THE HUDSON RIVER VALLEY REVIEW

A Journal of Regional Studies

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This issue is dedicated to the memory of Thomas W. Casey.

Thomas W. Casey and Elizabeth Burroughs Kelly in the summerhouse at Riverby

From John Burroughs' "Waiting"

Serene, I fold my hands and wait
Nor care for wind, nor tide, nor sea;
Rave no more 'gainst Time nor Fate,
For lo! My own shall come to me.

I stay my haste, I make delays,
For what avails this eager pace?
I stand amid eternal ways,
And what is mine shall know my face.

THE HUDSON RIVER VALLEY REVIEW

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Regional History Forum

Regional Writing

Book Reviews

***On the Cover*: Portrait of John Burroughs by Orlando Rouland, Courtesy of Craig Chesek © American Museum of Natural History (AMNH)**

COURTESY VASSAR COLLEGE SPECIAL COLLECTIONS

Our River: The Essay Art of John Burroughs

Jeff Walker

John Burroughs' house at Riverby is located on a high bluff overlooking the Hudson River. From this vantage point Burroughs watched nearly fifty years of American industrial history as waves of progress swept up the valley along the river. Over that same period, he observed the timeless pageant of natural history that also used the Hudson River Valley as a highway. In "A River View," published in *Signs and Seasons* in 1886, Burroughs explores the interplay of humans with the landscape, juxtaposing the human and the wild as they interacted along the Hudson River in the late nineteenth century. Whereas Burroughs had earlier written that the landscape could be an "outlying part" of oneself ("A Sharp Lookout," *Signs and Seasons*), in "A River View" he finds the landscape of the Hudson River Valley almost too grand, more to be observed than to know intimately.

Burroughs did not always feel put off by the Hudson. In fact, when he purchased the Riverby property in 1873, he seems to have been almost ambivalent toward it, for he made little mention of its location on the banks of the Hudson. He chose the site because it was close to New York City (with its literary connections) and Roxbury (with its familial connections), and because he thought it could be farmed successfully. Less than two years after moving to Riverby, writing in "Our River" (*Scribner's Monthly*, August 1880), the magazine precurser to "A River View," Burroughs had clearly warmed to the Hudson, for he concludes that, in compar-

ison with other North American rivers, "our river [the Hudson] is undoubtedly the most beautiful of them all." The Columbia River, for instance, is "haughty and impetuous," whereas the Hudson "pleases like a mountain lake." Twenty-five years later, however, in the opening passages of "Wildlife About My Cabin" (*Far and Near,* 1904), Burroughs stated that one reason he built his cabin Slabsides a mile back from the river in the middle of a swamp was that the grandeur of the Hudson River had grown "wearisome." Clearly, something had changed in Burroughs' feelings toward the Hudson River. The modifications Burroughs made to "Our River" as he revised it for inclusion in *Signs and Seasons* as "A River View" can help us understand that evolution.

The changes Burroughs made to these essays also offer a glimpse into the way Burroughs wrote and revised his work, for we have writings on this subject spanning nearly a decade, first in Burroughs' journal, then in "Our River," and finally in "A River View." In this paper I will discuss the topics in the essays themselves. I will then describe the revisions Burroughs made from one essay to the next, attempting to put them in the context of the revision process that Burroughs used for other essays. As we shall see, the modifications Burroughs made to "Our River" were more extensive and thorough-going than was his custom, reflecting his shift from ambivalence through attraction to vexation.

Subject Matter

"Our River" and "A River View" are distinctive among Burroughs' writings in that they describe nature on a much larger scale than the nature-walk essays for which he is justifiably famous: instead of the backyard or a neighboring woodland, Burroughs' subject is the Hudson River as seen from Riverby. He has limited his discussion somewhat by describing only winter and spring activities on the river, but gives detailed descriptions of many aspects of those activities.

"Our River," illustrated with eleven woodcuts by Mary Hallock Foote (one of the most well-known and respected illustrators of the day) was published in *Scribner's Monthly* in the summer of 1880. In it, Burroughs discusses many aspects of the Hudson River as seen from Riverby: the beauty of the river and its place among North American rivers; the geological setting and history of the Hudson River Valley; ice harvesting; the fall freeze-up; winter leisure activities such as ice boating and skating; the spring break-up; spring activities like duck hunting, eagle watching, and shad and sturgeon fishing; and finally, a description of the aftermath of a remarkable spring flood a few years previously. Some of these sections are primarily descriptive of the scenes as Burroughs observed them, whereas others contain long anecdotes illustrative of the material. For instance, the fall freeze-up

section contains several pages describing the wreck of the steamer *Sunnyside* when the river froze almost overnight, and subsequent attempts to recover the boat.

Mary Hallock Foote's illustrations are generic scenes of the Hudson Valley only loosely connected to the subject matter of Burroughs' article. Foote was among those illustrators known as the "New School of American Wood Engraving" whose work in illustrating nature essays such as "Our River" contributed to the increasing popularity of both the nature essay and the illustrated magazine (Warren, 82). However, the picturesque perspective of these illustrators depended, in the words of James Perrin Warren, on maintaining "the distance between the reader's 'artificial' life and the ideal of a natural antidote... the pastoral imagination depends on fundamental gaps between real and ideal, life and literature." Foote's illustrations for "Our River," with their picturesque qualities and placid atmosphere even in the face of potential catastrophe like a spring flood, maintain Warren's distance between people living in the real world and a nostalgic yearning for a world that is past.

Foote was probably chosen to illustrate Burroughs' article for several reasons. Her ability to capture the picturesque in woodcuts matched well Burroughs' ability to do the same in words, for Foote was an admirer of Burroughs and sympathetic to his literary goals. Furthermore, Foote was a native of the Hudson Valley, born and raised in Milton, about ten miles south of Riverby. In the 1870s and '80s, Foote was in the process of moving to the West Coast with her husband. In July 1876 she moved to California, but returned to Milton in March 1878 (when, coincidentally, she illustrated another of Burroughs' *Scribner's* articles, "Picturesque Aspects of Farm Life in New York"). She moved to Leadville, Colorado, in April 1879, returning to Milton in October of that same year—at which time she drew the illustrations for "Our River."

Mary Hallock Foote's illustrations show aspects of life along the Hudson, but do not convey the same impression as Burroughs' prose. For instance, the first illustration in the article "Spring Flood," shows a fashionably dressed woman on horseback riding placidly over a bridge (Figure 1). Two men in a boat are seen in the background, but they do not seem alarmed by the "flood." This engraving may illustrate Burroughs' observation that even a huge rainfall ("the heaviest fall of rain in the valley of the Hudson in 50

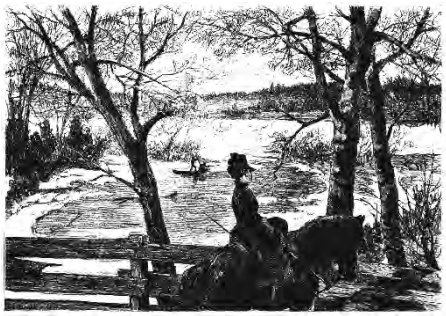

Figure 1

Figure 2

years" (493) does not disturb the "equipoise" of the Hudson. But the title of the illustration connotes to the reader a potential disaster, and Burroughs' description of the devastation caused by this rainfall along tributaries of the Hudson suggests that a spring flood can be catastrophic. The calm lady on horseback does not seem to be aware of any of this.

Another engraving that ostensibly illustrates a topic in Burroughs' essay "An Ice-Floe," (Figure 2) is almost unrecognizable as such: the foreground is dominated by a dark forest, and the background by a dark sky. The subtly illuminated river in the middle distance has an indistinct surface that could be just about anything.

Other illustrations for "Our River" have little at all to do with Burroughs' text. Some seem to be more from Foote's life than from Burroughs' article. For instance, "Crossing the Ice to the Train" (Figure 3) depicts a wild ride in a horse-drawn sleigh across the frozen Hudson River, a scene that comes not from Burroughs in "Our River" but from Foote in her own memoir (Miller, 4). "A Bird's-Eye View," possibly a self portrait of Foote (Figure 4), shows a woman artist sitting on a bluff high above the Hudson (perhaps in the Catskills near the Catskill Mountain House), sketching placidly among the rocks and not looking at the river at all. "The Old Cemetery at Marlborough Landing" (Figure 5) is a bucolic scene a few miles south of Foote's home in Milton, yet neither Marlborough nor graveyards are mentioned by Burroughs. Clearly, Foote's engravings were not meant to be illustrative of the material in Burroughs' essay per se, but rather to provide atmosphere and to sell magazines by promoting the pastoral or picturesque view of the landscape and all that went with it.

Figure 3

Figure 4

In the latter decades of the nineteenth century, it was common for magazines such as *Scribner's Monthly* to pair illustrations by artists such as Foote with articles by authors such as Burroughs (Warren, 82). Readers loved these glimpses of bygone times, and magazine publishers competed in presenting

picturesque aspects of life. Even writings that were not illustrated catered to the desire of audiences for depictions of the picturesque.

Figure 5

In this context, it is interesting to compare Burroughs' description of the Hudson River with that of Walt Whitman, who visited Burroughs in 1878 and 1879, and recorded some of his observations in short pieces in *Specimen Days*. For Whitman, the river was a great highway of commerce. He loved how the railroad ran along the east shore (few valley residents today can love the train for that reason), and the steamboats he describes are working boats, towing strings of barges. Whitman's description of eagles is typical: soaring into the teeth of the wind, "lord[s], among the power and savage joy." During one of his visits, Whitman even borrowed an entry from Burroughs' journal (January 29, 1878, interestingly enough observed at Marlborough Landing) and used it as the basis for a poem in *Leaves of Grass* ("Dalliance of Eagles").

Burroughs, on the other hand, does not mention the railroad, although he routinely rowed across the river to the Hyde Park depot to pick up visitors. His steamboat is a passenger boat (which sinks), and his eagles are besieged by crows trying to steal their food, or stand stoically in the wind and snow on ice floes. Burroughs' focus, as this paper hopes to demonstrate, is the juxtaposition of nature and civilization in which he feels that the "wild and savage" will ultimately outlast human activity.

Writing and Revising

Despite the fact that, "Our River" and "A River View" deal with many of the same subjects, they are very different, reflecting the changes in Burroughs' attitude toward the Hudson River from 1876, when he started to keep a journal, through 1880 with the publication of "Our River," to 1886 and the publication of "A River View." During this time, Burroughs became less and less enchanted by the river that flowed by his doorstep. The second essay reflects that disaffection. Burroughs' construction of the initial essay, and the revisions that produced the latter essay, reflect this evolution.

Many of Burroughs' essays are based on observations made during work in his fields or orchards, or on daily walks around the neighborhood. He recorded some of these observations in his journal, sometimes revising them right on the journal

PHOTO BY CHRIS PRYSLOPSKI, COURTESY OF RIVERBY STUDY CONSERVATOR

Riverby today, looking past the laundry house and well

page. At other times, Burroughs revised and reorganized the material that he included in his essay. In the winter of 1877 he made the following journal entry:

> One of the peculiar sounds here is the croaking of the great ice-frogs on the river rip, rip, they go in the still nights, and again when the sun first strikes the ice in the morning. It is a singular sound. Thoreau calls it a "whoop", Emerson a cannonade, and, again, "the gasp and moan of the ice-imprisoned flood." Sometimes it reminds me of a huge gong, then of a giant staff beating the air. It seems always in the air and to proceed from something in swift motion—it ricochets like a cannon shot and glances from side to side. It starts sometimes from under your feet, and rips or explodes and vanishes in the distance. Then again it seems like a grunt, as if some great ice-god were turning over in his sleep (February 11, 1877).

This entry—trimmed, rearranged, and embellished by the addition of the title of the Emerson poem from which the quotation is taken—ends up as the following passage in "Our River":

> No sooner has the river pulled its icy coverlid over him than he begins to snore in his winter sleep. It is a singular sound. Thoreau calls it a "whoop" and Emerson a "cannonade," and in "Merlin" speaks of
>
> "The gasp and moan
> Of the ice-imprisoned flood"

> Sometimes it is a well-defined grunt—e-h-h, e-h-h, as if some ice god turned uneasily in his bed.
>
> Then again I am reminded of loud croaking, as if some huge ice-frogs had come down from the polar regions; r-rip they go, now here, now there (485)

To create his trademark nature essay, Burroughs strung passages such as these together with new prose observations or ruminations. The fact that many of the observations in Burroughs' essays were not recorded in his journals attests to his fine memory or his creative abilities.

Burroughs did not always have a clear plan or outline for an essay before he started, and often surprised even himself by the time he was finished. "A Sharp Lookout" (*Signs and Seasons*, 1886) is one of his most famous essays, and yet after he finished it, he wrote in his journal:

> Finished my "Observations of Nature" "Signs and Seasons" today, begun two weeks ago. Writing is like fishing, you do not know that there are fish in that hole until you have caught them. I did not know that there was an article in me on this subject till I fished it out. I tried many times before I had a bite, and I done much better some days than others. Stormy days, either snow or rain (tho' snow is best) were my best days. The same is true of the Thoreau article, and indeed of nearly all my articles; they have been discoveries and have surprised me. (February 28, 1882)*

Once an essay was written, Burroughs' strategies for revisions were several. Taking the volume *Signs and Seasons* as an example, ten of the thirteen essays had been previously published in magazines. Some were not revised at all, but reprinted in their entirety; "A Taste of Maine Birch" (describing a fishing trip in Maine) is a good example. Other essays were revised by adding new material. For instance, "Tragedies of the Nests" (about the many disasters that can befall a bird's nest), ends with several new paragraphs set off by the phrase "Let me conclude this chapter with two or three more notes..." (*Signs and Seasons*, 92). More extensive revisions were made to create the essay "Roof Tree" (describing the building of Burroughs' stone residence, at Riverby), including new introductory material, a new conclusion ("There remains only to be added that…."), and numerous deletions within the body of the text (see detailed discussion in Walker, 2007). A major section extracted from "A Sharp Lookout" (discussing the methods and goals of a naturalist), the opening essay of *Signs and Seasons*, became the basis for the second

**"A Sharp Lookout" was originally published under the title "Signs and Seasons," and this entry shows that it had an even earlier title, "Observations of Nature," each successive title more inspired.)*

essay "A Spray of Pine" (on the natural history of the pine and the hemlock). The titles of several essays also were changed.

The most extensive revisions during the preparation of *Signs and Seasons* were those made to "Our River." The title was changed, a new opening section was written, and the material within the essay was rearranged. These three changes, and how they help us gauge Burroughs' evolving feelings toward the river, will be discussed in turn.

Changing the Title

It is understandable that Burroughs would change the title of the essay in light of his changing feelings toward the river. "Our River" suggests a community treasure or a welcome friend and neighbor, whereas "A River View" implies something that can only be observed. In fact, in "A River View" it is now the Hudson River that is "haughty," lacking the qualities Burroughs looks for in a companion, keeping him instead "at arm's length." Apparently, Burroughs would have been more comfortable in a river landscape that he could know intimately, perhaps in the same way that Wendell Berry, a century later, would come to know and write about the Kentucky River, upon whose banks his farm sits.

New Introductory Material

In the new introductory material, Burroughs describes the haughtiness of the river by contrasting it to a small stream:

> One can make a companion of [a small stream]; he can walk with it and sit with it, or lounge on its banks, and feel it is all his own… You cannot have the same kind of attachment and sympathy with a great river; it does not flow through your affections like a lesser stream (195).

The emphasis on walking with, and sitting with, the stream underscore the sense that the small stream can be a companion. Later in this same opening paragraph, Burroughs attributes the unsociability of the Hudson in part to the fact that it is an estuary, bringing the "austerity and grandeur" of the sea far inland.

Ever able to find the good in any situation, however, Burroughs asserts that a great river like the Hudson can do something that a small stream cannot—"idealize" the landscape. Here, the emphasis is again on a relationship based on detached observation and not personal engagement. By idealizing the landscape, Burroughs is referring to the way in which it:

> multiplies and heightens the beauty of the day and of the season. A fair

day it makes more fair, and a wild and tempestuous day it makes more wild and tempestuous. It takes on so quickly and completely the mood and temper of the sky above. The storm is mirrored in it, and the wind chafes it into foam. The face of winter it makes doubly rigid and corpse-like. How stark and still and white it lies there! But a bright day in Spring, what life and light possess it! (195-96)

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Burroughs crossing a woodland stream

This notion first appears in Burroughs' journal in early May 1883. Some rudimentary editing can be seen in the following journal entry, but the finished paragraph (above) contains many embellishments on the material contained here:

> At sun rise this morning the river was like a mirror, duplicating the opposite shore perfectly. Presently a breeze came and tarnished it, or made it white like ground glass. The river idealizes the landscape. It multiplies and enhances hightens [sic] the beauty of the day and season: a fair day it makes more fair, and a tempestuous day it makes more wild. The face of winter it makes doubly rigid and corpse-like; and to the face of spring and summer it adds new youth and sparkle. (May 2, 1883)

Rearranging Material

Writing before the advent of word processors, and before he had anyone to type his manuscripts, John Burroughs wrote entirely with pen or pencil on paper. This meant that revisions to documents were most easily accomplished by adding to the beginning or end of the article, and/or by deleting portions of the text. The revisions described above for other essays in *Signs and Seasons* adhere to this pattern. For Burroughs to accomplish the revisions to "Our River" that he felt necessary, he needed to "cut and paste" in a literal sense.

One of the most drastic changes to the essay was to move the section describing the geologic history of the Hudson River from the beginning of the essay to the end. This section is based on an article by a Professor Newberry in *Popular Science Monthly* (1878), one of Burroughs' favorite magazines. Burroughs'

interests in geology were long-standing, eventually culminating in the publication of *Time and Change* (1912), a book of essays on geology and the evolution of life. As the title suggests, *Time and Change* focuses on two topics: the immensity of geologic time and the effectiveness of tiny changes in organisms and rocks given very long periods of time over which to act. By the end of the nineteenth century, many geologists had become comfortable with an earth that was millions (or even billions) of years old, but the notion was not generally accepted by the public, or even by other scientists.

Burroughs felt it important to include a discussion of the geologic history in both "Our River" and "A River View" because of his conviction that geologic history is an important influence on the natural and cultural histories of the valley (Walker, 2006). The Hudson River may be one of the shortest major rivers in the world, yet its history, both natural and unnatural, is full and interesting. Three hundred years of European settlement, preceded by several thousand years of inhabitation by native peoples, all in the context of 15,000 years of history since the retreat of the last glaciers and more than a billion years of bedrock geologic history, combine to create a physical and cultural landscape rich in diversity.

In "Our River" the geologic history section provides an opening background to the rest of the essay. For instance, the Hudson River is described as an estuary, the mouth of a river flooded by rising sea level. As far north as Albany, 150 miles above its mouth at New York City, the river is subject to the twice-daily fluctuations of the tides. In fact, tidal flows explain why Burroughs' ice floes move down and up the river during the spring break-up. The interaction between ocean and river water in the estuary also affects the kinds of fish caught: salt or fresh water species can be found off Riverby depending on the volume of fresh water in the river, which is directly correlated to the amount of rainfall in the watershed. This is described in an episode included in both essays in which drought conditions bring salt water species as far north as Riverby (twenty miles north of the normal wintertime "salt front"), where they are caught in great numbers from beneath the ice.

Moving the geologic history section to the end of "A River View" suggests that Burroughs had come to place more emphasis on the magnitude of geologic changes over time, and to feel that nature would outlast the works of human civilization. The essay now ends with a surprisingly modern image (previously buried within the essay) of Manhattan inundated by rising sea level, with "the top of Trinity Church steeple alone standing above the flood," and of "the surf beating on our doorstep" at Riverby. This topic will be taken up in more detail later.

The first part of "A River View" after the new introductory material is a section

on the spring break-up. This is interesting because it compels Burroughs to treat the river phenomena in mixed chronological order: after the break-up comes the freeze-up and then a long section on ice harvesting and ice boating. In "Our River," the order also was mixed chronologically, discussing first the ice harvest, followed by the freeze-up and then break-up.

After a paragraph describing various aspects of the break-up (how to recognize it, why the river appears swept clean of ice at some times) comes a new paragraph, which is "Ovidian" in the words of Frank Bergon (1986). It describes the river:

> transformed into a strip of firmament at night dotted with stars and moons in the shape of little and big fragments of ice. One day I remember, there came gliding into my vision a great irregular hemisphere of ice that vividly suggested a half-moon under a telescope.... Sometimes during [calm] weather, [the ice] drifts by in forms that suggest the great continents, as they appear on the map, surrounded by the oceans, all their capes and peninsulas, and isthmuses and gulfs, and inland lakes and seas, vividly reproduced. (198-199)

These observations are drawn from an entry in Burroughs' journal in the winter of 1883:

> A singular spectacle on the river almost daily. The great black pool lies still and calm, when a vast field of ice comes drifting slowly along. One day it was the shape of a half moon and it had decidedly an astronomic effect. The ice was of the same silvery whiteness as the moon, and marked with similar lines and depressions. The river was the still, dark, fathomless sky; a small bit of ice here and there shone like a star. The motion was hardly perceptable [sic] and a veritable moon, enormously magnified, seemed to be passing my window. At other times a vast field of ice will take the form of some of the continents—one day it is Africa, another North or South America that drifts into my field of vision, with bays, capes, peninsulas, rivers, mountains all clearly sketched. The absence of wind for the past ten days causes the ice to mass in this way and assume these suggestive forms. I have never seen it so before. (January 1, 1883)

Whereas many of the descriptions of ice harvesting, ice boating, and eagles are taken directly from "Our River" (albeit rearranged), much of the writing about both the break-up and freeze-up of the river is new material taken from journal entries made after the publication of the original article (the two passages discussed above are good examples) or from memories and direct observations.

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Overlooking the frozen Hudson from Riverby

The new material adds significantly to the "Ovidian" imagery of the entire piece.

Inserted into the material taken directly from "Our River" are two new transitional statements that are significant. In the opening paragraph of the section on ice harvesting, Burroughs adds the following sentence: "A dweller upon its banks, I am an interested spectator of the spring and winter harvests which the waters yield" (202). He describes in great detail the ice harvest, but deletes the whole section from "Our River" that described fishermen working on the river. A person who reads only "A River View" is liable to be confused by this because no spring harvests are described.

As a transition into the geology section, Burroughs adds the following paragraph in which he juxtaposes nature and human civilization, and finds satisfaction in the fact the constructs of human society (especially the rich) still must share the water and the air with wild birds and aquatic animals:

> This great metropolitan river, as it were, with its floating palaces and shores lined with villas, is thus an inlet and a highway of the savage. The wild ducks and geese still follow it north in the spring, and south in the fall. The loon passes in his migrations and disports himself in its waters. Seals and otters are occasionally seen in it. (209)

The fact that this passage is inserted just before the geology section that forms the essay's conclusion suggests that expressing this sentiment (that nature's presence on the river is timeless in a sense) was an important reason that Burroughs revised the essay.

Because "Our River" was relatively old when Burroughs chose to revise it for *Signs and Seasons* (six years, whereas most of the essays in Burroughs' books were recently published or written specifically for the volume in which they were included), one has to wonder why he revised the essay in the first place, especially since his thoughts had changed so much. On the one hand, he may have revised it precisely because his feelings had changed so radically. Burroughs' writings are characterized by an honesty that endeared him to his readers. He was never shy of

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Residence of John Burroughs in West Park

making contradictory statements in different essays, and even pointed his inconsistencies or inaccuracies out on some occasions (see, for example, the critical commentary on "A Sharp Lookout" in Walker's 2006 reissue of *Signs and Seasons*, p. 297ff). On the other hand, Burroughs may have wanted to revise the essay so he could emphasize his growing conviction that humans were a smaller part of the landscape than "Our River" gives the impression: by 1886 Burroughs seemed to see humans as small (though important) players in a larger landscape, akin to the tiny, though not insignificant, figures in paintings of the Hudson River School artists.

In the decades after he moved to the shores of the Hudson River, John Burroughs' feelings toward the river underwent a marked transformation. His initial feelings appear to have been somewhat ambivalent: as previously noted, he chose the Riverby site because of its convenience and practicality, not its scenic location. Several years later, he wrote quite fervently in "Our River" of the wonder and beauty of the Hudson, describing many mundane, yet picturesque, activities that he observed. "Our River" also was written at about the same time (1880) that Burroughs was enamored by the picturesque stone house he had built at Riverby (Walker, 2007). However, for Burroughs, the picturesque proved to be a shaky foundation upon which to base his life: the house at Riverby was cold and impractical, and the view from Riverby turned "wearisome." When he revised "Our River" for inclusion in *Signs and Seasons*, therefore, Burroughs deleted some material, rear-

ranged what was left, and wrote major new passages in order to try to express his changed feelings.

At times it seems that Burroughs was not paying attention when he made these revisions. He added some new ideas, like the notion that the river idealizes the landscape and his description of ice masses that look like the moon. However, Burroughs did not rearrange the material in chronological order, even though there does not seem to be any reason to have kept it out of order. In addition, he added introductory remarks for material that he later cut.

Inconsistencies notwithstanding, Burroughs' goal with the revision was to emphasize the interaction between wild nature and human civilization as he witnessed it from the banks of the Hudson. The new "Ovidian" descriptions add to the mystery of nature, and to the sense that nature is outside human control. Placing the geology section at the end of the essay emphasizes that geologic changes happen, and will continue to happen, on spatial and temporal scales far exceeding the human scale. Finally, the "wild and metropolitan" paragraph, with its references to human artifacts ("floating palaces and shores lined with villas") conveys the message that ducks, geese, and loons will use the river just as they always have, despite the presence of humans. Referring to the river itself as "metropolitan" co-opts a word that is usually reserved for urban environments. This message was important enough to Burroughs that he went to extraordinary lengths of cutting and pasting, adding and deleting to revise an essay that was relatively old at the time.

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