

# Eleven Ways to Consider Air

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I.

Of all the elements in the American West romanticized in the nineteenth century, air is perhaps the most curious. Gold, copper, silver, and water certainly top the list in many ways and rightfully so. The notion of water in the arid West, for instance, lived long (indeed too long) in the Victorian imagination before it was recognized, finally, by some, as a resource with a rarity on par with some hard-rock minerals.

One of the greatest stories about illusory water beyond the one hundredth meridian concerns the Buena Ventura River that supposedly coursed across the alkali desert of western Utah before eventually crashing into the Pacific. Cartographers plotted the river carefully, Mormons told tales of its azure waters, and settlers wandered the desert in vain seeking the faintest sign of its meandering breadth. Trouble is, no such river ever existed despite the stories, despite the maps. It was a myth.

Air, though, was the most egalitarian of elements, and it was purer in the West, people thought, than anywhere else. And it was for the taking. One did not need a sluice box, smelter, or pickax to extract it from the sky. One need not go mad in the desert with a bogus map looking for it. All one needed was a set of lungs to process its infinity.

Seldom did a nineteenth-century travel writer pass through the West without gushing about the pure mountain air. Consider Horace Greeley, who had this to say in his 1860 account, *An Overland Journey*: “Brooks of the purest water murmur and sing in every ravine; springs abound; the air is singularly pure and bracing.” Likewise, in *Mountaineering in the Sierra Nevada*, published twelve years later, the swaggering adventure-crut, Clarence King, waxed this way: “After such fatiguing exercises the mind has an almost abnormal clearness: whether this is wholly from within, or due to the intensely vitalizing mountain air, I am not sure.” My favorite, albeit lesser known period author, Captain John Codman, traveled west in 1873 and took up lodg-

ing in my hometown of Soda Springs, Idaho, a settlement tucked in a sagebrush valley in the southeastern corner of the state. In *The Mormon Country*, published a year later, Codman wrote that in Soda Springs he had “nature in her wild majesty, [and] an elastic, stimulating air.”

The mountain air in the West was not there merely to enjoy for its “bracing” freshness; it was literally prescribed for one’s health, as if it could be bottled and sold. Silas Weir Mitchell, a physician of prominence toward the end of the nineteenth century, was well known for his “rest cure” (treating women for their so-called “hysteria”) and most notably here, for his “fresh air therapy.” If a man felt glum, soft, or, god forbid, effete, Mitchell sent him packing for the West where a stark encounter with rugged landscape and exposure to the wild air would restore his machismo faster than he could say “Buena Ventura.” Mitchell’s most well-known client was none other than Teddy Roosevelt.<sup>1</sup>

It is not known whether John Codman consulted Dr. Mitchell before boarding his Pullman Palace Car to the land of enchanted air, but it is clear that the idea of fresh-air-as-medicine was a priority for the fifty-nine year old blue-blood. His close friend and former Mormon prophet Heber J. Grant once remarked that Codman “suffered from asthma, and he discovered he was better at Soda Springs, Idaho, than at any other place” in the world. The message seemed clear: Go West, old man. Get some air.

## II.

During the early summer weeks of 1950, the Monsanto Chemical Company broke ground at the very northern edge of Soda Springs. There, at the northern city limit in a brushy stretch of grazing land amid knuckles and ridges of basalt, the company erected a phosphorus furnace plant above the subterranean layers of ore they planned to reach, exhume, and process. Since that summer, Monsanto has dominated the landscape, economy, and cultural fabric of the southeastern Idaho town. Monsanto *made* the town, people say.

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<sup>1</sup> If Mitchell were alive today, he might be pleased to know that canned oxygen is now sold over-the-counter and is gaining wide popularity in chic venues known as oxygen bars. Recently, the convenience store Seven-Eleven Japan stocked its shelves with canned oxygen and is now awaiting profits from those seeking a hit of vigor.

And should anyone forget the company's imprint on Soda Springs, custom-made trucks carry cauldrons each filled with six hundred cubic feet of molten, radioactive byproduct, or slag, and slop the refuse down a tailings slope into a waste lagoon.<sup>2</sup> This quasi-lava flow occurs five times an hour, around the clock, day after day, year after year. As a boy growing up there, I used to think it was spectacular, a manmade volcano in my back yard. Actually, the slag's peak temperature is about equal to a volcanic lava flow, topping off at 2,552 degrees Fahrenheit.<sup>3</sup> The slag pours and pours. And the air and the junipers and the silvery sagebrush and the streams and the yawning fields of winter wheat turn wild shades of orange. The townspeople pace the streets and sidewalks daily hunkering under that glow-dome, that pulsing spell of false luminosity. Night becomes day. The daylight is widened. And the air is not elastic or stimulating. It is acrid.

### III.

When I was seven, I stopped breathing and was rushed to the emergency room where I was revived on a cold table. I was not in Soda Springs, Idaho, at the time, but in Richland, Washington. We had moved to that desert town two years earlier when my stepdad got a job at the Hanford Nuclear Reactor Project as an electrician. I remember the respirators he brought home and how they made him look terrifying, like an insect.

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<sup>2</sup> Rock that contains trace elements of elemental phosphorus is processed in the electrical arc-furnaces as a means to extract the phosphorus, while silica and carbon are added to the mix to jettison any impurities. The by-product of this process is a gray, rocky, vitrified slag material that contains uranium and radium. For years, the city of Soda Springs eagerly used the slag as roadfill, foundation mix for schools and houses, sidewalks and bridges. In 1990, the EPA warned residents of Soda Springs that they were at a greater risk of cancer due to the low but ubiquitous levels of radiation around town.

<sup>3</sup> Only once has a man tipped his truck over into the magmatic sludge. I was in high school at the time and remember the day the story spread through town. The unimaginable had happened. That night I drove out to Monsanto and stood in its radiated glow, watching. I was haunted and unendingly fascinated. I imagined how his flesh must have poured from his bones, how the bones became smoke, how the smoke rose in a solitary plume and thinned on an ordinary wind. The slag had erased him. Only the carcass of his truck was recovered. The tragedy did not, however, interrupt the five-count rhythm of the day.

I had cousins who lived in Richland and it was at their house during a sleepover that my respiratory system shut down in the middle of the night. I shot up in bed, straight as a broomstick, and tried to draw a breath, but to no avail. I tried to scream for help but no sound escaped. So I did the next best thing: I pounded on the headboard and walls. I beat my fists into the mattress. In seconds, my aunt Marcia rushed in, while my uncle Jack a police officer, called the ambulance. After that I remember only fragments: the crowded ambulance, its strange half-light, my aunt's gown, hushes, and a hand to my forehead. I wore an oxygen mask the color of seawater. This time I looked like the insect and it was no less terrifying.

In the hospital, I could breathe again. I sat on the cold empty table, feet dangling over the edge, shirtless, my small chest heaving. A doctor orbited the table with a clipboard and stethoscope and asked a battery of questions, most of which my aunt could not answer. My parents, she had said, were on their way. That was the first time I had ever heard the words *asthma attack. Severe.*

Shortly after the attack, Mom scheduled a doctor's appointment where she faced her own barrage of questioning: "Do you or your husband smoke cigarettes?"

"Yes."

"Both of you or just one of you?"

"Both of us."

"Do you smoke in the home or outside?"

"At home. In the home."

Mom, I could tell, was uncomfortable.

"And the car? Do you smoke in the car?"

"Yes."

The doctor scribbled in his notepad, thumb-clicked his pen, pocketed it, and told me that I could put my shirt back on. "Mrs. Schrand, considering Brandon's history of allergies and his asthma, I strongly recommend you and your husband change your smoking habits at once. He has difficulty breathing under the best conditions. Having to breathe in the constant presence of smoke is like, well, it's like breathing with a piano on your chest." I stared at my plaid pants and my Big Bird sneakers and imagined what it might be like to have a piano sitting on me.

Mom usually cracked the window when she smoked in the car, but that day, on the way home from the doctor's office, she rolled the window all the way down. After that, she stopped smoking in my bedroom too.

IV.

Seneca, the ancient tragedian, orator, and writer, also suffered from asthma. He noted that of all illnesses that had visited him, asthma was the most menacing. "One could hardly, after all, expect anyone to keep on drawing his last breath for long, could one? . . . This is why doctors have nicknamed it 'rehearsing death,' since sooner or later the breath does just what it has been trying to do all those times." But he did not acquiesce to the haunting "squall" of asthma. Instead, he defied it, dared it to take him while he was sleeping: "I shall not be afraid when the last hour comes." Unlike Seneca, I feared the last hour, entertained nightmares about the last hour, recurring ones that replayed the scene at my aunt Marcia's house.

V.

Air, it seems, is not easily won in my family. We lived in Richland, Washington, for only three years before Dad was laid off from Hanford, forcing us to vacate our white, two-bedroom clapboard rental and move back to Soda Springs. There, my grandparents owned an historic three-story brick hotel, café, and bar right downtown and had enlisted my parents to help run the place. It was a family business in the strictest sense, and we all lived there, squared away in apartments on the ground floor. Because my grandparents' apartment was larger, though, I lived with them.

A few years before my asthma attack, my grandfather was diagnosed with emphysema, and although he quit smoking his Winstons, he refused to go on oxygen. His doctor urged him, emphatically, to use it, supplementally, at least at night. It would help, he said. Afraid of becoming dependent upon a tank, afraid of that kind of entrapment, my grandfather dug in and tried to fight the disease. Inevitably, though, he lost ground as everyone knew he would. Drawing a full breath became more and more labored. By the time we moved back to Soda Springs, a cold green steel cylindrical tank filled with pure oxygen

stood at the head of his bed. As a child, I was vaguely frightened of this armless gargoyle that towered in my grandparents' room. It looked like a beheaded soldier, a robot, or a bomb that could explode at any second.<sup>4</sup>

Only those patients who have advanced emphysema need supplemental oxygen, but all sufferers will need it eventually. The disease is particularly troubling because the lungs lose their elasticity. Those afflicted with emphysema are encumbered with the haunting reality that it is not just a progressively arduous task to draw a full breath, but it is inordinately difficult to exhale the breath once they have taken it.

My grandparents tried everything to outpace his degenerative respiratory condition. They tried steroids, exercise, inhalers, herbal remedies, prayer, anger, denial. At one point they drove to Mexico to look for large and inexpensive quantities of cortisone, a drug, they were told, offered relief for various victims. While some days were better than others, we all knew that eventually my grandfather's fears would come true: he would rely on an oxygen tank for the rest of his life. And that this disease would kill him.

If my grandpa smoked before he volunteered to fight in World War II, he smoked twice as much by the end of the war. There is little doubt that smoking led to and caused his disease. But for years after the war, his lungs saw no reprieve. He harvested grain on combines without

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<sup>4</sup> An aside: When I was in elementary school, I formed a club based on Bertrand R. Brinley's children's books, *The Mad Scientists' Club*. The books centered on a smart but goofy cast of characters who hatched hair-brained ideas with intent to help their nostalgically named town of Mammoth Falls. Their plans and schemes always backfired, of course, but these "failures" did not deter them from trying other experiments. Fully taken by these stories, I started to hatch some schemes of my own. One involved building a rocket out of my grandpa's oxygen tank. I cobbled together a launchpad out of two pallets, four cinder blocks, and scrap lumber. On notebook paper, I sketched a number of designs and schematics. Each one, however, hinged on the same ignition theorem: the rocket would launch if I knocked the valve off the tank with a twenty-pound sledgehammer. It would have to be a clean strike. One hit. The fear of a spark and a certain explosion, however, distressed me greatly and caused many sleepless nights. The launch was canceled indefinitely. I don't think it ever occurred to me, though, that it would have been my grandfather's air I was shooting into the horizon, his part-time life support system that would have surely exploded in our driveway.

cab enclosures, mowing through thunderheads of splintery chaff and grain dust. And when he wasn't attending to the ranch, he worked at Monsanto where columns of smoke filled the sky and thickened the air.

VI.

Like Mom, who had stopped smoking in my bedroom when I was diagnosed with asthma, Grandma also quit smoking her Bel-Air Menthols in their bedroom when Grandpa was hit with emphysema. I will not soon forget the artwork that adorned her cigarette packages. A crisp blue windblown sky feathered with a light, airy wisp of a cloud. The very package was the image of the freshest air imaginable.

Best of all, the packages came with coupons that could be redeemed for merchandise from the company's glossy-slick catalog. Grandma collected the coupons and one summer, gave me two shoe boxes filled with rubber-banded bundles that I mailed off to the Raleigh Bel-Air company in exchange for a red Tasco telescope with a black tripod and a yellow-and-blue two-person inflatable rubber raft complete with oars and air pump.<sup>5</sup> Combined, the two items required over two thousand cigarette coupons. I was ecstatic. I raced my bike over the sidewalks to the post office daily to see if any large boxes awaited me. Day after day, I returned home winded and disappointed.

The day my raft and telescope arrived, however, marked the day I redoubled my efforts to collect more coupons. At night I lay in my bed beneath a large skylight and flipped through the merchandise catalog, my wish book. And five times an hour the skylight would glow orange, coloring, if only faintly, the glossy catalog pages I thumbed through and marked with a ballpoint pen. I circled the full-color pictures of binoculars, compasses, bicycles, watches, radios, a color TV Math problems—columns of addition and subtraction—riddled the margins.

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<sup>5</sup> It is probably safe to say that few people today pay much attention to the common air-pump, but there was a time when its early incarnations generated a great deal of scientific discussion. The Honourable Robert Boyle, for instance, who is largely credited as the progenitor of modern chemists, was fascinated with the air pump. In 1657, he happened across an early model of the air pump—created by Otto Von Geuriecke, a German physicist who experimented with, among other things, vacuums and generators—and worked for two years on improving the contraption. And by 1659, Boyle had completed the new and improved “*machina Boyleana*,” which led to a number of significant experiments on the properties of air. The common air pump was integral to those experiments.

So many coupons for the compass left only so many for the FM radio. Possibilities abounded. The cardboard carton that held my new batch of coupons was pathetically empty, however, so I pestered Grandma making certain that every coupon was accounted for. "How many packs did you smoke today, Grandma?" I would ask, beaming. It was our running joke. "I can only smoke so many a day, you know!" She would say, and laugh.

VII.

On bright afternoons, I visited with Grandpa in his bedroom. He had an adjustable bed that, when elevated, made it easier for him to draw and release his breath. Their bedroom had a large window and the two of us would sit on the edge of his bed, share a bowl of cherries, spit the stones into the waste basket, and talk on all matters of the world—whether or not ESP was real, would California sink in the big quake, would Russia launch a missile at the US, and would Soda Springs be a target? All the while his oxygen hissed in the background. Sometimes I set up my telescope in his room so I could look through his window. Once, while I dragged the lens across the horizon, my eye intent on anything and nothing (usually a stand of cottonwoods or a skein of geese over distant brushy hills), and while my fingers dialed the fine-focus knob, Grandpa popped me on the head playfully. I looked at him, blinking. I was standing on his oxygen hose. "Oh, sorry," I said. "I didn't know."

Asthma does not affect the tissues in the lungs like emphysema. Asthmatics struggle to breathe because the bronchi in their lungs narrow and restrict airflow. Many people who suffer from asthma rely on aerosol inhalers when they feel particularly short of breath, like I did when I wrestled in junior high school.<sup>6</sup> I remember the gymnasium where we practiced and how the air was heavy and humid and odor-

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<sup>6</sup> During the composition of this essay, I came down with bronchitis, and was prescribed an inhaler in addition to the usual regimen of antibiotics. "Because of your history with asthma," the doctor said, regarding the inhaler. I checked the active ingredients for oxygen, but found none. Instead, I learned that the L-shaped canister contained a "microcrystalline suspension of albuterol in propellants [trichloromonofluoromethane and dichlorodifluoromethane] with oleic acid." Whatever *that* is, you won't find it among Seven-Eleven Japan's chic assortment of canned oxygen.

ous, and how it hung like weather. Thin, smallish, and light on my feet, I could sprint as fast as anyone on the team, at least for the first half-dozen wall touches. Then the ceiling lights blurred yellow while my chest burned and I would invariably fall behind the rest of the team, gradually at first (I can still hear my coach, a balding man built like a meat locker: *Come on, Schrand! Pick it up!*), and finishing last, sucking the sour air. My lungs felt raw and shredded. I would stumble to the court's edge and snatch up my inhaler and blast its foul gas into my throat. I hated that inhaler, though, because it was viewed by my coach and teammates as a weakness, an excuse, somehow emasculating. As the corridors in my lungs closed in on themselves, I understood what it must be like to have someone stand on my oxygen hose.

VIII.

Seneca did not have an inhaler. Nor did asthmatics in the nineteenth century; rather, they had the West. They had places like Soda Springs, Idaho. My grandfather had Soda Springs, too, but one day decided that the air was better elsewhere than it was in his hometown. And just like that, without ceremony or explanation, he and my grandma packed their red Volkswagen Rabbit and drove into the desert southwest, and settled for the winter in Bullhead, Arizona. They moved not for the weather, but for the air—his fresh-air cure. “He just knew he could breathe better there,” Grandma often says. “And what the hell? It was worth a shot.”

My grandfather stopped breathing and died in a fluorescent-lit hospital room on the night of January fourth, 1986. I was fourteen and remember clearly the moment he flatlined and how Mom ran out of the room, sobbing. I also remember not knowing how to react, so I didn't. I just remember the sound and Mom bolting, her face in her hands. And how the oxygen kept hissing long after he was gone.

It is summer. Almost twenty years have passed since my grandfather died. I sit in my grandmother's house and talk loudly because she is losing her hearing. My two children are not with me, so she smokes in the living room. When my wife and I visit and the kids are with us, Grandma retreats to her bedroom, shuts her door, and smokes quietly there, hidden away. Other times she will slip out the back door. When

we stay over we pitch a tent in the backyard in the cool open air. My grandma doesn't mind. It relieves her some because she is hyper-conscious of her smoking. Four years ago she spent over one hundred dollars on an air purifier. The next year she bought another at nearly four hundred dollars. She cleans the filter obsessively while we are there. She asks us time and again, "Can you tell a difference? Does it seem better in here?" And time and again we nod eagerly and say *Oh, yes. My! A big difference!* In reality, though, we cannot detect a change at all. I still find it difficult to breathe in her house and everything smells like smoke. The furniture, walls, carpet, everything. I used to joke that even the tap water smelled like cigarette smoke. I often wonder if her air purifying contraption is as bunk as the Buena Ventura, if it might be this century's mythic "fresh air cure."

This time back though the mood is slightly strained. Her breathing, I've noticed, is labored and heavy, her coughing fits, violent. And although I notice for the first time that an inhaler sits on the kitchen counter near her glass ashtray, I say nothing. I ignore it because she does not want to talk about it. Earlier in the morning she had gone to the doctor and was told that she may very well have emphysema, but he wasn't certain.<sup>7</sup> To be certain, he sent her home with a monitor that would track the flow of oxygen in her bloodstream. She is supposed to use it at night. "They want to see if I need oxygen. What a bunch of crap." She is obstinate. "At my age? What the hell is the point?"

## IX.

The mythology of the American West, which is an extension of the larger American mythology that begat it, goes like this: the land and the air and the watersheds and the species and everything down to a singular broom of spindly bog sedge, are ours. It has all been willed to us by some greater power, and it is all there for our taking. Manifest Destiny told us that the American West was the Garden of Eden all over again, a notion nineteenth-century travel writers like Horace Greeley, John Codman, and Clarence King promoted variously. To suggest that we have abandoned the garden mythology for a land-wise, water-wise,

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<sup>7</sup> For reasons that aren't exactly clear, emphysema is more common in men than it is in women, a fact that offered some hope for my grandma's health.

air-wise ideology is foolhardy. Manifest Destiny still runs in our blood, and is the blank check that funds strip-mining, feedlots, and agri-giants. And mitigative measures such as reclamation do little to offset the consequences of our dominant mythologies. After all, reclamation presupposes that whatever is being reclaimed was ours to claim in the first place. We believe this mythology so entirely that we have created a federal agency—the Bureau of Reclamation—in its honor.

Evidence that threatens to unravel our garden mythology—that suggests that the pristine is polluted, that the virgin is penetrated, or that the Buena Ventura was imaginative—is very often met with denial, derision, or dismissiveness. Consider, for instance, a recent AP article about the air quality in Soda Springs: “People living in the area of Soda Springs . . . have a health risk score that is nearly 109 times higher than the national average for other neighborhood tracts included in the 2000 census. The Soda Springs census tract ranks 283<sup>rd</sup> out of the nation’s 65,443 census tracts for the highest risk of industrial air pollution in the country.”

The article cites the air in my hometown as the thirteenth most polluted in the nation. It also says that federal regulators point to two culprits behind this diseased air: Monsanto and Agrium, a local corporation that produces industrial amounts of fertilizer.

Three days after this article surfaced, I scanned this headline in the *Caribou County Sun*, my hometown’s newspaper: “Monsanto Circulates Fact Sheet to Correct Health Risk Story.” The “fact sheet” was released hours after the AP article appeared, and no one in Soda Springs questioned, at least publicly, the veracity of the document. Monsanto’s message was clear and unwavering: *The AP article was absurd. It was flat wrong. Their data modeling methodology was botched; nothing could be further from the truth.*

I was troubled for any number of reasons. The intriguing way the paper framed the debate: the “fact sheet” correcting the “story.” Monsanto’s lightning-fast reaction. The sweeping assurances, the brio in their insistence. The fox insuring us the henhouse is shipshape, that Eden is still Eden, and that all is well.<sup>8</sup> But I was most troubled by what was not said, by the holes in the logic. The AP story, as they termed it, may very well have been flawed. The data could have been skewed. But this is hardly a yes-the-air-is-polluted, no-it’s-not dilemma

as Monsanto's fact sheet would have us believe. I am not a scientist, but I can say with some certainty that data sets—especially those dealing in parts per million—rarely work in absolutes, but rather gradations. Maybe the air in Soda Springs is not the thirteenth most industrially polluted in the nation, but could it be the sixteenth or seventeenth, or fifth for that matter? It is difficult to know. What is not difficult to know, however, is that the air in Soda Springs today is not the same elastic air John Codman once sought to relieve his asthma.

X.

It is commonly known that coal miners used to truck caged canaries into the mines as instruments that warned of imminent danger. The canaries' hypersensitive respiratory systems could detect a sudden shift in the air quality, and should the shaft fill with carbon monoxide, the canaries would tip over, giving the miners their short, albeit only, chance to evacuate.

On an already-hot morning in August of 1996, Scott Dominguez, an old high school friend of mine, did not have such a chance to evacuate. He had gone to work that morning, like he did every morning, at Evergreen Resources, Inc., a Soda Springs company that converted mining by-product trucked in from Kerr-McGee (another local operation) into fertilizer. That morning, Scott's boss, Allen Elias—an industrial tycoon infamous for violating multiple environmental safeguards—ordered Scott to clean the sludge out of the bottom of a twenty-five thousand gallon tank. Elias sent Scott into the tank without protective clothing, and when Scott asked for a respirator, his boss seethed: "There's nothing in that tank but mud and water. It's as safe as ordinary shampoo."

Fearful of losing his job, Scott descended into the darkness of the tank. Armed with nothing but a fire hose and broom, Scott went to work. But it wasn't long before he knew something was wrong. By the

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<sup>8</sup> Monsanto is not beyond reproach in the arena of environmental matters. For over four decades they knowingly saturated the small town of Anniston, Alabama, with PCBs (carcinogenic industrial coolants) by unloading "millions of pounds" of the waste into landfills and streams. They were sued and fined seven hundred million dollars in human and ecological damages. Anniston is now virtually uninhabitable as a result of the contamination.

time two of his co-workers started yelling down into the tank, Scott had already pitched face-first into the gray sludge. An ordinary canary would have been dead once it was lowered into the tank because it was filled with hydrogen cyanide gas. Scott suffered irreparable brain and physical damage. The EPA launched an investigation into Evergreen Resources, and the case climbed to the US Supreme Court. Now Elias sits in a Texas prison and Scott struggles day to day with speech and motor skills.

I cannot pass over the haunting irony of Evergreen as the name of a company that converted waste into fertilizer and nearly killed its employees in the process. If there were ever an ideological disconnect between our mythology and the results of that mythology, Evergreen Resources might typify it. Doesn't the name "Evergreen" connote notions of perpetuity and fecundity? Couldn't the company also be called The Perpetual Garden? Maybe so. Another example of this disconnect is shown in a recent Kerr-McGee television commercial. It shows a mountain desert brushed with fields of snow. A Bel-Air blue sky. Wild horses thunder across the open space and then slow, stop, and nudge what is presumably a natural gas plant. The assuring voice-over—set against some faintly patriotic background music—talks of fuel exploration (mining) and wild nature (streams, meadows, air) existing as one, not as strange bedfellows but as lovers. The machine kissing the garden.

XI.

We need the miner's canary as metaphor. We need it for the short term. The warning. The alarm system telling us that the air is no longer air, that night has become day, and that the Great Buena Ventura runs not through Utah's west desert, but through Eden, and that its headwaters are found in our imaginative dreams. What is most important though is that we find a canary for the long term, one whose respiratory system is hypersensitive to changes that can and will occur hundreds of years from now. We need a metaphor that will free us from our indenture to mythology. But as long as we can walk to our faucets and expect water, and as long as we can trust cigarette packages and fact sheets, Monsanto, Hanford, and Evergreen, and as long as we can step outside and expect the air to be there, pure and bracing, the mythology will march on with real consequences hanging in the balance.