As we saw in Part 2, preromantic poets tended to use personification allegorically, to represent abstract ideas. Examples range from the characters in Spenser’s *The Faerie Queene* and Chaos, Night, Sin, and Death in Book II of Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, to Pity, Wisdom, and the like in Gray’s “Hymn to Adversity.” Wordsworth initiated the tendency, adopted by fellow Romantics, to personify natural objects (the “dancing daffodils” in “I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud”). Most American nature writers, from Thoreau to the present, use personification within the Wordsworthian tradition. While it would be incorrect to state that contemporary nature writing is a mere rehash of nineteenth-century British Romanticism or New England Transcendentalism, it is the inheritor and developer of views on nature and the means of language to apprehend it as first devised by Wordsworth, Coleridge, Emerson, Thoreau, and, of course, Charles Darwin. I am in this section predominantly concerned with the ecocentric personifications of a group of nature writers, but I do not suggest that all of their personifications are of this type.

This section shows how personification is a major rhetorical tool in the work of eleven American nature writers—Thoreau, John Muir, Mary Austin, Aldo Leopold, Loren Eiseley, Edward Abbey, Annie Dillard, Terry Tempest Williams, Jonathan Waterman, Erik Reece, and Ellen Meloy—all of whom write to (among other things) describe and ultimately argue for the preservation of wilderness. My analysis, which unfolds in rough chronological order, is hardly exhaustive in analyzing the ecocentric personification in the works of these writers,
but it is, I hope, inclusive enough to show the critical importance of personification to the artistic expression of ecocentrism. This study could easily include analyses of the nonfiction of John Burroughs, Rachel Carson, Sigurd Olson, Joseph Wood Krutch, Ann Zwinger, Peter Matthiessen, Barry Lopez, Rick Bass, and others, but the writers I discuss in this section form a reasonable representation from the standpoint of influence, geography, chronology, style—and in their varied uses of ecocentric personification. Although he is by no means the first American writer preoccupied with wilderness, Thoreau was the first to show the importance of wilderness for human freedom and intellect, so I begin with him.

**Henry David Thoreau**

“The ecocentric root of modern environmentalism,” writes Timothy O’Riordan, “is nourished by the philosophies of the romantic transcendentalists of mid-nineteenth-century America” (3). No New England Transcendentalist, Emerson included, had more influence than Thoreau on future nature writing in America. His viewpoint is ecocentric, yet his writings, which often veer toward misanthropy, are ultimately more concerned with nature as a repository for human tropes than with nature in itself. Wilderness, Roderick Nash writes, “was ultimately significant to Thoreau for its beneficial effect on thought” (89). In his journal, Thoreau writes, “What is Nature unless there is an eventful human life passing within her?” (Journal 5: 472). But Thoreau’s humanism does not undermine an essentially ecocentric viewpoint; humans, along with their need for commerce, are for Thoreau included in what would later be called ecosystems. In *Walden*, confronted with a neighbor who has been working hard to supply his family with material comforts, Thoreau writes, “the only true America is that country where you are at liberty to pursue such a mode of life as may enable you to do without these, and where the state does not endeavor to compel you to sustain the slavery and war and other superfluous expenses which directly or indirectly result from the use of such things” (205). Leaving aside Thoreau’s bitterness toward the Mexican War, the words “directly or indirectly” show that Thoreau believed that ecology and human economy are interlinked.

Personifications, many of them ecocentric, play an important role in much of Thoreau’s work, early and late.¹ His first mature piece of prose, “A Winter Walk,” written while living in New York in 1843, leads the reader on a tour of a beneficent natural area. Fulfilling the dictum in Emerson’s *Nature* that “Words are signs of natural facts” (13), Thoreau