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## Don't Climb Every Mountain

Gravity is a harsh mistress.

— *Superhero The Tick*

Mountains and disabled people have something in common: they both get stereotyped as inspirational. Climbing a mountain, reaching its peak, is a personal experience mediated by centuries of preexisting symbolism. The mountaintop stands for all kinds of excellence: the high point, the acme, the peak of perfection, and the sublime. The mountain has an imperative quality: if you *can* climb it, you *must* climb it, “because it was there.” Don't just climb one mountain; “Climb Ev'ry Mountain.” The mountaintop is the ultimate standpoint, and reaching the top has acquired its own verb: “to summit.” Across the lifespan of American literature, many writers have expressed their shock of contact and their spiritual transformation at the summit. Mountain climbing stands for accomplishment, communion with divinity, and more recently, the acquisition of ecological consciousness. Mountaineering awakens the climber's respect for nature and deepens his environmental ethic. But what if you can't climb a mountain? The love of nature does not require specific bodily abilities. Mountaineering is an impossible standard internalized by many people who cannot climb.

My project here is to bring disability studies to bear on the environmental imagination. I challenge the unexamined ableism in ecocritical discourse. The value system of current environmentalism asserts that humans are part of nature and therefore obligated to care about it, not as rulers or stewards but as participants. This value system goes wrong when it defines some people as closer to nature than others. In

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this essay, I critique such exclusionary thinking and seek to widen the repertoire of human responses to nature. I focus on the genre of the first-person memoir, a literary form common in disability narratives as well as nature writing. In my literary criticism, I use the theoretical tools of phenomenology. Phenomenology is a useful discipline for this project, because it studies humans' perceptions of their surroundings from the first-person point of view. I borrow from the neighboring fields of ecophenomenology and queer phenomenology to construct a disability phenomenology of nature.

There is a pitfall, however, in relying on first-person memoirs to elaborate environmental consciousness. Thinking through one's own able body can reproduce normate assumptions about other people's bodies. First-person nature encounter narratives generally focus on the interaction between one specific body and one specific landscape. A narrow focus can eclipse the possibility of other body types and other landscapes. You can't see the body that isn't there. You can't see the people shut out by the lack of disability access; those not there because racists drove their great-grandparents out of town; and those not there because they have left the area to search for work. A consciousness grounded in a certain type of body, and that body grounded in a certain type of landscape, provides a vivid example of situated knowledge. The more specific we get about situated knowledge, though, the more we encounter the problem: Whose body will be exemplary? Disability memoirists, nature writers, and phenomenologists all use their own bodies as examples to make their points. How can these writers avoid exclusionary thinking? What kind of presence can register absence?

One solution is to turn to writing that is dialogic in and of itself: writing that contains a multiple consciousness. An important source for multiple consciousnesses lies in minority discourses. Minority discourses in the USA would include the writings of people of color and people from poor, queer, and disability communities. A member of a stigmatized minority group has to know the majority culture as well as his own. He never has the luxury of believing that his is the ideal or only body type that could occupy a particular space. If he so chooses, he can take this knowledge and use it to shape a more inclusive vision. Knowledge flows from the hard-earned experience of not feeling at home and then reflecting upon that experience. Even more complex knowledge results from negotiating multiple minority identities at the same time. Multiple consciousnesses can inspire multivoiced discourses within one narrative. Even when the story focuses on one body in one landscape, it can still retain an awareness of "Who's not here?" or "Who's not here yet?" Furthermore, minority consciousness

reveals the social privilege inherent in phenomenology, with its focus on mindfulness in the moment. If I am hungry and broke, or if I am being bullied, I may find it counterproductive to dwell attentively in the present place and time.

To demonstrate these principles, I do a close reading of Eli Clare's 1999 memoir *Exile and Pride: Disability, Queerness, and Liberation*. *Exile and Pride* combines disability narrative, nature writing, and reflections on identity politics and environmentalism. Clare has a sophisticated multiple consciousnesses derived in part from multiple forms of oppression. A transgender poet and memoirist with cerebral palsy, Clare cripps and queers conventional mountain climbing narratives in order to open up the symbolic landscape. Disability studies scholar Carrie Sandahl offers good definitions of queering and crippling: "Queering describes the practices of putting a spin on mainstream representations to reveal latent queer subtexts; of appropriating a representation for one's own purposes, forcing it to signify differently . . . Crippling spins mainstream representations or practices to reveal able-bodied assumptions and exclusionary effects" (37). Clare uses his personal history to redefine the relationship between the human body and the environment. His work moves toward a disability phenomenology of nature.

When bodies take up spaces that weren't expecting them, the rules of the game change. A sense of exile can be as revelatory as a sense of belonging. Disorientation can be the surest guide. Failure can become a form of liberation. As Clare's book shows, experience derived from membership in multiple minority groups can open up new landscapes of ideas. A mountain climbing story re-defines accomplishment. Bodily oppression in human society leads to an intimate sense of nature as refuge. Social exile spurs awareness of others who have been exiled from the landscape. Minority discourses help us to move beyond a parochial sense of place. The lessons learned from disorientation and inaccessibility can yield knowledge as valuable as the lessons learned from closeness to nature. The failure to feel at home can be a creative failure that leads to a more fully grounded politics of the body.

### Ecocritical Ableism

There is a long tradition in ecological writing that defines people with disabilities as the opposite of environmentalists. The ecocritic Sarah Jaquette Ray has coined the term "wilderness bodily ideal" to describe how adventure and nature writers have prized "the 'fit' body—able, muscular, young, and male—as a means to transcendence . . .

To the extent that engaging in adventure culture has become a reflection of environmental sensibility, bodies that do not fit this model are deemed unenvironmental" (260, 259). Jaquette Ray identifies "the disability-equals-alienation-from-nature trope" in several generations of writers, including Edward Abbey, who pondered in *Desert Solitaire* (1968) "how to pry the tourists out of their automobiles, their back-breaking upholstered mechanized wheelchairs and onto their feet, onto the strange warmth and solidity of Mother Earth again" (49). Abbey takes wheelchairs as his metaphor for alienation from nature and the ability to stand up as the prerequisite for reconnection. A wheelchair user, then, has the wrong body for Mother Earth.

Where the wilderness bodily ideal meets the symbolic importance of mountains, one finds an element of moral superiority. Reaching a higher altitude registers as spiritual transcendence. The influential disability studies scholar Rosemarie Garland-Thomson writes, "Western tradition posits the visible world as the index of a coherent and just invisible world, encouraging us to read the material body as a sign invested with transcendent meaning" (11). The climber on the slope embodies the invisible value system of environmentalism: a coherent and just relationship between humans and nature.

Locating spiritual transcendence in the body of the mountain climber, ecocritic Jeffrey Mathes McCarthy notes that "to transcend" literally means "to climb over": "So, all the time we use "transcend" in reference to metaphysics, or belief, or material trials, that word is rooted firmly in the physical act of climbing" (158). McCarthy argues that a "culture-wide" change in environmental consciousness can be "modeled in climbing" (173). In his analysis of mountaineering memoirs, McCarthy argues that the strenuous bodily work of climbing induces greater environmental consciousness: "[M]y reading of climbing narratives suggests that the life of the body pushes people beyond ego-centrism . . . the connection of self and environment climbers report is crucially shaped by the physicality of climbing" (170). In this formulation, environmental consciousness depends on bodily ability. Here, it is a very specific bodily ability to wield ice axes and find toe-holds.

Where the wilderness bodily ideal meets mountaineers with disabilities, the result is a Supercrip story. In disability studies, "Supercrip" refers to a disabled person portrayed as astonishing and exceptional. It refers less to an actual person and more to the portrayal of that person's activities. Mass media stories about people with disabilities are often Supercrip stories, showing them doing astounding things like raising children, playing basketball, and brushing their teeth. The Supercrip stereotype assumes that we can overcome our

disabilities and do anything with our bodies if we have strong characters and we want it hard enough (which also assumes that if we can't overcome our disabilities it's because we are weak-willed and indifferent). Take for example, this item from the American news magazine *The Week*:

Three U.S. veterans have conquered Mount Kilimanjaro — with only one good leg among them. Dan Nevins, 39, and Neil Duncan, 26, each lost both their legs, in Iraq and Afghanistan, respectively. Kirk Bauer, 62, lost one leg in Vietnam, in 1969. All use prostheses. They hiked to the top of Africa's highest peak, at 19,330 feet, to show that disability need not lead to inactivity. "If three amputees from three different wars and two different generations with literally one good leg can climb Kilimanjaro," said Bauer, "our other disabled friends can get out and go hiking or go biking or swim a mile, can get out and lead a healthy life. ("It Wasn't All Bad" 1)

A Supercrip story such as this one presents an exemplary body. Like other wilderness bodily ideals, the mountaineering Supercrip says, "You need to be more like me." Supercrips never accomplish anything just for their own pleasure or reward. The accomplishment always serves someone else. Here, Mr. Bauer presents himself and his two climbing companions as examples for disabled people down below. The climbing of Mount Kilimanjaro becomes a stick to beat up our other disabled friends who are too lazy to get off the couch and go for a hike. The Supercrip story also serves a wider audience as a source of "inspiration," that hackneyed term often applied to people with disabilities. Within disability studies, we talk about the Supercrip as an impossibly high standard other people with disabilities can't reach. The Supercrip therefore becomes a token, justifying exclusion of a broader disability community. If disability narratives can also be exclusionary and parochial, how can we open up the landscape to greater inclusion? We can start with the tools of reflection to be found in phenomenology and minority discourse.

### Phenomenologies

In recent decades, ecophenomenology has stressed the importance of bringing the body's knowledge back into the discourse and ethics of place. Like disability studies, ecophenomenology seeks to make the ties between bodies and environments conscious rather than automatic. Edmund Husserl, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and the other

inventors of phenomenology belonged to a modernist intellectual milieu, and with the modernists they shared an interest in making strange the habitual moments, the preowned categories of discourse, where we think we already know what something means before we even discover it. For Merleau-Ponty, the language of philosophy “asks for our experience of the world what the world is before it is a thing one speaks of and which is taken for granted, before it has been reduced to a set of manageable, disposable significations” (102).

Ecophenomenologists aim for active attention to the natural world. Ted Toadvine speculates that perhaps “an ethical response to nature becomes possible only when we are faced with the *impossibility* of reducing it to the homogeneous, the continuous, the predictable, the perceivable, the thematizable” (140). Resistance to prefabricated thought offers a direct link between ecophenomenology and disability theory. While ecophenomenology aims for fresh perception of nature, disability studies rouse awareness to the living body inside pat phrases like “blind justice” and “lame jokes.” What is the reality of blindness or lameness as a lived experience, before it is reduced to a tired metaphor?

Ironically, though, ecophenomenology sometimes leans on prefabricated notions of the human body while attempting to describe fresh contact with nature. Charles S. Brown and Ted Toadvine note, “the lifeblood of phenomenology lies in its concrete descriptions” (xvi). This lifeblood is also its weakness. For instance, David Abram argues for deliberate awareness of the

improvised duet between my animal body and the fluid, breathing landscape that it inhabits.” Abram assumes that this duet is subconscious, as when “my legs, hiking, continually attune and adjust themselves to the varying steepness of the mountain slopes behind this house without my verbal consciousness needing to direct those adjustments. (52–53)

Because he is able-bodied, Abram pictures the body's movement up a mountain as a subconscious act. This is not true for many people with disabilities. If mountain climbing is possible at all, we attempt it with much troubleshooting and deliberation. In calling for consciousness of nature, Abram claims an ableist starting point.

A narrow viewpoint easily arises from the privileging of local knowledge. If you define identity as local, you can't include those who live in other places. Ursula Heise questions, “just how tenuous the sense-of-place rhetoric has become for ecocriticism” (41). Heise critiques situated knowledge from the viewpoint of globalism, but her critique is

useful for disability studies as well. Local knowledge depends heavily on, as Heise says, “sensory perception and physical immersion, the bodily experience and manipulation of nature” (30). Situated knowledge thus requires the ability to see, hear, immerse oneself, and manipulate physical objects. Place-based rhetoric becomes even more exclusive if we assume that one’s ethics result from such sensory and physical immersion. Heise writes: “ecologically oriented discussions of place . . . tend to rest on the assumption that only a relatively small and directly experienceable spatial and communal framework will yield affective attachments and ethical commitments” (45). If ethics grow from intimacy with a certain corner of nature and you can’t access that corner, then you cannot have an environmental ethic.

If they so choose, writers can learn from their own experiences of minority identity to advance a more cosmopolitan perspective. The term “epistemic privilege” comes from feminist standpoint epistemology and signifies the knowledge advantage that comes with minority identity. Identity scholar Paula Moya claims,

The key to claiming epistemic privilege for people who have been oppressed in a particular way stems from an acknowledgment that they have experiences—experiences that people who are not oppressed in the same way usually lack—that *can* provide them with information we all need to understand how hierarchies of race, class, gender, and sexuality operate to uphold existing regimes of power in our society. (80–81)

Moya has left disability off this list, but it certainly belongs there.

Because they both emerge from minority consciousness, queer phenomenology provides a good model for a disability phenomenology. Instead of assuming the body’s easy orientation in nature, queer phenomenology assumes and even valorizes disorientation. In *Queer Phenomenology*, Sara Ahmed argues, “Indeed, to live out a politics of disorientation might be to sustain wonder about the very forms of social gathering” (24). Ahmed talks about minority identity in geographical terms useful to the discussion of disabled bodies in the landscape. “If orientation is about making the strange familiar through the extension of bodies into space, then disorientation occurs when that extension fails” (11). For Ahmed, the failure of the queer body to find acceptance, to nest, and to walk the straight path opens up new and divergent possibilities. Like the modernists who created phenomenology, Ahmed values the process of making the familiar strange, a process common to both disability and queerness. As Michael Davidson asserts, “One of the key tasks of disability studies is to take

the ordinary out of ordinary language, the familiar out of defamiliarization, the ability out of disability in order to understand the essentialist and ableist core to our definitions of difference" (33). Davidson uses the term "the defamiliar body" to describe this process, while Ahmed calls it the ability "to sustain wonder."

Disorientation can be painful and troubling, especially when it arises from social exclusion. Therefore, we should not reify or glorify disorientation as a desirable state in itself. Disorientation is useful when it blazes new trails.

### Eli Clare I: Redrawing the Topo Map

The writings of Eli Clare play out the politics of disorientation. The intersection of queer and disability identities opens up new landscapes of multiple consciousnesses. Clare is a transgender male poet and essayist with cerebral palsy who can walk. He uses his situated knowledge of disability and queerness to create a more inclusive counter history of nature. Clare's 1999 memoir *Exile and Pride: Disability, Queerness, and Liberation* is his account of growing up female, disabled, and queer in the Oregon woods. *Exile and Pride* presents a dialectic of belonging and not-belonging, a struggle of opposites that yields a new social location. Clare identifies deeply with the beaches, river, and forest of his girlhood home. Nonetheless, he also delineates a mismatch between home and body. His sense of exile is as revelatory as his sense of belonging.

Clare hypothesizes about his own presence in the landscape with a speculation similar to phenomenology. *Exile and Pride* is an interlocked series of autobiographical and political essays that fuse disability narrative and ecological nature writing. Clare often describes the mediation between self and place as a set of conscious steps or positions. He always registers this mediation as a political act. *Exile and Pride* is dedicated "To the rocks and trees, hills and beaches" (v) of an Oregon childhood, evoking Clare's primary sense of belonging. His intimacy with nature is strong and enduring, and so is his commitment to environmentalism.

I am the backpacker whose favorite trails now wind through old growth rain forest, trees standing so tall I can't find their tops . . . Everything cascades green, moss upon moss, swordtail ferns sprouting from rotten logs. The trail bends again and again around Sitka spruce, their roots sticking up high above ground, knobby and twisted. There is no undergrowth, only a thousand

shades of green. Among these trees, I find a quiet. I am the activist who has never poured sugar into a cat's gas tank but knows how. (20)

Clare holds the tension between his multiple and often contradictory identities as native of a poor Oregon logging town, poet, environmentalist, transgender man, abuse survivor, beneficiary of white privilege, active outdoorsman, and person with cerebral palsy. His writing contains a nuanced understanding of multiple identity formation. He layers one identity over another to reveal different facets of personal and political truth. "Gender reaches into disability; disability wraps around class; class strains against abuse; abuse snarls into sexuality; sexuality folds on top of race . . . everything finally piling into a single human body" (123). This layering of identities includes kinship with the land, yet also registers the absence of nonwhite, queer, and disabled people who could inhabit or did inhabit that landscape. Disorientation allows Clare to diverge from the ordinary paths through the forest, and he uses that experience to enrich his social ethics. Clare does not assume that his body is the "natural" counterpart to the Oregon forest and ocean. His body's mismatch with the landscape opens up critiques of ableism, patriarchy, racism, and environmental destruction. Clare reaches beyond his own sense of exile to the history of others who have been exiled.

In the nature writing of *Exile and Pride*, Clare dismantles bodily stereotypes and barriers. The book is divided into two parts called "Place" and "Bodies," as if to highlight the estrangement of the two as well as their need for reconnection. *Exile and Pride's* first chapter enacts the dialectic of belonging and not-belonging in order to bring disability into the social construction of nature. Only then can the book move on to Clare's identification with the outdoors.

At the start of *Exile and Pride*, Clare crips and queers the familiar figure of the male mountain climber. In his mountain-climbing story, Clare attempts and fails to reproduce bodily norms with a creativity similar to the work of queering in queer theory. He shreds "the masculine sublime," a discourse Susan R. Schrepfer finds in American men's climbing narratives. The masculine sublime subtly excludes disability in the very act of claiming and esteeming bodily vulnerability. Women climbers write "of joy and freedom, of warmth, of being 'at home,' and of the pleasure of companionship" (Schrepfer 144). Men, on the other hand, describe a "sublime moment of terror, mastered by will and reason and bringing spiritual transformation" (130). In one climbing story after another, men describe a feeling of abjection in the face of danger, followed by a new sense of clarity, spirit, and power. They risk

harm, and then emerge unharmed and triumphant. The disabled body haunts the masculine sublime by its absence. Clare's mountain climbing story is the return of the repressed.

Before Eli Clare writes about a literal mountain, he moves a couple of figurative mountains out of the way: the Supercrip and the masculine sublime. Clare begins his book not with literal mountain climbing but with its social construction. Here, the mountain doesn't symbolize transcendence, perseverance, communion with the sublime, or ecological awareness. Rather, the mountain symbolizes the oppression of marginalized people, defined not just as people with disabilities but much more broadly.

The mountain as metaphor looms large in the lives of marginalized people, people whose bones get crushed in the grind of capitalism, patriarchy, white supremacy. How many of us have struggled up the mountain, measured ourselves against it, failed up there, lived in its shadow? (1)

Susan Schrepfer sums up the ideology of the masculine sublime as "Mountains as the measure of men" (126). Clare also regards the mountain as a measuring stick, but sees it as an impossible standard that people nonetheless internalize. "We hear from the summit that the world is grand from up there . . . we decide to climb the mountain, or make a pact that our children will climb it" (1).

On Clare's metaphorical mountain, marginalized people try and fail to orient themselves. Clare uses the mountaintop as an "orientation device," in the same way queer phenomenologist Sara Ahmed uses the term to describe a heterosexual couple: "The fantasy of a natural orientation is an orientation device that organizes worlds around the form of the heterosexual couple, as if it were from this 'point' that the world unfolds" (85). People down below attempt to organize themselves in accordance with the standpoint of the people on the summit. Their failures are revelatory. "Up there on the mountain, we confront the external forces, the power brokers who benefit so much from their privileged position at the very summit. But just as vividly, we come face-to-face with our own bodies, all that we cherish and despise, all that lies embedded there" (2). There is an attempt at belonging, a swing into not belonging, and then a deeper understanding of self and place that results from this dynamic. Epistemic benefits flow from the hard-earned life experience of not feeling at home and then reflecting upon that experience. This learning process benefits not just the individual but the community. Sara Ahmed describes this process:

When bodies take up spaces that they were not intended to inhabit, something other than the reproduction of the facts of the matter happens. The hope that the reproduction fails is the hope for new impressions, for new lines to emerge, new objects, or even new bodies, which gather, by gathering around this table. (62–63)

Thus, the failure to reproduce the norm—here, the norm being the standpoint from the summit—is a creative failure. The mismatch between the bodies and the landscape contains the hope for new possibilities. Nonetheless, Eli Clare doesn't end the story with the glories of alienation. Rather, he adopts the standpoint of the mountain bodily ideal in order to perform an almost comic deconstruction of it. He describes members of his community as having the “wrong bodies” in order to show the process of re-definition that occurs when bodies take up spaces that weren't expecting them. The mismatch between body and landscape serves a larger critique of the exclusionary power structure. “We lose the trail. Our wheelchairs get stuck. We speak the wrong languages with the wrong accents, wear the wrong clothes, carry our bodies the wrong ways, ask the wrong questions, love the wrong people” (1). This wrongness goes far beyond disability to encompass a wide intersection of multiple identities with outsiderhood in common. The view from the mountaintop fails spectacularly as an orientation device; it's more like a disorientation device. The “very people who told us how wonderful life is at the summit booby-trap the trail. They burn the bridge over the impassable canyon. They redraw our topo maps so that we end up walking in circles” (1).

Moving further into minority consciousness, Clare then switches the standpoint and looks up at the summit from the perspective of the people down below. The tight grip of an internalized impossible standard, of “mountains as the measure of men,” begins to loosen. It turns out that “it's goddamn lonely up there on the mountain.” “We decide to climb back down to the people we love, where the food, the clothes, the dirt, the sidewalk, the steaming asphalt under our feet, our crutches, all feel right” (1). The mountain loses its power to command and becomes an option to be questioned. Here is failure as a form of liberation.

Clare recapitulates this process of discovery in a Supercrip narrative from his own life. He tells a mountain climbing story from the perspective of disability politics. Clare engages in conscious motor planning, a mindful relationship between body and nature akin to phenomenology. He plans a hiking trip with a nondisabled friend to the White Mountains of New Hampshire. He pores over the topo map, looking for a landscape that will match his internal bodily ideal of himself as a

hiker: "breathing hard, sweat drenching my cotton t-shirt, dripping into my eyes. I love this pull and stretch, quads and calves, lungs and heart, straining" (4). Body and mountain form a perfect match, with the hiker loving the physical workout that the steep grade enables. Clare judges the lines on the topo map in terms of bodily ability.

I looked for a big mountain, for a long, hard hike, for a trail that would take us well above treeline. I picked Mount Adams. I think I asked Adrienne, "Can I handle this trail?" meaning, "Will I have to clamber across deep gulches on narrow log bridges without hand railings to get to the top of this mountain?" Without a moment's hesitation, she said, "No problem." (3)

Clare's question points toward a disability epistemology of movement. There's a clash of styles here between disability thinking and able-bodied thinking. One could say that Adrienne gives a minimalist answer to a baroque question. Clare is thinking about landscape at a level of specificity familiar in disability communities. There's a difference in what is considered relevant or irrelevant information. Clare calls his explicit motor planning a "strategic game": "I watch Adrienne ahead of me hop from one rock to the next up this tumble trail of granite. I know that she's breathing hard, that this is no easy climb, but also that each step isn't a strategic game for her" (4). Clare engages in what occupational therapists call "task analysis," breaking down new or difficult jobs into smaller units. For instance, Clare describes here how he came back down the mountain: "It's hard and slow, and I use my hands and butt often and wish I could use gravity as Adrienne does to bounce from one flat spot to another, down this jumbled pile of rocks" (5).

The detailed scanning of the environment is part of disability culture's everyday adaptation and troubleshooting. This strategic game could be seen as an example of what disability scholar Mike Dorn calls "geographical maturity": a "form of being-in-the-world that is never complacent with the state of things, but sensitive and responsive to changing environmental conditions and willing to chart new lines of movement that others might follow" (189). Geographical maturity can be sinuous or diagonal rather than straightforward, adaptable rather than fixed. It resembles Merleau-Ponty's modesty in discovering an environment we can meet but never master (Westling 870). It also resembles the epistemic benefit Sara Ahmed finds in a queer life that veers off from the straight heterosexual line. "In such loving and living we learn to feel the oblique in the slant of its slant as another kind of gift. We would not aim to overcome the disorientation of the queer

moment, but instead inhabit the intensity of its moment" (107). Eli Clare embodies the oblique in the slant of its slant, with his asymmetrical body, "shoulders set slightly off center, left riding higher than right" (123) who "Roamed the beaches at high tide and low" (124). The slant of its slant brings the gift of expanded awareness, an awareness that lingers even when Clare is writing about the environment rather than queerness or disability.

Ultimately, Clare must draw upon his geographical maturity to acknowledge his own limits and to change the plan. "I start getting scared as the trail steepens, then steepens again, the rocks not letting up" (4). Eli and Adrienne decide to turn around and go back down the mountain. Eli concedes his inability. "I cry, maybe for the first time, over something I want to do, had many reasons to believe I could, but really can't. I cry hard, then get up and follow Adrienne back down the mountain" (5).

The story as a whole illustrates an important dynamic in disability epistemology: the struggle to accept the limitations of one's body versus the internalized desire to live up to impossible standards.

I climbed Mount Adams for an hour and a half scared, not sure I'd ever be able to climb down . . . and yet I climbed. Climbed surely because I wanted the summit, because of the love rumbling in my bones. But climbed also because I wanted to say, 'Yes, I have CP, but see. See, watch me. I can climb mountains, too.' I wanted to prove myself once again. I wanted to overcome my CP. (8–9)

Clare wants the classic mountain-climbing experience. He strains toward the summit partly because he loves mountains, but partly because of an internalized wilderness bodily ideal. Clare describes himself in the grip of Supercrip logic, where accomplishment never happens just for its own sake but also as a way of serving others: in this case, proving to the wider world that a person with cerebral palsy can climb a mountain. Why would such proof be necessary? According to Clare, it's "because down at the base of the mountain waits a nursing home" (12). Physical inability can provide an excuse for the segregation of people with disabilities. Two kinds of fear duel with each other: the fear of being stranded on the mountain versus the fear of social exclusion. This dilemma illustrates the difficulties of navigating the normative world's power and expectations.

Eli Clare is hardly the first person to experience fear while mountain climbing. After all, the mountain sublime is supposed to be frightening. As Greg Garrard notes, "The beautiful is loved for its smallness, softness, delicacy; the sublime admired for its vastness and

overwhelming power" (64). The difference lies in the way the hiker responds to the fear. Disability narratives can widen the emotional repertoire of possible responses to nature. In those responses, we can compare and contrast not only disability with able-bodiedness, but also transgender masculinity with the masculine sublime. According to Susan Schrepfer, men's climbing narratives turn on a "sublime moment of terror, mastered by will and reason and bringing spiritual transformation" (171). In the masculine sublime, fear must be dominated and suppressed. However, fear also enables the spiritual transformation. For ecocritic and mountaineer Jeffrey McCarthy, fear awakens a new sensitivity to ecological destruction through a heightened sense of one's own body and its vulnerability. Fear shocks the senses into awareness. McCarthy claims that "the body's very doom" is an open secret in mountaineering literature. Terror is always there yet denied: "it is a trademark of climbing writing that this lurking fear should be recognized but, like some long-gone lover, never introduced" (171). The masculine sublime courts the risk of disability only to deny it.

Eli Clare's story crips and queers the masculine sublime. Clare allows himself to cry at his disappointment. He acknowledges the fear, the risk, and ultimately his own limitations. When Clare writes that "I climbed Mount Adams for an hour and a half scared, not sure I'd ever be able to climb down," (8) he sees himself in the grip of a self-destructive attitude: trying to pass as nondisabled. Disability theorist Tobin Siebers writes, "For both the physically and mentally disabled, passing often requires overcompensation that exacerbates already existing conditions" (118). Passing enacts a normative form of magical thinking: the wish for the disability to just go away.

Ultimately, Clare sees his fear as a rational response to a dangerous situation and a cue to stop climbing the mountain. He doesn't have the able-bodied luxury of denying or triumphing over the fear. People with disabilities generally do not have the physical and emotional reserves to throw ourselves into the abjection of the sublime—and we generally don't need to do so in order to get a keen sense of our bodily realities. Clare tells a story of accomplishment, but not the accomplishment of climbing a mountain. The accomplishment here is the acceptance of one's own limitations.

Clare's nature encounter narrative ends not with the triumph of reaching the summit, but with some serious introspection about social attitudes toward disability. In US public discourse, there is a growing trend to portray people with disabilities as "handi-capable" rather than incapable. This trend is a wonderful thing. However, as Eli Clare points out, the can-do attitude has its own drawbacks. The social message

urging, "Never give up. You can do anything if you work hard enough" sometimes drowns out the message of "Know your limits." As Clare writes, "Overcoming has a powerful grip. Back home, my friends told me, 'But you can walk any of us under the table.' My sister . . . told me, 'I bet with the right gear and enough practice you *could* climb Mount Adams.' . . . I never once heard, 'You made the right choice when you turned around.' The mountain just won't let go" (9).

Clare concludes his Supercrip story with the vision of a future that allows more choices: "Post-revolution I expect there will still be literal mountains I want to climb and can't, but I'll be able to say without doubt, without hesitation, "Let's turn around here. This one is too steep, too slippery for my feet" (13). In this future world, one can acknowledge a mismatch between the disabled body and the landscape quite matter-of-factly. If the landscape is too slippery for your feet, you don't have to cram yourself into it like an ugly stepsister trying on the glass slipper. And you don't have to reject nature as a whole. You can simply change landscapes. The fetishism of mountain climbing reflects what William Cronon calls "these peculiarly American ways of thinking about wilderness [which] encourage us to adopt too high a standard for what counts as 'natural'" (86–87).

## Eli Clare II: Nature and Selfhood

Ultimately, Eli Clare moves us from the recreational wilderness to the timberland of Oregon and the economic struggles of the working-class white people who live there. In the spirit of the environmental justice movement, Clare turns toward a model of the environment as the place where we live and work (DiChiro 301). Clare grew up on the Oregon coast near the Elk River outside Port Orford, Oregon, which he describes as a "dying logging and fishing town" (30). Throughout the book, Clare returns to imagery of the Oregon woods and beaches. In this landscape, Clare has a strong and abiding sense of belonging.

Clare portrays nature as a girl's first and best teacher. She "spent long days at the river learning what I could from the salmon, frogs, and salamanders. Roamed the beaches at high tide and low, starfish, mussels, barnacles clinging to the rocks. Wandered in the hills thick with moss, fern, liverwort, bramble, tree" (124). The world outdoors was safe from the labels, cruelties, and restrictions of the human world. Clare represents the Oregon landscape as his only reliable girlhood companion. Or something closer than a companion: nature as the repository of selfhood. Clare describes his young body in terms of ability and activity. Clare had his "favorite climbing trees—white fir, grand fir, myrtle. I'd wrap my hands around their branches, skin

against bark, and pull my body up, clambering toward the sky, resting in the cradles where branch met trunk" (20). The image of skin sliding against bark portrays Clare's intimacy with nature. The girl finds intimacy in the water as well, recalling "how my body felt swimming in the river, chinook fingerlings nibbling at my toes" (123).

Closeness to nature takes on a distinctive shape for a child from a minority group who survives abuse and prejudice. Clare endured bullying because of his disability and also endured sadistic sexual abuse. Like other abuse survivors, she mentally vacated her body. "I lived by splitting body from mind, body from consciousness, body from physical sensation, body from emotion as the bullies threw rocks and called me *retard*, as my father and his buddies tied me down, pulled out their knives" (131). Abuse makes "inhabiting the intensity of the moment" impossible. In the context of child abuse and hate crimes, phenomenology's call to live consciously in the here and now looks like a marker of privilege available only to a lucky few.

Nonetheless, Eli Clare achieves a closeness to nature all the more remarkable and valuable in this context. The comfort, kinship, and education Clare received from nature were especially important because life was so unsafe elsewhere. The woods, rivers, beaches, and their inhabitants furnished the sense of belonging that human society refused to provide.

At 13, my most sustaining relations were not in the human world. I collected stones—red, green, gray, rust, white speckled with black, black streaked with silver—and kept them in my pockets, their hard surfaces warming slowly to my body heat. . . . Those stones warm in my pockets, I knew them to be the steadiest, only inviolate parts of myself. (124)

How does Clare envision the relationship between body and landscape? Nature becomes the body's haven. Clare entrusts "the only inviolate parts of myself" to the stones. Although her parents fail to make a safe home, Clare finds comfort in the trees, "resting in the cradles where branch met trunk." As she roams the beaches and hills, "Only here did I have a sense of body" (124). Clare hides part of her body away so it doesn't disappear entirely. There is just one catch: How does Clare reclaim this body from the stones once it is safe to do so? The adult Eli Clare still struggles to find his way back into the body. "And now 20 years later, how do I reach beneath the skin to write, not about the stones, but about the body that warmed them, the heat itself?" (124). Clare has camouflaged his body so completely, nature imagery still takes the place of bodily imagery. When Clare is

finally ready for sexual desire, he can only describe it in terms of his youthful pleasure in nature: "With her, desire traced my body, vivid and unmistakable, returning me to the taste of spring water, the texture of tree bark as I climbed toward sky" (134). Instead of a nature conservancy, the Oregon woods become a human being conservancy. It makes sense that Clare would return the favor by becoming an environmentalist.

Despite Clare's identification with nature, he declares a mismatch between his body and his home. From its title onwards, *Exile and Pride* reflects the difficulty of staying close to a landscape for people alienated from its human community. Clare left Port Orford and never moved back because of its lack of queer community, his traumatic history there, and the lack of work: "Not only are jobs scarce, but my CP makes job hunting even harder" (33). Even people with a "place-based ethic" can have good reasons to leave that place. Clare spent his childhood being sadistically abused by a family of woodsmen. That fact demonstrates that time spent in nature doesn't necessarily result in spiritual transcendence.

While Clare has lost a great deal with the loss of home, he has gained a sophisticated multiple consciousness. Clare's environmentalism and identity politics grow from reflection on his life experiences. His knowledge derives in part from his multiple experiences of oppression. Clare grew up with abuse that brought home the message: your body isn't safe here. Your body is the wrong body. Clare has taken this abusive message and turned it into a wider analysis of social injustice. If Clare isn't safe here, then who is? Who else has the wrong body? Who's not here? As Clare strives to make sense of his experiences, he shapes a more inclusive vision. To conclude, I examine two aspects of Clare's multiple identities: environmentalism and whiteness.

Clare shows the advantage of combining local knowledge with a more cosmopolitan viewpoint. For instance, Clare didn't really notice the whiteness of Port Orford until he had a chance to live in a more diverse city. Having grown up sawing wood in the Siskiyou National Forest and learning in school that clear-cutting was good for forest health, Clare had to leave town to discover environmentalism. However, environmentalism might not have resonated without that early kinship with nature. Clare's ecological voice combines a local ethic and a wider, comparative perspective. He takes two viewpoints at once: a place-based ethic of care toward the people and forests of his home, incorporated into an environmentalist rhetoric addressed to a wider audience. "If we are serious about protecting the [environment], we have to be accountable to the towns and people who will be shaken

to their roots by these changes" (59). Despite his necessary alienation from home, Clare cultivates no emotional detachment toward its destruction and impoverishment.

Internal struggle can result from the clash of cosmopolitan values and local knowledge. Returning to the Northwest for a visit, Clare takes a three-day hike in the woods. He conveys the shock of recognition, or rather, the shock of nonrecognition, as a familiar image becomes stressful and strange. "I round the next bend and am suddenly in a new clearcut: stumps as far as I can see, the great heap of tree parts left behind, bulldozer tracks frozen into the dry mud" (26). An internal argument takes place between his "adult politics and childhood loyalties." He struggles to see the clearcut as a normal part of home.

Instead I see a graveyard, a war zone, the earth looking naked and torn. I imagine tree ghosts as real as crows . . . I walk a mile, then two, knowing that I am seeing for the first time, seeing not as an outsider, a tourist horrified by some surface ugliness, but as someone who grew up in this graveyard, seeing with both my adult politics and my childhood loyalties, seeing through a lens of tension and contradiction. I walk, waiting for my bone marrow to catch up with my politics. (27)

The clearcut is home, all right, but it's a Gothic vision of home, from "someone who grew up in this graveyard." What does it mean to grow up in a graveyard? It means Clare is acquainted with grief, strangeness, and a history invisible yet haunting. Clare sees himself as the successor to that history, sorting through its implications to guide future actions. The image of growing up in a graveyard links to Clare's family history: his sadistic grandfather was a gravedigger as well as a lumberman. But Clare makes another comment that moves the discussion far beyond his personal history. Clare reads in this landscape the longer history of European colonialism at work on the land today. "Whatever metaphor I use, this is what white people have done to North America for 500 years —laid the land bare in the name of profit and progress" (27). With his adult knowledge, Clare places this clearcut into what historian Patricia Nelson Limerick calls "the legacy of conquest" (18) in the American West. Out here in the woods, where there are no other people of any race around, Clare finds Euro-American history in a vista of tree stumps. He can see who is not there.

Clare links himself to the history of white conquest, when he could easily identify solely as a victim of white patriarchal violence. Clare

sees environmental destruction as part of his white cultural heritage. Consequently, he urges white environmentalists to be precise about social location. To avoid collapsing our own experiences onto other people's histories, we must practice caution in making comparisons. For instance, Eli Clare

never grew into the white urban reverence for tree spirits and Mother Earth, a reverence often stolen from Native spiritual traditions . . . Nor did I ever grow comfortable with the metaphor of clearcutting as rape, the specificity of both acts too vivid for me to ever compare or conflate them. (25)

Clare uses personal experience to critique the politics of analogy.

The problem with a place-based ethic is that you can't see who isn't there. Clare has a sense of belonging that retains the awareness of absence. It is hard to see whiteness and its consequences from within white culture. In a nearly all-white town like Port Orford, Oregon, race seems to disappear. Patricia Nelson Limerick tells a different and more diverse story. "Minorities and majority in the American West occupied common ground—literally. Each group might have preferred to keep its story private and separate, but life on the common ground of the American West made such purity impossible" (292). Using his experiences of having the wrong body and of traveling through a wider world, Clare finds ways to reveal the multiracial history of a very white place. Clare makes race visible by reading it onto the landscape: "the only person of color in my hometown was an African-American boy, adopted by a white family. I grew up to persistent rumors of a lynching tree way back in the hills, of the sheriff running people out of the county" (9). For better and for worse, nature serves as a repository of human history. The woods are the place where the bodies are buried.

A lynching tree and a graveyard of stumps: trees and humans as measures of each other. A tree measured by lynching height, tall enough to accommodate an African-American body plus the length of the snapping rope. The lynching tree as the measure of white men, too: murder as the summit of white racism. The clearcut as a graveyard, trees measured as if they were human corpses. Eli Clare sees who's not there: the "tree ghosts as real as crows," the conquistadors and pioneers who cleared the land over centuries, and the people run out of the county. Clare reveals larger systems of domination through reflection on a specific place and its intertwined human and natural histories. His racial and environmental politics spring from his lifelong identification between nature and his own body.

Admittedly, a clearcut and a lynching tree do not reflect human closeness with the living earth. Death forecloses that possibility. Nonetheless, these two images allow us to see the contours of Eli Clare's phenomenology of nature, formed through local knowledge, cosmopolitan detachment, and the disorientation lessons of epistemic privilege. Earlier I quoted Rosemarie Garland Thomson: "Western tradition posits the visible world as the index of a coherent and just invisible world, encouraging us to read the material body as a sign invested with transcendent meaning." Thomson describes how the sight of a disabled body evokes preexisting metaphors and values. Clare takes this idea of the visible body invoking invisible values and applies it to nature.

The clearcut and the lynching tree provide a visible index to the ideologies of racism and environmental destruction. However, they also provide a visible index to Clare's ethics. Clare regards nature as having bodies contiguous with human bodies: "How could I possibly call my body home without the bodies of trees that repeatedly provided me refuge?" (10). The human body and the bodies of nature can be stolen, but can also be reclaimed. "The stolen body, the reclaimed body, the body that knows itself and the world, the stone and the heat which warms it: my body has never been singular" (137). Clare's crip phenomenology of nature reveals "the unexamined destruction of forest and river" that shaped the culture of his girlhood (10).

Phenomenologists, whether crip, queer, or eco-, want the same things: stories that don't replicate stereotypes. Respect for all landscapes and all bodies. The freedom to inhabit the intensity of the moment.

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