The Limberlost, Tinker Creek, Science and Society: Gene Stratton-Porter and Annie Dillard

by Eugene H. Pattison

PITTSBURGH-BORN writer Annie Dillard won the 1975 Pulitzer Prize for her first book, *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*, a meditative book on nature based in Virginia’s Roanoke Valley. Two reports of the award appeared in the Pittsburgh newspapers. One, a laudatory editorial, noted that because of the book’s setting, Dillard “mentioned Pittsburgh only in passing, as when describing childhood experiences,” but it still claimed for Pittsburgh some credit for Dillard’s sensitivity in observing nature.¹ Six books later, in *An American Childhood* (1987), she acknowledged her debt to Pittsburgh with accounts of the nature study she did there as a girl. The same newspapers anticipated this book’s appearance, and received it with enthusiasm for its local reminiscences.²

Academic scholars have focused on other references in *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*, placing it in a long tradition of American literary natural history writing, including several contemporary writers in the genre. They note the influence, which Dillard acknowledges, of Ralph Waldo Emerson, Herman Melville, and Henry David Thoreau.³ In the book, Dillard cites nearly 40 scientific writers; the most frequently mentioned are entomologists, ecologists, astronomers, and physicists. There are wide references to religious and literary works as well.⁴

Perhaps because the range of influences and citations is so wide, there has been little attention to the book Dillard said got her started in science. It was “Gene Stratton-Porter’s old *Moths of the Limberlost*,” which she saw in the library at Pittsburgh’s Ellis School while looking for information about moths after an incident in class.⁵ A popular

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¹ Eugene H. Pattison specializes in American literature as an English professor at Alma College in Alma, Mich. He has previously published criticism on two Ohio authors, William Dean Howells and William Henry Venable. He began research for this article while staying at the Pittsburgh Theological Seminary during a recent sabbatical.
nature photographer and writer, Porter (1863-1924) wrote nearly 30 books of sentimental fiction, poetry, and nature study, published between 1903 and 1929. Chief among these were *Freckles* (1904) and *A Girl of the Limberlost* (1909), both set in a swampy region near the Ohio border, south of Geneva, Indiana, where Porter settled soon after her marriage. In a 1992 interview Dillard expressed enthusiasm for Porter as a reading for young people, and mentioned the three books of Porter's just listed. They are all set in parts of northeastern Indiana where Porter had a chance to study nature much as Dillard did in Pittsburgh and later in Virginia at Tinker Creek.

Though Porter's book may have prompted Dillard's first scientific explorations in Pittsburgh, Dillard's stay at Tinker Creek was suggested mainly by Thoreau. Still, since popular books read by writers at an early age often influence them many years later, a comparison of Porter's and Dillard's writings on science can be instructive. Though they were born 82 years and 300 miles apart, each faced obstacles as young girls to developing interest in science. Yet they have very different reflections on science, scientific method, and the relation of these to wider spiritual concerns. Hence, this essay discusses three areas of comparison between them: first, in attitudes toward teachers and scientific authorities, and toward the constrictions society put on them as students of science; second, in ways of seeing the natural world; and, finally, in reflections on nature as a moral and theological teacher.

THE SCHOOL incident over which Dillard consulted Porter's book was, she says, "a searing sight." In January, too early for moths to hatch outdoors, someone brought a cocoon to school. As the children passed it around, it grew warm and jumped in their hands. The teacher put it into a mason jar, where a Polyphemus moth emerged. The jar was too small for the moth to spread its wings to their 6-inch span, and when the wings stuck together as they dried, the moth was taken outdoors and released. Dillard has told that story a number of times in different contexts. In *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*, it is an example of a fixity in nature, an inescapable memory ("The Polyphemus moth never made it to the past."). Ten or 11 years old, as she watched she was aware of almost nothing except "the thing's struggle to be a moth or die trying." Thirteen years later, in *An American Childhood*, the story illustrated how teachers strove to impart a sense of wonder about the world, but then often hampered that sense. Eager for information (AC, 158), she and her classmates "watched... transfixed," for the moth "had clawed a hole in its hot cocoon and crawled out, as if agonizingly, over the course of an hour, one leg at a time...." It was released ceremoniously: the children "paraded outside behind the teacher with pomp and circumstance." Dillard retells the story in *American Childhood* "to lay the moth's ghost, for I still see it crawl down the broad black driveway...." (AC, 160-161)

After the classroom event, Dillard looked for information, and saw *Moths of the Limberlost* in the library. It become her favorite book for a time: one of its "queer painted photographs" showed "what the Polyphemus moth would have looked like, whole." She was less reluctant than earlier "to exorcise my old teachers who, in their bungling, unforgettable way, exposed me to the natural world" (cf. TC, 59). But then she seems to attenuate such criticism by noting that Porter had inadvertently killed a rare moth herself (AC, 162).

In her second version of the event, Dillard calls Porter "a vigorous, loving kid who grew up long ago near a swampy wilderness of Indiana, and had worked up a whole memorable childhood out of insects, of all things, which I had never even noticed, and my childhood was half over." (AC, 162). Actually, Porter grew up on a farm in the Wabash River basin near LaGro, amid fields and woods where she gained a wide awareness of nature. Dillard had parallel opportunities in Pittsburgh's Frick Park, three blocks from home, in mostly "wild woods" where she could find birds described in her bird book and follow a trail and a stream bed that led the distance of a long streetcar trip across town (AC, 44). Looking for a less urban location, she could imagine writing the author of a favorite nature handbook to ask where she "personally might find a pond, or a stream." (81-82)

Dillard did know about the Limberlost as the place where Porter photographed and wrote about moths, and where her heroine Elnora Comstock collected moths. In successive stages of clearance and draining, the Limberlost Swamp was a setting in two of Porter's novels by the time the moth book appeared in 1912. She had seen the area when "there were miles of unbroken forest, lakes provided with boats for navigation, and streams of running water," reached on corduroy roads. Paradoxically, clearance for timbering, oil drilling, and farming made it accessible as a "hunting ground for birds, moths and flowers." There she studied first birds and then moths. It was rich with material for observation, as was Tinker Creek, though when Dillard lived at Tinker Creek that place was in a "rather tamed valley" (TC, 11), more domesticated than the Limberlost as Porter found it.

If the renderings of the two places are at all similar, it is not because of Dillard's reading of Porter, nor because the places end up in parallel stages of human alteration, but because both writers wish to celebrate or popularize the respective sites, and because they use similar field anecdotes. Both women were conscientious observers, and thorough in their projects. But Porter wrote with a simpler aim than Dillard: to popularize scientific nature study, by writing about it directly and simply, or by sugar-coating it with fiction. In the latter method, she was no doubt influenced by midwestern sentimental writers. Earlier influences were the language of English Romantic and Victorian poets and English historians, whom her father recited or declaimed, Victorian fiction, and a few works by French novelists. The only exception to this traditional fare is Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*, which she reviewed for a book club she organized. She does not go much beyond expressing appreciation for what she observes, and giving direct lessons for human conduct. There is little of the paradoxical and often tentative reflection on life, death, and the nature of the universe found in Dillard's writings.
BOTH PORTER and Dillard are skeptical of educational and scientific authority, and both protest society’s pressures on those who pursue unique or unusual interests. They both criticize the schools. In Porter’s Laddie, Mr. Stanton disapproves of the way schools regiment pupils and isolate them from the outdoors, where they could learn much about nature. His daughter, on her first day at school with an unsympathetically portrayed new teacher, denies the teacher’s adage, “Birds in their little nests agree,” for she has seen nestlings fight. She gets slapped for “impertinence,” and apologizes the next day for contradicting the teacher in front of the class. Dillard does not register such impertinent contradictions,15 but does suggest that much of what she and her classmates learned about science and the arts, they learned in opposition to their teachers’ assumptions about values the girls took from those studies (e.g., AC, 134, 236). There is probably no direct influence: the moth’s need to spread its wings is the only information from Porter that Dillard uses to show in what ways her teacher had “bungled” classroom instruction. But both women do question scientific authority. Porter does so directly: at nearly 20 points in Moths of the Limberlost she finds lepidopterists insufficiently informative, or so inaccurate that they have caused serious errors in her work.16 The citation of authorities in Pilgrim at Tinker Creek has broader purposes, and where Porter directly and perhaps misanthropically contradicts, Dillard has been said to disarm authorities more subtly.17

Different tones of skepticism may be seen in their accounts of emerging moths. More than once, Porter explains that moths must struggle out of the cocoon (e.g., ML, 70 and 253-254). Her character “Freckles” is awestruck watching a Luna moth “just being born!” and nature writer Jean Craighead George, for instance, has commented that the passage is beyond improvement.18 In contrast, Dillard did not retell her story about the Polyphemus to improve it, but to change the emphasis. Her second telling, in An American Childhood, is followed by a summary of Porter’s account of a childhood incident with a moth. Finding a beautiful yellow swallowtail, Porter had held it carefully in the air, its wings high over the back of her fingers. She wanted to show the fragile, rare creature to her father and then carry it back to precisely where she found it. But she was only a child, and so she came running home with it instead of walking. She tripped, and her fingers pinched through the butterfly’s thorax. She broke it to pieces. At this point, Porter had wept bitterly because she expected God to punish her for killing the moth (ML, 92-96). Dillard omits these histrionics, saying of the accident, “that was that. It was like one of father’s bar jokes.” (AC, 162)

In deeper irony, Dillard’s Polyphemus moth is an emblem of social constrictions. In her first account of the classroom incident with the moth, Dillard wrote that it initially headed for the “rest of Shadyside,” merely a “busy residential part of Pittsburgh” (TC, 61); but in the second version in An American Childhood, the moth

![Stratton-Porter holding a butterfly or moth specimen, important creatures for her studies and writings. In Dillard's writings, a particular moth had an important symbolic function.](image-url)
trivial interests of her girlfriends (91), and to the social concerns of her mother’s set who gave fine parties and got good suntans (125). Dillard continued to be interested in that “different sensory world,” and considered it at length in Pilgrim at Tinker Creek.

BOTH PORTER and Dillard became students of nature by learning to make careful observations, and both told readers how they learned to “train the eye.” Porter insisted that reading could not replace first-hand observation (e.g., ML, 67 and 207) practiced in long periods of immobility (83 and 157). Observation of moths required several abilities: to see one thing while looking for another (as she came to see moths while studying birds [ML, 7 and 228]), to “track” them and to know where to look for them (156-161 and 302), and to distinguish them from other small animals such as birds and tree toads (233). Stressing the same alertness, Dillard calls nature a “now-you-see-it, now-you-don’t” affair (TC, 16, 17, and 186). She, too, sees insects in their rarely observed movements while watching for other things (188-189). But she feels the need for immobility even more than Porter does: she must “straddle the sycamore log in absolute stillness, watching for muskrats” (20), unable to move as long as they can see her (186-187). She seems less sure of success than Porter, perhaps because she looks for more elusive aquatic animals. In that search, seeing the animal is almost revelatory, in the theological sense: one sees what the animal grants, as “a gift and a total surprise” (33); the moment of seeing it is a “greater hurrah” than its existence (192), for animals “simply do not want to be seen” (201).

But Dillard has much more to say than Porter about the way words and pictures interact. She insists on the need “to say the words, to describe what I’m seeing” (TC, 30). She began applying this to drawing practice at about the age of 10 (AC, 78-80), while playing detective outside a local tavern. She watched its patrons from a spot where she could not be seen (as she was to do with wild animals), noting signs of “suspicious activity” and, with one customer, planning to “memorize the whole man, inch by inch, and later reproduce the man in a drawing.” (126) Porter gives verbal descriptions, but she never says these helped her while hand-tinting black-and-white photographs with water colors, nor does she write about combining the techniques, as Dillard did. To be sure, the two writers are parallel in their scrupulous, self-aware observations and in their precision and close attention to subject.

In pictorial techniques, their greatest similarity lies in their rejection of drawing in nature study. Porter considered nature drawings “caricatures,” only as good as the artist’s talent (DB, 131), which sometimes failed her, even in coloring photographs (ML, 169). Dillard does not mention having used nature for subjects in drawing practice (see AC, 78-80 and 128-130). But when she does later draw such subjects, she does account for her failures. Unable to draw a horse as well as her relatives at their ranch in Wyoming,
Annie Dillard as a child in her Point Breeze backyard near the family's miniature log cabin.
she says: "I stay away from horses now, but I do a creditable
goldfish. The point is that I just don't know what the lover knows;
I just can't see the artificial obvious that those in the know
construct." (TC, 18)

But the two writers differ more fully in their purposes for
making pictures or considering that subject. Interested in publish-
ing her photographs, Porter also described her techniques at
length. Her elaborate, cumbersome camera equipment, with its
glass plates and time exposures, had to be set up and focused on
spots where birds or moths were apt to alight. She had to trim just
enough plant growth for a clear view, pose the subjects, sometimes
gently forcing them toward the camera, and remain alert as to
exposure length and the timing of each shot. To be accurate in
color, she followed what is still the best procedure for making
color pictures. Using water colors, she filled in precise details and
color values on light, precise black-and-white positive prints.
Believing that moths' colors faded soon after they began to fly, she
painted from live subjects, often trying water tints on blotter paper
until she got the right one. To photograph more of their markings,
she stroked moths with a camel's hair brush so they would spread
their wings wider than normal. But she conceded that sometimes
in live photography one had to sacrifice such decorations (ML, 7,
223-224 and 228), and she did not forget to mention her failures in
getting shots.24

But, where Porter used the camera, commercially, Dillard
almost became the camera, spiritually. In Dillard's vision, immobili-
ity and attentiveness are important not only for the sake of precise
photographic or verbal renderings of nature, but also for the sake
of what she, as observer, loses of herself in the experience. On one
occasion, she sat on the sycamore log bridge for 40 minutes
watching a muskrat, only moving when he could not see her (TC,
196-199). "For that forty minutes last night," she wrote,

I was as purely sensitive and mute as a photographic plate; I
received impressions, but I did not print out captions. My own
self-awareness had disappeared.... And I have often noticed that
even a few minutes of this self-forgetfulness is tremendously
invigorating. I wonder if we do not waste most of our energy
just by spending every waking minute saying hello to ourselves.
(198)

Actual photography would have prevented the absorption for
which it was here an analogy. Dillard never uses photography in
nature studies, and never discusses the technology of such use; less
cumbersome in our time than in Porter's, photography can still be
distracting. Hence Dillard distinguishes between

walking with and without a camera. When I walk with a
camera, I walk from shot to shot, reading the light on a
calibrated meter. When I walk without a camera, my own
shutter opens, and the moment's light prints on my own silver
gut. When I see this second way I am above all an unscrupulous
observer. (TC, 31)

More important for Dillard than still photography are analo-
gies drawn from cinematography, which has had several more
decades to shape the modes of perception.

In using cinematic analogies, of course, Dillard draws from a
technology that profited Porter when her novels began to be
filmed. Again, though, Dillard's use of cinematic technology has
A young Annie Dillard, unaware of the camera, instructs her younger sister on wilderness appreciation in Pittsburgh's Frick Park.
its complexity in figurative language. The sight of a mantis laying its eggs was for her a horrible nature movie, a "secrets-of-nature" short, beautifully photographed in full color, that I had to sit through unable to look anywhere else but at the dimly lighted EXIT signs along the walls, and that behind the scenes some amateur moviemaker was congratulating himself on having stumbled across this little wonder, or even on having contrived so natural a setting, as though the whole scene had been shot very carefully in a terrarium in someone’s greenhouse. (TC, 56-57)

Far from the melodrama and sentimentality of Porter’s day, Dillard refers to photography as a metaphor for consciousness and for elusive and illusory memories, and correlative to emotion. She insists that there is more to the present than a series of snapshots. We are not merely sensitized film, we have feelings, a memory for information and an eidetic memory for the imagery of our own pasts. Our layered consciousness is a tiered track for an unmatched assortment of concentrically wound reels. Each one plays out for all of life its dazzling and blurring translucent shadow-pictures. We tune in and out. But moments are not lost. Time out of mind is time nevertheless, cumulative, informing the present. (TC, 84)

Thus, for Dillard, the mind is the camera, its unconnected images drifting “across the screen from nowhere,” with the “present of [one’s] consciousness… itself a mystery which is… always rounding a bend like a floating log borne by a flood.” (93) Such “seeing” does more than make books of nature lore for nature lovers. Rather, it is a meditative, mystical exercise, sanctifying in self-forgetfulness. Differing in their discourses on the language of observation and reproduction, the two writers are just as different, across 82 years, in their respective natural theologies.

IV

THOUGH PORTER and Dillard write different types of natural history, both address religious or moral issues. In Laddie (1913), Porter is at her most comprehensive in portraying the Methodist piety in which she was raised. The tags of that piety are extensive in both Freckles (1904) and A Girl of the Limberlost (1909), where people have to be emotionally trained before they can find God in nature. Freckles must learn to avoid real physical perils and overcome terrors in the swamp before he can build a bower or “cathedral,” labeled in a quotation from William Cullen Bryant (57). Kate Comstock must overcome grief and bitterness over her husband’s death, which lead her to resentment of their daughter Elnora. She must come to terms with the fact that he died trying to hide an act of infidelity (GL, 213-233), and must overcome her resentment that others kept that fact from her. She expresses her “natural theology” after beginning to help Elnora rebuild a moth collection: her absorbed reflection on the newly emerged Citheronia moves her to give a solemn “lecture” to her daughter and to Philip, who is helping Elnora. Seeing the moth’s intricate patterns and life cycle, Kate feels close to God, and prays to learn more about the world, and to be made a better person. In soft apostrophe she asks her dead husband if knowing such wonders would not have kept him from infidelity (GL, 296-299). Later Elnora hears moral messages in the sound of the wind in the trees, which she will consult when the still-betrothed Philip asks for a farewell kiss, and she refuses (337).²⁵

In Moths of the Limberlost, Porter notes that she deduced particular creations from her father’s teaching that God created all things, and concluded that God made the butterfly first and saved what was left of beauty for all the other creatures (82-83). The intricate beauty of the Polyphemus convinced her that “Nature made this handsome moth last, and… surpassed herself as a finishing touch on creatures that are, no doubt, her frailest and most exquisite creation.” (244) Explaining why they must not cut the moth out of its cocoon, she uses key words from both sides of the controversy between science and religion, saying, “the evolution of species was complete to the minutest detail. The providence that supplied the acid, required that the moths make the fight necessary to emerge alone.” (253) She sentimentalizes about descriptions and names of moths (240), and tentatively ascribes human expression or emotion to birds (DB, 5). She is closer to acknowledging a distance between human personality and the rest of nature when she notes the absence of any nurturing sentiment in the moth’s life cycle (the adult moths are usually dead when their caterpillars hatch [ML, 77]). But that is still an “argument from design,” and neither these considerations, nor instances of parasitism and predation, do much to upset her view that nature is ordered and instructively wholesome.

Porter’s Limberlost is always rendered more simply than Dillard’s Tinker Creek, even at its greatest physical peril.²⁶ Tinker Creek is never simply a natural resource or an artifact of economic or scientific geography or a sentimental setting, as the Limberlost was. From the start, it is a locale of religious mystery and contemplation (e.g. TC, 2-3), an eremite’s “anchor hold” where Dillard has time to think about multiple mysteries. The two women’s few literary quotations manifest the same difference. Porter quotes simply to enhance romantic appreciations of nature. When Dillard quotes the same authors, such persons as Emerson and Pliny, as she does two or three times, her quotations are less simple and decipherable. In their mysticism or oddity, her quotations promote reflections on ambiguities in the management of the universe. She considers it a revelatory universe, full of such glory as the “epiphany” of 300 hidden blackbirds taking wing from the Osage Orange tree (TC, 16), or of fish in water (31), spiders (50-52), the complexity of life in a square foot of topsoil (94), or of the energy of life in sunlight (118) or in the parallel molecular structures of hemoglobin and chlorophyll (124-126). Like Porter’s work in meaning is a long passage on the swarming of Monarch butterflies, with an instance of the “force of will” with which one Monarch flies up a hillside (252-255).

In a later book, Dillard notes the complex impact of Darwin’s theories — Porter’s language suggests but doesn’t acknowledge any debt to Darwin — by recognizing that Darwinism broke open our perspectives on the age of the universe, and had complex
Dillard backpacking in the Pacific Northwest's Cascade Mountains.
results for work in biological sciences, philosophy, and theology. Tragic, but given “bad press,” is the Fundamentalist rejection of Darwinism, says Dillard; corrupt, she adds, is the social Darwinist’s use of it to justify savage struggle in society.\textsuperscript{27} As several critics have pointed out, Dillard’s writings are theologically complex—more so than Porter’s. For Dillard, the Creator, like Pascal’s God, has abscended, or perhaps “spread, as our vision and understanding of the universe have spread, to a fabric of spirit and sense so grand and subtle, so powerful in a new way, that we can only feel blindly of its hem.” (TC, 7) God’s designs are not easily inferred. For instance, the “language” of bird song, and the reasons for its beauty, are like an “uncracked, unbroken code.” (106-107)

As critics point out polarities of positive and negative images in Dillard’s work, they emphasize one pole or the other. On the negative side, powerful and persistent nature images from Tinker Creek stress malfunction or the profligacy of animal fecundity, or the horrors of predation: Luna moths mating, “hunching repeatedly with a horrible animal vigor” (159); the Polyphemus moth, ever crawling; a giant water bag killing a frog and “sipping” its dissembled flesh and bone; or mantids or ichneumon flies crowded together, devouring their own kind. When Dillard cites entomologist Jean Henri Fabre, with whose books Porter was proud to have hers ranked,\textsuperscript{28} Dillard selects instances of insect behavior that astonish or revolt Fabre: he is startled by the ferocity of mantis mating, the female devouring the male (55 and 57-58); he turns from the spectacle of “a bee-eating wasp, the Philanthus,” licking honey from the bee it has killed, while being eaten by a mantis (63-64); and he recognizes the failure of pine processionary to adapt to a new environment (65-67).

The world in Dillard’s view, whatever it has of design, is not a moral teacher; there is no right or wrong in nature. By that view, “we are moral creatures... in an amoral world.” Hence it is with her readings that Dillard brings human culture and “human values to the creek, and so save[s] her[se]lf from being brutalized.” (TC, 177-179) The ultimate meaning and morality of nature is a synergistic matter, as she often finds it in the Bible, the Koran, and the Jewish mystical tradition of Hasidism, which posits that man can assist God in the work of redemption by “hallowing” the things of creation. By a tremendous heap of his spirit, the devout man frees the divine sparks trapped in the mute things of time; he uplifts the forms and moments of creation, bearing them aloft into that rare air and hallowing fire in which all clays must shatter and burst. (94)

Moreover, by Dillard’s time certain presumed fixities in the universe, which could sustain Porter’s simple reflections, had disappeared: soon after Porter’s death in 1924, quantum mechanics made it impossible to speak of universal issues in her terms. Born later, Dillard can cite Eddington, Einstein, Jeans and Heisenberg, whose “Principle of Indeterminacy, which saw the light in the summer of 1927, says in effect that you cannot know both a particle’s velocity and position.” This makes the universe as elusive as many of the animals at Tinker Creek, without any final possibility of making inferences from nature about God or morality (202-204).

A broader intellectual and spiritual tradition largely accounts for Dillard’s differences from a writer she still enjoys reading. Muted recognition of a harsh side to nature in Porter is genuine polarity in Dillard, and success in reading the polarity depends on how well one can maintain the two poles in creative tension. Hence Dillard’s observations on both nature’s prodigal abundance, and the profligacy and predatoriness of its animals, carry her to theological reflection far more complex and paradoxical than the conservatism and simple piety of Porter, Dillard’s childhood inspiration to scientific pursuits.\textsuperscript{6}

Notes
\textsuperscript{2} Bob Hoover, “Annie Dillard’s ‘Childhood’ pays homage to Pittsburgh and the ‘50s,” \textit{Pittsburgh Post-Gazette}, Sept. 27, 1987, 28 and 30. Another Post-Gazette critic, Sally Kalson, reporting on a lecture Dillard gave the previous March (“Pittsburgh childhood inspires Dillard,” ibid., March 26, 1987, 17), briefly mentioned Dillard’s first six books. They included Pilgrims at Tinker Creek, \textit{Tickets for a Prayer Wheel, Holy the Firm, Living By Fiction, Teaching a Stone to Talk, and Encounters with Chinese Writers}. That summer the \textit{Pittsburgh Press} Sunday magazine ran excerpts from \textit{An American Childhood} (“Annie Dillard,” Aug. 23, 1987, 22-23 and 26). Dillard’s books continue in print, and three of them have been translated into French.
\textsuperscript{3} See, for instance, Gary McIlvry, “Pilgrims at Tinker Creek and the Social Legacy of Walden,” \textit{South Atlantic Quarterly} 85 (Spring 1986), 111-122; idem, “Pilgrim at Tinker Creek and the Burden of Science,” \textit{American Literature} 59 (March 1987), 71-84; and Marc Chemeter, “Tinkering, Extravagance: Thoreau, Melville, and Annie Dillard,” \textit{Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction} 31 (Spring 1990), 157-172. Judy Schaaf Anhorn sets Pilgrims at Tinker Creek in that tradition, running from Puritan leader John Winthrop and Quaker botanist William Bartram to Jefferson, Thoreau, and Audubon ("Lines of Sight: Annie Dillard’s ‘Purified Nonfiction Narration,’ “Cross-Cultural Studies: American, Canadian, and European Literatures: 1945-1985", Mirko Jurak, ed., [Ljubljana, Yugoslavia, 1988] 141-151). Of the 11 contemporary authors Anhorn lists as illustrative of the genre (ibid., n.2, p. 148), Dillard mentions Joseph Wood Krutch in Pilgrims at Tinker Creek, Loren Eiseley has reviewed Pilgrim, and Edward Abbey has revised \textit{Teaching a Stone to Talk}. In the latter book (1983) \textit{[New York, 1988]}, Dillard responds to Buckminster Fuller’s concept of “space-ship earth” (p. 152); Fuller reviewed the book. Two recent studies have compared Dillard with other writers of literary natural history. One (James M. Aton, “Sons and daughters of Thoreau”: the spiritual quest in three contemporary nature writers [Ph.D. diss., Ohio State Univ., 1981]) considers her with Edward Abbey and Peter Matthiessen. The other (Marie Golden, “Nonfiction nature literature: three contemporary writers” [M.A. thesis, Georgetown Univ., 1989]) considers her with John McPhee and Barry Lopez. Of possible influence is Aldo Leopold, whose \textit{A Sand County Almanac} (1949) was gaining popularity during Dillard’s childhood. That book and \textit{The River of the Mother of God and other essays} (Susan L. Fader and J. Baird Callicott, eds., [Madison, Wis., 1991]), suggest parallels in organization (as with the calendar chronology of \textit{A Sand County Almanac}), style, and Biblical references (though Dillard was well-versed in this through early religious training). Leopold’s idea of the “nomumen” of a place may resemble the medieval concept of “holy the firm,” which Dillard named her third book (1977). As far as I can tell, however, Dillard has not referred to Leopold in print.
\textsuperscript{4} Pilgrims at Tinker Creek (New York, 1985), hereafter cited as TC.
\textsuperscript{5} \textit{An American Childhood} (New York, 1987, hereafter cited as AC), 161.
\textsuperscript{6} Luckhart has led in popularity, selling over 600,000 copies in its first 10 years, and having been reissued 24 times in 84 years. A Girl of the Limberlost was reissued seven times during Porter’s life and has been reprinted 10 times since her death. Porter’s biographer, Judith Reck Long (\textit{Gene Straton-Porter, Novelist and Naturalist} [Indianapolis, 1990]) notes that Porter’s popularity began with six 1904 installments of nature study, “What I Have Done With Birds” in \textit{Ladies’ Home Journal}, which had a circulation of over 1 million. (183) Late in her career, her novels were made into films (227) and she had a regular contract with McCall’s for an editorial column (229). Shortly after 1910, she arranged to have Doubleday, Page and Co. publish her novels and non-fiction books in alternate years (189-190). Popular in her lifetime, her work has received little attention in academic scholarship until recently, as a subject of study in American popular culture.
A Scotch-Irish Emigrant Writes Home

by William Doak
Introduction by Jacqueline Sardi and Paul Roberts, Pittsburgh History

HISTORIAN KERBY A. Miller, in his landmark book on Irish emigration, writes that in letters to families by voluntary, even eager emigrants, most expressed a sadness upon leaving and a good many doubts about the American experience to come. "For most emigrants even the process of emigration -- their decision to leave, their methods of financing the journey, their poignant leave-takings, and the ocean itself -- only reinforced a worldview which encouraged the exile self-image and its transportation across the Atlantic." 71

The emigrant letter that follows was penned in 1848 by William Doak, a Scotch-Irishman. This means that he was a descendant of Presbyterians from Scotland who settled in Ulster, the northermost province of Ireland, in the 17th century. The term Scotch-Irish is an Americanism -- in the British Isles it is hardly known. There anyone who describes Ulstermen of Scottish origin would use the term Ulster Scots. But the compound name does reflect a historical reality; the people to whom it refers were culturally distinct from both the Irish and the Scots. 72

Pittsburgh, since the early eighteenth century, was a frontier haven for successive generations of Ulster emigrants, many of whom chose to settle in Allegheny City. Pittsburgh was an industrial hearth while Allegheny City was a hive of family workshops and its emergence as a light manufacturing and processing center attracted a population that was different from that of Pittsburgh.