

Nature Mysticism: the writings of Traherne, Whitman, Jefferies and Krishnamurti



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Abstract

The purpose of this essay is to attempt an investigation of what a 'nature mysticism' might be as indicated primarily by four writers: Traherne, Whitman, Jefferies, and Krishnamurti. These have been chosen because their writings are substantially mystical or at least because their mysticism is more easily identified than with others such as Wordsworth and a whole range of other writers and poets through the ages.

Keywords: Nature mysticism, Thomas Traherne, Walt Whitman, Richard Jefferies, Jiddu Krishnamurti, William James, Evelyn Underhill.

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1. Introduction

1.1. Mysticism: Some Definitions

Any writer on mysticism will inevitably bring certain assumptions with them to the subject, so it is important to state these at the outset. While broadly sympathetic to the definitions of mysticism given by James, Underhill, Zaehner and Happold (whose ideas are explored in more detail below), I am generally interested in a mysticism that does not require either the religious, the paranormal, or the occult. Hence no great effort will be expended to justify the concept of a nature mysticism against the very real (to them) worries that an orthodox Christian might have; nor on the

other hand will it readily be ceded that nature mysticism might expand to include Blake's or Steiner's angels or any other occult or supernatural phenomenon. I also have to state that I accept the perennialist view (popularised by Huxley) as against the contextual view (promoted by Katz et. al.). The perennialist view holds that at core we are looking at one phenomenon called mysticism as against many, so that any taxonomy of mysticism is more a taxonomy of paths than of ends. On the other hand the traditionalist view (epitomised by the works of Frithjof Schuon) is not useful here as it assumes that any 'real' experience of God has to come via established religion, so it would neither accept the importance of Traherne, Whitman, Jefferies, or Krishnamurti, or even the concept of nature mysticism.

Another important caveat on a too-ready acceptance of the above scholars' definitions of mysticism is that their definitions are perhaps too bound up with mystical *experience*. Although a discussion of discrete experiences, usually understood to be in some way 'peak' experiences, is useful, it obscures the fact that the lives of the mystics need also to be characterised in terms of their continuum or orientation.

As a rough working definition to begin the discussion of nature mysticism we can say that it is an expansivity triggered by Nature. This expansivity will include not only discrete experiences (such as certain raptures often cited as examples of nature mysticism) but a mystical continuum or orientation in which Nature plays a role.

12. *Via Positiva and Via Negativa*

Although the place of nature mysticism in existing taxonomies of mysticism will be explored later on, it is worth introducing at this point the distinction, widely held to be useful, between *via positiva* and *via negativa*. *Via negativa* is the more easily defined of the two: it is the path to mystical union via the denying of all manifest things. The work of Dionysius the Areopagite is perhaps the best example in a Western context, but the same principles are found as far afield as in branches of Hinduism ('neti, neti' – meaning 'not this, not that' is its Indian formulation); in Buddhism (in the very concept of *nirvana* or nothingness); and in modern sages like Krishnamurti and Douglas Harding. *Via negativa* carries with it associations of withdrawal, solitude, contemplation, silence, simplicity, and renunciation, though these are often caricatured, as in the supposed Christian 'heresy' of quietism.

Via positiva is the path of expansion, a growing capacity to lose boundaries and temporality until one becomes the Whole. Perhaps the best exponent of this path is Whitman (though as this may be an unfamiliar proposition, it will be defended in more detail below). One might more readily recognise *via positiva* in an ecstatic like Rumi or Kabir. Clearly nature mysticism will be more readily associated with *via positiva* than *via negativa*, but it does not in the least require one aspect common in *via positiva*: the devotional orientation, or at least not a theistic devotion.

The distinction between *via positiva* and *via negativa* is a difficult one, and even more so the relationship between this distinction and those between *bhakti* and *jnani*, heart and intellect, love and awareness, and theistic and monistic mysticism, and so on. All of these are useful signposts however.

13. The Role of Nature in Mysticism

If nature mysticism is perhaps more closely related to *via positiva* however, then what is the role of Nature in this form of mysticism? Some pointers as to what we are looking for are needed here. We have mentioned that Nature might be a trigger, that is a trigger to a discrete mystical experience, and that it might also be part of the continuum or orientation of a mystic. We can easily investigate the first case, as there are many recorded accounts of mystical experiences that took place as a result of the contemplation of a mountain, sunset, or even of humbler commonplace Nature: these are ecstatic or sublime moments. How can we learn about Nature as part of the continuum of the mystic however? The answer may lie in a simple characterisation of a mystic's writings: they may be pedagogical, or they may be the spontaneous celebration of the delight they find in their condition. This distinction is very important because the pedagogical is more often a picture of the mystic's audience than of their inner world – for some such as Krishnamurti there is no allowance made for the listener, while for others such as Gurdjieff it is almost impossible to disentangle pedagogical device from the real teaching. Hence to understand the role of Nature in the continuum of the mystic can take some detective work.

Nature as a trigger to mystical experience can be understood, as identified earlier, as part of an expansivity. It may also cause the resonance of some faculty that goes beyond time, so that as a *cause* of the loss of boundaries and as a *cause* of the loss of the sense of time Nature somehow works on certain individuals. Nature is vast, though this is often lost on city dwellers, and it is timeless in the sense that it regenerates itself. It is also *prodigious*, and this is part of *via positiva*: Arjuna's overwhelming experience of the cosmic nature of Krishna in the *Bhagavad Gita* is partly due to the abundance of creation that is manifest through Krishna. The views of Nature that we shall come across in nature mysticism are not romanticised views of Nature however, even if they may seem so on the surface. Nature can also be seen as the destroyer of the false, and this is important in Buddhist mysticism for example – the Buddha nature is revealed once the imperfections of vision are removed, rather than by grace as in the Christian tradition.

2. Scholars on Nature Mysticism

Recent debates amongst scholars of mysticism have focused on the perennialist / contextualist argument in which nature mysticism plays no important role. Hence it is more useful to look back at earlier scholars like Bucke, James, and Underhill who provided much of the basis at the turn of the century for later work; we also look at the work of an obscure author, J. Edward Mercer, and R.C. Zaehner, who wrote on nature mysticism in connection with drugs.

2.1. William James

In the *Varieties of Religious Experience* William James introduced an influential distinction between the religion of the healthy-minded and that of the sick soul, locating nature mysticism (without an emphasis on it by name however) in the healthy-minded. The distinction is useful because it helps focus on the problems of evil and innocence, both of which are inextricably linked with nature mysticism. James was unaware of the work of Jefferies or Traherne, and wrote his *Varieties* long before Krishnamurti was published, but he knew of Whitman and in a way that is not well understood today. At the end of the nineteenth century 'Whitmanism' as a proto-religion was much discussed; it is only more recently that Whitman studies has become merely literary, and James was reacting to the earlier debates. He makes this comment on Whitman:

In some individuals optimism may become quasi-pathological. The capacity for even a transitory sadness or a momentary humility seems cut off from them as by a kind of congenital anaesthesia. The supreme contemporary example of such an inability to feel evil is of course Walt Whitman.¹

This grossly misrepresents Whitman as we shall see later. James continues:

Thus it has come about that many persons to-day regard Walt Whitman as the restorer of the eternal natural religion. He has infected them with his own love of comrades, with his own gladness that he and they exist. Societies are actually formed for his cult; a periodical organ exists for its propagation, in which the lines of orthodoxy and heterodoxy are already beginning to be drawn; hymns are written by others in his peculiar prosody; and he is even explicitly compared to the founder of the Christian religion, not altogether to the advantage of the latter.²

We shall return to James's view of Whitman later, but it is interesting to note that he uses the term 'eternal natural religion'. Throughout James's chapter on the healthy-minded he attempts an even-handedness but we can see that his instinct is with the religion of the sick soul. I believe that James taps into a universal interest in evil, the morbid, and the penitent; this interest makes *via negativa* such a strong current in mysticism. Nature mysticism should not be assumed to require the naive

healthy-mindedness of James however. In his chapter on the sick soul James puts forward ('without judgement' he tells us) the view that 'naturism' is pessimistic because 'Old age has the last word: the purely naturalistic look at life, however enthusiastically it may begin, is sure to end in sadness.'³ (Modern adherents to this view gleefully cite the case of Whitman in his old age as an example.) 'Naturism' in this context is far removed from the concerns of nature mysticism.

James underpins his healthy/sick dichotomy with a further distinction: between the once-born and twice-born – the former are permanently in an innocent state of happiness and the latter regain it through some form of salvation. This forms the basis of two types of religion for him: naturalism and salvationism, and we shall consider this view in the nature mysticism of Traherne, Whitman and Jefferies. Before leaving James it is useful to comment on another important contribution he made to the study of mysticism: his four 'marks' of mystical experience. These are: ineffability, noetic quality, transiency and passivity.⁴ These marks have been largely adopted by later writers on mysticism, and perhaps have set the trend to consider mystical experience at the expense of mystical orientation. James concludes on the general traits of the mystic range of consciousness:

It is on the whole pantheistic and optimistic, or at least the opposite of pessimistic. It is anti-naturalistic, and harmonizes best with twice-bornness and so-called other-worldly states of mind.⁵

James's dismissal of Whitman, his obvious preference for the sick soul, and his emphasis on mystical experience do not diminish however his contribution to the study of mysticism, in particular his recognition of the authority that mystical experience brings to the experienter.

2.2. Evelyn Underhill

Evelyn Underhill first published her *Mysticism – The Nature and Development of Spiritual Consciousness* in 1911, some nine years after James' *Varieties*. It built on the work of James and Bucke (who also influenced James); it focused on mysticism; it was broader in its sources, though it did not venture further than the Religions of the Book (considering mystics of the Far East to be nihilists); and it shared the emphasis on mystical experience (adding further 'marks' to James' scheme). Of the four main protagonists in this essay Underhill was aware of Whitman and Jefferies, neither of whom she acknowledged as full-blown mystics. Unlike James she placed no great emphasis on the distinction between the healthy-minded and the sick soul, seeing in the mystics a universal earnestness and determination in their pursuit of

the absolute. There are many sympathetic references to Nature none of which make the association with naive healthy-mindedness that James implies. Here are some examples:

Such use of visible nature as the stuff of ontological perceptions, the medium whereby the self reaches out to the Absolute, is not rare in the history of mysticism. The mysterious vitality of trees, the silent magic of the forest, the strange and steady cycle of its life, possess in a peculiar degree this power of unleashing the human soul: are curiously friendly to its cravings, minister to its inarticulate needs. Unsullied by the corroding touch of consciousness, that life can make a contact with the "great life of All"; and through its mighty rhythms man can receive a message concerning the true and timeless World of "all that is, and was, and evermore shall be." Plant life of all kinds, indeed from the "flower in the cran-nied wall" to the "Woods of Westermain" can easily become for selves of a certain type, a "mode of the Infinite." So obviously does this appear when we study the history of the mystics, that Steiner has drawn from it the hardly warrantable inference that "plants are just those natural phenomena whose qualities in the higher world are similar to their qualities in the physical world."

Though the conclusion be not convincing, the fact remains. The flowery garment of the world is for some mystics a medium of ineffable perception, a source of exalted joy, the veritable clothing of God. I need hardly add that such a state of things has always been found incredible by common sense. "The trees which move some to tears of joy," says Blake, who possessed in an eminent degree this form of sacramental perception, "is in the Eyes of others only a green thing that stand in the Way."⁶

To "see God in nature," to attain a radiant consciousness of the "otherness" of natural things, is the simplest and commonest form of illumination. Most people, under the spell of emotion or beauty, have known flashes of rudimentary vision of this kind. Where such a consciousness is recurrent, as it is in many poets, there results that partial yet often overpowering apprehension of the Infinite Life immanent in all living things, which some modern writers have dignified by the name of "nature-mysticism."⁷

In the first passage Underhill hints at a personal sensitivity to nature, though in the second one is left with the impression that "nature-mysticism" is for her too grand a term. (I am not sure also whether her dismissal of Steiner is warranted: his theories were not derived from a study of the mystics.) Incidentally, she gives the following as a list of poets that fit the description in the passage: Keats, Shelley, Wordsworth, Tennyson, Browning and Whitman.

Underhill is keen to defend the mystic from the general assumption that they deny the world; she often uses their relation to Nature to illustrate this. At one point she cites the seeing of "all creatures in God, and God in all creatures"; at another the brother Wolf of Francis of Assisi; and at another the case of the Peruvian Saint, Rose of Lima, who sang the praises of God for a whole hour in alternation with a

songbird.⁸ In another passage Underhill recommends natural objects as subjects for contemplation.

Seen thus a thistle has celestial qualities: a speckled hen a touch of the sublime. Our greater comrades, the trees, the clouds, the rivers, initiate us into mighty secrets, flame out at us "like shining from shook foil." The "eye which looks upon Eternity" has been given its opportunity. We have been immersed for a moment in the "life of the All": a deep and peaceful love unites us with the substance of all things, a "Mystic Marriage" has taken place between the mind and some aspect of the external world. *Cor ad cor loquitur*: Life has spoken to life, but not only to the surface-intelligence. That surface-intelligence knows only that the message was true and beautiful: no more.

The price of this experience has been a stilling of that surface-mind, a calling in of all our scattered interests: an entire giving of ourselves to this one activity, without self-consciousness, without reflective thought. To reflect is always to distort: our minds are not good mirrors. The contemplative, on whatever level his faculty may operate, is contented to absorb and be absorbed: and by this humble access he attains to a plane of knowledge which no intellectual process can come near.

I do not suggest that this simple experiment is in any sense to be equated with the transcendental contemplation of the mystic. Yet it exercises on a small scale, and in regard to visible Nature, the same natural faculties which are taken up and used – it is true upon other levels, and in subjection to the transcendental sense – in his apprehension of the Invisible Real. Though it is one thing to see truthfully for an instant the flower in the crannied wall, another to be lifted up to the apprehension of "eternal Truth, true Love and loved Eternity", yet both according to their measure are functions of the inward eye, operating in the "suspension of the mind."⁹

Underhill leaves us with many question regarding a possible nature mysticism in this passage, the principle one being whether it really is a lesser mysticism, any more than 'quietism' is really to be treated as deficient. There are also useful pointers in this passage regarding the silence of the mind in which Nature speaks to us.

2.3. Edward Mercer

As far as I know there has been only one book published in the English language with the title 'Nature Mysticism': this was written by J. Edward Mercer in 1912 and is now out of print. Mercer was aware of Jefferies and Whitman (both of whom are quoted extensively, though Jefferies more so) but not of Traherne or Krishnamurti; he does also cite James' *Varieties*. *Nature Mysticism* is scholarly review of a wide range of sources, stating at the same time that 'metaphysics and theology are to be avoided'¹⁰ – the latter surprising as Mercer was bishop of Tasmania. He gives us a useful definition of nature mysticism that can complement the first approximation given earlier:

The goal of the nature-mystics is actual living communion with the Real, in and through its sensuous manifestation.¹¹

This definition is useful because it avoids the emphasis on ecstatic or otherwise special experiences and focuses more on a continuum, as implied in the word communion. The use of the term 'the Real,' though vague at this point, is also useful if we place it for the time being merely in opposition to the false or fanciful (thus alerting us to the danger of the romantic or merely aesthetic dimension of nature mysticism). Mercer is careful also to deal with the charge of anthropomorphism and also deals with the issue of animism (quoting Wordsworth's recollection of a boyhood incident on a lake where a peak seems to come alive to him¹²). Mercer is oddly cautious about nature itself, spending many chapters on the elements (eight on water, two on air, and one on fire) before dealing briefly with vegetation; he more or less rules out a discussion of animal life. Despite this the book is valuable, particularly for its conviction that nature mysticism is worthwhile in itself and also for the view that its pursuance can be fostered.

2.4. Zaehner

Richard Charles Zaehner wrote and translated prodigiously in religion and mysticism and expanded on the works of Bucke, James, and Underhill by his scholarship in Eastern mysticism (he does not seem to be aware of Mercer's work). Compared to these three he is a slippery character however in that his own views as a Catholic are hidden by a two- or three-deep layering of academic scepticism. Like Underhill however he regards nature mysticism, for which he coins the term panenhenic mysticism, as inferior to monistic mysticism, which in turn is inferior to theistic mysticism. The usefulness of his term panenhenic mysticism is diminished by his association of its domain, nature mysticism, with drug-induced 'mystical' states, particularly in his book *Mysticism, Drugs, and Makebelieve* first published in 1972. Much of this book is a re-presentation of an earlier work called *Mysticism Sacred and Profane*, first published in 1957.

Zaehner knew of all four of the major protagonists in this essay, though he seems to reserve an unqualified admiration only for Krishnamurti, referring to him as a 'holy man'.¹³ Nature mysticism has 23 entries in the index to *Mysticism, Drugs, and Makebelieve*, and deals at length with the subject in the chapter called 'The Vitalist Heresy.' Zaehner equates nature mysticism with cosmic consciousness (a term introduced by Richard Maurice Bucke, but who is dismissed by Zaehner as 'fatuous') and says of it that 'is essential to most of the experiences described in the Hindu sacred books.'¹⁴ He points out that for Proust as for many other nature mystics a mystical experience may come unheralded, but for Zen students, where a similarly mundane natural object or event might trigger a similar experience, they have been trained to seek it out and recognise it.¹⁵ Zaehner seems to classify Zen with

nature mysticism (this is supported by Suzuki, discussed below), and tends to relegate both to an inferior status than other forms. Typical of his mix of cant and scholarly dispassion, he goes on to praise the work of the Irish novelist Forrest Reid as beautifully expressing the experience of the typical nature mystic. Because however drug-induced experiences can induce similar states he goes on to criticise James for not distinguishing nature mysticism clearly enough from the kind of transcendental mysticism of Buddhism.¹⁶ (Incidentally he twice states of James that 'his sympathies were plainly all on the side of the 'healthy-minded' against the 'sick soul' who must be born again'¹⁷ – the opposite of my own reading!) At the end of the 'Vitalist Heresy' Zaehner groups Jefferies and Whitman as nature mystics, with Whitman perhaps the most thoroughgoing; he then slips into an attack on the Upanishads as the vitalist heresy (which in typical Zaehner style is meant half-ironically):

All this had of course been said thousands of years ago in the Upanishads, the fount and origin of all nature mysticism, for here too we find the perfect expression of 'Whitmanism' in all its preposterous defiance of logic and common sense.¹⁸

However Zaehner's association of nature mysticism with the Upanishads is useful, though it is Taoism that may be a better source for understanding it. He also mentions Spinoza in connection with nature mysticism. Speaking on Timothy Leary's account of the Catholic communion as giving an ecstatic revelation (similar to LSD) Zaehner perhaps sums up his attitude to nature mysticism:

This is perfectly fair account of Christian mysticism: it is the soul's love-affair with God and its spiritual marriage to him. It is not a merging into the All as so often in the Upanishads or with the nature mystics, nor is it the isolation of one's own eternal essence from all that is other than itself as in the Shankya-Yoga in India.¹⁹

Zaehner is entitled to the opinion that nature mysticism as he characterises it is fundamentally different from Christian mysticism and inferior to it, but Mercer's view, that nature mysticism is valuable regardless of its similarities or otherwise to other forms, is probably the best to take in the long run.

2.5. Happold

F.C.Happold's work, called simply *Mysticism*, was first published in 1962 and is still Penguin's current mainstream offering on the subject. Happold acknowledges it as a personal anthology and commentary, though he builds again on the work of James and Underhill; he takes for example James' four marks of mystical experience and expands them to six by adding a sense of Oneness and a sense of timelessness.²⁰ Happold does not claim to move forward our understanding of mysticism in any significant way, but does present a more balanced view than Zaehner. He gives equal weight to what he calls nature-, soul- and god-mysticism (corresponding to

Zaehner's three categories), and devotes a chapter respectively to Traherne and Jefferies. Happold shares with the other scholars mentioned here the emphasis on mystical experience; a confirmation of this comes from an account of Happold's visit to the great English mystic Douglas Harding, in which Harding tells of Happold's insistence on hearing about peak mystical experiences instead of Douglas' very down-to-earth teachings.²¹ Harding's own description of what comes nearest to a mystical experience is found in the opening chapter of his *On Having No Head*²², but, like Krishnamurti he consistently plays down the role of 'peak' experience.

3. Nature Mysticism in Religious and Mystical Traditions

3.1. Religions of the Book

A detailed analysis of the role of nature and nature mysticism in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam is beyond the scope of this essay, apart from some general remarks. The Gnostic and Manichean influence on Christian thought has made Nature and the body an area often set in opposition to the spiritual. This may be less so in Judaism and Islam. Christian mystics are generally agreed to have been more cautious in their language than Hindu or Buddhist mystics; Sufi mystics have also run into trouble with mainstream Islam. The theistic nature of Judaism, Christianity and Islam make nature mysticism more difficult to accommodate than in Hinduism or Buddhism.

An interesting example of how a modern Christian might view nature mysticism is that of Anthony Freeman, the Church of England sacked for 'not believing in God.' He writes:

Emotionally I hung on to the design argument long after conceding that there was no intellectual force in it. And it was my emotional response, to a growing doubt that the universe really has a design, which finally tipped the balance against it. I can still admire the way in which elements of nature interlock, but I can no longer accept that it is part of a plan. For example I can marvel that animals have so developed that they can breath air; I cannot accept (as the old view required) that God made air the way he did in order that the animals could breathe. Nor can I accept any longer (as traditional faith requires) that a good and skilful God would have designed so much waste and violence into nature, 'red in tooth and claw.'²³

Freeman is proposing a humanist Christianity, but what is interesting here is that in closing the door to a Christian God (at least the one taught in the seminaries) he is also closing the door to a nature mysticism. To see waste and violence in Nature, to see it as 'red in tooth and claw', and not see its beauty, tenderness, and intimations of the infinite and the eternal is to lose out indeed. This pessimism is however a

widespread view of Nature, and we need to keep this example in mind as we examine further on the prerequisites for a nature mysticism.

3.2. Hinduism

Zaehner rightly points out that the Hindu Upanishads say much that is consistent with nature mysticism, though it is hard to point to specific passages. What is often found is a regard for the natural order and for Nature in all its aspects, including the sexual. Although this may be hard to demonstrate, one is left with the suspicion that the Hindus of 2 to 3 thousand years ago, authors of the Upanishads, were more accepting of nature than at present; that renunciation has grown from a symbolic act and a simple choice of lifestyle to an active rejection of Nature. In the lives and teachings of those wonderful sages, Ramakrishna and Ramana Maharshi, we find no pleasure in Nature, and in the life of Gandhi an extreme of renunciation. Of modern Indian-born teachers it is the iconoclast Rajneesh and the Western-educated Krishnamurti who show a sensitivity and appreciation of Nature.

3.3. Taoism and Zen

Taoism, as the ancestor of Zen, is a more obviously promising ground for the development of a nature mysticism. The Tao Teh Ching is an unusual document in the history of mysticism, and quite unlike any Buddhist text, in that it seems to speak of the post-enlightenment stage in a matter-of-fact way; pointing out that the Tao is likely to be misunderstood; that the sage is like the infant yet rules or guides his or her community; that with the least interference the natural order will prosper; and that the sage prefers what is within to what is without. It is anti-intellectual and anti-technology. Suzuki points this out through a story from Chang-tze:

A farmer dug a well and was using the water for irrigating his farm. He used an ordinary bucket to draw water from the well, as most primitive people do. A passer-by, seeing this, asked the farmer why he did not use a shadoof for the purpose; it is a labour-saving device and can do more work than the primitive method. The farmer said. "I know it is a labour-saving and it is for this very reason that I do not use the device. What I am afraid of is that the use of such a contrivance makes one machine-minded. Machine-mindedness leads one to the habit of indolence and laziness."²⁴

Suzuki considers Orientals more attuned to Nature than Westerners, giving as an example two poems, the first by Basho:

When I look carefully
I see the *nazuna* blooming
By the hedge!

Suzuki explains that he has translated the Japanese word *kana* into the finishing exclamation mark in the poem; it expresses admiration, praise, sorrow, or joy, and in this context lends a mystical meaning to the poem, for the *nazuna* is the most common and insignificant of flowers. In contrast he offers a poem by Tennyson:

Flower in the crannied wall,
I pluck you out of the crannies;—
Hold you here, root and all, in my hand,
Little flower—but if I could understand
What you are, root and all, and all in all,
I should know what God and man is.

Suzuki points out the violence in Tennyson's act of plucking the flower; in contrast Basho merely looks, though carefully.²⁵ In the 'carefully' we have the whole of nature mysticism; in Tennyson's 'if' we have the whole of Western intellectual doubt.

4. Selected 'Nature Mystics'

4.1. Thomas Traherne

James and Underhill were unaware of the work of Traherne, as his mystical writings were not discovered until long after his death in 1674. The earliest publication (of the 'Dobell' poems) was in 1903 and followed by a prose collection in 1908 known as the *Centuries*. Further poems (unfortunately heavily edited by Traherne's brother Philip) were discovered at the British Museum shortly after, and more works found in 1964 and 1967. Zaehner rightly points out consonances in Traherne's work with Jefferies, Whitman and the Zen Buddhists, but it is Happold who devotes a whole chapter to him in his *Mysticism*. He comments:

Though Thomas Traherne cannot be numbered among the great mystics, he demands a place in any anthology of mysticism. Nowhere else does one find a similar fusion of nature-mysticism and Christo-mysticism as exquisitely balanced, so that both are essential parts of his consciousness, neither being complete without the other.²⁶

At first glance Traherne's work makes one think of James' 'healthy-minded' label; there is in his work a seemingly endless recitation of the joyfulness of his soul's simplicity and abundance, as reflected in and engendered by the abundance of creation. One has to search quite hard for the 'sick-soul' correlates. Traherne emphasises the innocence of childhood and speaks of his emergence from 'unbeing' to life and the delight in the treasures of the senses (in particular sight) and the sense that all *belongs* to him (and at the same time to all other men and women: in turn they are also his treasures). We are presented with a conundrum: how is that a grown man can speak so clearly of a childhood innocence and bliss, one that we all

recognise, however dimly, yet earnestly maintain it to be his present, adult, reality? One possibility is that he was gifted with a quite extraordinary memory for the childhood state, and furthermore that he was quite precociously gifted with wisdom at that age. More likely, in the context of mysticism, is that he travelled the same road as all of us: the gradual loss of innocence into a worldly-wise adult, then followed by a 're-birth' of some kind into the mystical awareness. (Douglas Harding provides an excellent analysis of this journey;²⁷ Ken Wilber also provides us with the concept of the *pre-trans* fallacy lest we confuse the pre-adult with the post-enlightenment stages.) This fits with James' 'twice-born' idea (and of course with the Indian equivalent, *dwiji*), but is quite at odds with the 'healthy-mindedness' of his prose and poetry. Let us look first at typical Traherne passages. Here are the first four verses of 'The Salutation', the opening poem of the Dobell collection (all selections from the Penguin edition²⁸):

1

These little limbs,
 These eyes and hands which here I find,
 These rosy cheeks wherewith my life begins,
 Where have ye been? Behind
 What curtain were ye from me hid so long!
 Where was, in what abyss, my speaking tongue?

2

When silent I,
 So many thousand years,
 Beneath the dust did in a chaos lie,
 How could I smiles or tears,
 Or lips or hands or eyes or ears perceive?
 Welcome, ye treasures which I now receive.

3

I that so long
 Was nothing from eternity,
 Did little think such joys as ear or tongue,
 To celebrate or see:
 Such sounds to hear, such hands to feel, such feet,
 Beneath the skies, on such a ground to meet.

4

New burnish'd joys!
 Which yellow gold and pearl excel!
 Such sacred treasures are the limbs in boys,
 In which a soul doth dwell;
 Their organized joints, and azure veins
 More wealth include, than all the world contains.

These verses introduce many of Traherne's themes: that it is blessed to be born (quite at odds with mainstream Christianity's concept of original sin), that the sense organs themselves are treasures (reminiscent of some Upanishadic and Tantric themes and practices); and that the objects of those senses are also treasures. He concludes the poem with this verse:

A stranger here
 Strange things doth meet, strange glories see;
 Strange treasures lodg'd in this fair world appear;
 Strange all, and new to me.
 But that they mine should be, who nothing was,
 That strangest is of all, yet brought to pass.

This verse brings out another oft-repeated theme: that all belongs to him. Leaving this point for a moment let us compare this extract to verse 5 of Wordsworth's 'Intimations of Immortality':

Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting:
 The Soul that rises with us, our life's Star,
 Hath had elsewhere its setting,
 And cometh from afar:
 Not in entire forgetfulness,
 And not in utter nakedness,
 But trailing clouds of glory do we come
 From God, who is our home:
 Heaven lies about us in our infancy!
 Shades of the prison-house begin to close
 Upon the growing Boy
 But He beholds the light, and whence it flows
 He sees it in his joy;
 The Youth who daily travels farther from the east
 Must travel, still is Nature's Priest,
 And by the vision splendid
 Is on his way attended;
 At length the Man perceives it die away,
 And fade into the light of common day.²⁹

There are some similarities (though we can be confident that Wordsworth would not have read Traherne): Wordsworth recognises the 'heaven that lies about us in our infancy' and the 'vision splendid'. But he is less optimistic: birth is a 'sleep and a forgetting'; the 'clouds of glory' that we trail have another origin than the wondrous world of the senses; and of course the 'shades of the prison-house' close in until the grown man sees his vision die away into 'the light of common day.' A closer look at Traherne's work does reveal however his own 'prison house.' In the *Poems of Felicity* collection the poems 'The Apostasy', 'Solitude', 'Poverty', and 'Dissatisfac-

tion' show Traherne's 'fall' from his childhood state of innocence, trapped by what he calls 'custom', that is the ways of the (adult) world that value tinsel, lace and baubles above the stars, the light of the sun, and the air we breathe. In 'The Bible' and 'Christendom' we learn of his recovery and restoration to a state of grace.

As a nature mystic Traherne is not the purest example for two reasons. Despite the emphasis on the body and the senses, in particular sight, there is not that much description of Nature; stars and clouds feature, but streets, cities, and above all people count amongst his treasures. His love of creation rests on what is beyond creation, which is what we would expect to find in a nature mystic, but it is a Christian God and a Christian message that restores him to the innocence-in-adulthood that is the mark of the mystic.

Traherne shows us however a basic attribute that must be present in the nature mystic: an acceptance of the body, its sense-organs, and the divine nature of the world received through those senses when pure, that is freed from selfish desires. We cannot know with Traherne if he meets the tentative requirement postulated for a nature mystic at the beginning of this essay: is his mysticism triggered by Nature? He speaks of no specific mystical experiences, more of a continuum, and the attainment of this continuum only briefly hinted at through receiving the Gospel. If there is a Nature component in his mysticism, it is elemental – in his case air and light, and it may be thanks to Mercer that we spot this at all. Perhaps Traherne's best prose on the subject is in the *Meditations*:

By the very right of your senses you enjoy the world. Is it not the beauty of the hemisphere present to your sight? Is not the vision of the world an amiable thing? Do not the stars shed influences to perfect the air? Is not that a marvellous body to breathe in? To visit the lungs: repair the spirits: revive the senses: cool the blood: fill the empty spaces between the earth and heavens; and yet give liberty to all objects? Prize these first: and you shall enjoy the residue.³⁰

Prize these first: and you shall enjoy the residue! This could be Lao Tsu talking, though Traherne goes on to recommend a most un-Taoist insatiableness for life: 'It is the nobility of man's soul that he is insatiable'.

4.2. Walt Whitman

In contrast to Traherne, Whitman's world is devoid of Christianity or any religiosity as conventionally understood; in similarity to Traherne, Whitman's world is a divine treasure-house of which again he is the proprietor. I have made a long study of Whitman as mystic³¹ and will summarise this before dealing with nature mysticism in his work. We have seen that James complained of a cult growing up around Whitman, and of comparisons to Christ; Zaehner found him preposterous; and to many in his day he was an affront to Victorian values. Contemporary Western criticism of

Whitman has become solely a literary affair, yet Whitman explicitly stated in *Leaves of Grass* that he intended to start a new religion³², and this was taken seriously by many intelligent and sensitive contemporaries: perhaps it is America's greatest tragedy that Whitman was misunderstood and remembered merely as a poet.

There is not space here to defend this view in detail other than to point out the religious impact he had on people like R.M.Bucke, Anne Gilchrist, Edward Carpenter (an English social reformer and mystic), John Burroughs (a naturalist and one of Whitman's biographers) and Emerson. His personal magnetism and the power of *Leaves* affected people far and wide, including the unlikely figure of Bram Stoker. The confusion over Whitman lies in his deliberate obfuscation in *Leaves*: he confided to Carpenter that he had 'hidden his eggs in it like a furtive old hen'³³. It also lies in a Western audience largely unfamiliar at that time with Oriental mysticism, to which Whitman's work bears great resemblance, though no derivation. One only need to look at the work of three Indian scholars to recognise that *Leaves* easily takes its place alongside the *Upanishads*, the *Vedas*, and the *Gita*: O.K.Nambiar³⁴, V.K.Chari³⁵, and V.Sachitanandan³⁶ demonstrate this, and we also find corroboration in the works of Dorothy Mercer³⁷ and Romain Rolland³⁸.

The objections of Zaehner to Whitman can be dismissed on two ground I believe: firstly by lumping him with the *Upanishads* he does our argument a service, and secondly I don't believe that he had studied either Whitman's works or life closely enough. The second ground also applies to James, though we need to look more closely at his assumption of 'healthy-mindedness' in Whitman. (Underhill's assertion that Whitman was not a full-blown mystic is merely a matter of personal preference; no scholars' lists will ever agree on a definitive group of full-blown mystics.) It is fair to say the *Leaves* is optimistic on the whole, as is the work of Traherne, but it contains a sharp-eyed realism about the human condition as well (all the following extracts from *Leaves* are Jerome Loving's edition³⁹):

Whoever you are, come forth! or man or woman come forth!
 You must not stay sleeping and dallying there in the house though you built it, or
 though it has been built for you.
 Out of the dark confinement! out from behind the screen!
 It is useless to protest, I know all and expose it.
 Behold through you as bad as the rest,
 Through the laughter, dancing, dining, supping, of people,
 Inside of dresses and ornaments, inside of those wash'd and trimm'd faces,
 Behold a secret silent loathing and despair.

No husband, no wife, no friend, trusted to hear the confession,
 Another self, a duplicate of every one, skulking and hiding it goes,
 Formless and wordless through the streets of the cities, polite and bland in the
 parlors,
 In the cars of railroads, in steamboats, in the public assembly,

Home to the houses of men and women, at the table, in the bedroom, everywhere,
 Smartly attired, countenance smiling, form upright, death under the breast-bones,
 hell under the skull-bones,
 Under the broadcloth and gloves, under the ribbons and artificial flowers,
 Keeping fair with the customs, speaking not a syllable of itself,
 Speaking of any thing else but never of itself.

(Crossing Brooklyn Ferry, v. 13)

How can one write about 'death under the breast-bones, hell under the skull-bones' unless one has known it? And what a choice of words! Unlike with Traherne, we can draw on many contemporary accounts of Whitman to fill out our picture of him: the following passage is from Carpenter:

I have two portraits – photographs – which I am fond of comparing with each other. One is of Whitman, taken in 1890; the other, taken about the same time and at the same age (seventy years), is of an Indian Gnani or seer. Both are faces of the highest interest and import; but how different! That of Whitman deeply lined, bearing the marks of life-long passion and emotion; aggressive and determined, yet wistful and tender, full of suffering and full of love, indicating serenity, yet markedly turbid and clouded, ample in brow and frame and flowing hair, as of one touching and mingling with humanity at all points – withal of a wonderful majesty and grandeur, as of the great rock (to return always to that simile) whose summit pierces at last the highest domain.

The other portrait, of a man equally aged, shows scarcely a line on the face; you might think for that and for the lithe, active form that he was not more than forty years old; a brow absolutely calm and unruffled, gracious, expressive lips, well-formed features, and eyes – the dominant characteristic of his countenance – dark and intense, and illuminated by the vision of the seer. In this face you discern command, control, gentleness, and the most absolute inward unity, serenity, and peace; no wandering emotions or passions flit across the crystal mirror of the soul; self-hood in any but the highest sense has vanished – the self has, as it were, returned to its birthplace – leaving behind the most childlike, single-hearted, uncensorious, fearless character imaginable.

Yet just here one seems to miss something in the last character – the touch of human and earthly entanglement. Here is not exactly the great loving heart which goes a few steps on the way with every child of man; here is not the ample-domed brow which tackles each new problem of life and science. Notwithstanding evident signs of culture and experience in the past, notwithstanding vast powers of concentration in any given matter or affair when necessary, the face shows that the heart and intellect have become quiescent, that interest in the actual has passed or is passing away.⁴⁰

The impression of Whitman in this passage is born out by other contemporary accounts, but is also interesting in Carpenter's juxtaposition of two mystical types: the second being a fair account perhaps of an Indian sage like Ramana Maharshi. The

passage also tells us the unique spiritual gifts that the West, and Whitman in particular, can bring to mysticism. The passage is also relevant to nature mysticism: a nature mystic cannot be one in which 'the interest in the actual has passed or is passing away.'

Leaves, despite its earthy nature, was carefully edited and re-edited by Whitman over a lifetime to its present state, and James' impression of it as optimistic is right. The assumption that this comes from an epitome of naive healthy-mindedness is unfounded, as Whitman's life shows, but even more so from what he left out of *Leaves*. I believe that he was acutely aware of the power of the written word, and that many things that we can allow ourselves to say to intimate persons cannot be left in print. A recent compilation of Whitman's discarded writings shows him capable of an extreme perversity, at least in *Respondez!* of which this is an extract:

Let the theory of America still be management, cast, comparisons!
 (Say! what other theory would you?)
 Let them that distrust birth and death lead the rest!
 (Say! why shall they no lead you?)
 Let the world never appear to him or her for whom it was all made!
 Let the heart of the young man still exile itself from the heart of the old man! and let
 the heart of the old man be exiled from that of the young man!
 Let the sun and moon go! let the scenery take the applause of the audience! let
 there be apathy under the stars!
 Let freedom prove no man's inalienable right! every one who can tyrannize, let him
 tyrannize to his satisfaction!
 ...
 Let churches accommodate serpents, vermin, and the corpses of those who have
 died of the most filthy of diseases!
 Let marriage slip down among fools, and be for none but fools!
 Let men among themselves talk and think forever obscenely of women! and let
 women themselves talk and think obscenely of men!⁴¹

This poem goes on in this vein. However, we may be in danger of focusing too much on this aspect of Whitman: this poem was probably intended to provoke a response from the reader to an inversion of all of Whitman's teachings, perhaps motivated in a downhearted moment by the generally indifferent reception from the American public of his time. In all events it was removed from *Leaves*.

Turning now to some similarities with Traherne, we notice the same delight in the mere fact of birth and the blessed gift of life, expressed for example in this poem:

TO THE GARDEN OF THE WORLD
 To the garden of the world anew descending,
 Potent mates, daughters, sons, preluding,
 The love, the life of their bodies, meaning and being,

Curious here behold my resurrection after slumber,
 The revolving cycles in their wide sweep having brought me again,
 Amorous, mature, all beautiful to me, all wondrous,
 My limbs and the quivering fire that ever plays through them, for reasons, most
 wondrous,
 Existing I peer and penetrate still,
 Content with the present, content with the past,
 By my side or back of me Eve following,
 Or in front, and I following her just the same.

Unlike Traherne he does not say that he comes from dust; unlike Wordsworth that he trails clouds of glory from his Maker, but he simply descends to the garden of the world, curious for life. Traherne's own phrase is 'insatiable': it is these expressions of the love of life that must make the basis of the nature mystic, the *via positiva*, and which make both Traherne and Whitman shocking to some conventional religiosity. We know in fact of Whitman's great love of Nature, not just from *Leaves*, but from contemporary accounts. What makes Whitman unique is that *people*, ordinary common folk, are to him an equal delight. Traherne shows this, but as with all his work, it is at a relatively abstract level from which we find it hard to construct the person: with Whitman his written expressions of the eagerness of his loving curiosity for the million or so inhabitants of Manhattan is born out by all contemporary accounts as a fact of his life. We build up a picture of a real person, rugged like a George Fox, and bold to meet any man or woman to gaze into their depths and contact them, essence to essence; in addition we find the Christ-like yearning to find those that can 'hear' him – Whitman was a fisher of men. And of women: the reference to Eve in the above poem is not a one-off literary flourish, rather it is part of the fabric of all his writings and his life – I know of no other man in the history of literature who so consistently included the woman as well as the man. As well as this determined symmetry between male and female Whitman insists on the same for body and soul:

I believe in you my soul, the other I am must not abase itself to you,
 And you must not be abased to the other.

(‘Song of Myself’, v. 5)

Clear and sweet is my soul, and clear and sweet is all that is not my soul.

Lack one lacks both, and the unseen is proved by the seen,
 Till that becomes unseen and receives proof in its turn.

Showing the best and dividing it from the worst age vexes age,
 Knowing the perfect fitness and equanimity of things, while they discuss I am silent,
 and go bathe and admire myself.

Welcome is every organ and attribute of me, and of any man hearty and clean,

Not an inch nor a particle of an inch is vile, and none shall be less familiar than the rest.

(Song Of Myself, v. 3)

Traherne is less dogmatic about body and soul: he may celebrate one at one time, but at another tells us that without the other all is worthless. Wordsworth, as most other poets of a mystical inclination, is also less inclined to be as determinedly even-handed as Whitman.

What though does Whitman contribute to our delineation of a nature mysticism? In *Leaves*, Whitman's celebration is so comprehensive, and so inclusive of man's arts and industries, that Nature, in the modern sense of it being in opposition to industrial and urban life, does not stand out. It is a comment of his to R.M.Bucke (his other chief contemporary biographer) that gives us an interesting insight into his attitude to writing on Nature (Bucke had suggested writing about a magnificent waterfall):

All such things need to be at least the third or fourth remove; in itself it would be too much for nine out of ten readers. Very few care for natural objects themselves, rocks, rain, hail, wild animals, tangled forests, weeds, mud, common Nature. They want her in a shape fit for reading about in a rocking-chair, or as ornaments in china, marble or bronze. The real things are, far more than they would own, disgusting, revolting to them." Whitman adds: "This may be a reason of the dislike of *Leaves of Grass* by the majority."⁴²

In *Leaves* the descriptions of nature are often in the form of lists, but effective in spite of that. There is a prose description in *Specimen Days* that perhaps comes closest to telling us how Whitman really sees nature:

1 *September*: I should not take either the biggest or the most picturesque tree to illustrate it. Here is one of my favorite now before me, a fine yellow poplar, quite straight, perhaps ninety feet high, and four feet thick at the butt. How strong, vital, enduring! how dumbly eloquent! What suggestions of imperturbability and *being*, as against the human trait of mere *seeming*. Then the qualities, almost emotional, palpably artistic, heroic, of a tree; so innocent and harmless, yet so savage. It *is*, yet says nothing. How it rebukes by its tough and equable serenity in all weathers, this gusty-tempered little whiffet, man, that runs indoors at a mite of rain or snow. Science (or rather half-way science) scoffs at reminiscence of dryad and hamadryad, and of trees speaking. But, if they don't, they do as well as most speaking, writing, poetry, sermons – or rather they do a great deal better. I should say indeed that those old dryad-reminiscences are quite as true as any, and profounder than most reminiscences we get. ('Cut this out,' as the quack mediciners say, and keep by you.) Go and sit in a grove or woods, with one or more of these voiceless companions and read the foregoing, and think.

One lesson from affiliating a tree – perhaps the greatest moral lesson anyhow from earth, rocks, animals, is that same lesson of inherency, of *what is*, without the least regard to what the looker on (the critic) supposes or says, or whether he likes or dislikes. What worse – what more general malady pervades each and all of us, our literature, education, attitude towards each other, (even towards ourselves,) than morbid trouble about *seems*, (generally temporarily seems too,) and no trouble at all, or hardly any, about the sane slow-growing, perennial, real parts of character, books, friendship, marriage – humanity's invisible foundations and hold-together? (As the all-basis, the nerve, the great sympathetic, the plenum within humanity, giving stamp to everything, is necessarily invisible.)⁴³

Part of this passage is quoted in Mercer's *Nature Mysticism*. Whitman gives us another glimpse of how he related to trees in the following passage:

10 - 13 October [1881]: I spend a good deal of time on the Common, these delicious days and nights – every mid-day from 11.30 to about 1 – and almost every sunset another hour. I know all the big trees, especially the old elms along Tremont and Beacon streets, and have come to a sociable-silent understanding with most of them, in the sunlit air, (yet crispy-cool enough), as I saunter along the wide unpaved walks. Up and down this breadth by Beacon street, between these same old elms, I walk'd for two hours, of a bright sharp February mid-day twenty-one years ago, with Emerson, then in his prime, keen, physically and morally magnetic, arm'd at every point, and when he chose, wielding the emotional just as well as the intellectual.⁴⁴

It was an endless pleasure for Whitman to simply be in nature, spending time in the countryside, enjoying the ordinary as much as any spectacular scenes like canyons or great waterfalls or brilliant sunsets. Bucke saw that natural things gave Whitman a pleasure that ordinary people never experience, and credited him with above-average hearing and sense of smell (though this is probably unlikely: Whitman may have just been more alert to his sensations). Whitman's opinion of Thoreau (whom he knew) was interesting: he suspected that the romantic view of nature expressed in Thoreau's *Walden* and in his life was not so much from 'a love of woods, streams, and hills, ... as from a morbid dislike of humanity. I remember Thoreau saying once, when walking with him in my favorite Brooklyn – "What is there in the people? What do you (a man who sees as well as anybody) see in all this cheating political corruption?" This is echoed in a passage from Thoreau himself:

I walk towards one of our ponds, but what signifies the beauty of Nature when men are base? We walk to lakes to see our serenity reflected in them; when we are not serene, we go not to them.⁴⁵

Whitman then is perhaps unusual in his love of nature as an encompassing love, not a turning away from the human and man-made. 'The Lesson of a Tree' is telling us how to let nature instruct us in our human sphere, and in the foundations of our being; it is teaching us a sobriety, a willingness to allow the important things to ma-

ture at their own mysterious pace, and not to apply the modern haste to our foundations. Beyond this lesson, and it is fundamental to Whitman's teachings I think, there is also the sheer exuberant delight in nature, and also an almost painful wonder at it:

As I have walk'd in Alabama my morning walk,
I have seen where the she-bird the mocking-bird sat on her nest in the briers hatch-
ing her brood.

I have seen the he-bird also,
I have paus'd to hear him at hand inflating his throat and joyfully singing.

And while I paus'd it came to me that what he really sang for was not there only,
Not for his mate nor himself only, nor all sent back by the echoes,
But subtle, clandestine, away beyond,
A charge transmitted and gift occult for those being born.

(*'Starting from Paumanok'* v. 11)

Whitman's mysticism is too broad, too Vedantic, to be confined to nature mysticism, though our understanding of it greatly increased by him. It is Jefferies however for whom the epithet 'nature mystic' may have been invented.

4.3. Richard Jefferies

Richard Jefferies was a contemporary of Whitman, though born in 1848 when Whitman was already thirty-one; he died young, five years before Whitman, in 1887. He was born in England, the son of a farmer struggling against the industrial age, and was a journalist and writer by profession, much as Whitman. That he is considered as a mystic is due to his book *The Story of My Heart*⁴⁶, which was published in 1883. *The Story of My Heart* is as unique and different from the rest of the world's mystical literature as the *Tao Teh Ching*, or *Leaves of Grass* – at times there is an extraordinary parallel with Whitman, and at other times he seems to say the opposite. Jefferies' love of nature runs along the same stream as Whitman's thoughts in 'The Lesson of a Tree', only he describes his raptures at greater length, and in terms of the empowering of his 'soul life'. Again and again he describes how he seeks solitary moments away from his family and work, and climbs a local hill, or seeks the sea, and strides across the human-remote countryside or beach in order to wrest the nourishment for his soul-life from nature; or he lies under a tree or by a brook and stares up at the sky and lets it fill him. His book is a careful prose, and in great contrast to Whitman's free verse, but he sings of nature, and, oddly for a Victorian Englishman, the body too:

There came to me a delicate, but at the same time a deep, strong and sensuous enjoyment of the beautiful green earth, the beautiful sky and sun; I felt them, they gave me inexpressible delight, as if they embraced and poured out their love upon me. It was I who loved them, for my heart was broader than the earth; it is

broader now than even then, more thirsty and desirous. After the sensuous enjoyment always come the thought, the desire: That I might be like this; that I might have the inner meaning of the sun, the light, the earth, the trees and grass, translated into some growth of excellence in myself, both of the body and of mind; greater perfection of physique, greater perfection of mind and soul; that I might be higher in myself.⁴⁷

For Jefferies his mysticism is one of longing, a desire that he calls his 'single thought' or prayer, and the beauty of nature raises it to the highest degree. Unlike those that run away from the human to nature, Jefferies finds the human body to be the sum of all beauty in nature:

Not only in grass fields with green leaf and running brook did this constant desire find renewal. More deeply still with living human beauty; the perfection of form, the simple fact of forms, ravished and always will ravish me away. In this lies the outcome and end of all the loveliness of sunshine and green leaf, of flowers, pure water and sweet air. This is embodiment and highest expression; the scattered, uncertain, and designless loveliness of tree and sunshine brought to shape. Through this beauty I prayed deepest and longest, and down to this hour. The shape – the divine idea of that shape – the swelling muscle or the dreamy limb, strong sinew or curve of bust, Aphrodite or Hercules, it is the same. That I may have the soul-life, the soul-nature, let the divine beauty bring to me divine soul. Swart Nubian, white Greek, delicate Italian, massive Scandinavian, in all the exquisite pleasure the form gave, and gives, to me immediately becomes intense prayer.⁴⁸

If Whitman can bring one to walk down the street looking at people that pass one in a new way – a kind of curious touch to each person – then Jefferies can cause one to see in them the distillation of sun, rain, and air on trees and their 'designless loveliness'; a new gift to us.

Where Whitman is at pains to praise the body and the soul equally, letting neither 'abase' itself before the other, Jefferies is quite sure that the soul is higher, more important, and that the soul or the spirit is *entirely lacking* in nature, in the rocks, trees and sky, where Whitman sees 'God's handkerchief' dropped at every corner. Jefferies goes further: he comments on the immense inhospitability of nature, the very sun that sends him into raptures burns and kills, the very sea is an undrinkable poison. It is a baffling contrast to Whitman at first, and is not easily resolvable; however we can leave it for now as a mark of the genuine expression of a mystic: that it is unique, and will not agree with another's tale of the ultimate. We can also find references in his book to having lived a hard life; one has the impression that he was as poor as Whitman, and as unpractised in economics, but his situation was worse, for he had a wife and children to support. The sheer hardness of extracting a living in Victorian England for a man so averse to the material spirit of that age may have found expression in his views on the in-humanness of nature: he even mentions all the hideous sea creatures, and finds dogs and horses alien to him. Yet

his soul is never so uplifted as under a tree! Or by the sky or sea; rarely can you find such an extensive and sensitive relaying of a rapture with nature.

He was at a loss to the human bustle and apparent purposelessness of the great throng of people viewed from the steps of the Royal Exchange in Victorian London, and railed against the work-ethic that prevented people from having *time* to reflect and be with nature (he shared this with both Whitman, Emerson, and Thoreau).

Jefferies presents us with contradictions – so much the better! But in his attitude to the eternal, he is quite classical in his discoveries, and unusually honest in admitting that he doesn't know what happens after death. He knows that *this moment* is eternal however; he is not worried that death may dissolve him completely, body and soul, for all of that is not *now*. In the following passage he is lying on the grass by a tumulus, the burial-place of a warrior of some two thousand years previous:

Realising that spirit, recognising my own inner consciousness, the psyche, so clearly, I cannot understand time. It is eternity now. I am in the midst of it. It is about me in the sunshine; I am in it, as the butterfly floats in the light-laden air. Nothing has to come; it is now. Now is eternity; now is the immortal life. Here this moment, by this tumulus, on earth, now; I exist in it. The years, the centuries, the cycles are absolutely nothing; it is only a moment since this tumulus was raised; in a thousand years more it will still be only a moment. To the soul there is no past and no future; all is and will be ever, in now. For artificial purposes time is mutually agreed on, but there is really no such thing. The shadow goes on upon the dial, the index moves round upon the clock, and what is the difference? None whatever. If the clock had never been set going, what would have been the difference? There may be time for the clock, the clock may make time for itself; there is none for me.

I dip my hand in the brook and feel the stream; in an instant the particles of water which first touched me have floated yards down the current, my hand remains there. I take my hand away, and the flow – the time – of the brook does not exist for me. The great clock of the firmament, the sun and the stars, the crescent moon, the earth circling two thousand times, is no more to me than the flow of the brook when my hand is withdrawn; my soul has never been, and never can be, dipped in time.⁴⁹

(This last sentence alone puts him on an equal footing with the Buddha!) Jefferies shares Whitman's easy dismissal of all past religion; he does not make a big thing about it, but perhaps goes even further than Whitman in finding no consonance whatsoever between any previous writings and his experience. As a journalist, and one who spent time in the British Library, he would had access to Eckhart or *The Cloud of Unknowing*, or other mystical works; but perhaps the Christian language of these hid the similarities with his experience. We are probably better off that he had to struggle to find his own words; perhaps the only one he uses that we might

recognise is the word 'prayer', and he only uses it for lack of something better. Jefferies' book is as explicit as Whitman's is implicit, yet there is not the slightest hint that Jefferies saw himself as a teacher, perhaps making the book an added delight.

Zaehner makes a sensitive analysis of Jefferies, but prefaces it with a reminder that nature mystics may be easily led to describe their experiences in terms of God (Jefferies does not in fact) though "'God' here is clearly not the God of the Bible but the pantheistic God against which Protestant Christians instinctively react"⁵⁰. To a non-Christian this is a baffling statement no matter how often it is repeated or explained; equally baffling is Zaehner's attempt to distinguish Jefferies' Nature from that of the scientists, the one imaginary and the other somehow 'real'. For a Catholic to find that science's view of Nature contradicts Jefferies, rather than complements it, is absurd: does he seriously believe then that by the same token science does not contradict Catholicism? Yet Zaehner needed to find a resolution between Jefferies raptures and his pessimism and this was his solution.

Happold includes a chapter on Jefferies in his *Mysticism* and introduces it with the comment that Jefferies combined nature-mysticism with soul-mysticism (the latter being the equivalent of Zaehner's monistic mysticism, or jnani in Indian thought)⁵¹. Happold also makes the comment that had Jefferies been acquainted 'with the wide stream of mystical tradition, he would doubtless have written differently'. As pointed out earlier he had the opportunity, and we simply do not know whether he deliberately avoided reading and referring to them, as in the case of Krishnamurti. However Happold also agrees that we are the richer for it!

Jefferies' active and almost aggressive search through Nature is paralleled in some way by that of Thoreau. The picture we have of Traherne and Whitman is that of a passive almost indolent enjoyment of Nature; Whitman, though always keen to be out of doors in a field, wood, or mountain, is never searching. Thoreau in contrast would stride for hours through the woods and fields of Concord: Reginald Lansing Cook in his interesting analysis of Thoreau as nature mystics says this of him:

He realised that it was wise to be outdoors early and late, travelling far and earnestly in order to recreate the whole body and to perceive the phenomena of the day. There was no way of knowing when something might turn up. He had noticed that when he thought his walk was profitless or a failure, it was then usually on the point of success, "for then," he surmised, "you are that subdued and knocking mood to which Nature never fails to open." One late August day, in 1851, when it appeared to him that he had walked all day in vain and the world, including field and wood as highway, had seemed trivial, then, with the dropping of sun and wind, he caught the reflex of the day – the dews purifying the day and making it transparent, the lakes a rivers acquiring "a glassy stillness, reflecting the skies." His attitude changed, and he took what Keats called "the journey homeward to habitual self." He exulted in the fact that he was at the top of his condition for perceiving beauty.⁵²

4. Jiddu Krishnamurti

Krishnamurti (1896-1986) was universally known as a teacher, but is rarely considered a nature mystic despite the fact that this dimension of him is often noticeable. His obstinate refusal to adopt poetic terms or traditional Hindu terms (though he knew them) gave his message an unusual strength, but the beauty in Krishnamurti's writings comes from his serenity of mind, and never more so than when he wrote about Nature. Perhaps the best of his many 'notebooks' is *The Only Revolution*, which introduces each section with keenly observed natural scenes, though not observed in the way that a naturalist would. Here are some examples:

The sun wasn't up yet; you could see the morning star through the trees. There was a silence that was really extraordinary. Not the silence between two noises or between two notes, but the silence that has no reason whatsoever – the silence that must have been at the beginning of the world. It filled the whole valley and the hills.

The two big owls, calling to each other, never disturbed that silence, and a distant dog barking at the late moon was part of this immensity. The dew was especially heavy, and as the sun came up over the hill it was sparkling with many colours and with the glow that comes with the sun's first rays.

The delicate leaves of the jacaranda were heavy with dew, and birds came to have their morning baths, fluttering their wings so the dew on those delicate leaves filled their feathers. The crows were particularly persistent; they would hop from one branch to another, pushing their heads through the leaves, fluttering their wings, and preening themselves. There were about half-a-dozen of them on that one heavy branch, and there were many other birds, scattered all over the tree, taking their morning bath.

And this silence spread, and seemed to go beyond the hills. There were the usual noises of children shouting, and laughter; and the farm began to wake up.

It was going to be a cool day, and now the hills were taking on the light of the sun. They were very old hills – probably the oldest in the world – with oddly shaped rocks that seemed to be carved out with great care, balanced one on top of the other; but no wind or touch could loosen them from this balance.

It was a valley far removed from towns, and the road through it led to another village. The road was rough and there were no cars or buses to disturb the ancient quietness of this valley. There were bullock carts, but their movement was a part of the hills. There was a dry river bed that only flowed with water after heavy rains, and the colour was a mixture of red, yellow and brown; and it, too, seemed to move with the hills. And the villagers who walked silently by were like the rocks.

The day wore on and towards the end of the evening, as the sun was setting over the western hills, the silence came in from afar, over the hills, through the trees, covering the little bushes and the ancient banyan. And as the stars became brilliant, so the silence grew into great intensity; you could hardly bear it.

The little lamps of the village were put out, and with sleep the intensity of that silence grew deeper, wider and incredibly over-powering. Even the hills became more quiet, for they, too, had stopped their whisperings, their movement, and seemed to lose their immense weight.⁵³

For Krishnamurti, nature's appeal is in the silence that resonates between him and it. He, like Jefferies, was glad for the minimum of modern intrusion on nature, so that the human blended with it and did not jar. In the next extract it is clear how people and their obliviousness to nature pained Krishnamurti.

On every table there were daffodils, young, fresh, just out of the garden, with the bloom of spring on them still. On a side table there were lilies, creamy-white with sharp yellow centres. To see this creamy-white and the brilliant yellow of those many daffodils was to see the blue sky, ever expanding, limitless, silent.

Almost all the tables were taken by people talking very loudly and laughing. At a table nearby a woman was surreptitiously feeding her dog with the meat she could not eat. They all seemed to have huge helpings, and it was not a pleasant sight to see people eating; perhaps it may be barbarous to eat publicly. A man across the room had filled himself with wine and meat and was just lighting a big cigar, and a look of beatitude came over his fat face. His equally fat wife lit a cigarette. Both of them appeared to be lost to the world.

And there they were, the yellow daffodils, and nobody seemed to care. They were there for decorative purposes that had no meaning at all; and as you watched them their yellow brilliance filled the noisy room. Colour has this strange effect upon the eye. It wasn't so much that the eye absorbed the colour, as that the colour seemed to fill your being. You *were* that colour; you didn't become that colour – you were of it, without identification or name: the anonymity which is innocence. Where there is no anonymity there is violence, in all its different forms.

But you forgot the world, the smoke-filled room, the cruelty of man, and the red, ugly meat; those shapely daffodils seemed to take you beyond all time.

Love is like that. In it there is no time, space or identity. It is the identity that breeds pleasure and pain; it is the identity that brings hate and war and builds a wall around people, around each one, each family and community. Man reaches over the wall to the other man – but he too is enclosed; morality is a word that bridges the two, and so it becomes ugly and vain.

Love isn't like that; it is like the wood across the way, always renewing itself because it is always dying. There is no permanency in it, which thought seeks; it is a

movement which thought can never understand, touch or feel. The feeling of thought and the feeling of love are two different things; the one leads to bondage and the other to the flowering of goodness. The flowering is not within the area of any society, of any culture or of any religion, whereas the bondage belongs to all societies, religious beliefs and faiths in otherness. Love is anonymous, therefore not violent. Pleasure is violent, for desire and will are moving factors in it. Love cannot be begotten by thought, or by good works. The denial of the total process of thought becomes the beauty of action which is love. Without this there is no bliss of truth.

And over there, on that table, were the daffodils.

(page 145)

This is vintage Krishnamurti, and not primarily a description of nature, but is included because it shows many of his concerns and how he related them to nature. In the daffodils he 'forgot the world'; for Krishnamurti, more like Jefferies than like Whitman, was not the 'rough' type that allows for the common, coarse and good-natured. The following passage shows again Krishnamurti's sensitivity to nature (he is speaking to Asit Chandmal):

"Have you noticed, sir," he said, "that when you enter a forest, for the first time there is a strange atmosphere, as if nature, the trees, do not want you to enter. You hesitate, and say 'It's alright,' and walk in quietly. The second day the resistance is less. And the third day it is gone."

I do not communicate with nature, and so this was something I had never discussed with Krishnamurti.⁵⁴

5. Sartre, Reid, Jaccottet, Dillard

Before pulling together the strands of nature mysticism discussed so far, it is of interest to consider what a specifically 20th century contribution to it may be. Krishnamurti's writings do not have the usual literary or poetic motivations; his nature writings came partly from a spontaneous engagement with nature, but may also be seen as a vehicle for his teachings, given that he has rejected *en masse* the language of mystical traditions (he could easily have spoken of himself as *jnani*, or used the language of the *Cloud of Unknowing*, or that of Socrates, Vivekananda, or Ramana Maharshi, to give just a few examples). Sartre, Reid, Jaccottet and Dillard represent a random selection of writers of the 20th century who also use Nature; what is of interest is that we can characterise their work in terms of *alienation* instead of the romanticism of Keats, Shelley, Wordsworth, and Tennyson for example, or the transcendentalism of Thoreau, Emerson, and Whitman.

In Jean-Paul Sartre's *Nausea* we have perhaps one of the best expositions of this uniquely 20th century alienation (it has always existed of course, but one could say

that with its coming-of-age in this century it has taken on a defined shape). *Nausea*'s key scene takes place in a park where the protagonist, having come to a dead-end in his romantic and professional life, experiences what is commonly understood to be an inversion of the mystic experience, but one triggered by Nature, and so of interest to us. The likely genesis of the entire story is a bad mescaline trip that Sartre took in 1935 (recorded for us by de Beauvoir⁵⁵), a theory supported by the frequent references to crabs and polyps in *Nausea*. The park scene is consistent with other descriptions of drug-induced states, but focuses on his natural surroundings, in particular the root of a chestnut tree, which he *becomes*. For Sartre (and most authorities, including Sartre, agree that it is autobiographical) the mystical experience of union is horrifying, characterised in terms of a sticky glue that permeates the park. He rejects it finally in favour of an immortality gained through literary striving.

Forrest Reid, an Irish writer, includes several 'nature-mystical' scenes in *Peter Waring*, one of which is quoted by Zaehner. Here are a couple of extracts:

And then a strange experience befell me. It was as if everything that a moment before had been all around me and external were now suddenly within me. The whole world was within me. It was within me that the trees waved their green branches; it was within me that the hot sun shone, and that the shade was cool.⁵⁶

The earth beneath me was living and breathing; and obedient to some obscure physical promptings I turned around and pressed my mouth against this dry grass, closer and closer, in a long silent embrace. It was just as well, perhaps, that there was no one to observe this exhibition of primitive and eternal instinct. I felt a passionate happiness and excitement. My head was hot; the salt sharp smell of the sea seemed to have set all my nerves thrilling and tingling; and I unfastened my shirt that my flesh might be naked. The past had slipped from me, and I lived in this moment, squeezing out its ecstasy to the last drop, as I might the juice of some ripe fruit. It seemed to me that I was on the brink of finding something for which all my previous existences had been one long preparation and search: I was fumbling at the door of an enchanted garden: in a moment it would swing open: already the perfume of unknown fruits and flowers was in my nostrils.⁵⁷

We are reminded of the oft-quoted passage from Whitman:

I mind how once we lay such a transparent summer morning,
How you settled you head athwart my hips and gently turn'd over upon me,
And parted the shirt from my bosom-bone, and plunged your tongue to my bare-
stript heart,
And reach'd till you felt my beard, and reach'd till you held my feet.

Swiftly arose and spread around me the peace and knowledge that pass all the
argument of the earth,

And I know that the hand of God is the promise of my own,
 And I know that the spirit of God is the brother of my own,
 And that all the men ever born are also my brothers, and the women my sisters
 and lovers,
 And that a kelson of creation is love, ...

(‘Song of Myself’, v. 5)

Sadly Reid's novel gives us only a few glimpses of nature-rapture: the second extract, as with a third beautiful passage, is brought on partly by the blooming of the protagonist's first-love for a young woman; when his romance fails he then attempts suicide by lying on the grass by the sea to catch pneumonia. The novel is a useful 20th century example of failed nature mysticism; we do not know why the experiences provide no lasting strength for the protagonist and suspect that their presence, though most likely an authentic record of the author's experience, was influenced by Jefferies (Jefferies' *Bevis* is mentioned in the novel). The form of alienation expressed in the novel is a mild one compared to that in *Nausea* (Reid's novel was first written in 1902, but rewritten under a new title in 1936, the time that Sartre was writing *Nausea*). We do not have a vocabulary or taxonomy of alienation in 20th century literature, but Reid's is at the *honest/disappointment* end of the spectrum if one did exist.

Philippe Jaccottet's alienation is of a different and more subtle order than either Reid's or Sartre's. The translator of his poems, Derek Mahon, refers to him as a secular mystic and says: 'Jaccottet's symbols are the elemental, pre-Socratic ones: tree, flower, sun, moon, road, mountain, wind, water, bird, house, lamp.'⁵⁸ Jaccottet's Nature is poorly-lit, usually at dawn, giving glimpses of elevation, but too ham-strung by a fear of death (absent in Sartre and Reid) to be called a nature mysticism. In a sad low-key way Jaccottet does communicate some of the beauty and eternity of Nature, but it is like the bloodless Christianity of the C. of E. transposed to a secular setting. He may be as subtle and obscure as Krishnamurti, but he is lost: perhaps this makes him more appealing.

Annie Dillard shows us a bolder and brighter Nature than Jaccottet; her alienation a little like Sartre's but more comfortable. There is a revealing passage in the introduction by Richard Adams to *Pilgrim at Tinker's Creek*: "If she were to feel much more deeply the misery, futility and waste of Nature which she describes so tellingly, she would go out of her mind; so would we all."⁵⁹ This reminds one of 'nature red in tooth and claw', which she does describe so well: perhaps the chapter on the weasel in *Teaching a Stone to Talk* is a good example. In it she comes face-to-face with a weasel and for a brief moment enters its fierce soul; she finishes by wishing that, like the weasel who bites into the neck of an eagle in its death-throws and whose jaws remains fixed there even when its bones have been bleached by the air and sun and dropped away, she could do the same with the sublime. Unlike the timid Jaccottet she is bold enough but cannot in the end do so: perhaps her

sense of suffering is too strong (as shown in a passage about a burned man). Whatever the cause her alienation from Nature is shown most lyrically in 'A Field of Silence': she experiences the kind of silence that Krishnamurti described in the extract above, but finds no comfort in it:

I do not want, I think, ever to see such a sight again. That there is loneliness here I had granted, in the abstract—but not, I thought, inside the light of God's presence, inside his sanction, and signed by his name.⁶⁰

Further on we find a resonance with *Nausea*:

When I turned away in this manner, the silence gathered and struck me. It bashed me broadside from the heavens above me like yard goods; ten acres of fallen, invisible sky choked the fields. The pastures on either side of the road turned green in a surrealistic fashion, monstrous, impeccable, as if they were holding their breaths. The roosters stopped, All the things of the world—the fields and the fencing, the road, a parked orange truck—were stricken and self-conscious. a world pressed down on their surfaces, a world battered just within their surfaces, and that real world, so near to emerging, had got stuck. There was only silence. It was the silence of matter caught in the act and embarrassed.⁶¹

This could easily have been from *Nausea* in fact: 'choked', 'monstrous', 'stricken and self-conscious', 'stuck', 'caught in the act and embarrassed' is exactly Sartre's language. But as well as the anthropomorphism we also find animism (both of Mercer's concerns!): she later describes the experience in terms of *angels*.

6. A Nature Mysticism Delineated

Traherne, Jefferies, Whitman, and Krishnamurti are mavericks and stand outside of tradition (it is only a literary convenience that Whitman is grouped with the American transcendentalists). However between them they delineate a nature mysticism that the other examples looked at in this essay can only make a minor contribution towards.

What has not yet been introduced and which may be useful in this discussion is the Oriental concept of 'suchness', and its Western equivalent in Eckhart: *istigkeit* ('is-ness'). If we were to ask Krishnamurti what we get by the continued practice of his 'choiceless awareness' his answer could easily be (if he cared for the term): 'suchness'. If we were to characterise the base experience of the nature mystic we could again say: 'suchness'. Why though is Nature any better for an experience of 'suchness' than in a room, or with one's eyes shut? The characteristic of Nature that Krishnamurti dwells on is silence, and this silence is surely just as obtainable in a monk's cell as in a forest.

Or is it? Is there perhaps a certain silence in Nature that has nothing to do with sound or the lack of it, that resonates deep within the observer? Krishnamurti clearly thinks so. However, to reach this silence the 'suchness' of Nature has to penetrate many layers.

Traherne teaches the 'elemental' base of Nature mysticism: a thankfulness for air and light. Although he recommends us to enjoy the residue, even to the point of insatiability, the requirement is to be content with next to little. By clinging to 'air and light', like the Taoist clinging to the Tao, the residue is present in its naked form, without the 'poor mirror' of the mind that Underhill is so aware of. We are then presented with 'suchness.' Jefferies and Whitman both suggest Nature in its more complex forms: trees, skies, and brooks, to penetrate the many layers of our conceptualising and bring us to silent 'suchness.' For Whitman there is an indolent relationship with Nature; Jefferies however has to stride for many hours for Nature to bestow its 'suchness' on him; Krishnamurti simply took his own 'suchness' out to Nature.

The (greatly misunderstood) phenomenon of the silent mind is at the heart of mysticism, and if it comes through Nature then we may call it nature mysticism. The obstacles to the silent mind are legion, but in nature mysticism a hurdle that must be overcome, or come to terms with, is the perception of nature as 'red in tooth and claw.' A sensitive personality – on the one hand a good candidate for nature mysticism – is, on the other hand, quite likely to find the eternal drama of predator and prey abhorrent. Anthony Freeman seems to be of this view, though we do not know from his book of any more detailed reason for his rejection of Nature: perhaps it is simply part of the general Western outlook since the Enlightenment. The scenes, familiar to television-watchers of recent generations, of a lion pack killing and devouring a zebra, with their cat-muzzles soaked in blood and gnawing at the torn remnants of gristle and bone that used to constitute a shy herbivore; all this is too much. Our own pain and death have become so remote and obscenified that we can no longer contemplate them, and neither can we contemplate them in Nature. Looking again at our four main protagonists we find no fear of pain or death in any of their writings, though it is Whitman who deals most thoroughly with the issues. Here he talks of pain:

Agonies are one of my changes of garments,
I do not ask the wounded person how he feels, I myself become the wounded
person,
My hurt turns livid upon me as I lean on a cane and observe.
(Song of Myself, v. 33)

This is not an easy passage to deal with, particularly the image of him leaning on his cane and observing. However, his long and selfless tending of the Civil War in-

jured in the field and the hospital – he helped many a soldier die in a more thankful and easy state of mind than would have been possible without his attendance and ministrations – lend a legitimacy to his *almost* callous statement. Of death he repeatedly sings his indifference or even pleasure at the prospect (like Socrates); here is an example:

And as to you Death, and you bitter hug of mortality, it is idle to try and alarm me.

To his work without flinching the accoucheur [midwife] comes,
I see the elder-hand pressing receiving supporting,
I recline by the sills of the exquisite flexible doors,
And mark the outlet, and mark the relief and escape.

And as to you Corpse I think you are good manure, but that does not offend me,
I smell the white roses sweet-scented and growing,
I reach to the leafy lips, I reach to the polish'd breasts of melons.

And as to you Life I reckon you are the leavings of many deaths,
(No doubt I have died myself ten thousand times before.)

(Song Of Myself, v. 43)

This passage points to a possible knowledge by Whitman of reincarnation, and certainly for the Oriental religions reincarnation is a way of dealing with death. Dillard however clearly finds pain difficult to deal with, and perhaps Sartre's indifference can be put down merely to an indifferent constitution generally (either to his own or others' pain). There is a morbidity in Dillard however, and this is perhaps simply a part of modern alienation. The opposite tendency, that of romanticising Nature, has different problems. In a typical Romantic view the problems of pain and death are merely glossed over and the sublime and aesthetic dimensions predominate. There is also the possibility that Nature becomes the escape (perhaps more with Shelly than with Wordsworth for example) and that 'simple' Nature will not suffice. The view from a grimy city bedsit window of a single tree with two pigeons in it is a microcosm of Nature, surely sufficient for the nature mystic, while the great vistas of the Alps are just more of the same. (We saw earlier that Whitman pointed this out: for Whitman the simple human activity of building a house, fishing, or even – hard to take – a slave auctioneer at his work, all these also were his 'suchness' and part of Nature.) Krishnamurti on the other hand, a pessimist like Jefferies, saw Nature in contrast to the human: his daffodils more precious by far than the consumers of meat and swiggers of brandy in the restaurant.

The *occult* nature of a teacher like Rudolf Steiner represents yet another view of Nature that is problematic. There is not space here to go into this in detail other than to mention his view of incarnation generally as a kind of 'fall' (consistent with Anthroposophy as esoteric Christianity). Another problem with Steiner is the an-

thropomorphic view of natural entities as 'sleeping' human entities: Mercer is worried by any kind of anthropomorphism in Nature mysticism. Our four main protagonists certainly do not promote such a view, though Whitman seems faintly sympathetic to an animist outlook. Blake, Swedenborg and Jacob Boehme also have 'occult' views on Nature and need to be compared with each other and Steiner.

7. A Pedagogy

If we pick up on Mercer's contribution of reflecting on how a nature mysticism may be pursued then what could form the basis of a pedagogy in it? There is only space here to venture a few remarks on this, but we could begin by imagining a purposeful placing of oneself in a 'natural' situation: it may only be a city park, but preferably a less-populated area of the countryside, perhaps with woods, fields and streams. What would turn a walk in the park or country into a fruitful exercise in nature mysticism? We could turn first to Traherne to lose our preoccupation with the tinsel and baubles of the world (whatever these may represent to one), and to be grounded in the air and light. We might consider Whitman's 'Lessons of a Tree' and his 'sociable-silent' relationship with them; if our mortality is preoccupying us then we might recall his contentment to become manure, and to 'reach to the polished breasts of melons.' With Jefferies we might look at our own limbs and see them as the distillation of the 'designless loveliness of the trees,' and also feel somewhere within a soul that 'cannot be dipped in time.' With Krishnamurti we might look at the hedgerow, with its harmonious balance of the living and dying that make eternal Nature, and fall deep into its silence.

8. Conclusions

Mystics of the first rank are rare and often misunderstood: nature mystics of the first rank are even rarer. This makes any delineation of nature mysticism problematic, though its undercurrent in secular life is strong and helps support its definition. We have seen that concepts such as 'suchness' and silence of the mind are relevant; the outlook of the nature mystic as related to the *via positiva* is useful, though not necessarily implying optimism. Nature can teach a simplicity; it also teaches a lesson of the immortality of the Whole through the birth and death of individuals: this means a deep contemplation of one's own pain and death however.

Nature mysticism has boundaries with the occult and paranormal, with the sublime and with the aesthetic: these boundaries need to be explored in more detail. Its relationship to other forms of mysticism need to be explored: for example a nature mystic with a devotional orientation (Traherne and perhaps Whitman) differs from a nature mystic with a *jnani* orientation (Jefferies and Krishnamurti). While a full-blown nature mysticism is rare its presence in a nascent form is widespread in the world's

literature, and the reasons for its failure to blossom are there to be discovered in that literature. Anti-nature also needs to be explored, including Huysman's *Against Nature*, D.H.Lawrences' attacks on nature in *Studies in Classic American Literature*, and a whole range of modern writers including Quentin Crisp.

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