monotheism, god, and supernatural is forced and strained when made to fit Amerindian thinking. More to the

mark, nature *manifested* sacred powers and revealed other-than-human persons of mysterious and numinous capacities. Instead of the opposition between divinity and creature or between supernatural and natural, there was—as already has been noted—a continuity between extraordinary and ordinary. While dualisms—such as body and spirit, for instance—existed, they were inserted into a different frame and bore a different, more intimate meaning than they did for Europeans.

If this observation be kept in mind, then the regard that southern New England Algonkians showed for animals assumes new and heightened significance. When the Narragansetts refused to kill crows or other birds that ate their crops, their behavior was consistent with other Indian practices. Thus, the English writer John Josselyn described the spiritual etiquette that attended the killing of a moose in the New England region: its heart, tongue, left rear foot, and sinews were ritually removed before the flesh was used, accomplishing the “gesture of reciprocity” that was the Amerindian response to beneficent power. Williams, in describing trapping practices for deer, cited the divine power the Indians saw in the animal to explain why the Narragansetts were “very tender of their Traps.” Wood noticed that native peoples adorned themselves with earrings in the forms of birds, beasts, and fishes, and he also remarked on the depictions of animals and birds incised into their checks. And John Eliot, the New England missionary, placed first in his list of religious questions his would-be converts asked, “*Why have not beasts a soul as man hath, seeing they have love, anger, &c. as man hath?*”³⁴

The ceremonial forms of southern New England Algonkians expressed regard for animals and their power and, beyond that, regard and gratitude for vegetable life. Successful hunts and harvests were both marked by ritual (as were numerous other occasions in Indian life). Ceremonies accompanied spring fish runs and made supplication for rain in time of drought. The Narragansetts held a midwinter festival, according to Williams, and the feast may have been related to the time of solstice. Meanwhile, Williams also recorded the giveaways, in which people outdid one another in distributing their goods, imitating, perhaps, the bounty that animals and plants had shown to them. At various ceremonial times, dances were led by shamans or powwows, who garbed themselves

in skins in order to imitate bears, wolves, and other animals, howling as they danced no doubt for the same purpose.³⁵

With all but one of their lunar months named for the planting cycle, Algonkian Indians expressed the significance of agriculture in their lives. But the ceremonial time of the community was supplemented by a round of other rituals, linked to hunting cultures, that focused more on individuals. Like the hunting cultures to the north and west, these Algonkians sought special guardian spirits in ritualized vision quests, and accounts tell of asceticisms and hardships incorporated into the practice. Thus, in one remarkable narrative, Williams wrote of a dying Narragansett’s call to Muckquachuckquand, who had come to him many years before, bidding the Indian to seek him in time of distress. Likewise, southern New England Algonkians honored the menstrual hut used in hunting cultures.³⁶ At the time of her menses, the fertility power of the woman was thought so strong that it could conflict with the other, male form of power needed in the hunt. Sequestered with her during her time in the hut, the woman’s power did not endanger others.

The chief religious specialist among the New England tribes was the shaman or powwow, and much of the English commentary on native life was preoccupied, invariably negatively, with this figure. The shaman’s tutelary deity and the power through whom he acted was Hobbamock (Abbomacho), who was also identified with Chepi, the shaman’s helper. A terrestrial spirit believed to be involved in the onset of disease and suffering, Hobbamock roamed abroad at night, commanding fear. He signaled the negative powers of the sacred, the dangers it embodied, and the need for special knowledge and prowess to deal with it securely. In similar vein, Chepi’s name was linked to terms for death, the departed, and the cold northeast wind. The English called Hobbamock the devil; and, in the language of their own dualistic understanding of good and evil, they were not completely wrong. Converted natives accepted the equation. It was true, too, that when Puritans first encountered the New England Indians the cult of Hobbamock seemed to be waxing and that of Cautantowwit declining—supporting the judgment that witchcraft beliefs are strategies for control that thrive in communal crises.³⁷

Shamans, as we noted, presided at the nature ceremonies of southern New England Algonkians. Such shamans entered their

true estate when they became entranced, possessed and taken over by Hobbamock and the powers of manitou. On Martha's Vineyard, Thomas Mayhew related striking accounts of shamanic possession. He spoke of "Imps," whom the shamans called their "Preservers" and "treasured up in their bodies." One narrative suggested that inanimate substances, too, were alive, for the shaman Tequanonim claimed he had been "possessed from the crowne of the head to the soal of the foot with *Pawwawnomas*, not onely in the shape of living Creatures, as Fowls, Fishes, and creeping things, but Brasse, Iron, and Stone." Another shaman on the island told of his initiation through "Diabolical Dreams, wherein he saw the Devill in the likenesse of four living Creatures; one was like a man which he saw in the Ayre, . . . and this he said had its residence over his whole body. Another was like a Crow, . . . and had its residence in his head. The third was like to a Pidgeon, and had its place his breast. . . . The fourth was like a Serpent."³⁸

Healers of their people, the powwows employed herbal medicines and shamanic sucking cures in ritual fashion. Their identification, in the healing ceremony, with animals was suggested by William Wood's description of one such rite. Here the powwow proceeded "in his invocations, sometimes roaring like a bear, other times groaning like a dying horse, foaming at the mouth like a chased boar, smiting on his naked breast and thighs with such violence as if he were mad." Shamans also aided their people by their divinatory powers. In one anecdote remembered after King Philip's War, it was the shaman's vision of a bear—a ravenous animal and so a bad omen—that convinced the Indians they should retreat from Bridgewater, Massachusetts. Rainmaking was also the shaman's province. And, less benignly, the shaman could, on occasion and with preterhuman aid, inflict evil on another. Thomas Mayhew reported how, at the behest of the powwow, "the Devil doth abuse the real body of a Serpent, which comes directly towards the man in the house or in the field, . . . and do shoot a bone (as they say) into the Indians Body."³⁹

Significantly, even the southern New England Algonkian understanding of the afterlife expressed an Amerindian immersion in nature religion. We have already pointed to the connection between Cautantowwit's house for the dead and the warmth and life-bestowing properties of the southwest and its wind. Archeological

evidence from New England burials supports the association, for not only were the dead aligned to the southwest but, in Narragansett burials, the dead were placed in fetal posture, suggesting the idea of rebirth. Similarly, red paint discovered in the graves suggests the blood and placenta that came with childbirth. And William Scranton Simmons has argued that the positioning of the skull to the southwest was related to the departure of the soul or souls in that direction.⁴⁰

Just as striking as evidence for a nature religion associated with death are the brief literary references of English contemporaries. Roger Williams likened Indian death hopes to the Turkish expectation of "carnall Joyes." William Wood, in words that bear full repetition, was more specific.

They hold the immortality of the never-dying soul that it shall pass to the southwest Elysium, concerning which their Indian faith jumps much with the Turkish Alcoran [Quran], holding it to be a kind of paradise wherein they shall everlastingly abide, solacing themselves in odoriferous gardens, fruitful corn fields, green meadows, bathing their tawny hides in the cool streams of pleasant rivers, and shelter themselves from heat and cold in the sumptuous palaces framed by the skill of nature's curious contrivement; concluding that neither care nor pain shall molest them but that nature's bounty will administer all things with a voluntary contribution from the overflowing storehouse of their Elysian Hospital.⁴¹

Nature religion, in sum, formed and framed native North American life from birth until death—and, in the Amerindian view, beyond. Nature religion shaped mentality; it lay behind behavior in symbolic and ordinary settings; it worked to achieve a harmony that was also an attempt to control the powers that impinged on life as native peoples knew it.

"We are well as we are," John Eliot had an Indian kinswoman say in his *Indian Dialogues*. The words have an ironic cogency when matched against the religion of nature that characterized Indian peoples in southern New England. That William Wood found Amerindians "little edified in religion" by their encounter with the English and that Daniel Gookin, before 1674, had heard of no one in the Rhode Island colony "instrumental to convert any of those Indians" are observations less than surprising. The Puritans failed to claim the majority of the Indians for Christianity for a

series of complex reasons. An English sense of cultural superiority, the growing commercial orientation of the colonists, beliefs regarding predestination, sectarian preoccupation with the already saved community, even the practice of congregational calling before ordination to the ministry—these and other factors undercut a wholehearted mission effort.⁴²

Yet, basic to the Puritan failure—and what concerns us here—was the different meaning and value accorded to the symbol of nature by each culture. If Amerindians lived a nature religion without possessing the abstract and universalized European concept of nature, Puritans understood nature in overarching and universal terms but never found the centeredness in nature characteristic of native peoples. Both cultures, in the contact situation, acknowledged the existence of sacred powers and, more, saw a holy presence in the world and in daily life. And both cultures valued community and lived according to “tribal” norms. But with the absolute claims of their religious commitment, the Puritans could not find common ground in nature with southern New England Algonkians.

What place, then, did the Puritans accord to nature? And how are we to include these inward-turning sectarians, haunted by questions of supernaturalism and salvation, in any account of nature religion? To do so is possible only if we recognize the clear priority of Jehovah in the Puritan vision. For these English colonists, nature could function only as part of a sacred geography in which the *supernatural* essence of the divine realm was strongly marked and in which sacred persons lived above and apart from nature. However, if we accept these limits and still continue to look for the religious place of nature in Puritan culture, the results are richer than at first we might suppose. Nature did function as a significant religious symbol for Puritans, and it was against and in interaction with nature that they made sense of their spiritual—and material—venture in the New World.

When William Bradford wrote of the Pilgrim landing at Plymouth harbor, he recalled the terror of “a hidious & desolate wilderness, full of wild beasts & wild men.”⁴³ The language is indicative, for it underscores one strong element in a complex Puritan relationship with nature. As Roderick Nash has told in his now-classic *Wilderness and the American Mind*, for European culture in general,

nature in the wilderness was manifestly different from nature in a garden.⁴⁴ The wilderness was a dangerous place, beyond human control and threatening in both physical and metaphysical ways. Outside the pale of established society and away from the culture of citted traditions, Puritans could revert to the savagery they found around them. Wilderness was, literally, the place of wild beasts: the fear was that, in the primitive forests with the beasts, one would become confused, *bewildered*, losing a sense of self and society that was essential to civilized life and to salvation thereafter. Hence, the absence of European humanity in the wilderness made it an alien and alienating landscape.

Yet both the Greco-Roman and the central and northern European cultures had found a sacred, if often negative, dimension in the wild country. For Greeks and Romans, the wilderness was home to a series of lesser gods and demonic beings—to pans and satyrs, nymphs and centaurs alike. For central and northern Europeans, wood sprites and trolls as well as other preterhuman beings inhabited the forests. Motifs of fertility, power, and danger were intertwined in this pagan heritage of Europe. With the heritage appropriated by Christian peoples as Europe was converted, moral valences were emphasized, and the ambiguous nature of forest beings was clarified. They still carried sacred import, to be sure; but, in keeping with the dualism of Christian teaching, now the spiritual force that lurked in the wilderness was purely negative. The wilderness was the territory of the devil and the powers of evil. Wild beasts and wild men who dwelled there could only be his emissaries and servants.

Hence, when Puritans regarded Amerindians in the New World for the first time, they did so wearing lenses that had been ground by centuries. Epitome of the spiritual degradation of the wilderness condition, native peoples showed the Puritans, as Daniel Gookin said, “as in a mirror, or looking glass, the woful, miserable, and deplorable estate, that sin hath reduced mankind unto naturally, and especially such as live without means of cultivating and civilizing.” Except for their “rational souls,” he thought, Indians were “like unto the wild ass’s colt, and not many degrees above beasts in matters of fact.”⁴⁵ New World nature, for Puritans, was a kingdom under Satan, and, preeminently, southern New England Algonkians were his assistants. In short, as Neal Salisbury has

said, the colonists saw Indians as “the complete inversion of the world they sought for themselves.”⁴⁶

In this context, Puritan identification of Hobbamock with Satan achieves new explanatory power, and the war Puritans waged against Algonkian powwows becomes a crusade, not simply against a false religion but against elemental evil. Powwows, although they might be native herbal physicians, were also—and more significantly—“partly wizards and witches, holding familiarity with Satan,” as Gookin said.⁴⁷ Prohibited under penalty by the General Court of Massachusetts, powwows no doubt seemed to most white New Englanders the embodiment of the spiritual dread the wilderness brought.⁴⁸

Yet, in other moments, at least some Puritans linked Indians to biblical history, needing to find a place for them in the divine plan of salvation that began with the fall of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. The Indians, these Puritans speculated, had descended from the ten lost tribes of Israel. “Surely it is not impossible,” Gookin wrote, “and perhaps not so improbable as many learned men think.” Another gospel minister sought various points of religious resemblance, noting Indian acknowledgment of a creator and of his providential relationship to the world and finding in Algonkian gestures of grief or gratitude toward a higher power evidence for the Israelite connection.⁴⁹ What makes these speculations important here is that, as a common Puritan view, they signal an ambivalence toward the wilderness and its inhabitants that gainsays the demonic dread.⁵⁰

Thus, even as nature stood for the kingdom of evil in the Puritan myth, the resources of the Judeo-Christian tradition made of the wilderness a place with provisionally positive spiritual meaning. True, the shift from negative to positive meant the demotion of wild nature as a sacred power: not simply the embodiment of Satanic power, it became the backdrop for the action of a God above and beyond it. Still, demotion became an appropriate price to pay for change, and change led to later forms of American nature religion.

The Jewish heritage of Christianity included the origin myth of the Exodus, which explained the common ancestry of the Jews and their preparation by God for a shared destiny as the people of his choice. At the center of the story, the Hebrews who followed Moses

fled the fleshpots of Egypt, experienced divine deliverance as they crossed the Red Sea, and then wandered in the deserts of Sinai for forty years. Here they endured trial and desolation, beset by temptation in the emptiness of the desert. Yet it was precisely in Sinai, with its harsh testing, that Yahweh revealed himself, giving the people an abiding pledge of his steadfastness in the commandments of the Law.⁵¹

As heirs to the Exodus account and the entire Jewish legacy, Christians, too, understood the wild places of the desert as sites for spiritual testing and the visitation of God. Jesus had fasted for forty days and forty nights in the (desert) wilderness, and there the devil came to tempt him and the angels came to minister to him. Accounts of fourth-century monks who fled cities for the Egyptian desert stress the solitude of these anchorites, the temptations and spiritual graces they experienced, and their communion with nature. Thus it was in the desert that the celebrated Antony of Egypt fought off the onslaughts of demons as he dwelled within a tomb, the symbol of his death to the civilized luxury of the cities and the self-indulgence they encouraged. “Monks lose their strength in towns,” he was once reported to have said. The tamer of wild beasts and the tiller of a garden, when he set off to visit the hermit Paul of Thebes, according to one account Antony encountered a centaur, a satyr, and a she-wolf, all of whom proved beneficent. As Paul and Antony talked, a crow flew down from a nearby tree and deposited a loaf of bread to feed them, and when, in aftertimes, Antony returned to the cave to find the corpse of Paul, two lions came flying toward him to dig the grave of the saint.⁵²

Tales such as these seem a far cry from the New World experience of the small band of English Puritans, especially in light of their Calvinist repudiation of monks and monkish superstition. Yet, within the continuity of Christian culture, something of the attitude of the fourth-century monks and their admirers had descended to these latter-day children of the Reformation. The wilderness was still a place of testing, the backdrop for a spiritual purification in which the corruption of old England might be permanently purged. As a proving ground for the saints, the wilderness might also protect them from worldly evil and even invigorate them. Indeed, it might become God’s chosen place for conferring religious insight. New Englanders such as Peter Bulkeley, John

Norton, Samuel Danforth, John Cotton, and Increase Mather all saw the connection between the wilderness and divine blessing.⁵³

Beyond that, although the theme would become more prominent by the time of the American Revolution, Puritans directly appropriated the Hebrew heritage of Christianity, viewing themselves and their enterprise in terms of the Exodus myth. From this perspective, the Atlantic Ocean became an extended and formidable Red Sea, an initiatory obstacle that would fit the Puritans for entry into the Canaan of New England. It was no chance metaphor when John Winthrop wrote of “the streights of the redd sea” in one of his final letters before sailing from England.⁵⁴ Fear of the ocean crossing was widespread, and events at sea were interpreted in terms of the providences of God in a wilderness testing. On board the *Mayflower*, William Bradford recounted, “a proud & very profane yonge man” had mocked the illnesses of others, telling them “that he hoped to help to cast halfe of them over board before they came to their jurneys end.” Yet he himself was stricken “with a greevous disease.” “He dyed in a desperate maner, and so was him selfe ye first yt was throwne overbord,” while the others “noted it to be ye just hand of God upon him.” Another “lustie yonge man” was luckier—or more blessed. In the midst of a storm he was thrown overboard, “but it pleased God yt he caught hould of ye top-saile halliards,” until his fellows could rescue him.⁵⁵

Even so, as Peter Carroll tells us, the trans-Atlantic passengers “were intensely interested in the wonders of the deep which they encountered for the first time.” The “concern for marine novelty,” wrote Carroll, reflected “an enhanced sensitivity toward natural history among men throughout Europe,” their legacy from the Renaissance. The same John Winthrop who had looked on the impending voyage as a Red Sea crossing took note of pieces of driftwood, seafowl, and whales. Exposed to the exotic realities of the Atlantic in the middle passage, it was as if, in a temporary enchantment with nature, some Puritans saw without biblical spectacles. They were filled with wonder at the vastness and novelty around them. They were also, as Carroll has argued, “conditioned” to that novelty. The conditioning would prove useful for the ocean voyagers as they settled in the “wild” country of New England.⁵⁶

Promotional literature designed to encourage people to emigrate had, of course, stressed the bounty of the new land. William Wood,

who numbered among the promoters, wrote not only of Amerindian peoples but also of the choice ground and “sweetest climate” where the settlers dwelled. The soil was “a warm kind of earth”; the marshes were “rich ground” that would “bring plenty of hay.” Meanwhile, wild herbs “for meat and medicine” grew abundantly. There were “likewise strawberries in abundance, very large ones, some being two inches about,” and one might “gather half a bushel in a forenoon.” For other seasons, there were “gooseberries, bilberries, raspberries, treackleberries, hurtleberries, currants,” the last, when sundried, being “little inferior” to what English grocers sold. For people who often endured polluted water, Wood noted that “every family or every two families” had “a spring of sweet waters betwixt them.” He added that it was “thought there can be no better water in the world” and that “those that drink it be as healthful, fresh, and lusty as they that drink beer.”⁵⁷ But Wood’s perspective was nonsacral as he described the New World riches; and, to be sure, there was a commodity orientation in the way he eyed the gifts that nature gave.

For others, however, more imbued with a Puritan spirit, New England as the promised land of Canaan offered sanctuary and a place of spiritual nurture. In a metaphor borrowed from English Puritanism, it was surrounded by the “hedge” of God’s grace, thereby becoming, presumably, an inward-blooming garden.⁵⁸ Although New England society existed in the tension between churchmen, who would maintain the protective hedge for the garden, and many members of their congregations and the settlements, who sought new plantations in the wilderness, in both cases nature mediated the experience of the New World.⁵⁹ Land, animal life, teeming vegetation, and the solitude of the heavens above impinged on these New England immigrants, so that the place where God had planted them took on sacred qualities.

Even the Indians, so frequently named as minions of the devil, could participate in the divine promise of the land, as Joseph Caryl wrote: “O let old *England* rejoyce in this, that our brethren who with extream difficulties and expences have Planted themselves in the *Indian Wildernesses*, have also laboured night and day with prayers and tears and Exhortations to Plant the *Indians as a spirituall Garden*, into which Christ might come and eat his pleasant fruits.”⁶⁰ There was a mystical sweetness in the image, an evoca-

tion, perhaps, of the woman of Revelation 12:6 who fled into the wilderness to be fed in a place prepared by God. Indeed, as Cecelia Tichi has written, "the extension of man's dominion on earth was, from the Puritan perspective, the enlargement of Christ's kingdom pointing toward the Apocalypse."⁶¹

Conrad Cherry rightly observed that Puritan New Englanders lived in the ambiguity inherent in their perception of the land as a "place of promise and of threat."⁶² A negative sacred ground in the province of Satan, it could—in the language of their myth—metamorphize into the place of God's testing and final benediction. Far removed from the relational bonds with nature persons that characterized the religion of their Algonkian neighbors, Puritans still found themselves awed by the land they had entered. In the end, they understood that the best wild country was subdued wild country, and they transformed the former Algonkian habitations from a sacred to an ordinary condition. And from the beginning their commodity orientation assured the trajectory of merchant, business, and mechanical success. Yet, on the way, they had absorbed something of the power of the Amerindian spirits who haunted the land. As Francis Jennings has argued, that land had been "widowed" by the ravages of European diseases and the dispiritment caused by Puritan displacement of the survivors.⁶³ But, as if the ghosts of times past (native and biblical) would make their claims on the future, the Puritans and their descendants could never experience the matter-of-fact relationship with nature that characterized their ancestors. Nature, in the America that was just over the horizon, would become a central religious symbol for many inhabitants of the land: seventeenth-century Puritans had been John the Baptists for distinctively American nature religion.

Already, by the early eighteenth century, philosophical thinking was reflecting the new experience of the Puritans. In one significant example, Cotton Mather, well-known minister in Boston, was pondering themes of nature and divinity in ways that foreshadowed the American Enlightenment and the nature religion of the revolutionary era. Heavily dependent on English authors, Mather still appropriated their material to make it his own. In *The Christian Philosopher* (1721), writing both as amateur scientist and religious

poet, he added to the book of biblical revelation a second volume of revelation in nature. Mather cited the Christian saint John Chrysostom for warrant and invited readers to walk in the "*Publick Library*" of nature. "*Reader, walk with me into it, and see what we shall find so legible there, that he that runs may read it.*" In language that adumbrated the Freemasonry on American shores a decade later, Mather admired the world as a "*Temple of GOD, built and fitted by that Almighty Architect.*"⁶⁴ He wrote in praise of the stars and planets, of the earth and attendant phenomena such as magnetism. And he underscored the wonders of God in the mineral, vegetable, and animal kingdoms.

Thus, in a long discourse on the lodestone, Mather rehearsed the scientific orthodoxy of the day but, following the pattern employed throughout his book, moved on to exhort philosophers to "glorify the infinite Creator of this, and of all things, as *imcomprehensible*. You must acknowledge that *Human Reason* is too feeble, too narrow a thing to comprehend the *infinite* God." Careful not to "fall down before a *Stone*, and say, *Thou art a God*," Mather could eschew idolatry but pay "a very agreeable and acceptable *Homage* unto the Glorious GOD" by seeing "much of Him in such a wonderful *Stone* as the MAGNET." Then, in a move prepared by the Platonism of older Puritans, he shifted from magnet to creator, from lodestone, as he said, to "*Lead-stone*." "*Magnetism* is in this like to *Gravity*, that it leads us to GOD, and brings us very near to Him." In a theological peroration, Mather ended with an extended discourse on the ways in which the lodestone was a "notable Adumbration" of the Savior.⁶⁵

As he commented on the world of microorganic wonder visible with the aid of Antony van Leeuwenhoek's microscope, Mather wrote enthusiastically of the seed, the "small Particle no bigger than a Sand" that could "contain the *Plant*, and all belonging to it," and he extolled its "astonishing Elegancy." After hailing the "peculiar Care which the great God of Nature has taken for the Safety of the *Seed* and *Fruit*," he shifted, significantly, from Nature's God to a personified Nature. "What various ways has Nature for the *scattering* and the *sowing* of the *Seed*!" And, "How nice the provision of Nature for their Support in *standing* and *growing*, that they may keep their Heads above ground, and administer to our In-

tentions!"⁶⁶ The slip was important: although, again and again throughout his *Christian Philosopher* Mather counseled readers to contemplate nature and go on to praise its creator, he had opened a door that would lead, in a later era, to the contemplation of nature itself.

Likewise, Mather's meditations on the physical world pointed to the analogical relationship between nature and human life in ways that linked the Puritan past to the New England Transcendentalist future. For the plants, the correspondence was simple enough, for the "*Revival of the Plants in the Spring*" signaled the Christian doctrine of the resurrection of the dead. But in a concluding contemplation Mather made the shift that linked the fate of the world to the spiritual condition of humankind. If humans would but believe and adore God and serve one another in community, then "the World would be soon revived into a desirable *Garden of God*, and Mankind would be fetch'd up into very comfortable Circumstances; till *then* the World continues in a wretched Condition, full of *doleful Creatures*, with *wild Beasts crying in its desolate Houses*, *Dragons* in its most *pleasant Palaces*."⁶⁷ Mather's coda on the glory of Christ and the Trinity could not undo the changed focus of his work. Once opened, the book of nature was not easily closed, and for many Americans it began to supplant the book of scripture.

Even so, the nature that Mather wrote about was nature at what Clyde A. Holbrook would call "second hand."⁶⁸ Mather's work represented a second-order reflection on nature, not a primary report on the experience of nature itself. When Mather published his *Christian Philosopher*, the great Puritan divine Jonathan Edwards was still a student at Yale College. Presumably, though, he had already had the experiences of nature at "first hand" that would appear in his later "Personal Narrative." Edwards and his childhood friends had built a "booth" for prayer in a "very retired" place in a swamp, and Edwards had other secret haunts in the woods where he would go for prayer.⁶⁹

In one incident that he recalled years later, Edwards told of an experience of God in nature that approximated the "cosmic consciousness" of a later day. "As I was walking there, and looking up on the sky and clouds," confessed Edwards, "there came into my

mind so sweet a sense of the glorious *majesty* and *grace* of God, that I know not how to express."

After this my sense of divine things gradually increased, and became more and more lively, and had more of that inward sweetness. . . . God's excellency, his wisdom, his purity and love, seemed to appear in every thing; in the sun, moon, and stars; in the clouds, and blue sky; in the grass, flowers, trees; in the water, and all nature; which used greatly to fix my mind.⁷⁰

The nature that Edwards had directly experienced became the prologue to philosophical (and scientific) reflection on the world around. Expressing Puritan philosophical thinking, which favored Platonism, Edwards saw that world in terms of analogies, things below that shadowed the ideal order above. His seventeenth-century forebears had read the scripture traditionally in terms of type and antitype. And they had seen spiritual signs and analogies in events as dramatic as the drowned man on Bradford's *Mayflower* and as inconsequential as a child hiding behind a sofa in a Puritan parlor. Moreover, with their preference for the Platonic logical system of Petrus Ramus as taught at Harvard College, the Puritans had placed beside their biblical typological thinking something of the ancient Greek philosopher's notion of the present world as a copy of the divine model or idea.⁷¹

It was these understandings from the Puritan past that informed the second-order writing on nature that Edwards undertook. In his unpublished manuscript "The Images of Divine Things," Edwards went considerably beyond his predecessor Cotton Mather to find throughout nature the truth that could be gained in sense experience. Mather's added book became a coeval book: nature, as Perry Miller argued, became authoritative even as scripture was.⁷² If Mather pointed to analogy and type and sometimes employed them, Edwards embraced his own form of type-antitype thinking as encompassing framework for reading nature. Instead of mostly using nature to corroborate biblical truth, he habitually quoted biblical text to fix nature the more firmly. "The book of Scripture," Edwards declared, "is the interpreter of the book of nature." Edwards's work, wrote Miller, was "nothing less than an assertion of the absolute validity of the sensuous."⁷³

"The things of the world are ordered [and] designed to shadow forth spiritual things," Edwards affirmed. Scripture confirmed the

fact, and it was “apparent and allowed” that there was “a great and remarkable analogy in God’s works.” In a doctrine of correspondence that, even more clearly than Mather’s, pointed toward the Transcendentalists, Edwards told of the “wonderfull resemblance in the effects which God produces, and consentaneity in His manner of working in one thing and another throughout all nature.” “It is very observable in the visible world,” he continued; “therefore it is allowed that God does purposely make and order one thing to be in agreeableness and harmony with another.”⁷⁴

Still more, if natural things reflected one another, they imaged the divine. “The sun’s so perpetually, for so many ages, sending forth his rays in such vast profusion, without any diminution of his light and heat, is a bright image of the all-sufficiency and everlastingness of God’s bounty and goodness.” In a reading more specifically Christian, the silkworm was “a remarkable type of Christ, which when it dies yields us that of which we make such glorious clothing. Christ became a worm for our sakes, and by his death kindled that righteousness with which believers are clothed, and thereby procured that we should be clothed with robes of glory.” And “as a type of love or charity in the spiritual world,” the universe was “preserved by gravity or attraction, or the mutual tendency of all bodies to each other.” Nor was nature unambiguously positive in its truth. “This world is all over dirty,” Edwards wrote. “Everywhere it is covered with that which tends to defile the feet of the traveller,” a clear intimation that “the world is full of that which tends to defile the soul.” And nature as human physicality likewise taught its negative lessons. “The inside of the body of man is full of filthiness, contains his bowels that are full of dung, which represents the corruption and filthiness that the heart of man is naturally full of.”⁷⁵

Even with its negative truths, nature was altogether revelation, as Edwards testified. “If we look on these shadows of divine things as the voice of God purposely by them teaching us these and those spiritual and divine things, to show of what excellent advantage it will be, how agreeably and clearly it will tend to convey instruction to our minds, and to impress things on the mind and to affect the mind, by that we may, as it were, have God speaking to us.” The God who spoke in nature guaranteed, then, a *continuing* revelation. Earth and sky were not simply neutral or even nurturing.

Instead they announced the active presence of God, and the active presence of God signaled the millennium at hand. The longed-for Christian future was already becoming present; and, as Mason I. Lowance and Sacvan Bercovitch have underlined, the God who heralded it promised an *American* millennium.⁷⁶ It was in the New World, in the landscape of New England, that the eschatological future would become present. It was in this specific setting that natural things would figure forth the divine.

But there was even more, for the future, in the natural shadows that whispered. There was, indeed, as Perry Miller argued and as we shall see in a later chapter, a line between Edwards and the Transcendentalist Ralph Waldo Emerson.⁷⁷ But the line was drawn from a biblically enriched Platonism even as it was expressed in mysticism. If nature was sensuous presence, it was also—in a paradox that hinted the later dilemma of Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, and assorted other Americans—material absence. By themselves, material bodies—and so the natural world—did not exist as substances. Rather, they were made real, imbued with meaning, through human perception and divine power and knowledge. Challenging both the philosophical dualism of René Descartes and that of Isaac Newton and his followers, Edwards could find no independent existence, as substance, in a natural body. The world was “therefore an ideal one; and the law of creating, and the succession of these ideas” was “constant and regular.” “Nothing that is matter can possibly be God,” Edwards wrote, and “no matter is, in the most proper sense, matter.”⁷⁸

Edwards was clearly teaching idealism, and he was also implying, in some sense, the divinity of nature. Just as much, he was implying the power of humans to confer meaning—and existence—by their thought. Analogical philosophy provided the logical ground for the mystical mind. The earthly copy could unite with the original divine form or idea; and, in transformed condition, Puritan analogy would become the Transcendentalist correspondence between nature and spirit.

Less mystically conceived but nonetheless significantly spoken, another word for nature came when, four years before the promulgation of the Declaration of Independence, the work of Cotton Mather’s contemporary John Wise was republished. In his *Vindica-*

tion of the Government of New-England Churches (1717), Wise had written in opposition to the *Proposals* of 1705, signed by Mather, for changes in the church government of eastern Massachusetts. But, ironically, on the importance of nature the two men agreed. In fact, Wise succeeded before Mather or Edwards—and more than either of them—in advancing one form of the Enlightenment view of nature. For nature, in Wise’s reading, became a fundamental principle and *law*.

Significantly, Wise placed his argument from nature first, before his argument from scripture, in the *Vindication*’s text. The churches of New England, he argued, like the primitive Christian churches, were “founded peculiarly in the Light of Nature.” “It seems to me,” Wise wrote, “as though Wise and Provident Nature by the Dictates of Right Reason excited by the moving Suggestions of Humanity; and awed with the just demands of Natural Libertie, Equity, Equality, and Principles of Self-Preservation, Originally drew up the Scheme [of New England church polity], and then obtained the Royal [God’s] Approbation.”⁷⁹

For Wise, the “Light of Nature” or “Light of Reason” was a “Law and Rule of Right” and an “Effect of Christ’s goodness, care and creating Power, as well as of Revelation; though Revelation is Natures Law in a fairer and brighter Edition.” Indeed, as Wise saw it, “That which is to be drawn from Mans Reason, flowing from the true Current of that Faculty, when unperverted, may be said to be the Law of Nature; on which account, the Holy Scriptures declare it written on Mens hearts.” In more concrete terms, there was “an Original Liberty Instampt upon his [man’s] Rational Nature,” and any who intruded on this liberty violated “the Law of Nature.” And there was a natural equality, so that it followed “as a Command of the Law of Nature, that every Man Esteem and treat another as one who is naturally his Equal, or who is a Man as well as he.” The power to form governments, therefore, issued from the people and returned to them again.⁸⁰ The language—and religion—of nature was ready to unfold in the “Nature and Nature’s God” of the American Revolution.

2 / Republican Nature ✽ FROM THE REVOLUTION THAT WAS LAWFUL TO THE DESTINY THAT WAS MANIFEST

In July of 1776, not long after the signing of the Declaration of Independence, Royall Tyler was graduated from Harvard College. Several months later Yale accorded him an honorary baccalaureate, and by the end of the year he had joined the patriot army. He did not see much active service, though, and was already reading law during the Revolution. With a master of arts degree conferred by Harvard in 1779 and admittance to the Massachusetts bar in 1780, the young man began his career as a lawyer, a career punctuated most notably by a short-lived romance with Abigail (“Nabby”) Adams, daughter of John and Abigail. Then, in March 1787, on a political mission to New York for Massachusetts Governor James Bowdoin, Tyler spurned New England rule and attended the theater. In little more than a month, his own play *The Contrast* was being staged at the John Street Theatre in New York City.¹

It was the earliest American comedy to be presented by a group of professional actors. And, although after 1787 Tyler continued to join letters to his legal calling, his first effort became his best-known work. Produced, significantly, in the month before the beginning of the Constitutional Convention, *The Contrast* at once expressed and encouraged a new national pride. The first American play staged more than once, in New York alone, it drew audiences five times in 1787, with a return engagement at the time of George Washington’s inauguration two years later. Before the close of the century *The Contrast* had played probably fifteen times outside New York City, including performances in Baltimore, Philadelphia, Boston (where it was dubbed a “Moral Lecture”), and Charleston. One contemporary reviewer called the work the “effusions of an honest patriotic heart,” while, in our own century, Allan Gates Halline hailed it as “a spiritual Declaration of Independence.”²

What was it that this young man—a Harvard graduate in the shadow of the Declaration—had done to stir the enthusiasm of his