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Questions and Prompts for Response: Day One

I've given general prompts already, applicable to most everything we'll read. But I'd like to offer more particular remarks and prompts as well. Here's the first installment.

Bear in mind, please, that these questions aren't meant to be taken as checklists to cover or scripts to be followed. Let them suggest and generate, not dictate, what you write in your responses. Pooling perspectives, we'll cover a lot.

Day 1 AM: Intros and Issues

The essays broach the character, typology, development, and functions of what we call nature writing—its nature, as Wallace has it. Until you've actually read around in the genre, these may be hard texts to talk back to, especially the introductory ones by Lyon and Wallace. It's fine to file away what they say to inform what you read as you proceed. Make note, for one thing, of what both writers assert about shifts of sensibility nature writing emerged from and enacts: what were these shifts, and how do these accounts of them compare? Note also the claim about the specifically American character of the genre: what are the grounds for this, and how does it strike you as a European?

The other two essays, by Oates and Lopez, don't undertake to introduce nature writing but do raise issues critical to definition and reception of the genre. What the heck *is* nature (or "nature") anyway, and what (if anything) does it have to do with human interests and concerns—especially writing? The general prompts I posed to you pertain, especially the one on *stories*, with Lopez's piece a sort of thumbnail narrative theory itself. So for both these essays (among other things) you might remark on what they assert or suggest about relations of stories to nature—and also on how the essays themselves deploy storytelling in making their case (if a case is what they're making).

Finally: from what you understand of the genre here at the start, would you say these essays are themselves works of nature writing? Even if, with Lopez, storytelling in general is the subject? Even if, with Oates, the stance is "against nature" and so-called nature writing comes under stiff attack?

Day 1 PM: Precursors

There's an excerpt here from a writer both Lyon and Wallace cite as central to nature writing's development: William Bartram. There's one from a writer whose father is famous but who got retrieved from obscurity only recently, with resurgent interest in women's writing on nature: Susan Fenimore Cooper. And then there's Emerson, not a nature writer as such but exponent of Transcendentalism (American Romanticism, roughly speaking) and wellspring for this genre as for much of American thought and expression generally.

With Bartram: what do you read here that exemplifies what Lyon and Wallace remark about him, that bears out the enthused reception Europeans especially (like Coleridge) gave him, and that intrigues and excites you as a reader two centuries hence? With Cooper: what in her temper, tone, and subject matter do you think might account for both her popularity early on and her subsequent obscurity? How might you compare her with Bartram as voice and source for writing in this vein? What might gender have to do with it? What else is at stake in the comparison?

As for Emerson: there's a lot here, and I'll walk you through highlights with the *Nature* excerpts especially. But both there and with his journal entries, one avenue of response would be to relate his assertions and observations to the moods and moments you've just encountered in Lopez and Oates. How and where does he evince the connectedness of the one and the alienation of the other? What in Emerson's writing might lead you to characterize either of these others as Emersonian?