existing hierarchies. Feminist compositionists need to explore these issues to effect change, and the writing classroom provides the perfect environment to read, discuss, and write about culture and ideology. However, in the meantime I applaud Schmidt's efforts to add to the multiplicity of feminist voices contributing to contemporary composition theory and pedagogy, and I look forward to hearing future voices join the conversation.

_Dramas of Solitude: Narratives of Retreat in American Nature Writing_,

Reviewed by Christopher J. Keller, University of Florida

On first glancing at the title of Randall Roorda's new book, few would find reason to think it related to composition studies. But _Dramas of Solitude: Narratives of Retreat in American Nature Writing_, whatever its title indicates, provides an engaging account of how retreat narratives function, how they resist standard labels and generic classifications as "nature writing," and how they can be used in the writing classroom. Roorda analyzes retreat narratives not just as texts that merely facilitate traditional literary analyses, but as works that offer the necessary resources for ecological literacy and "participatory" readings, those which readers may reasonably aspire to produce.

_Dramas of Solitude_ has two main goals. First, it narrows the field of "nature writing," delineating the genre according to "repeated instantiations of a certain core story" that depicts specific narrative movements—keeping in mind that "not every text depicting nature ranks as 'nature writing' any more than every story containing mystery is a 'mystery.'" Second, it makes retreat narratives important to rhetoric and composition studies by questioning how student literacy and identity are formed; how writing, or composing, differs in solitude and society; and finally, how rhetoric and composition as a discipline might be restructured by new examinations, definitions, and uses of these texts.

In refiguring the field of "nature writing," Roorda looks at some of the genre's canonical authors in order to "identify as one further condition of the genre that the destination of retreat be figured as a community or web of relations that the writer feels implicated in and is concerned to comprehend." Thus, nature is not meant to be only a backdrop for human events and representations. Roorda focuses much
of his discussion on one of Henry David Thoreau's lesser known works, "Ktaadn," which is the first of three wilderness travel stories in *The Maine Woods*. This essay, Roorda argues, is "paradigmatic" of retreat narratives: it is about losing the human, about a quest from the human world to the nonhuman world and how this passage becomes a "drama of recognition" for the individual. Roorda believes that because Thoreau did not compose all of "Ktaadn" during these wilderness experiences (he wrote much of it when he returned to Walden), a conflict existed between Thoreau's need for self-assertion as a writer and his self-dissolution as a voyeur in a nonhuman world. Thus, "Ktaadn" in Thoreau's oeuvre is important as a work that emphasizes the "dream" of nonhuman worlds rather than as an examination of the writer's identity in nature. Roorda not only resists traditional literary analyses of Thoreau's writings, but, more importantly, he tangentially raises questions of literacy in the classroom. Cultural studies methodologies may be prominent in composition studies, but *Dramas of Solitude* pushes these boundaries further by posing questions of ecological literacy, questions that ask how we shape and are shaped by place(s), in and out of the literary. Such questions are crucial in forming more comprehensive notions of student identities.

Roorda argues convincingly that while Thoreau saw his journey into nature as a retreat away from something—from humans and civilization—John C. Van Dyke viewed his journey as an approach toward a specified location, the desert: a place where names end, and a world where "great truths" may be sought and found." Roorda discusses Van Dyke's *The Desert* in relation to the author's biography, particularly his racist attitudes. For example, Van Dyke liked to imagine the original indigenous residents of the desert, but he viewed them as "an evolutionary intermediary, a point of traffic between the human and (nonhuman) 'natural.'" The question arises: whether one can or should be able to separate biography from nature writing. Roorda tries to resolve this dilemma by finding middle ground between "complicity and dissent." To do so, he investigates theories of organicism, concepts that perceive nature's organization—its order—as a hierarchy. These theories tend to be supported by the white racist patriarchy as justification for domination and oppression in biological (thus hierarchical) terms: Van Dyke did just this. But Roorda argues that Van Dyke should not be so easily dismissed and that organicism should not be fully abrogated; he sees the necessity for a "rehabilitated organicism," one divested of its hierarchical inclinations but kept for its "recognition of biological interconnectedness." Roorda is correct here. As compositionists and theorists of language, we need to realize more completely how nature is constructed through discourse and how discourse often disconnects nature and culture and sets them in opposition to each other. Roorda's
proposal for a new organicism is not merely a call to biologists and ecologists, but also a call to those who understand that the natural world is a discursive formation, one that needs to be reformulated—rewritten—in the midst of current ecological crises.

In Roorda’s view, Wendell Berry’s The Unforeseen Wilderness is a narrative of retreat that differs from Thoreau’s and Van Dyke’s in that it offers an ethical dimension previously unseen: nature, or wilderness, is a realm that instills morals in those who enter it properly. Thus, as Roorda writes, the whole book is “a testament to a mode of dwelling within the place and not a description thereof.” Berry, he claims, is not interested in pointing out what he sees; instead, he is interested in focusing on how he sees it and how it affects him. Nature has certain “meaning-values” for him: patience, silence, and humility, for instance. The wilderness “unforeseen” is positive for Berry because “To locate strangeness in the place is to locate familiarity in oneself, in the enclosure of one’s preconception.” The ability to “predict” wilderness, in contrast, is negative because it forces places to be (re)made from preconceptions of them. Roorda argues that Berry’s retreat narrative is “exemplary”—as opposed to “paradigmatic,” like Thoreau’s and Van Dyke’s—because it warns that we should not go to nature in order to leave or escape culture; instead, retreat should be a passage from one moral order to another, mediated by “meaning-value language.” The present cultural order should be “reaccommodated” by way of this natural order. What is learned in nature should not be left there; these lessons, or morals, should be reintegrated into culture. Typically our writing classrooms center on investigations of the human—gender, race, and class, for instance—and show little if any interest in the nonhuman world. What is needed, though, is not mere sensitivity to the natural world—as a conqueror shows mercy to the conquered—but investigations by academics and students that write nature with an understanding that it is not Other, not an escape. The natural world interacts with culture and affects humans as much as humans affect it.

While Roorda shows that Thoreau, Van Dyke, and Berry exemplify different types of narrative movement (retreat) through nature, he also demonstrates that John Muir, a writer who “struggled against assuming the identity of a writer,” wrote retreat narratives which raise questions about the distinctions between orality and literacy. Muir preferred the spoken over the written word; he enjoyed speaking in the parlor more than writing in the wilderness. He sought to be a “rhapsode” rather than a writer. But in his day and in our own, many “of the pronounced literate cast” feel that nothing is truly “captured” unless it is expressed in writing. Roorda resolves this dispute by claiming that “nature writing” is not just writing about or from within nature; it is instead writing that depicts nature as it is distinguished from human culture and writing that
studies the conditions that create this distinction in the first place. Most people, students in particular, naturally try to avoid identities as writers. They are, like Muir, more comfortable with speaking. Roorda suggests, though, that we should not privilege writing over speaking or even try to make oral/literate and nature/culture distinctions; instead, we should use these binaries as "speculative instruments" to probe all that is available to us. Thus, "participation in the world does not begin and end in writing," but writing can become "an emblem of living."

_Dramas of Solitude_ also investigates, in more general terms, the behavior and identity of writers immersed in nature—in short, _how_ writers write when they are (physically) in the natural world. Here Roorda discusses the notion of "solitude," but he is quick to point out that we should not endow "solitude" with negative meanings (those associated with modernist images of writing): loneliness, alienation, and confinement, for example. Solitude in nature is actually _freedom_; it allows movement and the absence of mechanization. He believes, "solitude is not framed as alienation and atomism but refigured as affinity and integration within what Leopold calls the 'biotic community,' recognition of which comes to inform the human communities in which acts of writing are situated." Writing should not always be conflated with living, but it is more than the mere production of publishable books and essays. Even writing for nonpublic audiences is helpful to "some community" and may help "constitute one's occupation, one's identity all the same," and, Roorda suggests, writing in nature may even be closer to living because when we put pen to paper and look down, our inspiration comes when we look up.

The book briefly delves into classroom practice and pedagogy with analyses of first-year writing students' own narratives of retreat. Roorda offers examples from four student writings: in the first student's essay, he investigates its "generic" formulae to the "nature writing" genre; in the second, he examines the difficulties students have cultivating experiences in nature and then expressing them; in the third, he discusses the dangers of over-retreat(ing) from the social realm; and in the last, he probes issues of masculinity in retreat "adventures." _Dramas of Solitude_ questions the relationships among general education, literacy, and nature, and he concludes that the boundaries between nature and culture cannot be erased completely. Roorda, though, does advocate more thorough examinations of the relationship between place and identity: "neither can we neglect the implication that understandings of landscape may have more than scenic import, and that this possibility may be suppressed through some of the very circumstances that also conduce to ethnocentrism and social oppression." Roorda promotes educational practices that address issues such as identity formation and social oppression through "the medium of nature experiences as well as
through critical inquiry," and he also stresses that his studies rely on “keeping it simple.” As educators we cannot and should not prescribe students’ readings of Thoreau, for instance, or their experiences in nature; instead, our most important strategy is both to “reaffirm” the generic conditions through which nature can be experienced and to allow students to “reinvent” their own conditions. Narratives of retreat are some of the most important resources we have for understanding the relationship between nature and culture, and they should be written and studied for the changes they can bring forth.

For those interested primarily in the direct relationship between “nature writing” and classroom pedagogy, Dramas of Solitude has little to say. Roorda goes into great detail examining writers’ behavior and identity in narratives of retreat—dedicating much of his argument to the texts of Thoreau, Van Dyke, Berry, and Muir. He excites interest by briefly discussing classroom practices but quickly moves to more theoretical angles of inquiry. Thus, anyone searching for strict pedagogical approaches to teaching “nature writing” in the composition classroom should not look here.

In addition, Roorda’s analyses of the canonized “nature” writers are clearly written and nuanced, but perhaps Dramas of Solitude would have been more fulfilling had greater attention been given to the works of important female authors such as Annie Dillard’s Pilgrim At Tinker Creek, Ann Zwinger’s Beyond the Aspen Grove and Wind in the Rock (1978), or Sue Hubbell’s The Country Year: Living the Questions. Part of Roorda’s argument is that “nature” in the United States is constructed by the writings and viewpoints of the dominant white culture, but the emphasis on white male authors devalues the importance of women writers who have participated equally in this construction, even if it has fostered racially oppressive and ethnically narrow representations of the natural world.

Despite any shortcomings, Dramas of Solitude: Narratives of Retreat in American Nature Writing does two things very well: first, it makes a strong case for interdisciplinary practices in the composition classroom; and second, it offers some initial guidelines for teachers of writing to restructure their courses with “participatory” readings. When we offer students a heuristic that allows them to break down the nature-culture binary, “nature writing” as a genre affords an interdisciplinary approach that many of us have long encouraged our students to practice. Students writing retreat narratives, Roorda encourages, do not just have to be “writers,” but they may, for instance, assume roles as reporters, scientists, participants, philosophers, or even rhapsodes.

Roorda’s Dramas of Solitude also allows us to envision a restructuring of composition studies and neighboring disciplines in that it asks students to examine “literary” nonfiction in nontraditional ways: they are encouraged to participate in it. In doing so, a strong connection is
made between the types of texts students consume and the texts they produce. Perhaps students will begin to realize that there is not such a large barrier between language and the “real world” they perceive outside of texts, that language is part of the actual world rather than separate from it; this is an epiphany we all would like to see our students reach.

In the past decade more instructors have begun designing heuristics that facilitate student examinations of nature, retreat narratives, and environmental discourse in the writing classroom. This is evidenced by the rise of such organizations as The Association for the Study of Literature and Environment (ASLE), The Environmental Communication Resource Center, and numerous scholarly articles printed in journals such as JAC and Technical Communication Quarterly. Also, a number of important books on the subject have been published in the last few years, including David W. Orr’s Ecological Literacy: Education and the Transition to a Postmodern World, Carl G. Herndl and Stuart C. Brown’s Green Culture: Environmental Rhetoric in Contemporary America, M. Jimmie Killingsworth and Jacqueline S. Palmer’s Ecospeak: Rhetoric and Environmental Politics in America, Sidney I. Dobrin and Christian Weisser’s two forthcoming books Ecocomposition: Theoretical and Pedagogical Approaches and Natural Discourse: Toward Ecocomposition, and Dobrin’s forthcoming textbook, Saving Place: An Ecoreader for the Composition Classroom. Greening the writing classroom, though, is still a relatively new movement, and Roorda’s book offers a timely and useful account of these theoretical and pedagogical approaches. Dramas of Solitude strongly reasserts why many have begun teaching the environment and “nature writing” in their composition courses and why others should follow suit.