

THE LOOP OF MEANING:
A PERSONAL VISION OF ANNIE DILLARD'S
PILGRIM AT TINKER CREEK, TEACHING A STONE TO TALK,
AND HOLY THE FIRM

A THESIS
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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the three works by American essayist Annie Dillard: Pilgrim at Tinker Creek, Teaching a Stone to Talk, and Holy the Firm. This thesis attempts to clarify and clearly elucidate Dillard's meaning through the application of a template to these three texts which have been combined into what French linguists have termed texte. The template uses Dillard's own rhetoric, her symbols, images, and other figurative and literal language, to develop what I have termed a spiraling loop of meaning. Within this loop what I have termed isles exist where the reader may stop to reflect and to experience the atmosphere and language of each isle. Each of the isles represents a state of consciousness which the template aids the reader to see: the Isle of Wake and Half-Opened Eyes, the Isle of Self and the Left Eye, the Isle of Out and the Right Eye, the Isle of Shadowland and Closed Eyes, and the Isles of the Outback, which are the Isle of Breakthrough and Open Eyes and the Isle of Maat and the Third Eye.

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Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

This study examines images, symbols, and use of language in American author Annie Dillard's Pilgrim at Tinker Creek, Holy the Firm, and Teaching a Stone to Talk. It excludes her poetic and autobiographical works. The aim of this thesis is to illuminate what may be seen as a pictorial map drawn in these three texts (see Figure 1) by explicating Dillard's use of particular images, symbols, and language. She states, "I'm dealing with imagery, working toward a picture" and that "what I have been after all along is not an explanation but a picture" (Teaching 127; Pilgrim 179). The picture map Dillard paints with language becomes, for me, a path, a direction, and a meaning for her texts. I see the course the map details as constantly in flux and continually flowing in the circular motion of a spiraling loop of meaning.

Dillard's work has not yet been subjected to significant critical analysis and almost all of what has been done is in the form of reviews. Two dissertations featuring Dillard's work focus on the similarities and differences in the philosophies of Dillard and Thoreau; their focus clearly is more on "nature" writing than on each individual author. However, this study does not compare her work to others or classify Dillard as simply

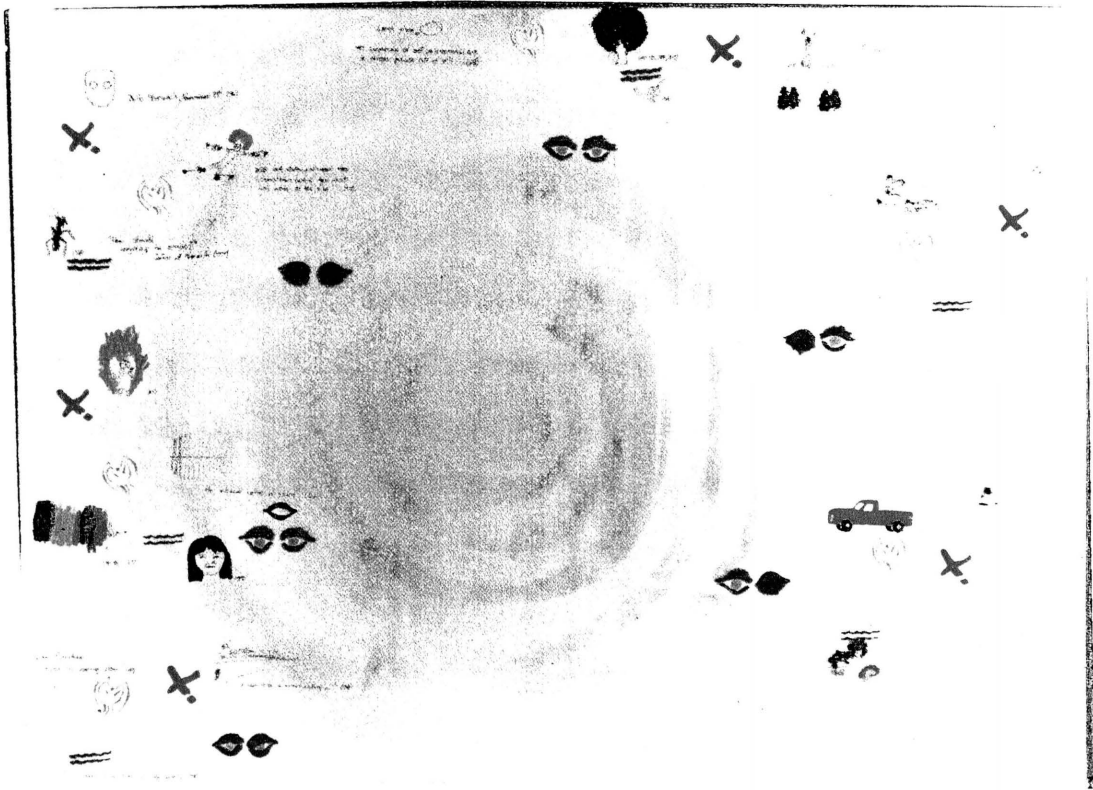


Figure 1: The Loop of Meaning in the Spiral of Six Isles.



Figures, page numbers, and text which surround the parallel blue waves are found in Pilgrim at Tinker Creek.



Figures, page numbers, and text which surround the yellow angel are found in Teaching a Stone to Talk.



Figures, page numbers, and text which surround the red plane with broken wing are found in Holy the Firm.

another "nature" essayist, instead, this study seeks to discover what her words mean--what design she draws. It seems only reasonable that a grasp of what Dillard's text is saying is a prerequisite before an attempt can be made to create critical analysis. By combining the three texts--Pilgrim at Tinker Creek, Holy the Firm, and Teaching a Stone to Talk--to form what French critics have termed texte, I have elicited a template, the use of which gives shape to the impressionistic, looping map of meaning I discern in Dillard's work.

In Dillard's three books Pilgrim at Tinker Creek, Holy the Firm, and Teaching a Stone to Talk the spiraling loop of meaning is illuminated both literally and figuratively. Dillard describes herself a "sojourner," someone searching for the way, for meaning, and the map she draws is a guide for her search (Teaching 150). My template also forms a map, a map of the loop of meaning and what I choose to call isles, those figural places which symbolize the heart of her image and which are "in effect asking imagery to reveal to her [and to the reader] the meaning of her own experience" (Day-Lewis 58-9). The word isle further evokes the ideas of eyes and of religious worship (aisles), while at the same time focusing the reader's attention on water imagery by disallowing the idea of land implicit in a more commonly used word such as island. The recursive water imagery throughout all three texts flows on all sides of

each isle and conjures up a spiraling loop, which in turn strongly suggests the shape of the map as a spiral.

Dillard states that when she "wakes . . . the land begins to respond as a current upwells" (Holy 64). Again, she notes that when we wake it is "to the deep shores of light uncreated" and "it [the light] pours over--like a waterfall, a tidal wave" (62; Pilgrim 259). In effect, Dillard sails quickly on this water from isle to isle, for no one isle is more desirable than another, nor is one attainable without the others; these isles form a continuum within the loop, a perpetual spiral. Many times the isles meld together and appear as one, and at other times they are clearly differentiated; therefore, any semblance of a priority of appearance or of any absolute sequence of these six isles is false and is belied by the constant movement of the currents that surge around each isle. However, in an attempt to reconstruct and to interpret Dillard's image map, this study does take up the isles in a specific order. The artificiality of this arrangement of the isles does not diminish any part of each isle's purpose; it simply assists this linear analysis of an extremely circular concept. Whether the discovery of each isle is by mere collision or by calculation, running ashore is unavoidable.

Each of these isles metaphorically represents a stage of Dillard's experience, and their eye names reflect each stage. The eye symbols for each isle elucidate, and

coordinate in a concrete way the position of each abstract isle on the map. There are six isles on the map: Wake--half-opened eyes; Self--left eye; Out--right eye; Shadowland--closed eyes; and isles of the Outback, Breakthrough--open eyes and Maat--the third eye. Dillard relies heavily on sight imagery and often treats this sense as the most dear to her, without which all "sense[s] and life [become] mere incidental addition[s] to the idea of eyes" (263-4). The tremendous dependence on sight imagery--seeing, vision, and eyes--which envelops and burns throughout her texts, is abundant. Observations of nature, the landscape, animals, light, color, dark, dreams, and the nightmares she "sees" in her head all depend on eyes: eyes that are alive with the earth and the sky, eyes that see color, eyes transfixed by the light and transformed by the dark. The place of these six isles in this study is to illuminate Dillard's picture-map and meaning. Dillard claims "I have been drawing a key to the islands;" this study intends to draw a clue to her "key" (Holy 25).

This study consists of five chapters. Chapter Two delivers the reader immediately onto the shores of the first isle, the isle of Wake, where the sojourner's conscious journey begins. On the looping map this first start (stop) can be named the isle of Wake and Half-Opened Eyes. This isle represents the instant Dillard begins to see. Here the sojourner is alerted to reality and awakened

from dreams, whether they be from sleep or from a wandering mind. The initial push of energy for the sojourner's unending journey claims its source and mother as the isle of Wake. Every other isle on the map has sprung out of this isle--Left Eye, Right Eye, Open Eyes, and the Third Eye. Even the isle of Closed Eyes is first discovered with the Half-Opened Eyes, but the view from Shadowland and Closed Eyes blurs and distorts the conceptualization abilities of the sojourner's eyes and although they appear open, they remain shut. So on the isle of Wake Dillard's mixture of paints (words) for her map stirs, swirls. The Half-Opened Eyes of this isle are the eyelids rising up as if pulling up anchor and launching the sojourner's ship.

Chapter Three concerns the isle of Self, the one most frequently found through the immediate notice of one's being after waking. After one wakes and opens one's eyes, often the foremost activity of the brain and subsequent perspective of the eyes pertains to oneself. The isle of Self rushes in like a tidal wave; it jars the searcher awake like an automatic alarm. The eye posture of the Left Eye best suits this isle because of ancient associations this eye holds with the feminine. The feminine and its traditional ties with intuition, the inner form, and the female body's ability to procreate all symbolize the activities and the landscape which nurtures the idea of the isle of Self. On this isle Dillard examines the different

states of self-consciousness. This isle displays insights into Dillard's dark, often self-defeating and self-destructive moods. While on this isle, Dillard frequently lingers in doubt and seems to be unable to find any hope. However, the isle has two sides and although the sojourner spends much time on the defeating side, she does manage to cross over to the liberating side of the isle and in so doing, she is also able to travel on to other isles.

The fourth chapter concerning the isle of Out is much larger than any other because by definition this isle encompasses all that is outside the self. This isle's surface and climate are complex; it includes specific analysis of landscape, animals, people, and events in relation to their metaphorical meaning in the loop. On the isle of Out the sojourner is suddenly no longer isolated or alone and instead is able to make connections between herself and all the others that sparkle and ignite the isle's atmosphere. The eye posture ascribed to this isle--the Right Eye--satisfies this study's purpose basically because it is the left eye's opposite. Between the isle of Self and the isle of Out tremendous opposites come into play, so it is appropriate that the isle's eye symbol be the Right Eye. While traveling through the isle of Out, the sojourner concentrates solely on the surroundings, the external, the outside, the outer side, the extrinsic, the unconcealed, and the exposed. The adventures on this isle

fill the texts and serve as both a respite for the sojourner and a means of departure for distant isles.

The fifth chapter describes Shadowland as an isle that veils itself in darkness and terror. The traditional imagery of light as good and dark as bad best describes the origin of the isle's name. The word shadow suggests the presence of light, a light which is diffused, slanted, and indirect, but one that cannot be touched. This is the exact light which falls on the isle of Closed Eyes. On this isle Dillard cannot see anything that is "light"--anything that is good, that is useful. Instead, she can only see hurt, terror, fear, anger, and death. It is as if Dillard's eyes were sealed with anguish and despair, for although she may be wide awake and standing in the middle of the sun's light, on the isle of Closed Eyes she is blind and drowned in darkness. Her mind forgets all memory of light--all hope is banished from the dismal territory called Shadowland. In the shadows and through Closed Eyes, the language of this isle describes and exemplifies the paradoxes of life and death. Yet, Dillard survives the terror and transcends the pain of this isle as she moves on and outward to other isles.

The final chapter brings the traveler full circle and onto the isles of the Outback; the isle of Breakthrough and Open Eyes represents the sensual and the temporal aspects of the loop, and the isle of Maat and the Third Eye

represents that which is beyond the senses and a transcendental orientation within the loop. These isles are placed in the same chapter because both isles deliver the sojourner to a realization and an epiphany. On these Outback isles Dillard understands not only the reason for the looping journey but also the reason for its continuance, its place in the cosmic realm of things. The isle of Breakthrough and Open Eyes takes Dillard directly to the center, to the meaning, in the daylight with her eyes and body wide open. The sojourner finds heaven on earth, so to speak, on the isle of Breakthrough. On this isle all the fogginess of the isle of Wake, the doubts of the isle of Self, the questions of the isle of Out, and the terrors of the isle of Shadowland are answered and resolved. These answers may not last forever for another isle's shore may quickly appear on the horizon and change the course directing it back into the loop--but this is exactly the point for no "true" searcher stays. On the isle of Maat (named for the ancient, All-Seeing god) and the Third Eye, the experience of deliverance is much the same, but with one exception. The exception is that on this isle the sojourner leaves all that is corporal and temporal and enters into the strange and beautiful waters of the farthest isle of the loop. Dillard does not know, at least in the sense of when or how, that she is on this isle. She does know though that the isle exists, for

hidden in the text she reveals the splendor of its land and skyscape. It is through the Third Eye (also the isle's eye posture name) that these sightings of this majestic isle are seen.

Lillian Hellman spoke of a "pentimento," the original picture coming through the new one, saying "perhaps it would be as well to say . . . [that it] is a way of seeing and then seeing again" (Three 309). Dillard "sees" in exactly this way the six isles within the spiraling loop of my map of meaning. Each isle is seen one way, on the literal level of her text, and then seen again on a figurative level in the rhetoric of her text: isles swirling in the waters of her words. Each chapter illustrates these two ways of seeing so that the original picture map, the pentimento, shines through the text. So let us now "leave the lighted shore to explore some dim headland" (Pilgrim 2).

Chapter II

THE ISLE OF WAKE AND HALF-OPENED EYES

The isle of Wake begins the circling journey around the isles of Dillard's textual design (see Figure 2). In the beginning, the day must be alerted, the light seen. The cognizance of dreams, nightmares, and imagination often prevails in the dark, but in the light one must wake. And in an effort to place the six isles in a time frame familiar to the reader's everyday experience, the voyage around Dillard's looping picture begins here on the isle of Half-Opened Eyes--the isle of Wake. In a very basic sense, Half-Opened Eyes initiate Dillard's vision-journey, for without eyes waking and opening, the other isles either become invisible or indecipherable. Although blood, often invisible, and sleep, often indecipherable, are necessities of life, one cannot remain in dreams--one must wake. This awakening to awareness, alertness, and living is an essential stroke, the first isle encountered in the waters which are turning and looping toward the eternal center isle of light.

Immediately in Pilgrim at Tinker Creek, Dillard's imagery launches into a circular weave, when she states that one wakes from "a curved sleep" (Pilgrim 2). Even while sleeping, Dillard's curving loop of meaning perpetually spins. Yet this waking process is not only a

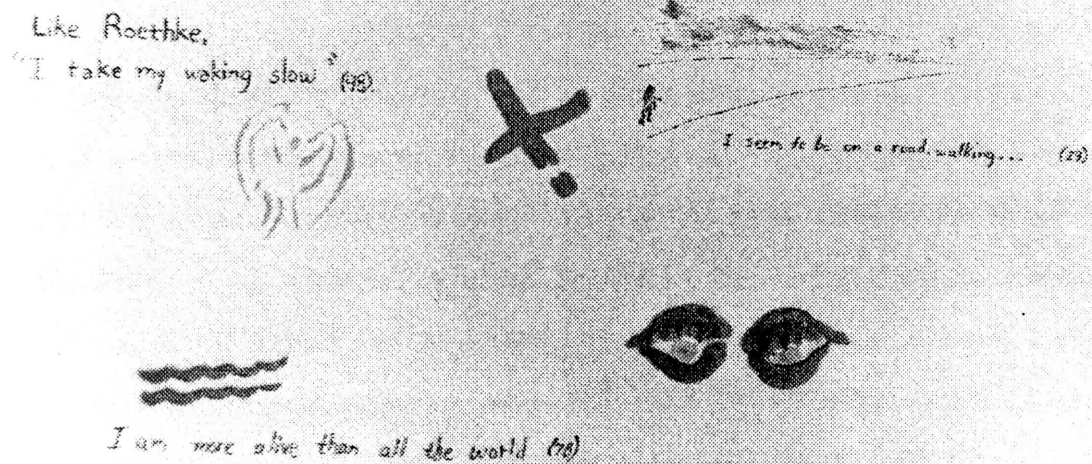


Figure 2: Close-up of the Isle of Wake and Half-Opened Eyes.



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cessation from sleep. It is also a wake like that of a ship cutting through the water leaving a momentary trail of its course; however, like the waves on the water, it is only a fleeting beginning for what otherwise reveals no beginning or end. Waking is an ongoing process; Dillard wakes a "hundred times a day" (Holy 42; Teaching 97).

Although these examples are liberally put together from all three texts in a manner that appears to have little rhyme or reason, a complete reading of each notation shows they are neither taken out of context nor contrived. It cannot be stressed enough that a message pervades these three texts, a message that an openness to life must be the goal for each moment. The isle of Half-Opened Eyes provides a starting place for such openness as well as refreshment and nourishment for the goal. The isle itself constructed figuratively in the water imagery--currents, shores, and waves--and painted literally in the words of her texts--waking a hundred times--requires a cautious approach for the proper course to unfold leading around to the rest of the isles in the loop.

HOW NOT TO WAKE

Leaving the lighted shores requires not only a landing on the isle of Wake, but also the following of a distinct route to find, to cross over, and to depart from the isle. Dillard notes that if we wake abruptly "we wake in terror, eat in hunger, [and] sleep with a mouthful of blood"

(Pilgrim 175). Abruptness then is one route to be avoided. Later, on another isle called Shadowland, we will see that Dillard believes this particular manner of waking will cause us to suffer from wrongthinking, and lead us into a jagged course not true to the loop.

A jagged course begins from a rushed start, an abrupt awakening which does not fully see or understand the isle of Wake as an integral first step, the primary point beginning the circle of meaning. A hasty waking forgets the beauty of the "curved sleep" and remembers only the terror from some unknown darkness. When landing on the isle of Wake in this manner, "all [Dillard] want[s] to do is stay awake" because she is "terrified . . . [and must] keep awake" (85-6, 42). However, keeping awake is contrary to keeping alive, to keeping in the swim of the loop. An eye cannot stay open, nor can a person constantly "see." If unable to stop, rest, and blink, the life dies drowning. Dillard terms this the life of "the fixed--the world without fire" and also finds "the fixed" on a later isle (67). Therefore, a delicate balance, not waking too suddenly and not lingering too greedily on the isle maps and is the best route. This delicate balance can be measured in the natural process of breathing, not hyperventilating and not suffocating. It is comparable to the yogi practice of "prana," a disciplined breath control which leads to consciousness awakening. Cherishing the breath and embracing the isle of Wake, Dillard echoes Van

Gogh's opinion that one should "breathe as hard as [one] can breathe" (240). Unveiled within this disciplined breath and this deliberate, slow, and balanced manner of awakening is the desirable route to follow in order to find, cross over, and depart from the isle of Wake.

HOW TO WAKE

The recommended route around the isle of Wake is plainly stated. According to Dillard, whether waking from sleep or from an unannounced alteration of the senses, the aim is to wake easily and somehow innocently. While describing the correct way to and through the isle of Half-Opened Eyes, Dillard specifically states that we should do as Roethke's poem suggests, which is to "take [our] waking slow" (Teaching 98). Waking slowly requires again a deliberate--though relaxed--effort, a practiced breath, and a firm hard breath, as Van Gogh suggested. Furthering her definition of proper arousal and description of the isle's atmosphere, she wakes as if "in a god," as if "just born" (Holy 11; Pilgrim 213). This type of waking enables one to see as "newborn babies must see," "to explore the neighborhood--[as] an infant" and to discover where "love without object begins" in the looping waters and the landscape of distant isles (Teaching 43; Pilgrim 11; Teaching 48). Succinct and poised in Roethke's poetry and Dillard's prose then is the recommended way to wake--"slow" as an innocent babe and holy as a graceful "god." Thus

when the isle of Half-Opened Eyes is rightly found, it stirs the child and the god in us all.

CHILD-INNOCENCE

The innocence of the child, which flourishes in Half-Opened Eyes, embodies the isle's position as a beginning point in the loop as the newborn represents the beginning of life for man. Dillard states that "Innocence is a better world," though holding on to innocence may not always be possible (Pilgrim 81). Perception of and landing on the isle of Wake, usually inherent to the infant's vision, may turn elusive to one who is no longer young, but Dillard insists its boundless landscape be constantly explored, never ignored or forgotten. The struggle to hold on to the innocent view and unblemished perspective of a child is a constant fight for all who travel the loop. Yet, sometimes even children lose their vision of the isle of Wake and flail in the waves of distant shores.

An example of such a child is found in the last chapter of Teaching a Stone to Talk; Dillard tells about her child friend, whom she has known for some years. The two see each other for planned adventures in a cottage in the woods. Neither the child's name or relationship to the author is revealed in the text. The child's purpose in the text clearly illustrates how an individual, no matter what age, can fluctuate between an innocent outlook and a disfigured or impaired viewpoint on the isle of Half-Opened

Eyes. Dillard states that her nine-year-old friend is "now aware of some of the losses you incur by being here" and is beginning to lose some of her innocence, but that her friend does remember being born, for the child says, "the light hurt my eyes" (156, 159). Dillard, who frequently strikes a rhetorically self-defensive pose, dismisses the idea of pain the child associates with the memory as childish "self-pity"; yet, metaphorically the 'hurt' symbolizes the child's sense of her loss of innocence (159). Regardless of the reason for the pain, the fundamental message Dillard conveys here is the fact that the child chooses to hold on to what she understands as her first visit to isle of Wake. Memory, defined here as the inner focus of the mind's eye, and sight, simply defined as the outer focus of the mind's eye, play forcefully in waves and figurative language of the texts. Together, the vitality of the innocent (unencumbered and boundless sight) and the experience of the more acquainted (encumbered and similarly bound memory) make meaning in the words and create waves in the waters of the isle of Wake. Dillard's nine-year-old companion is a walking, talking example of the combination of innocence and experience we all possess on the isle of Wake.

In an effort to understand both worlds, both the "light" and the "hurt," to learn from each, and to find the right route on the isle of Wake, Dillard demands that we "teach our children one thing only--to wake up" (97). She

hopes we all visit the isle as often as possible. She asks us all to "feel the now" (Pilgrim 97). These practices allow us to experience the isle of Wake as a child does, innocently and sometimes painfully. But there also exists, parallel to the child's waking path, another acceptable route through the isle of Wake.

TOUGH-ACTIVE WAKE

Possessing neither the strength of a god nor the grace of an innocent, another more rugged pair of eyes begins to open. These eyes belong to the searching human spirit; they befit "strangers and sojourners, soft dots on the rock" (Teaching 115). These tough eyes service pilgrims seeking solace and sanctity. The wake allows the sojourners to cast off from the shores of Half-Opened Eyes and to travel on towards the other isles unfurling in the loop. Dillard plainly illustrates this with words of motion and adventure. She repeatedly finds herself "to be on a road walking"--"walk[ing] on my way" (Holy 28-9, 63-5; Pilgrim 242). Dillard announces that "living is moving" and "life is a stroll--or a forced march--through a gallery hung in trompes-l'esprit" (82-3). One should "take a deep breath, open [her] eyes [and] . . . abandon all to start walking . . . to Point Barrow, Mount McKinley, Hudson's Bay" and moreover, to "spend the afternoon" (242, 220, 248, 269). Dillard reaffirms a previous innocence, now lost, when she states that often a "feel[ing] like just be[ing]

born" accompanies the search (213). As innocence is regained, the waking eyes permeate the scene with an "energetic readiness" and a sense of being "more alive than all the world" (78, 82). This rousing sense wants only to be "wholly acted upon, flown at, and lighted on in throngs, probed, knocked, even bitten" (221). The tough eyes required for such a vision-journey are what Mary Daly, feminist author and professor, terms active eyes (103). Daly defines active eyes as a noun: "[as] eyes which scintillate," and as a verb: "to beam through the archetypal image that blocks vision" (103). The archetypal images Daly refers to are those which facilitate false hope and a boundary of fatal vision, and are images which enslave one to the isle of Closed Eyes--Shadowland; these are the images Dillard tries to avoid by remembering to wake properly, "slowly," innocently, humanly, holy, and actively.

DISCOVERY WAKE

While slowly waking, Dillard illustrates the next step as one of uncertainty, one of discovery. Of course, songs of discovery resonate from every isle's shores, but the first isle asks the basic question about "where it is" (emphasis added; Pilgrim 12). The inquiry about it is the crux of Dillard's argument, it is at the core of her meaning, it is the center isle of light. The entire vision-journey searches for it. Dillard claims this to be

the question of "our original intent" (12). Throughout the texts she diligently conducts "an effort to discover where we so incontrovertibly are" (128). Her answers lie looping in the texts. Questions about dreams, reality, land, and life consume the journey at times. Forgetting sometimes to swim, she sinks in the tidepool or drowns in the undertow of distant shores, and she "reel[s] in confusion [and] . . . do[es not] understand what [she] see[s]" (24). However, this type of waking is again reminiscent of the isle of Closed Eyes and not conducive to travel through the isle of Wake. Instead, one must remember to wake slowly. One must at "the least--try to be there" and not in an imagined and unreal place (8). The sojourner on the isle of Half-opened eyes must realize that she "cannot cause light; the most [she] can do is try to put [herself] in the path of its beam" (33). The discovery process has already begun.

Dillard's sojourner wakes on this beginning isle slowly; her half-opened eyes center as innocently as a child's eyes. The innocence of these eyes often fades and the active eyes of the searcher begin to open. As defined in the introduction, the isle of Wake has only been designated as the first isle of the simultaneously occurring isles in the loop because of the 'conventional' association of waking as beginning. Therefore, as Dillard innocently and actively lands on the isle of Wake, while evenly breathing and instinctively walking across the isle

and through any imagined boundary or imitation of restraint, she initiates her quest for meaning--the journey around and through the six isles of the loop and the discovery of it. As her eyes open, the sojourner remains momentarily on the isle of Wake. The isle urges the eyes to open and discover the beam of light and to let "cheerful human conversation wake" us, as well as to stray away from this isle and toward other isles (77).

Chapter III

THE ISLE OF SELF AND THE LEFT EYE

When the "now" that one is urged to feel on the isle of Wake first begins to be realized, the knowledge of self and the horizons of the isle of Self and the Left Eye also begin to be seen; these instances frequently follow each other because the "now" of the immediate surroundings is usually first detected in the self (see Figure 3). The isle of Self, the second resting place on the voyage around my template of Dillard's isles of the loop, often emerges at this moment, and sometimes grounds the sojourner's primary vessel--her self--for what seems an eternity. The typical succession from the isle of Wake to the isle of Self is as characteristically correct as the after-waking actions of stretching and extending the body (the vessel) and then considering, first, the conditions of the self. So on this isle, Dillard, now awake, determines to find the path through Self which will lead onward to the other isles in the loop.

The primary path on this isle often becomes obscure, and to follow it seems extraordinarily difficult because its direction is obscured by the visions and dark images created by the Left Eye. The left eye, which in the past was considered "the evil eye" and was also associated with "ignorance," often sees only a dissipated way around the

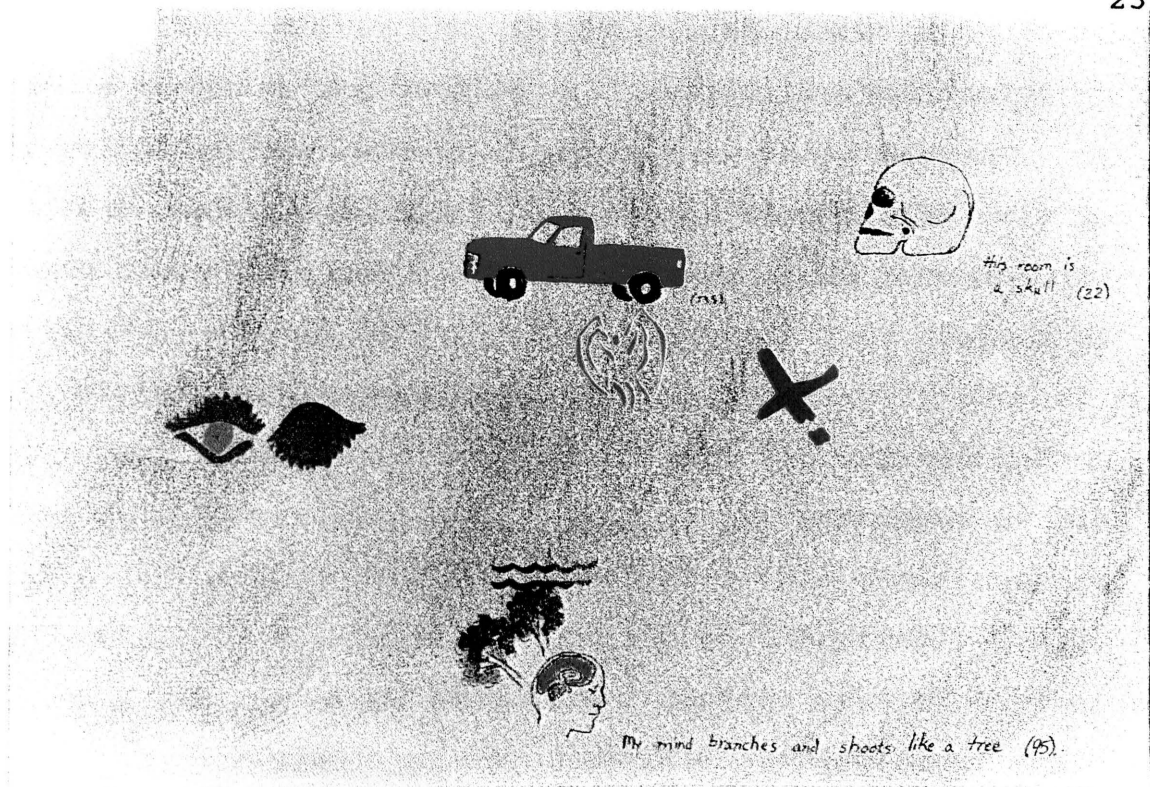


Figure 3: Close-up of the Isle of Self and the Left Eye.

isle of Self (Walker 138; Campbell 116). And on this wrong path a negative and fearing self dwells overbearingly, constituting the largest region of the isle; however, another path can be found which leads through the isle to where a positive and loving self grows in an undauntingly beautiful, though hard to reach, region. Both regions of the second isle are explored in this chapter.

What cues the reader that Dillard has arrived upon this isle is the word self. Self is our awareness of our being or identity, and Dillard divides this consciousness of being into a desirable light and an undesirable shade. Dillard distinguishes between the desired type of self with its lighted region, and the unhealthy perception of self with its drowning pools by italicizing the lighted self. In this study, a similar practice will be followed: the lighted self will be noted in all capital letters and the darkened self underlined. An examination braving first the shaded side of the left eye's purblind self, since it falls upon most of the isle, and then crossing to the lighted SELF best suits the sights on the isle of the Left Eye. Four paths through the shades of self on the isle follow.

THE PERVADING DARKNESS CREATED BY THE self

The transition from the isle of Wake to the isle of Self frequently occurs in the morning, and if the wrong side of the isle of Self is approached, darkness will still

swallow the scene. In this darkness the left eye opens, its vision blurred and clouded, "see[ing] only tatters of clearness through a pervading obscurity" (Pilgrim 19). Stumbling in the darkness of self the singularity of one's body, one's hand, or one's room fails to comfort the eye and leaves one stranded in self-consciousness. The left eye pictures the "room [as] a skull, a fire tower, wooden, and empty" and a realization emerges of the need for other than self, perhaps a memory of the lesson learned on the isle of Wake that one "cannot cause the light" (Holy 22; Pilgrim 33). However, stranded and sinking in this self, the morning's silence molds eyes into "stone" and skull into "a polar basin" (Teaching 49). The shift from one's own outward thriving form to an inner decaying form, from a body carrying the network of life to an empty shell containing nothing but dust, creates a strange feeling of lifelessness and meaninglessness in the sojourner. The carriers of such decay that flourishes on this side of the isle are not bound to the human realm only. Material or plant forms can also exhibit this type of possessed self, as Dillard explains: on a morning in summer "the silence gathered and struck" and "the fields and the fencing, the road, a parked orange truck--were stricken and self-conscious" (135). Here the silence, the fields, the fences, and a truck fall into the negatively shaded side of the isle.

FALSE REFLECTIONS CREATED BY THE self

Dillard confirms being grounded temporarily on this side of the isle when she writes of "the paralysis of [her] own spirit" (137). The silence "and the stillness" on this side is "unendurable" and nothing can break this "paralyzed day," not even a human's song and whistle, nor a Labrador's bounce and "lope"; nothing can break this "loneliness [which is] unendurable" (136-7). Dillard furthers the devastating effects this tedious and limited viewpoint can have by comparing a life containing only an awareness of this type of self to a "life of sorrow" (137). Dillard curiously switches the traditional imagery of morning as a time for re-birth, renewal, and re-awakening to a time of despair and death. She also acutely personifies each figure in the scene as inconceivably and totally immobilized by silence. By turning her body, the field, inanimate objects, time, and silence upside down and inside out, she creates an opposition of usual meaning, and, in this manner, she illuminates this opposing side of self. Her eyes of blood and tissue are not "stone," a parked truck of metal and grease is not "self-conscious," a morning in July, the season of fruition, is not deadly, and silence, a holy song, is not non-existent. These strange twists, which challenge Dillard's own existence, affirm the reality and justify her stance against this side of the isle of Self in the looping waters. Everything on this self's side reflects a negative image in the waters of the

isle of the Left Eye, a hollow and wasted likeness of reality.

THE ILL self CREATED BY THE CITY

Dillard also sees a torn and twisted reality much like the reality of the empty side of self in city life and living in a self-consciousness which not only "separate[s] us from our creator--but [which is] also the one thing that divides us from our fellow creatures" (Pilgrim 79). Anyone who reads the newspaper or watches the nightly news knows that many Americans living and working in the Manhattan skyscrapers, the Silicon Valley, the Chinatowns, the barrios, the metroplexes, or even the smaller communities often confirm by their actions the terrible and traumatic effects this disease-like strain of self-consciousness has on their daily lives. In the jungle, a freelance writer, who works in Hollywood and lives in Manhattan and Paris, knows this strand of the diseased self to which Dillard alludes and he "wonder[s] why [he is] going back" to the city (Teaching 55). Cemented and forever stuck in the muck of this region on the isle of Self, this disease can be fatal and as Dillard says, it is "the curse of the city--next year . . . I'll start living; next year . . . " (Pilgrim 81). It is a life which is an agonizing and prolonged struggle with the reaper who steals all sight from the left eye while holding the right eye firmly shut; it is a life "as if before a firing squad" (251). The fact

that the city life is often romanticized, frequently dubbed sophisticated and desirable, offers strong reason why the popularly-held view of self-consciousness as a self-absorbed state, a negative state, seems to persist in American culture. This understanding of self-consciousness makes perfect sense to some infected city folk. The usually artificial and manmade setting of the city perfectly suits the unnatural behaviors this illness excretes and the clouding self-consciousness of an ever present death. Modern philosophy plays its part, too, for according to Dillard, social Darwinism contributes to much of this malaise by its promotion of the idea: "If you're so smart, why ain't you rich?" (Teaching 121). One who is stuck on the dark side of the isle of Self sympathizes with such a materialistic and shallow philosophy of life as if totally unaware of the lighted side. And the mirrored windows of the building or the glass of the vanity on this side of Self (self) reflects only eyes staring back at eyes.

CONTRADICTIONS OF self AND ESCAPE TO SELF

On the isle of the Left Eye, still on the backwater side of Self, the rudder breaks and the boat no longer drifts, but grounds on the shores as an "anchor-hold" (Pilgrim 2). This anchor-hold can be fatal, like the infected city life, if it is not freed and the line unshackled from the squalid self. Dillard knows this to be

true when she claims that "God pities overt self-consciousness" (Teaching 70). Was the grave loneliness and despair she felt on this side of the isle a self-induced insanity, an idea produced by her memory and bound vision, an idea that sprouts out of the negative self? While on the dark side, hearing the silence of those mornings in her room and in the summer field as a hurtful noise completely contradicts Dillard's more frequent image and perhaps strongest metaphor of God as silence and silence as Holy. In this blatant contradiction she diagrams the route of a lost ship's voyage, hoping that by doing so her ship and her sojourning self can, in the future, avoid the abyss of the sickened region of the isle of Self. Seemingly stuck in a whirlpool on the wrong side of the isle, Dillard does find the light, avoids the abyss, and recaptures her right SELF as she recognizes that "it is only human feeling that is freakishly amiss" (Pilgrim 178). Only an "overt self-consciousness," a self opened obviously to only itself--its human--and, therefore, closed and unreachable self to God, is what God "pities." An examination of the lighted SELF, the guileless SELF follows.

THE SELF LIVES IN THE OUTDOORS AND THE INDOORS

Utilization of this second isle's lighted SELF is necessary for rounding the curve, for heading in the desirable direction of the loop, for going with the flow. The utility of the SELF can be seen in animals and men of the outdoors. In creatures of the outside world

"unseen . . . but present [this type of SELF exists as] tapirs, jaguars, many species of snake and lizard, ocelots, armadillos, marmosets, howler monkeys, toucans and macaws and a hundred other birds, deer, bats, peccaries, capybaras, agoutis, and sloths" (Teaching 57). Each of these animals innately knows and grabs onto the SELF and rarely, if ever, lands on the humanly manufactured side of Self on the dark path. The Arctic explorers, whom Dillard frequently mentions with such intrigue and respect in Teaching a Stone to Talk, are also outside, far out on the cold continent. Yet these men who are in such dire situations also seem to ignore any false idea of the isle of Self and, instead, possess a magnificent "dignity, and SELF-control" (emphasis added; 26). Whether outdoors, like the animals and explorers, or indoors alone, Dillard can ignore the false self, too.

In the winter, the human animal's course is to hibernate, like many other beings, and Dillard discovers her SELF when she "come[s] in to come out" (Pilgrim 38). On the inward trek of this isle, she explores the positive side of SELF while learning about others. Maximum and best-quality inner maintenance rules the course of the cold weather days and Dillard "reap[s] the harvest of the year's planting," gains the knowledge, and absorbs the experience of other SELVES (38). Therefore, it can be maintained that with a regimen of such healthy habits, the utilization and cultivation of this positive SELF can be the alternate path

around and through the isle. This region of the isle occurs less frequently and is drawn, to a lesser extent, in Dillard's rhetoric than the darker region because this SELF only briefly stays the sojourner's "walk"--her trip around the isles of the loop. This SELF leads quickly, often instantaneously, and almost inseparably to other isles; therefore, the right path through the isle of the Self and the Left Eye undoubtedly presents itself in the positive SELF.

THE SELF EXISTS AS A VEHICLE FOR TRAVEL AROUND THE LOOP

A SELF-consciousness reminiscent of the second isle's positive side allows the body and the soul a means of departure, leaving one's SELF behind while consciously remaining an integral part of the present. A manner and approach similar to daydreams and an attitude of wholeness and oneness with nature subconsciously mix in the mind on this path across the isle. Dillard parallels this SELF and the route to which it leads as one's "mind branch[ing] and shoot[ing] like a tree" (95). And as the mind "branches" and "shoots" one is able to become anything--"You are God . . . a retired railroad worker . . . a starling . . . a sculptor . . . a chloroplast . . . evolution. . . You are God" (129-31). Once the SELF accepts its flexibility, its freedom to be any and all of these other things and SELVES, the searching SELF on the isle of the Left Eye decides to live from love not fear.

The sojourner lets God in the door of SELF. The searcher does not tread relentlessly, stupidly against the SELF, against the "love" (Teaching 141). Soon the SELF will be ready to travel on to other isles.

THE OVERTURNING SELF

Within the other SELF the body disappears, and the spirit soars in its understanding of SELF, which sees the scars along with the beauty, and creates knowledge and experience, not ignorance and death. Dillard explains that proper SELF-consciousness does hinder the experience of the present, the "now," because once verbalized in the brain and put into a linear mode, or deposited in the memory, the circle of the present ceases and is lost. However, she acknowledges that without the momentary loss of the immediate, we would not know the enduring gain of the timeless loop. Dillard believes this type of "interior verbalization is helpful to enforce the memory" of the right life which follows the loop, the neverending spiral deepening "the present of [one's] consciousness as a mystery which is also always just rounding a bend" and continuously "will overturn, overturn, overturn" (Pilgrim 81, 93). Overturning in the waters and on the shores of the lighted side of SELF spins the sojourner into the circle of the isles; therefore, the SELF when properly realized, confirms the loop and is enabled to resume the walk, the journey to the circling isles.

Chapter IV

ISLE OF OUT AND THE RIGHT EYE

Riding the waves and striking against the shores of the next isle, the sojourner loses track of self and, with a minimum of emotional and personal impositions, analytically sees and studies the outside world of this isle. The isle of Out and the Right Eye is the next isle in the loop pattern of my template and Dillard spends much time on this isle (see Figure 4). Indeed, Dillard is apologetic when she states "[I] talk too much" and complains that her mind is programmed to sort and seek as much "trivia" as possible about everything and anything (Pilgrim 31). Yet what Dillard calls trivia are, in actuality, the symbols of her journeys, and tools which enable her to "analyze and pry" (31). Dillard states, "I'm a fugitive and a vagabond, a sojourner seeking signs" and on the isle of Out many signs reside (267). These trivia and signs are really representatives of the multiplicity of means toward her journey's end, her loop, her goal as seeker, as sojourner. They include all the different hues of paint available to her for the map. Dillard is the artist who "lives jammed in a pool of materials" (Holy 22). The elements that make up these different things are the same elements that constitute the form and shape of the waters and the islands in which the language of the text

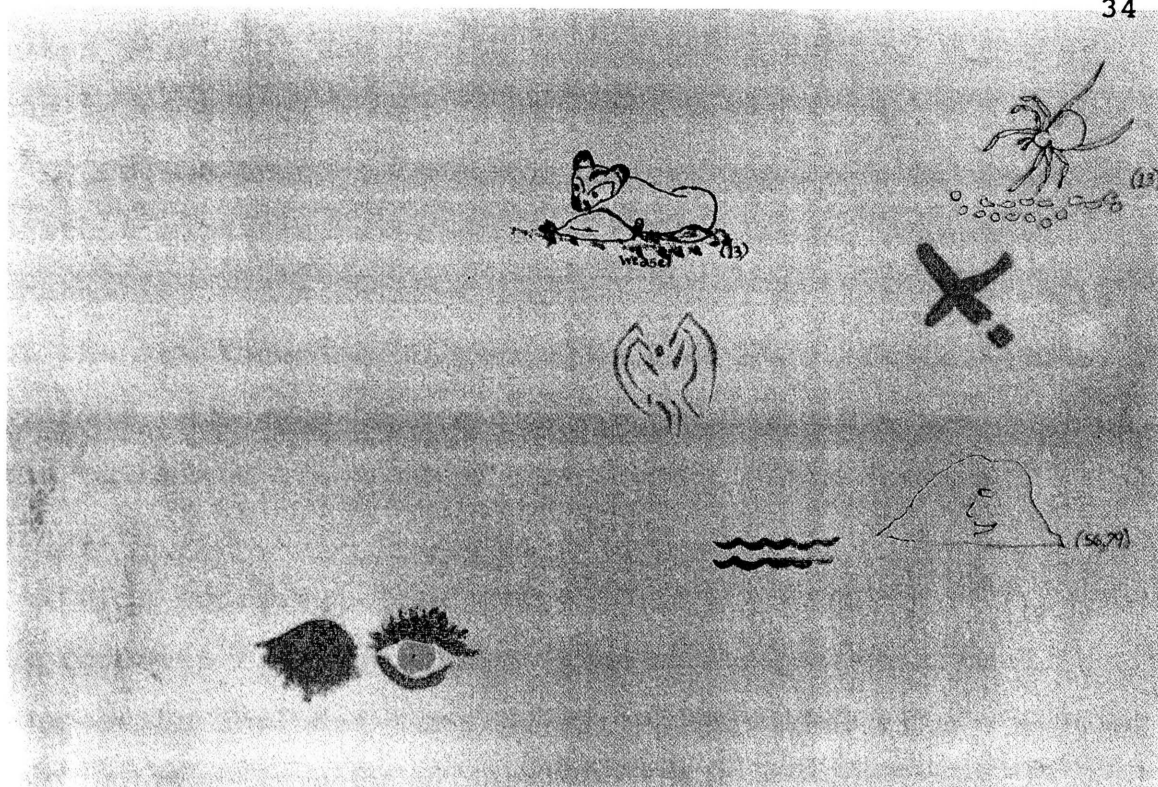


Figure 4: Close-up of the Isle of Out and the Right Eye.

makes meaning. The spring of the water and the roots of the isles can be found in all this trivia.

On the third island Dillard introduces inhabitants of distant galaxies, salamanders, fiddle tunes, a knotted snakeskin, and a Chinese saying, "that we live in a world of the ten thousand things" (Teaching 69). These images, notions, and wonders are then assimilated into the body of the texts and the mind of the reader. When properly prepared from this strange-sounding recipe as it is in the texts, a wonderful dish ensues: mixed metaphors.

Ingredients from the animal kingdom in this strange concoction include: the macabre mating dance of the praying mantis, the tenacity of weasels, the back-stroke of muskrats, the vast variety of salamanders or newts, the skeleton of a goldfish, the migration of hawks, the roosting of starlings, the swooping grace of swallows, the visitation of a goldfinch, the meticulous spider, the egg-laying dragonfly, and the Polythemus moth. A partial list of the people required to stir the mixture includes: theologians, historians, entomologists, scientists of all sorts, explorers, Ecuadorian Indians, neighbors, members of the congregation, strangers, artists and herself. Finally, the pot in which this diet brews is discovered in land, space, and time, a vast area which includes the total and partial eclipse of the sun, the stars, the moon, the seasons, different times of day and night, the mountains,

the woman's face on the mountain, the creeks, the ponds, the bay, the ocean, and the islands. It is on this isle, which everybody calls by a "different name," that Dillard prepares readers and fellow travelers for their journey into entomology, philosophy, history, religion, flora, and folk; it is an immense reservoir from which all may drink (Holy 25). A division of these things, figures, images, animals, people, and land is necessary for a clear illustration of the isle of Out and the Right Eye because the well of her knowledge about this isle's inhabitants dives so deep and the range of its horizon runs so long.

Dividing Dillard's journey on the isle of Out into four major paths which can be either separately or simultaneously traveled enables the reader to better follow the author's steps and adventures on the isle. The first path to be examined will be generally categorized as Observation and subdivided into three distinct techniques Dillard utilizes while visiting this isle. The division of these three manners of observation is first made through authorities' opinions, remarks, and their experiences; second from a dangerous and risky vantage point; and, in opposition to the dangerous type, the third manner is a completely safe and benign technique used in an absolute silent and still observation of the Out. After the stillness and silence technique which is the most frequently-referred-to manner of observing the Out, Dillard

directly leads into the second leg or path concentrating on the isle's animal life. Dillard is fascinated with the animals that swim, swarm, soar, and saturate the shores of the isle of Out. A notch higher in the Darwinian hierarchy, the next path on the isle is one crowded with people. The people on this trail are common folk, neighbors, and friends and in this way are quite different from the famous people found on the observation through authority opinion leg of the path. These people are unique in their own right. Remaining true to the loop and operating from dust to dust, the isle's last path cuts through the land itself. This final path to be explored through the land is forged by the water and creeks, cluttered with brambles and trees, and blown by the wind. Although these four paths--Observation, Animal, Folk, and Land--are seemingly divergent, substantive, and unconnected, they are the mixed ingredients of the recipe found on the isle of Out and the Right Eye.

THREE DIFFERENT TYPES OF OBSERVATION

1. Celebrated Opinions and Perspectives

Referring to Pilgrim at Tinker Creek, Charles Deemer of the New Leader finds Dillard "terribly self-centered . . . egomaniac[al]" and Eudora Welty claims that Dillard is "the only person in the book [and that] she can recall no other outside speech to break the long soliloquy of the

author [Dillard]" (Straub 168; Contemporary Literary Criticism 176). Such views ignore the multitude of authorities Dillard quotes, alludes to, or discusses. Dillard's wide-ranging encounter with the best minds of civilization takes on the quality of a dialogue. As Graham Good recognizes in The Observing Self: Rediscovering the Essay, "quoting in the essay introduces an element of dialogue" 6). The dialogues conducted in the texts can be divided into six groups, which are dialogues with religious leaders, religious/social groups, poet/philosophers, common folk, distinct places, and scientist/philosophers. Consider for example this sampling of some of the references mentioned and authorities quoted in Holy the Firm from the category of religious leaders: Dionysius and Isaiah (45), Christ (60), and Saint Benedict (63). The examples from the religious/social groups are the Armenians (24), the Levites (24), the Roman church (25), the Mohawks (59), and the disciples of Christ (60). Figures from the poet/philosophers found in Holy the Firm are Chesterton (21), Henry Miller commenting on Knut Hamsun (26), Emerson (57), Meister Eckhart (62), and Aristotle (70). The group of common folk consists of student Terry Wean (30), a sailor (50), a merchant's son (64), and, in the final pages of the book, an implicit dialogue with Julie Norwich who is a neighbor and a friend (73-6). The places mentioned besides the fields and forests of Dillard's personal

travels are mountains, specifically "Mount Baker and the Sisters and Shuksan, the Canadian Coastal Range, and the Olympics" (20). And finally the scientist/philosopher noted in this book is Pythagoras (42).

A similar list from Teaching a Stone to Talk includes the religious leaders Pope Gregory (44) and Jerry Falwell (80). The religious/social groups here are the "Wildflowers" (a singing group) (17), eighteenth-century Hasidic Jews (41), and the wilderness generation at Sinai (69). The poet/philosophers are Ernest Thompson Seton (12), Erasmus (50), Thoreau (64), Martin Buber (69), Roethke (98), Wallace Stevens (99), Coleridge (131), and Credulous Pliny (149). Common folk are represented by Oswaldo (36), a free-lance writer (55), the children (58), Alan McDonald (64), Larry (67), a little boy and his mother (78-80), Carl Angermeyer (114), Soames Summerhays (115), Alf Kastdalen (118), and Noah Very (155). Places mentioned in Teaching are Hollin's Pond (12), the Arctic Ocean and the Beaufort Sea (42), the Napo River (53), the Galapagos islands (73), the Yakima valley (86), the Zagros Mountains (92), the Crab Nebula (96), and Daleville, Virginia (107). The scientist/philosophers mentioned in this work are Lemaitre and Gamow (71), Charles Darwin (119), C. H. Waddington and Arthur Koestler (120), Herbert Spencer (121), William Paley, T. H. Huxley, and Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (122), and Albert Einstein (123).

A category of explorers/adventurers must also be included for this book; they are Peary and Henson (18), nineteenth-century arctic explorers (21), L. P. Kirwan (22), Salomon Andree (23), the Franklin expeditioners (24), Sir Robert Falcon Scott (26), Roald Amundsen (27), Fridtjof Nansen (28), Edward Parry (30), Joseph Green (38), Henry Hudson (39), Charles Wilkes and John Murray (45), Lieutenant Maxwell (47), and Gordon MacCreach (56). One more category must also be considered, the documents/sources represented by the Scientific American (144), the English Old Testament (150), and an old Pawnee notion (166).

In Pilgrim at Tinker Creek Dillard primarily mentions either poet/philosophers (which includes writers, painters, and artists of all types) and scientist/philosophers. The poets/philosophers include Kazantzakis (3), Thoreau (11), Stewart Edward White (17), Donald E. Carr (19), Martin Buber and Ruskin (30), Jacques Ellul (33), Edwin Way Teale (35), Van Gogh (69), Paul Valery (71), Stephen Graham (80), Picasso and Michael Goldman (83), Thomas Merton (85), Rimbaud (96), Gerald Manley Hopkins (106), Coleridge (107), Klee and El Greco (127), William Blake (136), Joseph Wood Krutch (162), Rachel Carson (166), Aeschylus (170), Julian of Norwich (177), Heraclitus (201), Emerson (202), John Knoepfle (205), Horace Kepar (218), and Simone Weil (242). The scientist/philosophers are Pascal and Einstein (7),

Marius von Senden (25), Farley Mowat (42), Pliny (52), J. Henri Fabre (57), Arthur Koestler (70), Kepler (71), Copernicus (101), John Cowper Powys (112), Asen Balikci (114), Robert E. Coker (120), Jacob Branowski (132), John Dee (141), Rutherford Platt (164), Arther Stanley Eddington (175), Paul Errington (194), Werner Heisenberg (202), Uvarov (208), William Barker (209), Charles Elton (225), R. R. Askew (231), Gerald Durrell and Howard Ensign Evans (236), Donald Culross Peattie (245), Dr. Urquhart (254), and Isak Dinesen (267). Three religious leaders cited are Xerxes (87), Abba Moses (257), and Ezekiel (268). There are also three document/sources represented in Goethe's character Faust (83), a Kabbalistic phrase (129), and a letter from Valerie Eliot (T. S. Eliot's widow) (168).

This rich, varied tapestry of contact with the minds of others testifies to Dillard's many interests and indoor occupations on the isle of Out. These lists should do much to disprove Deemer's and Welty's claims of monologue or monotony of tone. Also many of these other voices appeared more than once, for instance Buber, Pliny, Einstein and Teale, yet only their first contribution is noted on the above lists.

2. Risky Observation

Dillard weaves the words of these authorities and celebrities into the message that is uniquely her own as

she moves toward discovery of the third isle. But during the risky observations she makes meaning and watches the isle of Out without the assistance of anyone or anything. While involved in this second kind of observation, Dillard relies totally on her own strengths; she forgets danger and ignores risk. Fearless on the shores of the isle, she forgets how hot the sand is under foot, how deep the sand lies in the green heart of the isle, and how swiftly the deadly snake can strike; rather, she concentrates intensely on the immediate phenomenon. The previous isle disappears from sight, and, now, with the isle of Self out of sight and firmly on the shores of the isle of Out, she pries, sometimes foolishly, into the lives, deaths, and struggles of other beings and events. One foolhardy, or at least dangerous, example of how far any notion of the self is left behind occurs in Pilgrim at Tinker Creek during a flood. Dillard climbs the brick retaining wall, a wall which is only one brick wide. Nonetheless, Dillard, balanced on top of the bricks, "walk[s] right out into the flood and stand[s] in the middle of it" (155). She awakens to the severity of the situation when, on the return trip, she meets another risk taker and they must "like teeth on a zipper" weave themselves around each other to pass (155). Oddly enough, Dillard makes no mention of fear or allusion to it, perhaps because, deep in the risk mode, studies on the isle of Out do not generate any past memory or assumed

plight. Instead, the right eye devours the present surroundings without restraint. In this mode of observation Dillard becomes like the "Mohawks along a strand of scaffolding who have long since forgotten their danger"; therefore, climbing a retaining wall out into the middle of a flooded creek bed reflects an instinctive rather than a careless action, an instinct to see fully and from every direction the isle of Out (Holy 59).

Another risky observation of the isle of Out exposes itself to Dillard while standing in the Yakima Valley in the strange light of the eclipse. Dillard did not know that witnessing the eclipse would lead her into the rising waters and physical dangers of the risk mode of observation. Unlike walking out into the middle of a flood where the danger is present and undeniable, the eclipse and the eerie light it cast over the valley and all the people watching it fall into the risk category because they threatened the sense Dillard most depended upon--her sight. As she experienced the magnificence of the sight, she "watched the landscape innocently, like a fool, like a diver in the rapture of the deep who plays at the bottom while his air runs out" (Teaching 86). The skilled word play of the description of her reponse to the backward light illustrates the risk as the "air runs out" as well as the sudden departure to the distant and enlightening isles of the Outback as one who "plays" in the "rapture" finds

joy and life, not fear and death. Such sudden departures from one isle to another occur often and can cause the isles to fuse or merge making definite delineation of a specific isle's location on my map difficult at times. Yet the eclipse which carries Dillard from the isle of Out to the isle of Open Eyes must be placed on this isle and in the risk observation mode because it is this specific external incident--the exact thing which creates the isle of Out--that initiates the travel onward.

Whether the risk observations are physically dangerous or mentally frightening, the idea of getting hurt crosses Dillard's mind, but often these risks are comically and joyfully accepted as Dillard concedes "this looking business is risky" (Pilgrim 23). Nevertheless, an appetite for such seeing rules her observation at times when she realizes that she "could use some danger . . . " (245). The risk and danger mode allows for freedom and loss of self as fully as the poet/philosopher/scientist mode allows one to ponder new questions, different ideas, and other Selves. Still, this risky behavior is rare and the usual style of observation on the isle of Out requires equal amounts of mental concentration and physical control, but remains relatively safe in its sublimity.

3. Stillness and Silence Observation

In addition to conversing with others and climbing out on a limb, Dillard has a third style of observing the world

around her on the isle of Out. This approach is deliberate, disciplined, "skilled," "supple," and requires the loss of self, or at least a very controlled sense of self (Teaching 16). This approach commonly serves the birdwatcher or the scientist, for it necessitates great patience and faith that something might actually occur. That something might be the appearance of the extremely shy muskrat daring to push out of her hole and swim into sight or the melody of the wind's song. Dillard describes the necessary wrap and the external garment one must wear for this type of observation as "stillness." This wrap, when properly worn, covers Dillard like invisible paint and enables her to see things on the isle of Out she would normally miss. Dillard spends hours wearing the wrap created out of stillness and sown in silence in hopes of observing the unfettered activities of those on the isle. Deep in the rapture of stillness she waits, silently stalking the study--which may be any one of millions of things like an elusive animal, the waves on the ocean, or the meaning of the wind. Together, the study and Dillard wait with right eyes open and alert, ready for the show: "now you see it, now you don't . . . stun[ning] me into stillness and concentration . . . " (Pilgrim 16). The author and the weasel (from the beginning of Teaching a Stone to Talk) are again "stunned into stillness," stranded simultaneously on the shores of the isle of Out, and stuck

staring back at each other--"our eyes locked, and someone threw away the key" (13-4). Dillard further comments that this marriage (and all the others to occur on the isle of Out) between such seemingly disparate souls represents "yielding, not fighting"--it is a natural union resulting in a flowing around all of the isles and especially around this isle (16). It is a yielding to the current; a surrender in the waves along the looping course.

The practices of sustaining stillness in the world, quiet stalking in the fields, waiting on the bridge, and watching out the window saturate Dillard's days. Holy the Firm focuses on people; therefore, the populated side of this isle fills many of its pages, yet these people bounce off of the land and animals like buoys along the shoreline and blend perfectly into the stillness of the isle. Dillard often stands staring out of her windowed wall just "watching the bay . . . how many tons of sky can I see" (61). The idea of careful observation pervades Holy the Firm. The idea prevails that the right eye of Out must remain open to the events, forms, colors, shapes, objects, and notions of the currently surrounding phenomenon. Dillard explains that she comes out, she takes walks, she waits, she listens, she studies the islands, the mountains, the blackberry brambles, the creek and the Napo River to "get a feel for the place--the tributaries, the riverside villages . . . to keep an eye on things" (Teaching 55, 73; Holy 64-6).

The pages of Pilgrim at Tinker Creek abound with the imagery of stillness observation. As the starlings begin to roost, Dillard recalls that she "didn't move" and the shape the gathering birds seemed to make was "tapered at either end from a rounded middle, like an eye" (40). The eye stares at the eye as it did on the isle of Self, yet here Dillard's eye does not see her own eye's reflection but the eye of the other and the Right Eye of the isle of Out. Indeed eye imagery associated with each isle is frequent. An epiphenomenal experience also occurs on the isle of Out as the author observes. As she stalks, in hope of sighting a muskrat, she discovers that "at the creek I slow down, center down, empty. I am not excited; my breathing is slow and regular . . . I freeze . . . I go calm . . . I find balance and repose . . . I retreat--not inside myself, but outside myself . . . I am a petal, feather, stone" (emphasis added; 200-1). Here, as during the eclipse, Dillard bounds from this isle to those of the Outback when she transforms into a "petal, feather, stone." Just as the lure of the Out so captures the author, the energy force and strength of its description also captivates the reader. Clearly, Dillard finds that "revelation is a study in stalking" and echoing Jesus, she proclaims: "Cast the net on the right side of the ship, and ye shall find" (186). Go out and take a walk. So now the course is set, the isle of Out found, and the prescription

known--"I'll stalk . . . I'll wait on bridges; I'll wait, stuck, on forest paths and meadow's fringes, hilltops and banksides, day in and day out . . . " (251).

Why is Dillard so adamant about the Out, so prepared to spend her life waiting and watching the activities and forms of this isle? A revelation holds her, a revelation which is the epitome of the stillness approach. Dillard plainly and succinctly states "

I would like to learn, or remember, how to live.
 . . . I might learn something of mindlessness,
 something of the purity of living in the physical
 senses and the dignity of living without bias or
 motive. . . . I would like to live as I should
 (Teaching 15).

Reminiscent of the sojourner on the isle of Wake, the author searches throughout every isle for meaning and proper living. The wonder of the isle of Out is that in various loud and silent ways it accentuates a multitude of roads to take. Sometimes forgotten, either in the noise of the day or quiet of the night, Dillard remembers that "wherever there is stillness there is the still small voice, God's speaking from the whirlwind, nature's old song and dance" (70). And the wind's song can be heard again.

The strict and solemn observation of Nature, the outside, and all of its inhabitants found in this stillness, delivers Dillard to the realm of the isle of the Right Eye and to the shores of the Isle of Out. Deep in landscape of the isle and within this stillness, one may attain a certain peace in the newly gained acknowledgement

of the integral relationship between self and other; and with this newly gained perspective, understanding, and insight the voyage to the other isles begins. However, this is only one path leading through the isle of the Right Eye, and there exists still more untraveled territory on the isle of Out.

ANIMALS ON THE ISLE OF OUT

Animals fill the pages of Dillard's work; the subjects of the first sentences of Pilgrim at Tinker Creek and Teaching a Stone to Talk are respectively a tomcat and a weasel. A cat confirms "the day is real" on the second page of Holy the Firm (12). Dillard's journey on the isle of Out would not be possible without notice of those who primarily live there--that is without so many animals tromping through the texts. Animals that come in from the out--spiders, moths, and goldfish to name a few--lie flat on the page but spin full and real in her words, and they also create meaning on the isle of Out. Fascination and horror dwell in the rhetoric of these animals's lives and deaths. The sojourner seeks knowledge, redemption, love, and God and, in so doing, searches every corner, every creekbed, every field, and every hiding place for it; therefore, the multitude of energy and thought spent on the beings found in such places is quantifiable and just. Ignoring the lower life forms negates the higher, and

Dillard definitely desires to see and grasp the highest; she definitely seeks spiritual fulfillment. The animals act as steering mechanisms often leading Dillard around the isle of the Out and the Right Eye and outward into the looping waters, sometimes blowing her ashore upon the isles of the Outback--(Breakthrough (Opened Eyes) and Maat (the Third Eye)--and at other times back to the isle of Self (Left Eye), or the isle of Wake (Half-Opened Eyes), or the isle of Shadowland (Closed Eyes). However, the direction taken is of minor importance; it is the journey that counts. As Willa Cather once said, "the end is nothing; the road is all" (Willa Cather's America. Dir. Richard Schickel. Films for the Humanities, 1978.)

The isle of Out serves (as do the other isles) as a home base, a point of departure for the journey. In the beginning pages of Teaching a Stone to Talk, Dillard describes the weasel's physical characteristics as "thin as a curve, a muscled ribbon" and the loop continues in him as an inhabitant of the isle of Out (13). The entire chart of the course lies as if within the shape of his body, the circle imagery of the "curve" and the spiraling figures of the "ribbon." The course or the picture map of the circling loop that Dillard aspires to paint in words comes alive in the weasel's form. Juxtaposed against the round imagery used to describe the weasel, Dillard states that "he would have made a good arrowhead," curiously mentioning

here the sacred symbol of the arrow (13). The ancient and sacred symbol of the arrow may represent Artemis's strength and control over wild animals or Cupid's piercing eyebeams of love and similar control over human animals; however, as either form of control, the arrow symbolically soars as a means of direction across the isle of Out. The arrow cuts through the isle's landscape and its water's waves sleekly, and without interrupting the swirling loops of the isle's surroundings because the path or "channel" it cuts is also "as straight as an arrow" with "grace itself the archer" (Pilgrim 100). The arrow's motion remains in the spiral path for the aim and target of "grace" is the loop itself. Dillard calls herself "the arrowshaft" and this makes the head and the shaft each dependent on the other (12). This dependence alludes to the relationship between Dillard and others which often shines on the isle of Out. In her journey for the center isle, the bow found in the waters and the arrows hidden on the isles serve as other vessels and vehicles of Dillard's search. Although at first seeming to contradict the main imagery of the work, the spiraling circle, the arrow actually curves as it flies for the target--the center isle. Together, the shaft (Dillard) and the head (the weasel) soar across the sojourner's path--searching for the center isle--and, in this way, the image echos the Mundaka Upanishad belief that "the soul is the arrow" (Powell 174).

Reciprocity, and an awareness that while watching she is not alone, strongly bonds the author and the Out. She watches the world with her right eye, as the world watches her with its right eye, and, exactly as Dillard's and the weasel's eyes "locked" in stillness observation, a rooster sighted her and "kept one alert and alien eye on [her]" (Teaching 134). The alien creatures of the Out reel, circling the observer and captivating her in the reflection of themselves; two swans, beautiful lifelong mates, fly "in clockwise ellipses" and "circled on" (108). Yet these creatures, their eyes, and their circles forever change (as they do in stillness observation) and "when you look again the whole show has pulled up stakes and moved on down the road. It never stops. I went out to see what I could see" (Pilgrim 11). What she goes out to see is something she hopes to see over and over again: a constant exploration of the isle of Out reaffirms the existence of the other.

Ranging from the microscopic to the majestic, the many and varied species that dwell on the isle of Out illustrate the isle's massive mixture of others. In Holy the Firm the animals are relatively small and docile, echoing the dramatic personages also encountered there: housecats (12+), spiders (13+), sow bugs (13+), moths (14+), earwigs (14), bristle worms and warblers (15), brown hens (23), and wrens (26+). The wren visits Dillard later on the isle of Breakthrough. In Teaching a Stone to Talk the creatures

include not only insects (a Polistes [41+], ants [57], and a tarantula [53]), birds (Penguins [42] and heron egrets [58]), reptiles (Iguana [76]), hoofed mammals (deer [60+], foal [77+]), sea lion and snails (126). In Pilgrim at Tinker Creek, the inhabitants of the isle of Out live on almost every page: cat (1+); canary (3); steers (4+); rabbits (4); squirrels (4); frogs (5+); water bug (6+); mockingbird (7+); sharks (8+); flying insects, birds, crawling creatures (15+); red-winged blackbirds (16); caterpillars and field mice (17+); sea turtles, blue gills, water snakes, birds, carp, chickadees, ants, honeybees, slugs, and aphids (46+); spider (51+); mantis (54+); polythemus moth (59+); insects (63+); newts (109+); goldfish (124+); female goldfinch (215, 244); eels (219+); snake (223); and towhee, butterflies, and birds (247+). Even those animals that are not readily seen are pondered over. Dillard wonders about the multitudinous and great intensity of life as she notes that:

in the top inch of forest soil, biologists found an average of 1,356 living creatures present in each square foot, including 856 mites, 265 springtails, 22 millipedes, 19 adult beetles and various numbers of 12 other forms[,] . . . estimates of . . . two billion bacteria[,] and many millions of fungi, protozoa and algae [all] in a mere teaspoon of soil.
(Pilgrim 94)

Whether the animal is in the house or in the field, Dillard respects its living area and keeps what she terms a "critical distance" between herself and it (Teaching 114).

She does this so that each may "enjoy an easy sociability without threat of violence or unwanted intimacy"; after all, the point of coming out is not to fight or to attain a self-centered love, but to learn to yield and love unconditionally as she and the weasel do (114). So inside the house (but remaining on the isle of Out), she allows the spider "the run of my house" and decides to "keep a sort of company" with it (Pilgrim 50; Holy 13). And outside where the more fierce, or at least more fanatical, creatures thrive, she wisely "waits out the snake," patiently watches the praying mantis "egg laying for over an hour," and "watch[es] the orb-weavers, the spiders at their wheels" (Pilgrim 223, 251).

FOLK IN THE ISLE OF OUT

One who claims to keep company with spiders, who walks for hours each day in the fields and creekbottoms, and who spends an entire year in a cabin in the woods alone, might be said to prefer solitude, at least from other humans. And, to an extent, Dillard does write about a life that is singular and alone, as do many essayists. However, the human beings that inhabit her pages come from a broad spectrum of humanity, as did the animal population. Many who have already been mentioned have provided the ideas to construct much of the isle's interior dwellings providing--as it were--houses of thought, different tables from which

to eat, and perspectives out of different windows from self. But equally important are the people that Dillard examines in the everyday world--people who live close by, people she worries over, those with whom she attends church, those she witnesses on the shore or meets in the field, and even some who seem to have been created in the mind of the author.

Through an accident of the mailcarrier Dillard meets her neighbor, whom she has called "Larry" (in order, she says, to protect his or her true identity) and of whom she has heard rumors. The nature of Larry's work, considered strange and ridiculous by most, is the reason Dillard does not disclose his real name. His work is teaching a stone to talk. Larry holds a full season ticket for the games played on the isles of the Outback; however, as Dillard wonders and theorizes about his motives, and his plans, she, like Larry, is able to suppress fear of failure and to restrain any doubts or preconceived notions of the task he attempts. Although Larry may spend most of his time on the isles of Open Eyes and the Third Eye, as Dillard's neighbor he provides an escape, an out, and a human example of an animal-like freedom. Through his example, Dillard is able to sail directly to the isle of Breakthrough and Open Eyes when she understands his purpose as "like any other meaningful effort, the ritual involves sacrifice, the suppression of self-consciousness, and a certain precise

tilt of will, so that the will becomes transparent and hollow, a channel for the work" (Teaching 68). The image of a channel through which the water flows recalls the image of the weasel's curved shape and the arrow's path and this image guides Dillard around and across the isle of Out. Even though she cannot witness first-hand Larry's experiments and can only hypothetically guess his procedures, in her imagined scheme of his doings she goes to the isle of Out.

A major character in Holy the Firm is Julie Norwich. She is one for whom Dillard grieves and one who is often stranded on the shores of the isle of Closed Eyes, yet she has also been called Dillard's "alter ego" and, in this respect, routes the author to the isle of Out (Lucas 187). Perhaps Lucas sees an identity because Dillard states that she and Julie "looked alike" and somehow the little girl reminded her of herself at that age. This perception, when compared to the definition of alter ego as "another side of oneself; second self," suits Lucas's claim (41). However, the child reflects the author's own image in a contrary light and a drastically changed exterior, thus again presenting another avenue to explore--a separate path on the isle of Out. Dillard travels the child's path, "watch[es] her" and proclaims that she "kept [her] eye on her [Julie]," much the same way she waits and watches the birds or the waves (39, 41). This avenue enables an

observation of oneself apart from oneself, as if standing on the outside looking in. Relationship factors such as these abound on the shores and cover the inland of this isle.

At church the experience of the isle of Out comes in. During Mass the congregation, which includes Dillard, repeatedly recites the Sanctus in what is the "stillest voice, stunned" (Teaching 32). Here the isle's exposure comes not only through the other people and their surrounding voices, but also from the words they recite. The script of God's glory and power and might, of all the out and the in, of heaven and earth fills their lungs, and Dillard pronounces that "it is here, if ever, that one loses oneself at sea" (32). Lost at sea, tumbling over the waves, not necessarily close to any shore at this point, Dillard, however, lands on the Out because the next thing she does notice, is the picture of singers on stage, a group marvelously named "the Wildflowers" (17). In praise of God or in praise of Out, the Wildflowers clumsily strut and "burst onstage" (32). The stage of the isle of Out is set with figures, silhouettes of ordinary people singing, unaware of anything else. At Mass, the isle obscures and muddles with dream-like settings and absurd characters as Dillard devises ways to find the Out while caught inside the walls of the church.

On a January day Dillard went out to walk on a hillside near Tinker Creek and met an interesting boy,

perhaps around eight or nine years old, whose manner of speech and behavior seemed to contradict his young years. In a deliberate attempt not to travel anywhere, and especially not to think, she finds that the surprise encounter with the boy immediately sets her plans awry. She noticed he had "enormous eyes," and something about him seemed a "fraud," but he seemed "like a nineteenth century cartoon of an Earnest Child" (79, 83). Meeting the boy, she leaves the isle of Self because her original intention in walking had been to serve her self's relaxation, and stumbles onto the isle of Out as she carefully watches his every move and expression, and searches for meaning in his calculated, almost rehearsed words. After she tells the boy she knows his mother, he warms up, but only in his conversation; his still-cautious manner shows a need for companionship. Dillard sees in the boy an "other" that she has never experienced--a being who knows loneliness to the bone. Crossing distant boundaries such as these, the isle of Out and observations on it become strikingly similar to the isle of Closed Eyes, but only if the observer becomes trapped in the shadow and perpetually lost in these darker zones. Dillard takes care not to stay; she "simply had to go," although she and the boy "parted sadly" (83).

These people on the isle of Out offer Dillard opportunities to dream, to remember, and to experience unknown human plights. On the isle of Out, a suppression

of doubt and fear incites and invites the observer to see others--whether they be fish, fowl, or folk--as extensions of something grand, something unfathomable. At times, these folk, animals, and natural phenomena only mirror the observer's stance, but often they renew and revive the observer's vision with a hope of understanding the relationship between the self and the other. And they provide a light of meaning in the world, especially when these visions propel the observing traveler onward and outward to distant isles. Dillard finds hope and meaning in the other people and recommends that for others to find the same, they should do as the great Renaissance man prescribed: "'Observe,' said da Vinci, 'observe in the streets . . . the loveliness and the tenderness spread on the faces of men and women'" (Pilgrim 38-9).

THE LAND AND NATURE OF THE ISLE OF OUT

The final section of this chapter on the isle of Out logically pertains to that area where the action of the isle takes place--the land. The land and all of its accoutrements--the sky, the wind, the sunlight, the water, the plants, the mountains, and strange freaks of nature--present to Dillard a wonderful and most complex picture of life and death and all that comes between. In the land and backdrop of the isle of Out, flowers and petals from every scene float down the pages of all three texts. The images

of nature which fill the pages show how firmly rooted Dillard is in the land; the Land is her church. Even though she attends both Catholic and Congregational services regularly, she questions the legitimacy of a building meant for worship when she asks why people continue to go inside when "all the people in all the ludicrous churches have access to the land" (Teaching 18). The accessibility of the land may be as easy as walking in the fields behind the cottage or as difficult as navigating the Arctic circle. Dillard finds splendor in the outside and on the isle of Out in every place and in no particular place. Her fascination with Polar explorers is surely kindled by their kindred awe and deep feeling for the land and their praise of the land's beauty "as if it were a moral or spiritual quality;" Fridtjof Nansen especially spoke of the land as "deep and pure as infinity . . . the eternal round of the universe" (28). Here, the explorer undauntedly sees the loop in the landscape. The land is the isle of Out.

Dillard gives strong motive for her continual effort to travel on the isle of Out, for her obvious obsession with the isle's inhabitants and climates. She conducts these daily walks and ritualistic journeys "as a moral exercise . . . [and as] a constant reminder of the facts of creation" (Pilgrim 121). And as she affirms about stalking, she reaffirms that, in summer, she goes down "to

the creek again, and lead[s] a creek life. I watch and stalk" the land and its many faceted faces (182). The February day is like a "beautiful woman with an empty face" and the mountain possesses the "still-beautiful face [of one] who was once your lover" on the isle of Out (56, 79). After an undeterminable span of time contemplating this isle at the creek, gazing out of the window, or wherever--the isle's fullest grandeur displays itself to her; she comments "I have long since lost myself, lost the creek, the day, lost everything but still amber depth" (190). A still, amber depth of concentration on the Out consumes the author and the subjects of the sightings that she shares with the rest of the world. The stillness which overcomes her, aids her denying any form of separateness between her subject and herself. In the denial of any separateness she loses all preconceptions which would restrict, inhibit, cloud, alter, or distort her vision on the isle of Out. The necessity for this type of loss in order to gain true witness of the isle of Out, is plainly and repeatedly stated: "my own self-awareness had disappeared . . . so often that I have lost self-consciousness about moving slowly and halting suddenly; it is second nature to me now." And again: "only a total unself-consciousness will permit me to live with myself. I have to ditch my hat . . . " (198-99). This loss of self-consciousness and separateness is not restricted to humankind alone, for even

the foliage finds peace in similar repose as Dillard describes "a sugar maple leaf that stunned [her] by its elegant unself-consciousness" (245).

The language of all three texts advocates the belief that "the earth, without form, is void" (Teaching 128). Examples of such language are found in descriptions of the landscape itself--islands, plants, mountains, creeks, rivers--and in things which surround or are elements of the outside--the sea, the wind, the sun, and the sky. A brief look at the landscape on the island in Puget Sound where Holy the Firm was written reveals that "the land is complex and shifting" and " . . . outside the window, deep in the horizon, a new thing appears" (22, 50). New things are always appearing on the isle of Out and one day Dillard looks out and sees "a thousand new islands" (68). These new things represent the other world that awaits one who can forget she is separate from the isle of Out.

Islands are intriguing and captivating to Dillard as she dreams of their limitless possibilities--"the Galapagos Islands are [a] metaphysics lab" (Teaching 73). A plea for all to go out and see the world and to work in the lab resounds through the isle's landscape; this work, this adventurous endeavor for the sojourner is a matter of growth and survival, of life and death. The isle of Out and its discoveries contribute greatly to the knowledge of this growth, to an awareness of this validity of form--"the

landscape in which the protein starts shapes its ends as surely as bowls shape water" (127). Therefore, the curved bowl of the landscape and the isle of Out often serve to shape the sojourner's search by defining the larger course of all of the isles in the loop.

Plants, trees, and flowers shape the isle of Out's course as well. As one walks through the woods, which are "flush with flowers," an awesome strength fills the eyes and the knowledge of the energy is felt here too--"[there is] real power here . . . trees bespeak of generosity . . . we know nothing for certain, but we seem to see that the world turns upon growing, grows towards growing, and growing green and clean" (Pilgrim 111-12). Varieties of this power include majestic trees and the landscape's silhouette in the "overarching boughs of [the] sycamore . . . and beyond, [in the horizon's] rolling ridges", the strength of Bamboo which "can grow three feet in twenty-four hours"; the beauty of "the hedgerows [which] are blackberry brambles, white snowberries, [and] red rose hips" (Teaching 157; Pilgrim 163; Holy 65). Within the energy of all the elements of Out the spirit of the isle can be seen in the largeness and brightness of its light and language.

The water which cuts through and around the isle holds Dillard transfixed. The water transforms as the land's perspective delivers the author to new wonders. Dillard

realizes its power and confirms its intelligence when she states that "I learned not to stare at the back of my hand when I could look out at the creek" (Pilgrim 266). Another revelation surfaces on this isle; within the banks of both The Napo River and Tinker Creek, the waters of each and the form each transcends into are what Dillard perceives as "the incarnation" (102). The massive surges of water streaming along the earth's surface on the land of Out suddenly seem the answer, suddenly seem to possess all knowledge: "it is not out of the way. It is in the way" (Teaching 59). On the isle of Out "the creek is more like itself when it floods than at any other time: mediating, bringing things down" and in this way it clarifies for the observer the path across and through the bush of the isle and onward to distant isles (Pilgrim 152).

Dillard states that the creeks are "the world with all its stimulus and beauty [and that she] live[s] there. But the mountains are home" (3). Dillard sees a congruence between the water imagery which swells the pages of her texts, and the imagery of hard places, rocks, and the mountains. Dillard points out immediately that she came to the cottage in Puget Sound "to study hard things--rock mountain and salt sea--and to temper my spirit on their edges" (Holy 19). The sea as a "hard thing" expresses danger and control, no longer recalling the incarnation image, but rather one of cruelty and spite. Juxtaposed to

the image of the mountains as "hard things," implacable and sinister, Dillard also states that "the mountains are no more fixed than the stars" (Teaching 129). Everything, then, is constantly moving, constantly changing on the isle of Out, and all forms are alive.

The wind is another element of the isle of Out, and its breath and power capture the author. In Holy the Firm, a major method of traveling out is through the picture window on the seaside wall of the cottage. It is through these panes that Dillard drifts and flies with the breeze as she explains that "the world at my feet, the world through my window, is an illuminated manuscript whose leaves the wind takes, one by one, whose painted illuminations and halting words draw me, one by one, and I am dazzled in days and lost" (24). She is lost; she is unself-conscious on the isle of Out. During other instances of Out in the field or beside the creek, the wind and the sunlight bring messages of relationships. Dillard equates the "muscular energy in sunlight [as a] correspond[ence] to the spiritual energy of the wind" (Pilgrim 118). This physical energy of light and the spiritual energy of wind are in opposition to the typical and traditional imagery of strong wind and holy sun. The opposition represents the spiraling nature of the Out; everything out goes in and everything in goes out with the loss of self and the gain of others. It is this

opposition, this contradiction, this paradox, and this extraordinary (though natural) experience or occurrence which drives the sojourner onward. It is the same juxtaposition as mountains as "hard things" and as things "no more fixed than the stars." So the sojourner stays in the Out as much as possible to feel the sun and the wind and to see "the green ray [that] seldom seen streak of light that rises from the sun like a spurting fountain at the moment of sunset; it throbs in the sky for two seconds and disappears" (17). The seeker desires to be there, to be out during those two seconds.

Out in the land and "up to [her] knees in the world," the author passionately pursues the paths around this huge isle, whether the avenue be one built by men, the trail worn by animals, or the crevices cut by the elements (209). The isle of Out provides the sojourner with an endless supply of the materials needed to find the other isles, especially the isles of the Outback. Dillard states, "I am passionately interested in where I am. . . . I've learned the names of some color-patches, but not the meanings. . . . Intricacy, then, is the subject, the intricacy of the created world" (128-9). The meanings of "color-patches," mountains, creeks, flowers, winds, fish, people, and all the others who dwell on the isle of Out, Self, and Wake is learned if the sojourner can jump directly from these isles to the Outback isles. However,

the journey around the loop can bog down sometimes and stall out in the benighted perspectives and shallow visions which lurk on the isle of Shadowland, which is the next isle to be discussed.

Chapter V

The Isle of Shadowland and of Closed Eyes

While traveling the loop, swimming the sea of these three works, the sojourner frequently stalls and sinks in the debris surrounding the fourth island, or what has been termed the "dark side" (Contemporary Literature 176). Nancy Lucas sees these parts of the texts as full of "horrors, senseless pain, and death" and also as "border[ing] on the macabre" (184). In keeping with the other islands and their resemblance to stages of seeing, this isle of Closed Eyes can be viewed as Shadowland (see Figure 5). Dillard claims that most of us spend "half of our waking and all of our sleeping lives in some private, useless, and insensible waters," and these are exactly the waters which surround the isle of Closed Eyes (Teaching 98).

For clarity's sake, the instances, beings, and figurative language Dillard employs to illustrate the darkness of this isle are grouped into two large categories separated by a third smaller section. The first category to be examined is the Real. The devices Dillard uses to illuminate this shadowed region are actual people and their fates, actual animals and their behaviors, and other phenomena of the natural world such as the harsh extremes of the weather. The middle section is Grey because the

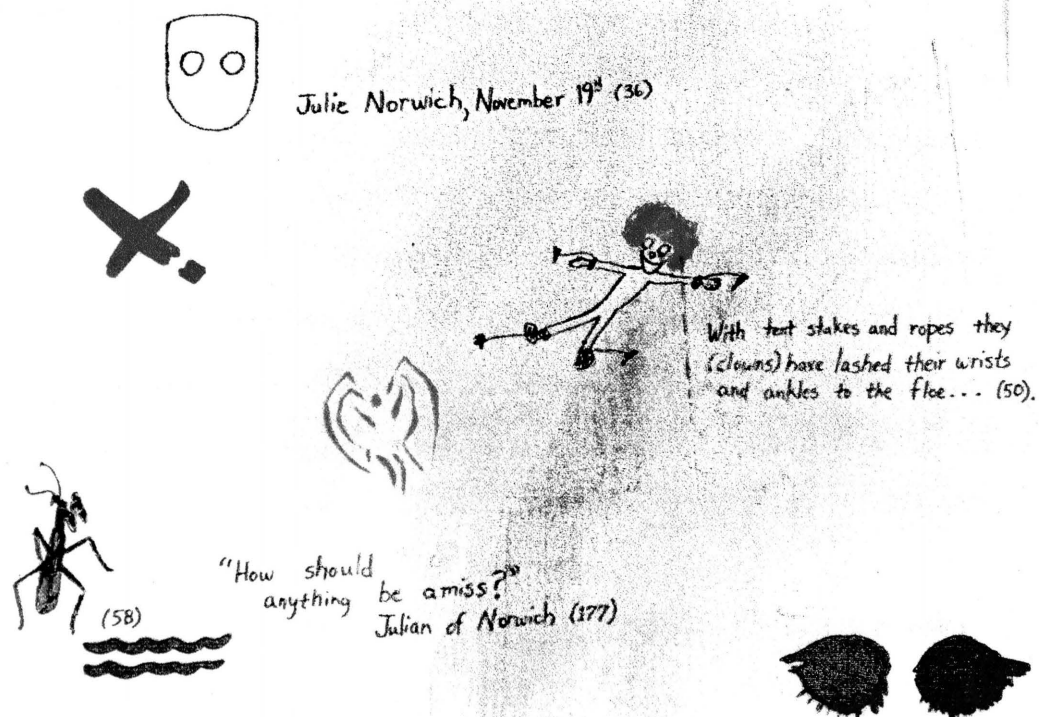


Figure 5: Close-up of the Isle of Shadowland and Closed Eyes.

instances and elements in this area are a mixture of reality and dream, and, hence, members of both the Real and the Unreal. The final category, the Unreal, includes images Dillard creates through a fearsome perspective and unbalanced posture, focusing on her imagination and how it tends to run amok on the shores of Shadowland. In the Unreal, a twisted outlook, a skewed vision of reality as evil, envelops the isle of Closed Eyes. It unfolds in the pages which turn Santa Claus into an angry god, dream into nightmare, and memory into curse.

In the Real category the portrayal of human suffering startles, often stuns the reader. For example, the child whom Dillard curiously names Julie Norwich represents most strenuously the savage power and pull that the waters which surround this isle harness. Julie symbolizes death and reincarnation; ultimately she is the Phoenix, but on the isle of Closed Eyes, she is the embodiment of death and ghastly despair. Julie Norwich is a seven-year-old who had been physically and spiritually maimed for life in a plane crash. On the morning of the plane crash the foreshadowing of the horrible events to follow is obvious as Dillard states "there was no reason--no wind--no hope of heaven and no wish for heaven--and [that day] was filled with terrorists' gods" (Holy the Firm 35-6). November the nineteenth was the day Julie's plane clipped its wing on a fir top because of engine failure and fell from the sky.

Please note the date because it appears again later in the Unreal section. Dillard spares no details as she describes Julie's face as oozing and "dissolving into the sheets" at St. Joe's hospital (36).

The significance of Dillard's encounter with Julie becomes clear as we examine the images associated with it. Two weeks prior she and the innocent child had met "under an English hawthorn tree" (39). Why is Dillard so careful to mention (she does so twice) the specific type of tree under which she first remembers meeting the child? Perhaps she does so to tap into the rich legendary heritage associated with these trees. The ancients believed

the hawthorn represented the White Goddess Maia, mother of both Hermes and Buddha as separate versions of the Enlightened One. She was the Goddess of love and death, both the ever-young Virgin giving birth to the god (of fire), and the Grandmother bringing him to the end of his season. Therefore her tree was associated with both female sexuality and destructive spells. (Walker 465)

The destructive associations also occur in modern thought. For one example, "some English countryfolk have an intense horror of sleeping in the same house with hawthorn blossoms, thinking this would bring great misfortune" (465). Did the sap of the hawthorn dissolve into Julie's skin and hence determine her fate?

We should also not fail to note the similarity between Julie Norwich and the medieval mystic Dame Julian of Norwich. Are Julie Norwich and Julian of Norwich kindred

spirits in name only? No coincidence this great is an accident. In William Zinsser's Inventing the Truth: The Art and Craft of Memoir, a book which originated as a series of lectures held at the New York Public Library, five American authors discuss their methods of creating a text. Dillard states in "To Fashion a Text," that "a great deal can be done in nonfiction . . . [where] the writer controls the materials absolutely" (74). Here Dillard demonstrates such control. Julian of Norwich's philosophy echos throughout Dillard's texts, whether it be Holy the Firm, Teaching a Stone to Talk, or Pilgrim at Tinker Creek where it is explicitly noted--"How should anything be amiss?" (177). Yet the grip of Shadowland also constantly tugs and yanks the author in all three texts. Dillard presents with the Julie figure an opposition to Dame Julian's philosophy--"and all will be well, and all will be well, and all manner of things shall be well"--and a personification of the isle of Closed Eyes. Always on this dark isle, a tension exists between the coexistence of the total darkness and terror of Shadowland, exemplified in Julie's injury and other "violence here and there," and the blinding illumination and joy of the isles of the Outback, where the tree with the lights in it grows and "it is only human feeling that is freakishly amiss" (Holy 24; Pilgrim 178).

The author acknowledges that the structure of Holy the Firm and its three parts are poetically Christian-based and

representative of the Creation, the Fall, and the Resurrection. Julie's crash, which is placed in the middle part, relates to earthly concerns, human emotions, ideas of unjust suffering, and the author's despair and doubt in Shadowland, all of which correlate to the recognized Christian influence of the book's structure. On this isle Dillard forgets that God's spirit, as saints and secular geniuses remind us, is indescribable and beyond human language and thought. The imagery utilized when describing Julie's eyes as "naked and spherical" invokes eyes which are mirrors of the indescribable mystery and the reflection of all that is God (36). But her eyes are totally sealed, tightly closed from a view from the isle of Maat or any other isle's possibilities of perspective for on an Outback isle Julie is seen as a representative of God--an angel and a fire falling from the sky. Seraphs, as Dillard reads, "are aflame with love of God" and "born of a stream of fire issuing from under God's throne" (45). Ancient images such as these are revised when, on the isle of Shadowland, Julie falls from the sky in a flaming plane, although Dillard only sees an aimless destruction in the flames. In an almost indecipherable manner, especially for one stuck on the isle of Closed Eyes, the reincarnated Julie proves Julian's prophecies. Dillard reminds the reader throughout Holy the Firm that God is everything and nothing, "wholly here and emptied" as is Julie's flaming face (31).

However, stranded for a time in the muck of Shadowland, the author loses awareness of God's existence and Julian's resolve, and only remembers the gloom and destruction of Julie's young life.

Did the hawthorn's shade determine Julie's course, or will the hawthorn's shade be replaced by the sycamore's light bearing leaves? Even while cast, wrecked on the shores of the dark isle, sometimes Dillard can see the lighted shores of distant isles as she proclaims that Julie's face will be repaired by surgeons and soothed by time because "this will all be a dream, an anecdote" (76). Dillard concludes the book with the promise that the isle of Closed Eyes will not be a permanent home for Julie Norwich, nor for herself.

It was fire that consumed the child's face, and fire also consumed the man, Alan McDonald. Dillard tells us that every morning for two years she has read a newspaper clipping which concerns a man who has been badly burnt twice in his life, once as a boy and again as an adult (Teaching 64-5). Why does she purposefully practice such morbid habits and why confess to them in her texts? Perhaps these horrifying revelations represent the darkness that must be experienced to appreciate the light? The inclusion of such despair and darkness is unavoidable while traveling the loop and striking the shores of Shadowland.

A third person who inhabits the isle is Miss White, her name traditionally symbolic of both innocence and

frigidity. An interpretation of her name in this contradictory manner fits Dillard's description of this person. The elderly neighbor from Dillard's childhood painted "undersea scenes" like crisscrosses or "horizontal smears of colors sparked by occasional vertical streaks" (141). The cross imagery of White's paintings of horizontal and vertical lines foreshadows Dillard's later equating of Miss White and God. Miss White burns Annie's palm using a magnifying glass to focus the sun the same as Dillard imagines God would do: "will he take and hold my hand in his, and focus his eye on my palm, and kindle that spot and let me burn?" (141). Fire again burns as Dillard runs from "that knowledge, that eye" on the isle of Closed Eyes, an isle filled with "fear and pain" (141).

On a typical evening walk Dillard meets a boy whom she has reckoned to be around eight. It is the same "Earnest Child" from the isle of Out, yet in this interpretation of their meeting, he takes the author to Shadowland. This young boy is fearful of the author until she reassures him by explaining that she has met his mother, whom Dillard discovers is a member of Jerry Falwell's congregation. After this rather indirect introduction, he is more at ease and tells her he does not play at the creek because the horses "would trample him" and he is scared of "snakes--water moccasins" (81). Dillard paints a somber portrait of the frightened child. His demeanor was like an aged man's,

"tired, old even, weary with longings--solemn" (81).

Dillard tries to persuade him to play, to leave the isle of Closed Eyes and discover the other islands. Her endeavor though is in vain for the boy is "cold" and his lips are "blue" (81). In this passage Dillard's language never lightens and thus it becomes apparent that for some like this boy there is no release; the tide never goes out from the shore of sadness, from Shadowland and the isle of Closed Eyes.

Observations of animal suffering also symbolize the isle of Shadowland. Dillard's response to the deer at Provencia serves as an excellent example. The cruelty of the crude Ecuadorian hunt and especially the entrapment of the small jungle deer jolts Dillard to remember that she "eat[s] meat", too. Her face as she watches the deer's desperate escape attempts, which only further his entanglement, is expressionless or "at least not the expression" her fellow American travelers "expected" (63). She explains her almost studious stance and facade while witnessing the savage yet subtle scene by claiming that "things like this are not issues; they are mysteries" (64). Dillard witnesses the deer's unfortunate end during the same time period that she reads McDonald's account. The deer and the man are then explicitly compared and she asked, "What is going on here?" (66). As she witnesses the deer's slow death and reads about the burned man's agony,

she anchors herself in doubt and fear at the shore of Closed Eyes.

On the shore and in the dark regions of this isle, humans are not the only destroyers, for animals kill, too. A dramatic example of this occurs when Dillard relates naturalist Will Barker's story of the terrifying locusts. The locusts which covered the field where the sleeping unaware man laid, chewed him until he was awakened by his friends and "when he stood up, he was bleeding from the throat and wrists" (Pilgrim 209). This man bleeding from his throat, wrists, and hands reminds the reader of the image of Christ on the cross. Another image, this time of Christ's forty days in the desert, can also be drawn here as a comparsion to the sojourner's stay on the isle of Shadowland. The sojourner in the shade, like Christ in the desert sun, is placed in this desolate location on this far isle as a test for completion of the search, for rounding the loop--although whether it be a test from God or from self remains uncertain. What is certain is the power of the darkness and the strength of the hold of the isle of Closed Eyes.

Not only are humans attacked by animals; animals kill animals too. The macabre action of the female praying mantis devouring her mate during actual intercourse occurs in daylight and in the real world of the dark island (58). No shadow or nightmare creates the mantis's violent bliss;

it is only her nature. Therefore, death and a willingness to die (such as Christ gained in the desert) are integral ingredients, necessities in the loop, and often reside on the isle of Shadowland.

Moths sizzle in the flame of innocent "well intentioned" candlelight, a light meant for reading, not sacrifice (Holy 17). The moth "burn[s] for two hours without changing" (17). The moth burns "like a hollow saint, like a flame-faced virgin gone to God" and like Julie and Alan (17). The flames, "holy and facilitating," though shedding little light on the dark isle while Dillard sleeps, never cease to burn as the waters surrounding the island never cease to roll (19).

Like a long obituary, two pages in Pilgrim at Tinker Creek describe how some animals stumble into death: "the tomcat that used to wake me is dead;" "the steer [that drowns] in the creek;" "the waterbug [that is] sucked, dissolved, spread, still spreading right now, in the steer's capillaries;" "the mockingbird [that] dropped from the roof;" "the sharks [which] if they still their twist and rest for a moment, die;" "the spider [that] slumbers at her wheel" weaves her web of death's blessing for her survival; "the Polyphemus moth, its wings crushed to its back, crawls down the driveway, crawls" away to die; and finally after the gruesome act of devouring her mate, the fruit of the act or "the mantis's egg cases [that] curve

inward, align[ing]" with the loop (98-9). Even though the loop imagery prevails in these figures of death "spreading," "twisting," "webbing," and "curving," the overall picture of death the author paints here is not a positive one. Instead of images of regeneration and resurrection, images of total desolation and destruction emerge; yet, the loop is not completely negative because some animals do profit from death's gifts. The spider exists on carcasses which die in her web, and the mantis's larvae harvested in bizarre and barbarous fashion will provide another generation of the species. Both serve to illustrate death's other role, that of life-giver; death's position on the wheel and its island home of Shadowland is justified in the loop.

Just as men and animals die sometimes natural, sometimes awful deaths, sometimes the weather turns bizarre and unaccountable and blows harshly on this isle too. In Pilgrim Dillard parallels the unexpected with the expected when she recalls a flood. Tinker Creek flooded on June 21st, the summer solstice, "the longest daylight of the year" but Dillard found the day "so very dark" (149). It was so dark she "couldn't see" and the creek was like "a dragon," yet, "more like itself than at any other time: mediating, bringing things down" (150-2). The image of the creek as "more like itself" lingers on the isle of Out and carries the sojourner onward to other isles, but on the

isle of Closed Eyes the darkness of the "longest daylight" and the image of the creek as a menace prevail. The creek as a "dragon" resembles other creatures that live on Shadowland; the flood frees it to become something horribly powerful and mystically known. Hurricane Agnes, the same storm which brought the flood to Tinker Creek, hit Pennsylvania twice, "coming and going," flooding a graveyard and leaving "ancient corpses . . . stranded on housetops, in trees" (157). The helicopter pilots assigned to lift the bodies and return them to lower ground were "sickened" (157). One preferred his duty in Vietnam to his duty in Pennsylvania (157). Only in Shadowland would decayed, rotting corpses stick in treetops and on rooftops.

Dillard says, "I live in a world of shadows that shape and distance colors, a world where space makes a kind of terrible sense" (29-30). Where the shadows and space she refers to exist makes little difference in their effects on Dillard, whether in the Real areas like the documented cases of corpses in treetops, in the Unreal region of nightmare, or in the Grey regions where actual people and events also reside, yet in a surreal way on the isle of Shadowland. All three regions are shaped by shadow. Two instances of the Grey area, which combines the Real and the Unreal, occur in the Arctic and in the skies of an eclipse. Visions and thought dreams incited by this real, though mysterious, place and this actual, though rare, event

illustrate the Grey regions of the isle of Closed Eyes and Shadowland. Dillard quotes arctic explorer Fridtjof Nansen's description of the darkness he and his crew lived in for "almost two years" when they were stuck frozen in the northern ocean, and the harsh reality of this Arctic Shadowland's impact upon human spirit:

I long to return to life . . . the years are passing here . . . this inactivity crushes one's very soul; one's life seems as dark as the winter night outside; there is sunlight upon no other part of it except the past and the far, far distant future. I feel as if I 'must' break through this deadness. (Teaching 46)

Light is presence, light is now, though Nansen feels no hope of the present; instead, he only feels or hopes for what has happened and what may happen much later. Nansen's experience details dismal days spent on the deep obscure waters where time turns like nightmares and days are tangled in the brush of the dark isle. Dillard calls the Arctic explorer's prose solemn, a word paradoxically meaning "the force of religion" as well as "gloom;" it is also the word Dillard chooses to describe the boy in the field (22, 81). Solemn also accurately describes the atmosphere of this isle.

The light on the isle of Shadowland is distributed sparingly and often shines on the sojourner in a horrifying and malicious manner. In the chapter named "Total Eclipse" Dillard is struck by the sun's negative image as if she were struck by lightening--dead. The eclipse that Dillard

witnessed in Yakima, Washington, is introduced in the first sentence of the chapter as a sensation "like dying . . . [like] sliding down the mountain pass and into a region of dread . . . like slipping into fever, or falling down that hole in sleep from which you awake yourself whimpering" (84). The language of the entire chapter is filled with violence, death, and images of the isle of Shadowland. Fear and insanity override all other emotions and drag the viewer of the eclipse down into the debris of this isle. Deranged and distraught, Dillard admits that

what you see in an eclipse is entirely different from what you know. Usually it is a bit of a trick to keep your knowledge [that the sun's only going to be dark for a short period] from binding you. But during an eclipse it is easy. What you see is much more convincing than any wild-eyed theory you may know. (90)

In other words, an eclipse creates its own reality, its own theory, and it thwarts past notions and future promise. This stay on the isle makes the colors change, "the world wrong" like a "movie filmed in the Middle Ages. . . . Everything was lost" and "dead" (91-2). She feels dead--all feel dead because "we got the light wrong" (93). The wrong light lingers and Dillard concludes that "you will never see anything more awful in the sky" than a "world [that] is swaddled in darkness" (95). The language of the eclipse could drown the viewer in the water of Shadowland's shores for the waves beat relentlessly on the pages and one

could easily keep her eyes shut on the isle of shadows and eclipses, slowly dying on the shore.

The "solemn" prose of the Arctic explorers and the "wrong light" of the eclipse depict the Grey side best for this illustration of the loop; therefore, let us now travel into the final region of the isle--the Unreal or imagined. The island's interior in this region consists of "spread, and deepened, and stayed" shadows of the night and of eyes shut tight in a "curved sleep" constantly risking "exhausting nightmares" (Pilgrim 20, 2, 12). Dillard compares the darkness to a state of consciousness man's mind can neither conquer nor forget. Arrival upon this part of the isle is as unavoidable and as unstoppable as a "muddy river [which] flow[s] unheeded and cannot be damned" (32). Strange thoughts which pop up out of nowhere are born on the isle of Shadowland. Nightdreams destined for the guillotine are as perverse and as unexplicable as imagining a typical night stroll into the "kitchen for milk and find[ing] on the back of the stove a sudden stew I never fixed, bubbling, with a deer leg sticking out" (52). This walking nightmare reiterates Dillard's point of the uncontrollable and inevitable curve into Shadowland that all who travel the loop must make because one would never intentionally journey to this land of horrors just as one would not fix a stew of deer appendages.

Sleeping dreams, nightmares, swarm in the warm waters of the isle of Closed Eyes. Dillard dreams of "two huge

luna moths" mating with such "utter spirituality and utter degradation" that she watched "fascinated" (159-60). The eggs hatch and suddenly her bed is full of fish. "Fat" and "with bulging eyes" swarming in "slime," which is "three feet deep," she awakes screaming (159-60). She admits that she should not have watched, she should have kept her eyes shut, so the nightmare's course and fertile, ripening eggs would never have had the chance to burst into fruition--the fish and the fury. But again a compulsion to venture, to discover the loop pushes the sojourner onward and around the isles, regardless of the terror.

In early winter Dillard has another dream about a prayer tunnel with "no exit or entrance" where "death would follow after a long and bitter struggle" (257). Inside her childhood home next to its basement "but unattached to it" lies the prayer tunnel. It is unattached because there is no exit or entrance and because it is in the loop. Both the basement and the tunnel were covered in a "fine sifting of snow," yet within all this whiteness Dillard states that inside the tunnel was "utterly without light" (257). How can this be without light? A dream with no light enveloped in a constant "unmelting, wind-hurled snow" seems to be a dream of contradiction. And it is a contradiction the same as Julie's accident, the deer at Provencia, and the dark light of the white Arctic; all are equivocations which surround the isle of Closed Eyes and Shadowland.

Dillard actually lands on the isle as she "walks in emptiness" (Teaching 48). On a long ice floe she boards voluntarily, she observes ghosts of explorers, clowns, a tall priest, women, children, babies and a wooden upright piano; Christ is there, too (48-52). Many of the people in this dream are "staked" to the ice (50). The dream is another contradiction, with the crowd lying tied and Christ "crouching," pretending to be a penguin. Another figure, stands "in the center of a circle . . . confounding" those who watch him (52). This person who stands, not crouches, in the middle and commands everyone's attention, is none other than a baby. He is the baby whom Dillard and other members of the Congregational church have prayed over; he was born on November twentieth, the day after Julie's plane crash on November nineteenth (20). Could Oswald embody the renewed Julie, the renewed spirit, the reincarnation? In this topsy-turvy dream, discovered in the Unreal depths of the isle of Shadowland, anything is possible. This dream in Shadowland, in its ridiculous way, illustrates the confusion and opposition which abounds on the isle.

In Shadowland, things usually holy are corrupt and turn ominously in reverse. Silence which is "heaped [and] spread" emits a great "pressure" (133). The silence requires a strength that drains Dillard and leaves her frightened, depressed; switching from images of audition to images of vision, she states, "I do not, I think, ever want

to see such a sight again" (134). She is lonely here in the silence of Closed Eyes. Silence as sinister, smothering, and devastating is contrary to Dillard's typical meaning of silence--"God is silence" like the inaudible roar of the spiraling waves, turning in and out (133). In the opposite light of Shadowland she turns to see if anyone is coming down the road and the silence "struck" again "like yard goods" falling on her head (135). And the fields turn "surrealistic . . . monstrous . . . impeccable" (135). Momentarily frozen on the isle of Closed Eyes, Dillard's rhetoric ceases to offer any hope of salvation. Here she staggers in an unreal reality, and her thought dreams twist nervously, binding the course and damming the flow around the loop.

Dillard worries that the place where we are is not suited to us. All is "as shadow" and "space is curved, the earth is round" in accordance with the loop but instead of renewal and rebirth in and on the isle of Shadowland she believes that "we're all going to die" and that "as much of the world's energy seems to be devoted to keeping us apart as was directed to bringing us here" (150-1, 126). This negative visualization of the loop as an unacceptable gift manifests itself either in a real or surreal form on this isle. Dillard worries on the isle of Closed Eyes that we are cast out and forever lost. The meaning of "it" here is

an unacceptable gift because on the isle of Shadowland "it" represents a destination believed to be "the last stop" somewhere that "isn't home," somewhere "east of Hercules" (emphasis added; 151). However, the isle that is east of Hercules and "east of the Mountains" can never be a final resting place because there is no finality, no cessation of the looping waters (Holy 19). The eastern isle resurrects and confirms the continuity of the loop, and, leaving the isle of Shadowland, Dillard recognizes her error and corrects the language; what was once a "last stop" transforms into a circular course, "rocking over the salt sea at random, rocking day and night round the sun and out toward east of Hercules" (emphasis added; Teaching 152). Never last, always toward, the neverending waters carry Dillard away from the isle of Closed Eyes and onto the shores of the isles of the Outback. The fatalistic fallacy of the dark isle fades and the light and the love of distant isles frees the anchor, loosening the ship from the shore.

Chapter VI

THE OUTBACK ISLES: THE ISLE OF BREAKTHROUGH AND OPEN EYES AND THE ISLE OF MAAT AND THE THIRD EYE

The distant isles of Open Eyes and the Third Eye exist together in an area called the Outback, for they contain the wonders of a land and a sky untarnished by the muck of the offshore debris from the isle of Closed Eyes and all disparate ideas not true to the loop (see Figure 6). These isles are full of the pristine promise of the desert, the sea, the sky and the world of illumination. These isles are found in a region called the Outback for they, like the outback of Australia, the panhandle of Texas, the deep forests of Canada, the outer reaches of Mongolia, the mountains of Tibet, and the remaining rainforests of South America preserve the quintessence of life and, in so doing, also preserve the integrity of the loop. The position of these isles in my loop of the sojourner's pursuit satisfies the closing curve of the aboriginal circle of the spiral. There is no conclusion of the journey, no ending of the loop; yet, the location of the isles of the Outback serves as a balance for the roundness, pushing outward again and beginning another swing into another loop. Therefore, the spiraling journey Dillard wakes to and walks through every-day is completed and begun on the isles of the Outback.

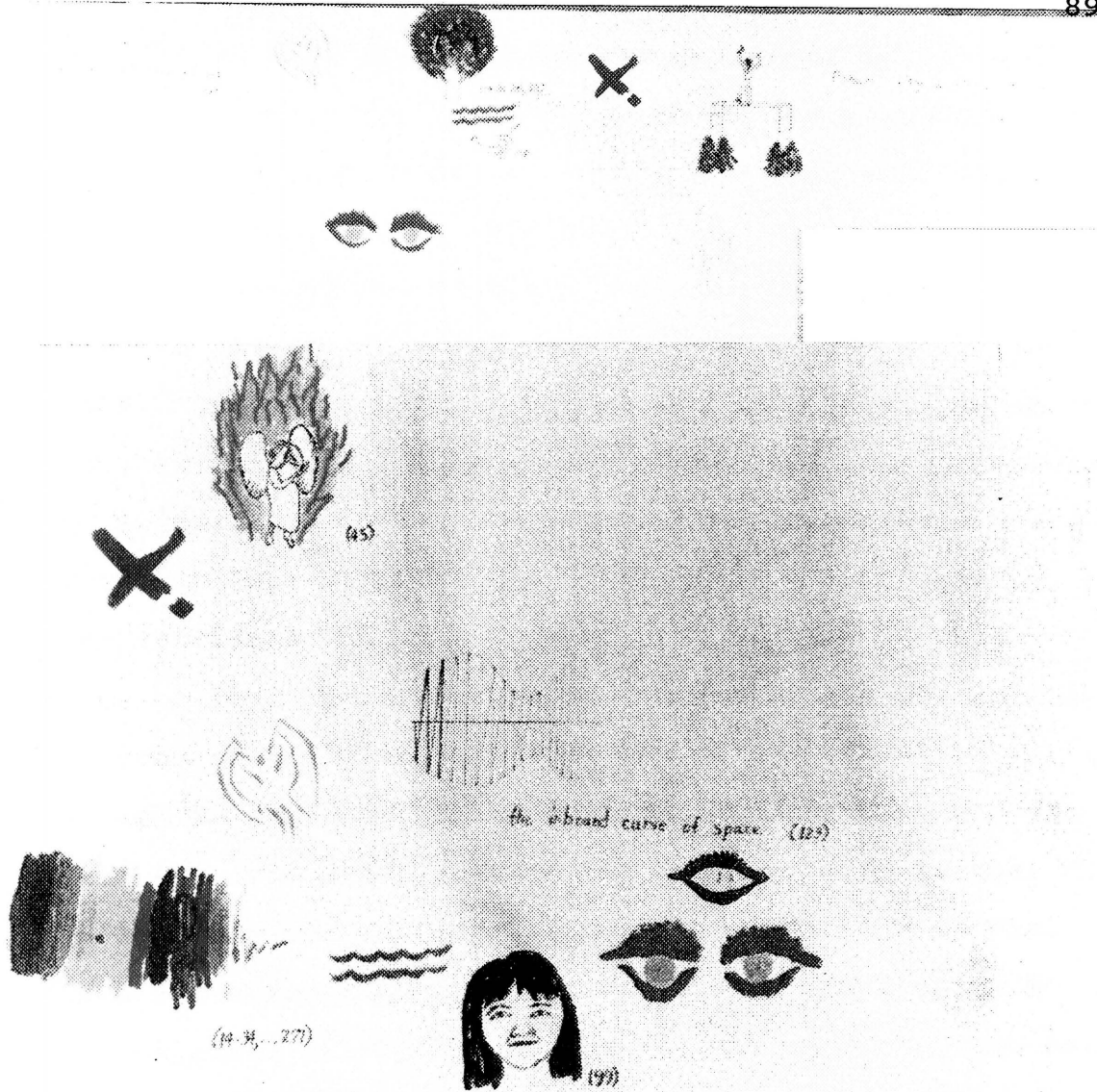


Figure 6: Combination Close-up of the Isle of Breakthrough and Open Eyes and the Isle of Maat and the Third Eye.

The isle of Open Eyes grounds the sojourner in the soil of the earth, while the isle of the Third Eye simultaneously sends her soaring above the earth, the sky, and through the meaning of her looping journey.

The isle of Breakthrough and Open Eyes elicits for the observer images of reality and fantasy found on all the isles. Symbols of and metaphors for this isle grow in the bush, swim in the sea, fly in the sky, and exist wherever the sojourner searches and sees. This is the isle where everything makes sense; the color-patches make meaning, the form functions. Here both eyes are open and no shadow of doubt or fear fills the sight. On the shores and in the environs of the isle, the sojourner finds salvation and the courage to continue her quest. The isle of Maat and the Third Eye, the other isle of the Outback, lies farther down the loop beyond the corporeal senses. The isle of Maat takes its name from the Egyptian goddess believed to be "the original All-Seeing Eye and Mother of Truth, her name based on the verb to see" (Walker 112). It is on this farthest isle that the sojourner fully "sees" the design of the spiraling loop and its meaning. A meaning discloses itself on this isle that encircles the body and the spirit, the reality and the fantasy, the living and the dead, the light and the dark, and everything in between. The experience of the isle of Maat is indescribable and transcendent, and, in this way, it often fades from the

observer's memory and takes the shape of a dream-vision--known in the heart and mind, yet unknown in the how or why. Landing on this isle is an unconscious act; however, Dillard divulges through rhetorical clues and in trance-like, induced state admits her acquaintance with and passage through the beautiful mysteries of the isle of Maat. Together these two isles exist in the Outback regions the isles of the loop.

The stream of an unbridled consciousness, which runs naturally and freely along a curved course with no boundaries and no limitations, leads to these distant isles. These isles are the most difficult to describe, perhaps because they represent exactly that which cannot be explained and which is not concisely realized--always present but never here; it is as if they were to represent that which is tangible to the eye and visible to the hand. The isles of the Outback express the same dilemma Dillard finds herself in on the isle of Wake when she realizes on any one of these three isles that she "cannot cause light; the most I can do is try and put myself in the path of its beam" (Pilgrim 33). The light she refers to is the sort of thing these isles express. The roaming water in the waves raging around these isles is from the cause, the mysterious source, a source originating from everywhere and nowhere, "wholly here and emptied," "the alpha and the omega," and everything and nothing a cause which is found in any wave

cleansing any shore of the isles of the loop (Holy 31, Teaching 76). The light shines from a visitation to these isles and results from the experience of these isles.

The locations of the isles of Open Eyes and of the Third Eye on my map of Dillard's texte are so close they are often confused, and one not carefully reading the map may easily wind up unconsciously cruising toward the isle of the Third Eye or consciously sailing toward the isle of Open Eyes. And this is the basic difference between the two isles: it is simply a distinction of an extremely vague distance. It is a distance which to some is nonexistent as "form, distance, and size were so many meaningless syllables" to the blind patients of Marius von Senden (Pilgrim 25). Dillard discusses his book Space and Sight and describes his restorative operations to remove cataracts from people blind since birth. She reports the reactions his patients had to their newly-gained sight. The patients' feelings toward this phenomenal new sense were mixed--pure terror and absolute joy, but von Senden's conclusions about their conceptions of space were uniform. The blind have no sense of space, "no idea of depth, [instead] confusing it with roundness"; distance was an inconceivable idea for the once blind but now sighted (25). This perception of distance equals the space between these two isles because the blind perceive the cycle. It is a

distance that exists only if an agreement is reachable that distance exists at all. One way to distinguish the distance between is to determine whether the experience of the isle is ventured upon with both eyes open and alert, therefore consciously, or whether the isle unveils its course in a dreamlike state, neither asleep nor awake, and in a transcendent state. The conscious experience of the isle of Breakthrough frequently leads directly into the mystical consciousness of the isle of Maat, so together these two isles simultaneously drift, without and within each other.

Dillard discovers that certain aspects of scenery prevail on both isles. The atmosphere of both is thick with circle imagery, illustrating the loop and the spiral of the completed picture she paints, the solace she seeks. The atmosphere again is similar to von Senden's patients' ideas of "roundness," the loop, as an integral ingredient of life's figure, whether seen or unseen (25). The chronicling of these isles and their location on the map cannot complete the neverending loop, yet the realization of these isles provides the sojourner passage, a round trip - ticket, so to speak, around the circling path. On the bicycle that Dillard and her child friend had found and repaired, the child discovers a "long loop route around which to ride" as a concrete example of the isle of Open Eyes. And when she acknowledges the joy by "singing at the

top of her lungs" as she rides away, the child also experiences excellence of the isle of the Third Eye (Teaching 161-62). The ride around the looping trail concurrently delivers the girl to both of the isles of the Outback.

Dillard's retelling of the legend of an Eskimo shaman provides another example of one who metaphysically travels and chronicles the loop. An Eskimo shaman leaves his body and swims through the continents down to the sea floor in order to appease an old spirit woman who lives there controlling how many animals the shaman's people may or may not kill each season. The shaman afterward would "awake, returned to his skin exhausted from the dark ardors of flailing peeled through rock, and find himself in a lighted igloo, at a sort of party, among dear friends" (Pilgrim 99-100). The shaman's memory of leaving his skin and his arduous task are the sort of fantastic images which generate from the isle of the Third Eye. The lighted igloo paints the isle of Open Eyes, and, together, these isles formulate the knowledge gained by the shaman and his friends, the knowledge that life without sacrifice has no meaning, no kill, no substrate. Life without undergoing the journey around the isles of Wake, Self, Out, Shadowland, Breakthrough, and Maat has no form, no color, no meaning. During his journey down and back up from the bottom of the sea, the shaman experiences all the

sensations, the thrills, the fears, and the joys of the six isles of the loop, and in these experiences, he revels in an understanding of each isle's meaning and purpose. This is a revelation similarly found, but not as deeply appreciated, on the isle of Out where Dillard confirms that "the earth, without form, is void" (Teaching 128). In the lighted igloo, the search for the Eskimos has now returned to the beginning, starting another loop and another year's cycle, another life.

The Eskimo legend recounts in words what Dillard ponders in substance and time when, out for a walk in an attempt to sneak up on spring, she discovers the knotted snakeskin. Turning the skin over and over in her hands, she cannot find how to untie the knot--"it was continuous . . . a loop without beginning or end" (Pilgrim 73). Finally, it occurs to her that she cannot "catch spring by the tip of the tail [anymore] than [she] could untie the knot" (74). The loops of children and trails, of Eskimos and human survival, and of snakes and their skins are but a sparse collection of the numerous examples of the all encompassing "loop" and the massive symbolism it incorporates into the texts. An explication of the isle of Breakthrough and Open Eyes and the isle of Maat and the Third Eye underscores Dillard's meaning for this most important word. Even a brief survey of the variety of different instances and illuminations where the word "loop"

appears illustrates the tremendous authority and power it carries in the language of Dillard's texts and in the creation of her picture-map.

Humorously and figuratively, Dillard is "knocked for a loop" when the young man in the restaurant says that an eclipse they have just experienced "looked like a Life Saver," but the pun which appropriately fits the situation for the eclipse also brings her full around the isles, as well as emphasizes her attachment to the word in sincerity and in jest (Teaching 98). For the most part, the dark event of the eclipse took Dillard to the shores of Shadowland, but for a brief moment, it also drove her upon the shores of the isle of Breakthrough when she stated "the meaning of the sight overwhelmed its fascination" (94). Then the eclipse immediately picked her up and dropped her on the isle of Maat as her next statement implies that "it obliterated meaning itself" (94). Once again the sojourner quickly sails from isle to isle and in no particular order.

Often the loop imagery pertains to visions which also embrace the others who live on the isle of Out. An example is the wren which Dillard's cat dragged in from the isle of Out which was "alive" and "a god" who rides on her "shoulders--tugging--swinging" on "loops of [her] hair" directing her across the isles of the Outback (Holy 26-8). The sea, the winds, and the skies "don't quit . . . end . . . nor do they cease from spreading in

curves," and when Dillard dreams of seeing the stars, she wonders whether they are "something with wings, or loops" (21, 28-9). The clear sightings of the loop and the circle imagery within these elements pick Dillard up and swoop her squarely on the isle of Open Eyes, and sometimes over the isle of Open Eyes to the isle of the Third Eye. Dillard longs for such sightings because

Then I might be able to sit on a hill . . . where starlings fly over, and see not only the starlings, the grass field, the quarried rock, the viney woods, Hollins Pond, and the mountains beyond, but also, and simultaneously, feathers' barbs, springtails in the soil, crystal in rock, chloroplasts streaming, rotifers pulsing, and the shape of the air in the pines. And, if I try to keep my eye on quantum physics, if I try to keep up with astronomy and cosmology, and really believe it all, I might ultimately be able to make out the landscape of the universe. (Pilgrim 137-8)

A landscape she concludes, while on the isle of Breakthrough, is one that she would "paint . . . on an unrolling scroll" (138). However, while on the isle of Maat and the Third Eye, "the completed picture needs one more element . . . a fringed matrix, lapped and lapping . . . [and] the shearwater looping the waves" (Teaching 131). The landscape of this isle has more than three dimensions, for it is without limitation, without time; it is the vision that Nansen spoke of as "deep and pure as infinity . . . the eternal round of the universe" (28). The sojourner on the isle of the Third Eye realizes, "I am light . . . I can hardly see," and while walking and

exploring, discovers that all the "islands [and sojourners] are rooted in [the loop]" (Holy 65, 69). The implicit and explicit loop imagery used to establish validity of the isles of the Outback spin luxuriously in the texts and affirm Dillard's spiraling picture-map image as the journey winds "straight on up, till 'up' ends by curving back," and "the circle is unbroken" (69-70).

On the shores of the isle of Open Eyes manifestations of the isle are "seen" in circles and loops. Images of the forest which "looped the shore" of the river turn round and transport Dillard from the isle of Out where she saw the butterflies' spiral as only an interesting shape, to the realization on the isle of Breakthrough that this curve "goes on everywhere, tit for tat, action and reactions, triggers and inhibitors ascending in a spiral like spitting butterflies" (Teaching 54, 128). The triumph of the curves on the isle of the Open Eyes causes Dillard to live in "that circle of light, in great speed and utter silence" (108).

On this isle the author creates meaning and sight as the blind do with colorpatches, light, and texture. Dillard quotes William Blake's prerogative, "He who does not prefer Form to Color is a Coward!" and dismisses Blake's edict and proclaims her own wish that the creator had created fewer forms and more colors (Pilgrim 136). Here, on a superficial level, she seems to contradict her

world-without-form statement, but in actuality she argues for both sides. Light and sight constitute color. Color, in the blind man's mind, is only light and shadow. Color, in the sighted man's mind, is only light and shadow, as well, whether his eyes are open or shut. On the isle of Breakthrough and Open Eyes and the isle of Maat and the Third Eye, Dillard "sees" all ways, utilizing color and form with all eyes open. She sees in form "the looped soil," in spirit "the mystical hoop snake with its tail in its mouth," and in color "a color-field painting, wrapped round at an unknown distance" of the neverending spiral (76, 96; Teaching 43). These are conscious or avowed expressions of the isle of Open Eyes and transcendent visions of the isle of the Third Eye in the curve. Losing track, leaving the linear road, and seeing the "tree with lights in it," the snakeskin tied with "no beginning or end," the creek which "never stops" and "is by definition--the incarnation," the waves which are "world without end," and life as "lighted seasons," and movement as "a balloon; [which] moves, circles, slows, and vanishes" is the pastime on these isles (Pilgrim 28, 73, 86-7, 93, 102, 103, 128, 143, 241, 271).

Children frequent these places. Open Eyes and the Third Eye are lands of "sense" and Dillard believes "only children keep their eyes open. The only thing they 'have' got is sense" (90). Her admiration for children stems from

their abilities of discovery, primarily because they "will pick up 'everything;'" she further observes that if you are searching for something like "an arrowhead . . . caddisfly larva," or the method of travel and route to the Outback isles, "you must walk with a child" (90). It is this wide-eyed innocence combined with sense that is required for the realization of these isles. Insane with anger over Julie's plane accident, Dillard denies the children their power and rejects "sense," claiming it to be restrictive and base, "bound by the mineral-made ropes of our senses" (Holy 48). However, the contradiction serves a purpose as it clearly illustrates her frustration, despair, and angered confusion. Upon reflection, Dillard knows better and most often finds her way to the Outback through her senses. Yet also apparent in this contradiction is the fact that children grow up and most totally lose their senses by binding themselves to the mineral-made ropes; consequently, some find themselves spending long afternoons, mornings, and evenings on other islands and, in so doing, seldom return (at least as innocently) to these Outback isles. Some never return and live incompletely, never reaching either isle of the Outback. Salvation lies within the looping isles but only for those who seek the unbroken circle of the neverending journey and the "sense" of childlike discovery.

Another extraordinary sense evoked on the isles of the Outback enables Dillard to see and to understand things in

an enlightened and fantastic manner. The sense born here surpasses the five normal senses and allots Dillard a new perspective of the world through which she travels.

Although this unusual sense can be initiated on the isle of Open Eyes, it most often blooms in the jungles of Maat. In this sense Dillard, like the spiritual leader Rebecca Jackson

is able to capture a state of consciousness in which waking personality . . . drops away. She soars, lifts, leaps easily into the sky, flies through the air, looks down from a great height, and can see things never visible from such a perspective before. She is given sudden, integrating flashes of understanding about the nature of the physical universe in visual form. She can leave the physical body behind, hold conversations with angels, tour symbolic landscapes, and re-enter the body again. (Daly 172)

In the "symbolic landscape," like those found in the Outback, Dillard echos Julian of Norwich and wholeheartedly believes nothing is "amiss" (Pilgrim 177). Nothing is without meaning because everything is within the loop. On the isles of the Outback the curving loop is seen, felt, heard, tasted, and smelled. Here one is able to eat the world--as Emerson said, "I ate the world" (271). Existing side by side on these isles is the abandonment and the embracing of ideas. In Shadowland, Dillard was struck down by thinking of silence as sinister, but only momentarily, for soon she abandoned the benighted idea and after time passed, the keel of her ship loosened, and she sailed freely and completely around the isles. The freedom on the

isle of Maat permitted her to unconsciously embrace "angels in those fields" and on the isle of Breakthrough to consciously embrace them by stating a few months later to a friend that indeed "There are angels in those fields," although she also states that she was "surprised" and could not recall the "thought of angels, in any way at all" (Teaching 137).

Isaiah's "six-winged Angels" written in prophecy, Dillard's "angels in those fields" seen in silence, and William Blake's "tree filled with angels" remembered from childhood are all inhabitants of and symbolic of the distant isles of the Outback (Holy 45; Teaching 137; Powell 159). Yet the isles of Breakthrough and Maat also contain other figures which are traditionally considered holy. For example, there are cows who stand in water (Hollin's Pond which is actually only six inches deep) and whose appearance from a distance looks like "miracle itself" to Dillard (Teaching 12). However most of the symbolic representatives of these isles are seen in things jumbled and contradictory to their traditional associations and meanings. On the isle of Breakthrough and Open Eyes Dillard watches the sea lions whose "joy seemed conscious," while beside them, the palo santo trees sway in the surrounding waters of the isle of Maat and the Third Eye as they "bear the lichens effortlessly, unconsciously, the way they bear everything" (emphasis added; _ 74-5). On these

isles "everything, everything, is whole, and a parcel of everything else" (Holy 66). Whether found in the angels, the cows, the sea lions, or the palo santo trees, "all there ever could be" (67), "a dot" (Pilgrim 103), a "world without end" (143) and especially a tree, exist on the isles of the Outback.

Trees living "on the inbound curve of space-time" of the isles of the Outback magnificently shine with the light of the source (Teaching 123). Dillard sees a "cedar," Xerxes saw a "sycamore with lights in it"; on the isle of Open Eyes the "cells in the tree pulsed charged like wings beating praise" and on the isle of the Third Eye the viewer is "transfigured" (Pilgrim 88, 241). Whether the sojourner is pulsed or transfigured by the tree with the lights in it, either action causes Dillard to cry "heaven and earth indistinguishable!" (Teaching 49). On the Open Eyes isle the tree grows, and, on the Third Eye, the isle is in the tree; it is in the lights.

In conclusion, Dillard defends her texts: "Whether these thoughts are true or not I find less interesting than the possibilities for beauty they may hold" (152). On the isles of the Outback, the sojourner learns that her quest, her travels, are not to be concluded by any specific or final destination. Dillard resolves: "I go my way, and my left foot [and left eye] say 'Glory,' and my right foot [and right eye] say 'Amen:' in and out of Shadow Creek [and

Shadowland], upstream and down, exultant, in a daze [with half-opened eyes], dancing" (Pilgrim 271). The dancing, walking search goes on forever, and the path circles in the waters and shores of each isle eternally. Nearing the shore of the Third eye, Dillard proclaims with her eyes open that "the power we seek [is a] continuous loop" (76).

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