Every year, right in the middle of spring semester, a handful of eager Honors Students willingly complete a rigorous twelve-page application that describes an extended research project. In addition to the application, these students also write lengthy proposals and meet with faculty advisors. But here is the strange part: these students do this because they want to, and not because they need a good grade in any class. Why? This process is necessary to receive one of three annual $2,300 Honors program Independent Summer Research Grants.

This year, Junior Honors students Marie Robinson, Amberlyn Peterson, and Breanne Eddington all received such grants. Marie’s project is titled “Mind Her or Mine Her? The Implications of Feminizing Nature.” Amberlyn’s work produced the research paper, “Free Energy Analysis of PNA-DNA Nucleotide Mismatches.” Breanne also did scientific research, titling her enterprise “Life in a Salt Crystal: Reviving Desiccated Microorganisms from the North Arm of Great Salt Lake.” The three researchers presented their findings in Nunemaker on October 24th, to a crowd of nearly twenty colleagues, parents, and faculty members.

Marie spoke first. Her project examined the feminization of nature in texts ranging from Francis Bacon to the Wilderness Act of 1964. Marie argued that though older texts employed the nature/woman metaphor in order to justify domination of the earth, modern texts could reclaim the metaphor “as a protective agent for the environment.”

Next, Amberlyn shared her findings. Her information flew right over several people’s abilities to comprehend, involving a multitude of technical genetic terms, though one of the few audience members in the room with a graduate background in genetics noted that Amber “really knew her science amazingly well.” Generally, she focused on the structure of PNA—something with “great promise for use in the detection of gene mutations as well as gene-targeted drugs.” Amberlyn’s presentation involved some interesting models and simulations as well.

Lastly, Breanne presented her project which involved collecting salt crystals from the Great Salt Lake, “reviving these organisms from collected salt crystals, extracting their DNA, and analyzing their genes to identify novel organisms.” Breanne noted that the same process used in her project might also be used to revive organisms from the dried up salt sea on Mars.

All three presentations went extremely well and inspired a lively question and answer session. The three researchers described their summer experience as valuable, educational, and enjoyable. Marie also commented on the practical benefit of summer research “for graduate schools, because most undergrads have not done research,” especially funded research.

If any Honors Students have a research idea buried away, talk to Marie, Amberlyn, or Breanne about their projects and the process they underwent to receive the grant. Application forms will be available in early January when Professor Badenhausen will also hold an informational meeting for interested applicants. This money is available each year so motivated Honors students can spend a summer in the lab or library, and not in the hot dog stand. Take advantage of this rare chance.

-Creed Archibald
New Adventures in the Honors Program

As much as all Honors students love “Humanities” and other core Honors classes, it is good to have a little variety sometimes. That is why the Honors Degree requires that students complete an additional six credit hours of upper-level Honors courses that are beyond the spectrum of the seven-course LE sequence. This upcoming spring and May term are sure to offer some fun and interesting ways to fulfill these credits.

In the spring, Richard Badenhausen will be teaching a course called “War, Trauma, and Narrative,” which explores how individuals and cultures have processed war and trauma imaginatively in a wide variety of genres, including epic poetry, elegy, memoir, film, drama, and architecture. This topic is extremely relevant today, given the country’s current involvement in the war in Iraq. This seminar will examine a variety of texts that demonstrate how soldiers from many different wars have attempted to process the horrors they encountered in combat. Students will also receive a special visit from Boston psychiatrist Jonathan Shay, who has treated war veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder for over twenty years and has written two provocative books examining The Odyssey and The Iliad through his understanding of that condition. Although this course is already fully enrolled, keep an eye out for similar Honors classes in the future.

May Term offers even more possibilities for Honors students, including the first-ever Honors May Term trip called “Science on the Sea of Cortez.” Honors professor David Goldsmith will take students to Loreto, Mexico to study biology, geology, and chemistry for eight days in the middle of May. Goldsmith is the “Rock Guy” who will focus on Geology, while fellow professors Judy Rogers and Robyn Hyde will cover the biology and chemistry side of the trip. Students will learn how each of these disciplines of science affects the others since no branch of science actually exists in a disciplinary vacuum. This class will explore the roles that tectonic setting and local seawater chemistry play in affecting biological diversity. The students will meet together first in classroom sessions to learn about these relationships and then observe the practical applications of the class lectures while in Mexico.

The trip takes place May 12 through May 20 and will cost about $2,900, which covers transportation, lodging, food, and some equipment rental. Students also have the option to scuba dive if they certify before the trip, but they will need to pay for the equipment on their own. Professor Goldsmith assures everyone that this will be an amazing trip where you will not only get hands-on experience in the field, but will also have plenty of free time to hang out on the beach that is right outside of the resort they will be staying at. “If you roll out of bed in the morning you will practically get your feet wet,” he said.

This trip is cross-listed as Honors, Biology, and Chemistry. Taking it for Honors credit will fulfill four credit hours toward the Honors Degree. For more information contact David Goldsmith, Judy Rogers, or Robyn Hyde.

If you still want to take an Honors class during May Term but prefer to remain closer to home, then you may want to consider “Hitler & the Holocaust,” taught by Mike Markowski and Michael Popich. This course will explore the causes, historical context, and results of the Holocaust. Professor Markowski said the course will examine Hitler and the Nazis, dealing with them fairly as humans in history (which they were) and not devils incarnate (which they were not). It will also explore the “past on present” to illuminate modern anti-Semitic movements along with Osama bin-Laden’s writings against the Jews and Americans. The class will meet Mondays and Wednesdays from 9-12. For more information contact Mike Markowski or Michael Popich.

These are only a few of the additional Honors classes that will be available, illustrating the intellectual variety within the program. By including such diverse courses, the Honors program stays true to its mission of giving students a truly liberal education.

–Jessica Shurtleff

Honors Program Study Abroad Initiative

A group of Honors faculty, students, and administrators, in concert with the college’s development office and two Westminster Board of Trustee members, has been working on an initiative to design and fund an annual capstone study abroad experience for all active Honors students in their junior year. This month-long, Honors travel initiative would employ the hallmarks of Honors education: active, student-centered learning; interdisciplinary approaches to challenging topics and texts; and team-taught seminars. Only it would take place in a foreign city! Do you know of any individuals, corporations or foundations that might be supportive of such an initiative? The program’s hallmarks are 1) academic excellence and 2) the transformative possibilities of international experience. If you would like a fuller description of the plan or know someone we should meet to discuss the idea, please contact Prof. Richard Badenhausen, Director of the Honors program, at rjb@westminster-college.edu or 801-832-2460.
Imagine a small, apparently dark, segment of sky. Now, imagine that section filled with billions of sparkling globes, glittering clouds, swirling bodies of light, and realize that each one of those represents another galaxy that exists where scientists once thought there was nothing. That was the backdrop at this semester’s “Pizza with Profs,” where 24 Honors students in attendance were not only given food for their stomachs, but food for thought by Professor Bonnie Baxter.

Professor Baxter, introduced to the group as “the goddess of the Great Salt Lake,” researches micro-organisms in our local land-locked sea, and is investigating the possibility of discovering life on Mars through her research. She spent the seminar challenging her audience with thought-provoking issues: Is it possible that life once existed on Mars? Is it possible that tiny organisms frozen in the red planet’s polar caps could show that Earth has not always been the only planet capable of supporting life? These questions gave some students the heebie-jeebies, but intrigued others to make queries and expand on their knowledge of life beyond Earth.

In true Honors style, Professor Baxter kept the atmosphere of the lecture relaxed and compelling by beginning the evening with “clustering.” She broke the students up into groups of five or six and asked them to discuss their thoughts on life in outer space, on Mars, and on the universe in general. This generated conversations involving everything from complicated theories of the expanding universe to the ability of gold fish to survive short periods of time in a freezer. Professor Baxter then invited the groups to express their ideas (the gold fish idea remained unshared), and then used their ideas as a springboard into discussion of what is known about the universe beyond…which, it turns out, isn’t much.

From there, Professor Baxter moved the conversation back to earth—or rather, a few miles beneath the earth—where not too long ago she discovered chunks of salt over 250 million years old. Within these salt rocks, microorganisms were found still living in pockets of fluid. Pictures taken of these microorganisms showed DNA viruses—in other words, preserved miniature ecosystems. These examples, combined with evidence that halophilic (salt-loving) organisms are capable of surviving in space, suggest that halophilic microorganisms would be perfectly capable of still being alive, frozen in the ice of Mars. These pieces of the past, according to the fascinating research of Professor Baxter, could lead to mind-boggling discoveries in the future.

- Meghan Hekker
The Honors Council has just finalized guidelines and implementation is set for January 1, 2007. Dr. Badenhausen clarified the real purpose of the fund saying, “This program continues the Honors program’s tradition of mentoring students and helping them sharpen their thinking about post-graduate plans. While the monetary support is certainly a benefit for students, the program is also designed to help students reflect upon and target what they hope to get out of the graduate school experience.” Although students are certainly not held to their decisions, the Council does need to see that the student is worth funding and holds some focused goals. The grants are not limited to any class standing, but each student can only receive one grant during their Honors career. The application must be completed and turned in electronically to Dr. Badenhausen no later than three weeks before travel commences, and then the Honors Council will act on the proposal.

Ray Bradford, currently a senior in the Honors program, is set to graduate in the spring and is considering many schools outside the state of Utah. When asked his opinion, Ray interjected, “I think the Grad School Fund is a great idea and much needed.” Seth Longhurst, a junior with senior standing, hopes to enter an MBA program in either California or Chicago sometime after his Spring 2007 graduation. When asked for his opinion Seth stated, “It is very beneficial for students to visit schools, meet with the deans, professors, and students and get a feel for the institution, but it is often cost prohibitive. The grants will help lessen that problem.”

-Marie Robinson
Orientation Engages the Mind and Body

New Honors students started the year off running – literally. At the Honors program orientation on August 18th, they scoured the campus for clues in a scavenger-hunt race and later cut across the village green to capture their opponents’ flag. They also participated in an interdisciplinary “Science of Yoga” workshop. “A common thread of last year’s evaluations,” said Honors program Director Richard Badenhausen, “was a request that more active endeavors be mixed in with the academic sessions so that students didn’t feel like ‘blobs’ at the end of the day.” True to the Honors spirit of innovation and progress, the twelve Peer Mentors met with Badenhausen to modify the orientation experience so that it would better involve new students while still showing them the ropes of the Honors program. Freshman Bryan Craven said, “I really enjoyed the spectrum of activities offered this afternoon,” while Omid Adibnazar added “capture the flag was awesome.” Overall, the class of 33 new students seemed to agree.

When introducing new students to the real meat of the Honors program, tradition proved to be wonderfully efficient. The Peer Mentors felt the customary common-read discussion groups were a great success. This year’s text, Tracy Kidder’s *Mountains Beyond Mountains*, profiles a doctor’s fight to improve health care in impoverished Haiti. In four Peer Mentor-led groups, students gained their first taste of a Humanities class; they discussed poverty, politics, and the attitudes and responsibilities of the privileged within the context of how one person with a vision can make a difference in the world. Students also participated in the usual opening Q&A session with their parents, meals with peer mentor groups, and self-portrait exercise, among many other activities. Meanwhile, Honors parents enjoyed a lunch with Provost Cid Seidelman and Alumni Director Dana Tumpowsky, the highlight of which was a talk by “experienced” Honors parent, Regie Bradford, mom to senior Honors student and ASWC President Ray Bradford.

At the end of the day, new students and mentors alike were ready to crash in the lounge of Olwell Hall and watch “Ferris Buhler’s Day Off.” Like the movie’s high-school hero, their day had been fast-paced and action-packed, but they weren’t headed towards graduation. Instead, armed with new-found friends and an insider’s scoop on the seminars, living arts events, and program resources, the new Honors students were well on their way to a successful experience at Westminster College.

-Michele Barber

Honors Program Welcomes Parents

College orientation typically includes moving into residence halls, picking up text books, meeting faculty and staff, and playing “getting-to-know-you” games; but this year’s Honors program orientation helped parents adjust to college life too. While students got to know each other and become familiar with the campus, parents attended a luncheon with faculty, staff and other parents of Honors students.

Westminster Provost Cid Seidelman shared the feelings he had when his daughter left home for college. Regie Bradford, a Westminster Honors program parent, talked about the transformation she’s seen in her son Ray—crediting the college’s experiential learning environment, opportunities for participation in student life, and the supportive Honors program.

After lunch, parents took a walk through the historic Westminster College neighborhood with Dana Tumpowsky, director of alumni and parent relations. “Parents have a lot of questions—about the college, about Salt Lake City, about the outdoor activities and resources nearby Westminster,” Tumpowsky said. “Our stroll gave these parents a chance to talk with Westminster staff and learn about the college, city, and community. We want parents to know the college has resources available for them, too. They are an important part of what we do at Westminster.”

-Michele Barber

Freshmen take a moment to relax and practice yoga with professors Nina Vought and Bonnie Baxter

Freshmen Fun at Orientation

Freshman Mary Enge and her family enjoy Honors Orientation

-Anna Hansen
Matt Polichette

Matt Polichette is currently a first-year Honors student at Westminster College. Matt is ambitiously pursuing a major in computer science with a minor in math. With the knowledge he garners in these two areas, Matt is heading toward a career in engineering. As evidenced by these goals, Matt obviously has a scientific, number-loving mind. At Utah’s North Summit High School, Matt was an officer on the math team, a peer leader, a member of student government, a member of the National Honor Society, a participant on the Junior Engineering Team, and served on the Governing Youth Council. While participating in all of these activities, he also earned an Associates degree.

At Westminster, Matt does a lot more than study. He is a member of the Ski & Snowboard Club, enjoys ASWC Wild Wednesdays, and likes to party. Of course, like any intelligent Honors student, he always parties responsibly. However, the weekend before a Humanities paper is due, you won’t find Matt out on the town—he is too busy writing.

Matt loves the people at Westminster and describes the amazing students as one of the college’s best features. “People are pretty cool here; I love the social atmosphere,” Matt said. Yet socializing has not been his most interesting Westminster experience thus far. He has done intense soul searching while talking with Professor Peter Conwell. Matt defines these deep conversations with his advisor as his most life-changing experience in college. This is due to the fact that the conversations resulted in the setting aside of his previous future plans and a complete rethink of his career path.

Matt says that the hardest part of college is being involved in the Honors program. Yet this is precisely why Matt chose to this path. “I really like to challenge myself,” he stated. Clearly, Matt is not an average guy. Between socializing with other students, devoting himself to succeeding in class, conquering the challenge of Honors, and working for the college, somehow he manages to juggle all of his activities and commitments and still find time to sleep.

-Paula Porter

Faculty Profile

Professor Chuck Tripp has been involved in the Westminster College Honors program from its inception 20 years ago. In fact, he taught one of the first seminars in 1986 with Professor John Watkins. He has seen the program grow from freshmen classes as small as thirteen to today’s typical entering classes of 35 students each year. Tripp holds a doctorate in political science and, in addition to teaching the “Political Economy of Conflict” Honors seminar, he has taught every course in political science multiple times and a variety of special topics courses including Politics of Argentina, Environmental Politics, and American Federalism.

However, Tripp isn’t only here to teach information; he is carrying his theories beyond the classroom and showing by example how to be an informed and politically active citizen. In 1989, he published a children’s book titled Just Mole, which he describes as a fictional response to Nietzsche’s “ unbending” portrayal of extreme individualism. The main character is an adolescent mole, a “loner” who is at the same time inexorably linked to his community. Tripp is currently working on a draft of indictments against President Bush, while seeking to dispel the attitude that all charges of corruption are only “political attacks” and can be dismissed with that explanation. “It’s important,” he says, “to know about our legal system, what it provides for us, and to have a sense of what’s illegal and what’s immoral – to have a sense that it matters.”

Looking to the future, Tripp sees the world as growing increasingly materialistic and consumer-driven: people expect to have it all now, and spend more time working to increase their spending ability. He says this trend is “consuming people’s thinking processes” and displacing more important issues. “Political ignorance exists because it’s a lot of work NOT to be politically ignorant,” he said. He cites family responsibility, work, and busy lives as common reasons people fail to vote or be involved, but adds, “as I get older I’m less likely to see those things as a valid excuse for ignorance.” To dispel this ignorance and find a clearer perspective to understand our society, he advises, “Read as much as possible. Read good books.” He also applauds the bumper-sticker credo “Question Authority” on the grounds that so much of what we are told is subject to interpretation. Reading, questioning, and urging his students to do so, Professor Tripp continues to be a great asset to the Honors program community.

-Paula Porter
A (Brief) History of Nunemaker Place and its Namesake

Current home to the Honors program, Nunemaker Place was originally constructed in 1977 as a space for quiet meditation and cultural events. Built for $300,000, the structure was named a winner in a design contest administered that year by the Western Mountain Regional Conference of Architects. In 2002, the Utah chapter of the American Institute of Architects gave the building an award for structures that are older than a quarter century and still significant architecturally. Over the years Nunemaker has hosted weddings, held classes, provided the setting for poetry readings, and served as an intimate space for chamber concerts.

The building was made possible by a gift from Irene Nunemaker, a longtime executive with Avon cosmetics, who was originally from Kansas but lived for a time in Salt Lake City. A devoted Presbyterian, Nunemaker was connected to Westminster College, a former Presbyterian mission school, through college trustee Rev. A. Walton Roth, also a Kansas native. Known also for her interest in the cultural and artistic scenes, and philanthropic work, Miss Nunemaker provided funds for similar buildings at a number of college campuses across the country, including the Honors building at the University of Kansas, which is named Nunemaker Center.

Irene Nunemaker’s donations have also funded a camp for developmentally disabled youth in New York, as well as many buildings in Kansas, including nursing homes, a YWCA building to aid battered women, and the Nunemaker Dance Studio at the Topeka Performing Arts Center. In 1977, she was awarded an honorary doctorate of Humanities from Westminster College. Irene Nunemaker died on July 5, 1996.

The building at Westminster College was designed by Salt Lake City architects Martin Brixen and James Christopher, who first took Irene Nunemaker on a tour of buildings they had recently constructed at the Snowbird ski area. Visitors familiar with those Snowbird structures will immediately recognize some similarities in the design that was very characteristic of the 1970s: a heavy use of concrete, experimental use of indirect and natural lighting—especially through large windows—horizontal cedar on the walls, and non-traditional angled walls and facades.

Outlining Irene Nunemaker’s sole requirement for the construction of the building, Salt Lake City architect James Christopher told the Salt Lake Tribune in 2003, “She wanted a space that could be used for any number of things, including just to ‘be’ in. She wanted the building to provide a sense of quiet and reflection and contemplation.” Although the building was never used as a chapel, student tour guides who want to annoy Professor Badenhausen should stick their heads into the building and refer to it as “the old chapel.”

The philanthropist’s vision for the space has been fulfilled as the Honors program now enters its third year in the building, with students lounging, studying, reading email, and engaging in discussion. One section of the fall Humanities seminar meets regularly on the lower floor, while evening programming keeps the building hopping at night. This fall, over a dozen functions for Honors students have taken place in the building, ranging from student research presentations to a diversity workshop to an overnight film evening, complete with scary movies and ghoulish legends delivered by folklorist Dave Stanley. Oh, did you not know that Nunemaker Place is haunted?
Dear Friends and Colleagues,

As members of the Honors program, you have all proven yourselves to be high-achieving students. That level of achievement indicates a fruitful future for each and every one of you. Yet, as you move forward to meet that future, take time to remember the experiences and individuals who have helped bring you to this point. Whether it’s your first year at Westminster or your last (hopefully!), celebrate your opportunities and embrace each as a new and exciting challenge. Rise to meet these challenges and the remainder of your life will be just as successful and fulfilling as the beginning has been. Good luck in all your endeavors, and remember that there are always those of us who are rooting for you in your corner.

Sincerely,
Your SHC

On Thursday, October 19 many Honors students gathered in Nunemaker for a spooky night of stories. Dave Stanley, a Westminster English professor, told some of Salt Lake City’s urban legends, speaking of haunted hospitals and graves marked with the number 666. Students even learned about Westminster’s haunted history, including the secret ghost-life of our own Honors program home – Nunemaker Place.

To further liven up the party, the Student Honors Council provided marshmallows and other makings for s’mores, resulting in sticky faces and hands for all. Students exchanged their own stories: John Cook narrated his experience at a lake haunted by boat accident victims and Gus Paras told of a “murder car” (a car suspected of causing the brutal murder of its owners).

Finally, some retired home and the brave remained to watch scary movie classics such as The Shining, The Exorcist, and Interview with a Vampire. Oddly enough, the VCR began refusing to work around midnight. Jessica McKelvie, a sophomore, jokingly wondered if “the ghosts of Nunemaker possessed the VCR once we had over-stayed our welcome.” However, the students refused to let the spooky unseen spoil their night of fun. Many remained until morning.

Overall, the event was a successful celebration of the Halloween season and an opportunity to bring the Honors program community closer together. Freshman John Cook remarked, “we came together (at Urban Legends Night) in a way that would have been difficult in any other setting.” Of course, nothing bonds people more than staying together in a dark, haunted room for hours on end.

-Harayah Coleman & Jesse Resnick

Meet the SHC

Marie Robinson (President)
Class: Junior
Major: Political Science
Favorite Ice Cream: Peanut Butter & Chocolate Swirl

Lahdan Heidarian (Vice Pres.)
Class: Junior
Major: Psychology
Favorite Ice Cream: Chocolate Chip Cookie Dough

Amy Burns (Secretary)
Class: Sophomore
Major: Political Science
Favorite Ice Cream: Jamoca Almond Fudge

Chert Griffith (Treasurer)
Class: Sophomore
Major: Biology
Favorite Ice Cream: Blue Raspberry Sherbet

Honors Students Awaken Dead History

Honors students Amanda Grant, Lena Bain, Lauren McCrady, and Valerie Yoder roast marshmallows and listen to ghost stories at Urban Legends Night.
A part of me wishes I could narrate a story full of sorrowful injustices, and challenges overcome despite all odds; thinking that a past like that would give my opinions credibility, perhaps even rendering my advice worthy. But quite frankly, I have been spoiled. True, Jr. High was miserable and I seem to have a knack for publicly embarrassing myself, yet, at the end of the day, I have always had what I needed, and for the most part, got what I wanted.

Born into a life that would meet all my basic needs it is logical then that I would continue to live comfortably. But maybe that's not enough. I believe there is more to life than comfort and personal desires. I trust many of you can relate. Life always has its roller coaster of emotions and unpleasantries, but when compared to people in many other parts of the world, and even parts of this country, it is as if others’ sorrows and challenges must be judged by an entirely different standard.

I sometimes feel guilty that I haven’t suffered to the same degree as much of humanity, but guilt of this kind is a fruitless and burdensome torture of the mind. It is a torture that only action can alleviate. Which brings me to my real point, that of the common maxim, “To those whom much is given, much is required.”

The past is preparation for the future not only in lessons learned, but in blessings we’ve been given. I like to think of life as an investment. The more deposited, the greater the interest pays off. For the past twenty-one years, my life has consisted of large deposits of opportunities, education, and encouragement that many people, especially women, could only dream of. Needless to say, the interest I should be paying is a generous amount. The comfort of my past has given me the strength, the courage, and the tools necessary to make my future one of service. Now it’s up to me to live beyond personal challenges and take on the challenges afflicting the greater society so that maybe, just maybe, I can make another’s life as blessed as mine.
Currently, society’s interaction with nature is one of dominance; a relationship inevitably leading to both the destruction of the environment and our own well-being. In order to move away from a historically abusive relationship with nature, it is important to recognize our daily impact on the environment. The key to understanding this relationship lies in our conscious awareness of the discourse we engage in to discuss and write about nature. Benjamin Lee Whorf wrote in *Language, Thought and Reality* that “people act about situations in ways which are like the ways they talk about them” (148). The language we use to describe an entity inevitably affects the way in which we relate to it.

Historically, writers and authors have characterized nature as a feminine entity. In the 1951 Broadway musical, “Paint Your Wagon,” the lyrics of Alan Jay Lerner’s song called “They Call the Wind Mariah” begins, “Away out here they have a name for rain and wind and fire. The rain is Tess, the fire’s Joe, and they call the wind Mariah.” Lerner’s femininization of wind and rain in “They Call the Wind Mariah” is just one of many examples of writers feminizing nature. We can see other examples like the Sierra Madre Mountains, meaning “Mother Mountains,” and we often hear the earth referred to as “Mother Earth.”

Engendered environmental discourse is prevalent throughout many eras of great ideological, historical and political change. For this reason, it is no surprise that the use of such language has generated significant and differing interpretations and responses. Carolyn Merchant’s *The Death of Nature* (1980), and Annette Kolodny’s *The Lay of the Land* (1975), argue that historically, the literary references of feminized nature have only given man an impetus to destroy and oppress the environment. However, other modern texts seem to demonstrate the opposite conclusion. Regardless of the position one decides to take, it is first important to acknowledge the arguments on both sides of the issue by examining the language we use, the context in which we use the language, and the actions that it instigates. Using Kolodny and Merchant’s text as a lens, this essay will examine the use of feminized language in the Wilderness Act of 1964 and Terry Tempest Williams’s *Refuge*. In the latter, Williams feminizes nature, and in doing so, places the environment on a proverbial pedestal to be protected and valued. In addition, the Wilderness Act of 1964, although it indirectly employs the “nature as woman” metaphor in a protective manner, falls short of properly reclaiming the metaphor that Merchant and Kolodny criticize. To reclaim, by definition, means to redefine and reinvent the meaning and connotation of a word. For example, the gay community has reclaimed the once derogatory word *queer*, and now employs it as a positive word. Similarly, the nature as woman metaphor can be reclaimed from previous negativity and used for positive, protective ends.

My examination of these texts reveals contrary viewpoints and indicates that the positions on the implications of feminizing nature are not all together conclusive. Moreover, the previous misuse of the nature as woman metaphor, criticized by Merchant and Kolodny, may be potentially reclaimed through Williams’s text. However, analysis of the texts indicates that perhaps the responsibility for reclamation is better left in the hands of modern authors and writers, not legislators and government agents.

First, it is important to lay out a definition of the term “nature.” Kate Soper in *What is Nature?* argues that “nature refers to everything which is not human and distinguished from the work of humanity. Thus ‘nature’ is opposed to culture, to history, to convention, to what is artificially worked or produced, in short, to everything which is defining the order of humanity” (15). Within the context of this paper, Soper’s definition does not apply. Nature, although separate from the work of humanity, is not completely detached from humanity. Nature affects humans and humans affect nature, so we are inaccurate when we speak about them as totally separate, non-connected entities. Contrary to Soper’s definition, the acknowledgement of the deep-rooted connection between humans and nature through linguistic analysis is essential to understanding nature itself and creating an impetus for its protection. When we view ourselves as connected to nature, we see an obligation to protect the environment.

More often than not, we learn of our relationship to our surroundings through written and oral discourse. Consequently, in order to reform our historically destructive viewpoint, we must revise our language and discourse. Just as the civil rights and feminist movements of the mid-20th century altered the meanings, rights to usage, and connotations of certain words and discourse, modern environmental authors may be reclaiming the nature as woman metaphor as a way of bringing to light previous destruction. In addition, this new reclamation of the nature as woman metaphor provides an impetus for reparative action and a therapeutic discourse for the relationship between humans and nature.

Kolodny believes the earliest explorers and settlers of America were seeking a quintessential paradise with which to escape the darkness of “the grinding poverty of previous European existence” (6). In order to heal the wounds caused by the step-mother Europe, America was experienced as a “single dominating metaphor: regression from the cares of adult life and a return to the primal warmth of womb or breast in a feminine landscape” (6). The land became mother, nurturer, healer, and provider. However, Kolodny argues that America produced a pastoral literature different from Europe’s. Rather than being a metaphor used merely in writing, settlers began to manifest the nature as woman
metaphor through daily experience and interact with the land in ways that paralleled the nature-oppressive discourse. Unrelentingly dominating Mother Nature, settlers began expanding, “transforming the virgin territories into something else – a farm, a village, a road, a canal, a railway, a mine, a factory, a city, and finally, an urban nation” (7). The expansion resulted in an inherent internal and external conflict between man’s outer “necessity” for resources and his inner need for comfort, escape from current market demands, and the future unknown. Man became the incestuous rapist of his own virgin mother.

In *Refuge*, Terry Tempest Williams tells of a conversation she has with her father and brother in regards to her deceased mother, Diane. She writes:

“My father no longer hunts. Neither do my brothers. “I can no longer participate in the killing,” Dad said. “When I see the deer, I see Diane.”

Hank put his gun down years ago. So did Dan. Steve carries his rifle into the hills, but he has not shot a deer since 1983. (251)

Williams’s father relates nature to the woman in his life, and in doing so, sees himself incapable of destroying it. By mentioning this conversation with her father, Williams demonstrates that nature can be experienced as feminine and still be satisfying and non-abusive. It is in viewing nature as feminine that her father refrains from destroying that which represents nature – the deer. Williams’s text challenges Kolodny’s original contention that the masculine relationship to a feminized nature leads to the devastation and abuse of nature.

Williams reclaims the nature as woman metaphor when she draws parallels between the destruction caused to the land and her mother’s body. She writes about the flooding of the Great Salt Lake saying, “I could never have anticipated its rise” (22), and juxtaposes the lake with her mother in the very next sentence saying “My mother was aware of a rise on the left side of her abdomen” (22, italics mine).

As the lake rose, the tumor in her mother’s body rose. As the rising tumors took over the landscape of her mother’s body, the rise in the lake took over the landscape of the birds and the area around the Great Salt Lake. In the end of the novel, Williams comes to find out that the source of the tumors in the women of her family is a result of nuclear fallout that her family witnessed on a road trip north of Las Vegas. The incessant mechanized destruction man causes affects not only the body-earth, but the human body.

Writer Cassandra Kircher, in “Rethinking Dichotomies in Terry Tempest Williams’s *Refuge*,” argued that “By describing women characters who easily commune with nature, Williams taps into what Sherry Ortner identifies as cultural constructs that envision women as closer to nature because of their body and natural procreative functions” (Gaard and Murphy 159), and contends that, “By perpetuating these woman/land connections that Annette Kolodny and others have labeled as regressive – […] – Williams, in a sense, strengthens harmful stereotypes” (Gaard and Murphy 160). I do not agree with Kircher. Feminizing nature may encourage stereotyping; however, it seems apparent that Kircher overlooked the broad message of Williams work when making her argument. Williams does anything but support the destruction of the environment. In fact, at the end of the book she seems to call the reader to action when she tells of trespassing on a nuclear power plant boundary with nine others in an act of civil disobedience. She is not ready to sit by idly and watch the devastation occur. An author uses “rage” to describe themselves or their characters when they are not content with the situation. Had she merely described the women as victims, she may have perpetuated the social construct of dominance over women and nature. But she does not. Instead she says “we can heal ourselves” (35).

Contrary to Kircher’s contention, Williams feminizes nature as a way of reconnecting the reader, the human, with the land from previous obscurity. Although it may seem easy for Kircher to dismiss Williams’ language choice as “normative” and “existent within a social construct,” perhaps we should consider that a positive use of the land/body connection renews our individual sense of connection to the environment and in turn, summons us to protect that which we have previously lost and become detached from.

Clearly, there is no definitive conclusion about the implications of feminizing nature. This essay simply provides a new reading of texts and a demonstration that a metaphor can be reclaimed in order to benefit the object it previously destroyed. The future health of the environment lies in the existence of new paradigms and new viewpoints on our place in the world. Most of the change begins with the written and oral words we choose to describe nature. The responsibility for changing the way we feminize nature rests in the hands of authors and writers world-wide. Terry Tempest Williams expresses this idea best at the end of her book when she spoke of her arrest for civil disobedience. As one of the officers handcuffed her wrists, another frisked her body and found a pen and a pad of paper tucked inside her boot. When asked what they were, she responded with one shocking and powerful word – “weapons” (290).

**Works Cited**


Musings

From Your Editors . . .

This year, as editors of the Honorable Mention, we would like to take a brief moment to gloat a bit (we promise it will be short!). This year our newsletter won second place in the National Honors Collegiate Council Newsletter Contest student publication division. The newsletter from 2004 won third place, so moving up in the ranks was very exciting for all of us. Thanks to all of you in the Honors program who made this victory possible!

And now, let’s continue to the “honorable” advice portion of our editorial spiel:

We may wish we could forget many events in our past—like that test we completely bombed, or that disastrous date we suffered through back in freshman year. But every experience in our lives gives us an opportunity to learn and grow. Failing a test gives us incentive to study harder for the next one or to seek help from a professor. Going on a really horrible date makes us more aware of who we choose to date in the future.

The Honors program challenges us every day. The challenges we face now will help prepare us for our lives outside of Westminster College. From those getting ready to head into their last semester at Westminster (like Jessica), as well as for those looking forward to finishing their first, we encourage you to take every experience here at Westminster, and every experience with the Honors program, and learn from it. Use the good and the bad to make your life richer in the long run. Embracing past accomplishments as well as past mistakes will undoubtedly make you stronger in the future.

Honorably Yours,

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