and theological partisanship. Bush, a Presbyterian minister, is a little too eager to prove the righteousness and superiority of his non-unionist and "gospel" mission-focused forebears. Such a preachy undertone detracts from an otherwise engaging and fascinating study.

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The Young John Muir: An Environmental Biography. By **Steven J. Holmes**. Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1999. xvii + 309 pp. $55.00 cloth; $22.95 paper.

Given the already prodigious body of literature on the naturalist John Muir, Steven Holmes's new biography might seem superfluous, but nothing could be further from the truth. This is perhaps the most scholarly work on Muir. In it, Holmes offers a refreshing alternative to the standard hagiography, sifting through layers of myth and misperception that have accumulated over Muir's popular image to reveal a portrait of him that is both historically and psychologically convincing.

Steven Holmes calls his work an environmental biography. Reflecting the interdisciplinary approach of scholars like Harvard professor Lawrence Buell, who helped guide this book, Holmes' concept combines methodologies from history and psychoanalysis in an effort to produce an account that puts as much weight on the world the individual inhabits as it does on the individual himself. The basis of this more-balanced approach is the object relations theory, which Holmes borrows from recent post-Freudian scholarship. Object relations theory, Holmes explains, shifts the traditional focus of psychoanalysis on "the sheer expression of drives or the fulfillment of needs" (11) to a focus on our relationships with other persons. It thus moves psychology away from an exclusive preoccupation with the individual person. Holmes opens this methodology up even further to include the individual's relationships not only with other persons but also with the broader environment—historical, cultural, and physical—in which he or she resides. As Holmes puts it, "my approach assumes both a radical historical embeddedness and an equally radical individual power of unique and spontaneous imagination, choice, and action" (279).

In fact, there is nothing radical about either of Holmes's assumptions. Historians in particular may wonder why he has to justify embedding his subject in the broader context of time, place, and events. But this is precisely what has been lacking in much of the literature written on Muir. As a result, the relationship between Muir, his ideas, and the specific environment in which he lived has gone under-appreciated. Biographers of Muir have also tended to accept uncritically the popular notion that Muir left his childhood irrevocably behind with a radical conversion to wilderness. Muir himself contributed to this romance with later revisions to his autobiographical journals. This belief has served to justify giving only cursory attention to the early influences on Muir's life, because these influences were not judged to have had any significant bearing on his mature thought. But Holmes provides convincing evidence that this conversion was more contrived than real. The result is a more dynamic portrait of Muir, which shows his arduous but ultimately successful integration of all the contradictory influences of childhood into a coherent, mature identity.

Among the many valuable insights that Holmes's perspective uncovers is the connection between Muir's preservationist ethic and the frontier Christianity with which he was raised. Holmes has been more careful than most biographers to identify the specific form of Christianity that Muir knew—that of the Campbellite movement—and so he is able to recognize patterns and characteristics unique to this religious culture as they appear later in Muir's life. Even if Muir did not remain closely aligned with Campbellite Christianity, this religious culture nevertheless contributed significantly to the development of his ideas about nature. Holmes hints here at the very intriguing possibility of a connection between early American popular Christianity and the later development of environmental thought and ethics. Much more could be said on this subject.

But the most important theme that Holmes pursues throughout his book is the metaphor of home. It follows naturally from his assumption of a basic continuity in Muir's psychology that the relations that existed in his family constituted an important precedent that would extend throughout his life. Holmes argues that these relations formed the very basis of Muir's later understanding of nature. Nature would become for Muir an extension of his childhood home. This did not happen all at once, and probably the most interesting aspect of Holmes's narrative is its exploration of the ways in which Muir manipulated nature's symbolic meaning, gradually making it a familiar place. Holmes traces this process through Muir's gendered, and often eroticized, descriptions of natural objects. He demonstrates how Muir transposed the emotional energy of a succession of close female relationships onto nature, but, avoiding a narrowly Freudian interpretation, Holmes argues that it was *how* Muir *related* to these women, not his frustrated sexual desires, that Muir transferred outward. The eventual success of this emotional process began to manifest itself in Muir's written descriptions of nature by his late twenties as he expressed a growing sense of comfort and belonging in the wilderness using a language evoking domestic associations.

This interpretation of Muir's relationship to nature is vastly different from the alternative that his popular image suggests. The wild convert to wilderness who sways in the treetops during a raging storm or the ascetic loner who spends months at a time in the alpine solitude of the Sierra Nevada, nourished on nothing more than tea and a handful of crackers—these are the images that the common mythology of Muir typically recalls. This wild vision—dramatic, entertaining, and often stimulating though it is—for most of us does not offer any realistic model of how we might also share the natural places Muir so loved. Indeed, the popular image of Muir is more an obstacle than a bridge to our sympathies and makes *his* nature seem all but inaccessible. One of the greatest services that Holmes has done with this book is to let some of the air out of that over-inflated melodrama. He presents us with a Muir who is both warmer and more believable, a man who fell in love with wilderness, not as the result of some ecstatic conversion, but because these wild mountain environments had become natural extensions of the emotional bonds that held together his family and closest friends. This is a man we can understand—not simply wonder at—and a nature to which we feel we also could belong.

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