Emily Ecclestone "One thirty years ago" (Muir 122)
Close Reading

In the section of Muir's journal entries, "The Wild Parks and Forest Reservations of the West," he reflects on his time in the Central Valley of California. He begins the passage by contrasting the valley from his first visit to his current visit and uses this part of his journal entries as call to action for conservation of our natural surroundings. Within this passage, Muir repetitively uses personification, similes, metaphors and a little bit of alliteration when describing the plants that are commonly found the in area. These devices are implemented in various different ways, but all refer back to highlighting the poor treatment of nature.

The sections where Muir uses alliteration, is not only when positively describing nature, but also when negatively describing it. The first example of Muir alliteration is when he depicts the Central Valley as once being "one bed of golden and purple flowers" (121), but then immediately follows with "Now it is ploughed and pastured out of existence, gone forever" (121) to depict the valley in his present day. The first line also includes a metaphor which Muir compares the valley to resembling a colorful flower bed informing the reader about the beauty that existed in the valley. It is in the second line that he uses alliteration to negatively denote the change that has occurred over the past thirty years. Although "ploughed" might be an unrecognizable verb at first glance, remembering that Muir is Scottish reasons that he is referring to a "plowed" field. Therefore, he is informing the reader of the negative impacts.

In contrast, alliteration also appears in the descriptions in a positive matter. An example is "fragrant flowers around a thousand lakes" (122). In this instance, the alliterative phrase highlights Muir's main subject As there have been a few comments Muir being a poet, the alliteration in his writing adds a poetic affect.

Throughout the passage, Muir gives the plants human characteristics by utilizing personification. He continues with his descriptions of the desert plants, or at least the ones that are left, "the sturdy cacti that defend themselves with bayonets and spears" (122). By personifying the desert cacti, Muir is attempting to explain two things. The first thing is the obvious humanizing of the cacti. The second thing he is attempting to explain the impact the "ploughed" areas have had on the natural environment. Through the personification, Muir is explaining that the cacti are having to use such extreme defense mechanisms to stay alive and describes their prickly thorns as "bayonets" and "spears."

Metaphors and similes are used in various parts of Muir's passage, as well. In most instances, the similes and metaphors are found within the personification, however, there are some that stand alone. Muir uses two similes in the following quote, "miasma, snakes and alligators, like guardian angels, defend their treasures and keep them as pure as paradise" (122). The first one is the comparison of the listed reptiles to a guardian, this showing the extent of their protectiveness. The second one depicts the result of them defending their areas and compares it to being paradise-like. Both of these further illustrate Muir's overall message in this passage about the importance of protection of an area.

In addition to the figurative language devices that Muir uses, he also plays around the diction in the passage through repetition. The phrase "bed of" is used four times when describing an area of the flowers: "was one bed of golden and purple flowers" (121), "continuous bed of flowers" (122), "so rich that they look like beds of rainbows" (123), "continuous bed of flowers" (122) and "a sumptuous bed of mosses and liches" (123). It is possible that repetitively describing the groupings of flowers as a bed was with the intent to show that the plants and flowers are comfortable and at home. Muir only describes them as beds in positive situations, hence that the environment should not be plowed over because it would take that comfort away from the plants.

Although it is not exactly repetition, Muir repetitively uses certain adjectives and verbs that have a natural, original connotation within his descriptions. Specifically, he uses "unreserved" (121), "unchanged" (122), "unspoiled" (122), "preserved" (122) and "pure" (122) to create this sense of a natural environment to further influence and emphasize the importance of conservation.

Similarly, Muir applies repetition in the passage when he refers to the plants in each area that he describes. This is done through the word "wild" as he emphasizing the fact that these plants are a part of the wild nature and that they essentially are unprotected. Specific examples are "the wild plant health" (122), "purely wild" (122), and "a tuft of wild grass" (122).

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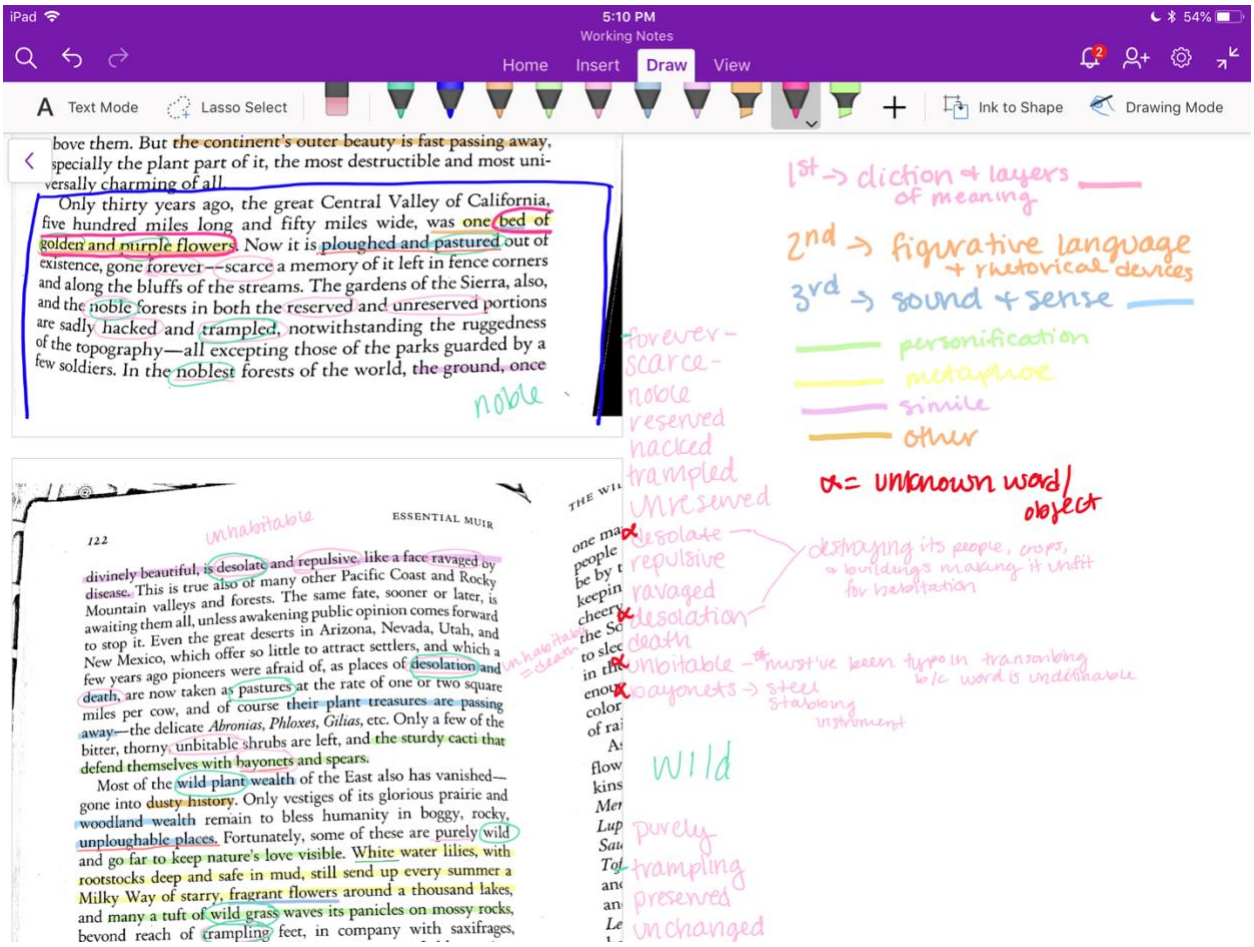
Close Reading

"One thirty years ago" (Muir 122)



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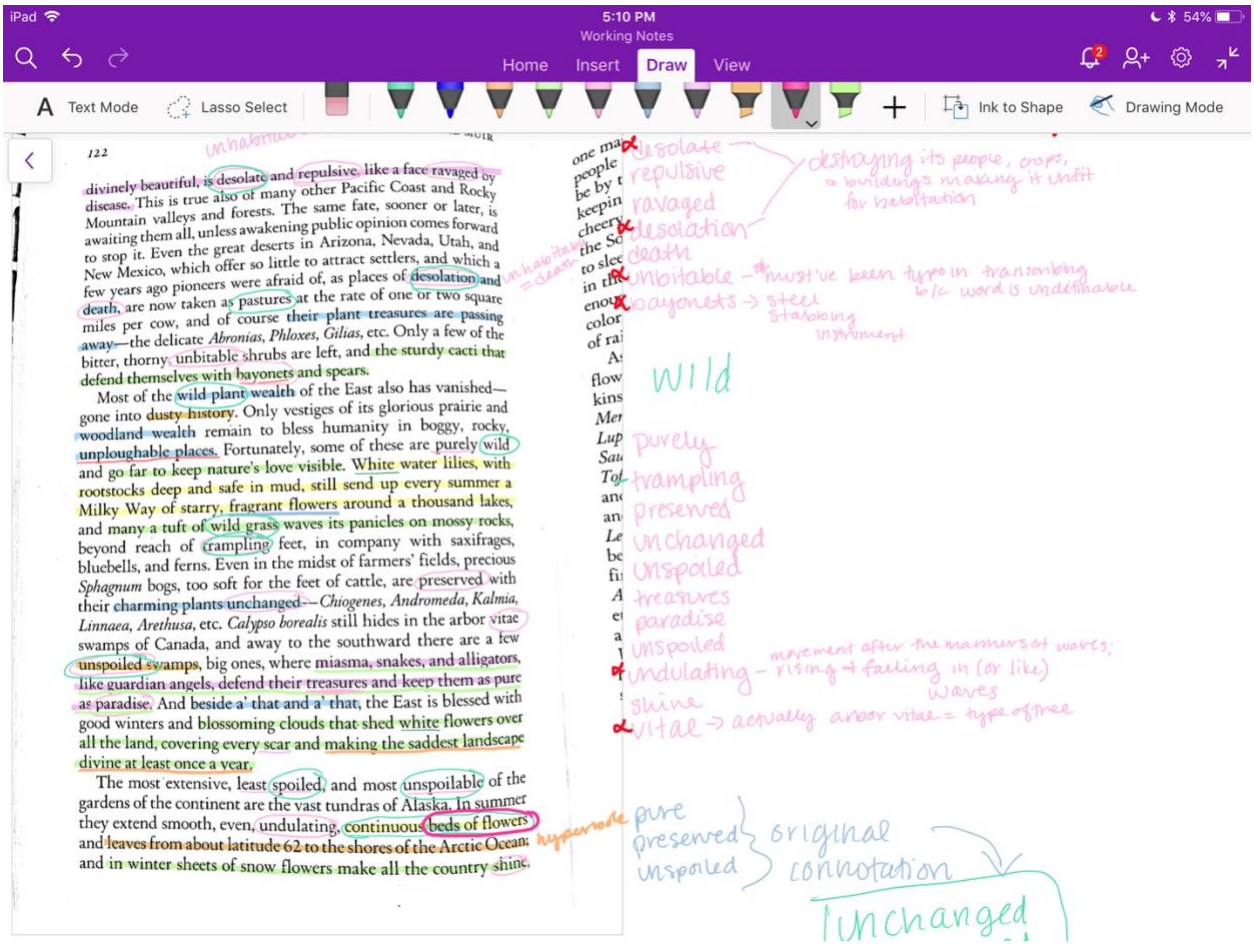

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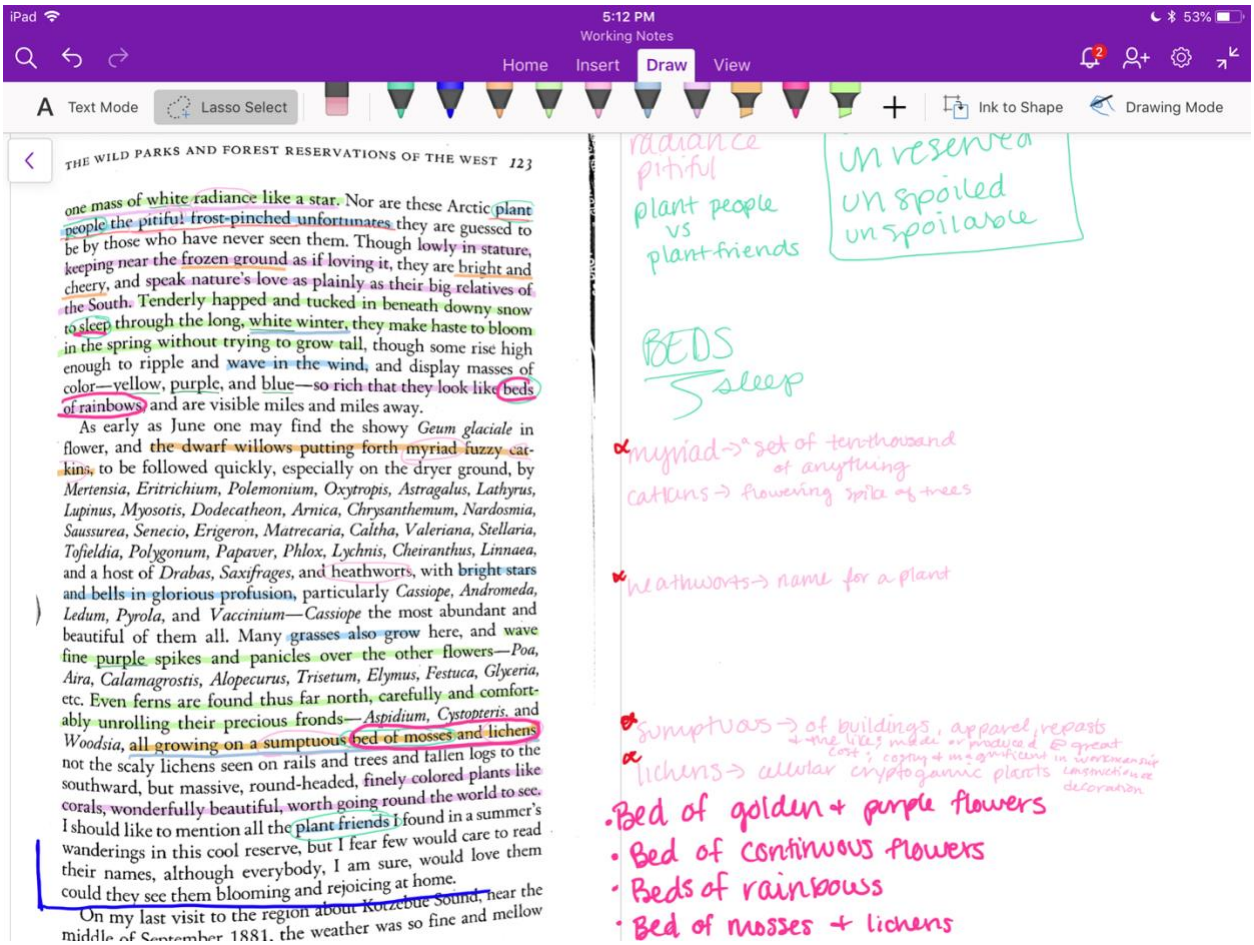

THE WILD PARKS AND FOREST RESERVATIONS OF THE WEST 123

one mass of white radiance like a star. Nor are these Arctic plant people the pitiful frost-pinched unfortunates they are guessed to be by those who have never seen them. Though lowly in stature, keeping near the frozen ground as if loving it, they are bright and cheery, and speak nature's love as plainly as their big relatives of the South. Tenderly happed and tucked in beneath downy snow to sleep through the long, white winter, they make haste to bloom in the spring without trying to grow tall, though some rise high enough to ripple and wave in the wind, and display masses of color—yellow, purple, and blue—so rich that they look like beds of rainbows and are visible miles and miles away.

As early as June one may find the showy *Geum glaciale* in flower, and the dwarf willows putting forth myriad fuzzy catkins, to be followed quickly, especially on the dryer ground, by *Mertensia, Eritrichium, Polemonium, Oxytropis, Astragalus, Lathyrus, Lupinus, Myosotis, Dodecatheon, Arnica, Chrysanthemum, Nardosmia, Saussurea, Senecio, Erigeron, Matrecaria, Caltha, Valeriana, Stellaria, Tofieldia, Polygonum, Papaver, Phlox, Lychnis, Cheiranthus, Linnaea,* and a host of *Drabas, Saxifrages,* and heathworts, with bright stars and bells in glorious profusion, particularly *Cassiope, Andromeda, Ledum, Pyrola,* and *Vaccinium*—*Cassiope* the most abundant and beautiful of them all. Many grasses also grow here, and wave fine purple spikes and panicles over the other flowers—*Poa, Aira, Calamagrostis, Alopecurus, Trisetum, Elymus, Festuca, Glyceria,* etc. Even ferns are found thus far north, carefully and comfortably unrolling their precious fronds—*Aspidium, Cystopteris,* and *Woodsia,* all growing on a sumptuous bed of mosses and lichens not the scaly lichens seen on rails and trees and fallen logs to the southward, but massive, round-headed, finely colored plants like corals, wonderfully beautiful, worth going round the world to see. I should like to mention all the plant friends I found in a summer's wanderings in this cool reserve, but I fear few would care to read their names, although everybody, I am sure, would love them could they see them blooming and rejoicing at home.

On my last visit to the region about Kotzebue Sound, near the middle of September 1881, the weather was so fine and mellow

radiance
pitiful
plant people
vs
plant friends

unreserved
unspoiled
unspoilable

BEDS
sleep

myriad → a set of tenthousand of anything
catkins → flowering spike of trees

heathworts → name for a plant

sumptuous → of buildings, apparel, repasts + the like; made or produced @ great cost; costly + magnificent in workmanship construction or decoration
lichens → cellular cryptogamic plants

- Bed of golden + purple flowers
- Bed of continuous flowers
- Beds of rainbows
- Bed of mosses + lichens