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LINES IN  
THE WATER

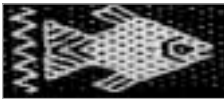


Nature and Culture at Lake Titicaca

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PREFACE      Lakes



Water: the most commonplace of liquids and the most essential, it quenches our thirst and brings green to our world. It is the most mutable as well. It freezes into ice, it vaporizes into steam, and, as a liquid, it assumes an endless variety of forms: a soft drizzle, a placid pond, a waterfall that can be heard for miles, a raging sea whose waves tower a hundred feet high. We can cup it in our hands and drown in its depths.

Water: the favored element of storytellers, who are drawn to its unmatched capacity to stir the imagination. The oceans bring to mind infinity. By showing the puny and fragile nature of human existence, they underscore the magnitude of the human will as it seeks to accomplish its ends. The sea is the realm that challenges and transforms the heroes of antiquity, like Odysseus, who finds the journey home as difficult as the war. It defines as well modern heroes and antiheroes, like Captain Ahab,

destroyed by his obsessive quest for the great white whale. Rivers, too, are the stuff of stories. Characters can float downriver, like Huck Finn on the raft, fleeing a confining order, or they can travel upriver, like Marlow in *Heart of Darkness*, moving toward a confrontation with utter savagery. Rivers suggest movement, quests, life itself.

As I pondered the task of writing a book about Lake Titicaca, I often thought that lakes lack such dramatic power. Of the myriad attributes of water, they display only its plainness. Smaller than oceans, stiller than rivers, they simply sit, confined by their shores. Surely someone must have written an engaging book about a lake, I said to a friend one day, but the only one that we could think of was Garrison Keillor's *Lake Wobegon Days*. No wonder: a lake is a good place to spend an afternoon swimming or fishing, as is the habit of the sturdy Minnesotans whose lives provide Keillor with the material for his humor.

Troubled from time to time by such examples of the apparently prosaic quality of lakes, I feared that I would not be able to draw readers into the story that so engaged me about the fishermen of a distant lake high in the Andes. In response to this concern, I developed a plan. I would search out books about lakes and read them. They might lead me to discover some engaging aspect of lakes that had eluded me. Friends and bookstore clerks helped me assemble a list of books that provided me with my bedtime reading for several months.

I began with Theodore Dreiser's *An American Tragedy*, a book that I dimly recalled hearing of as a classic early-twentieth-century American novel. A solid, though perhaps overlong, piece of realist fiction, it centers on the life of Clyde Griffiths, who moves to a factory town in upstate New York, takes a job as a supervisor, and meets two young women: Sondra, a pretty, if vapid, member of one of the town's wealthiest families, and Roberta, a charming, vivacious worker in the factory. He attends parties with the former and has a clandestine affair with the latter, during which she becomes pregnant and is unable to obtain an abortion. She wants to marry Clyde before the baby is born, but he retains the hope that his romance with Sondra might flourish. Clyde persuades Roberta to leave the town and spend some time with her parents, while he continues to attend parties with Sondra.



Morning light, Capachica Peninsula. Photograph by Tim Kittel.

Increasingly afraid that Clyde will abandon her, Roberta presses him to see her. He agrees to join her at a lake where they can go boating. Before he meets her, he comes across a newspaper article about an accidental drowning of an unidentified man and woman in a lake. The thought of killing Roberta fascinates and horrifies him. They meet at a train station, travel to the lake, and register at an inn. When he takes her out on the lake in a rowboat, she accidentally falls into the water. He watches her flounder, he hears her desperate pleas, but he does not rescue her. She drowns. He flees; his attempts to conceal the fact of his involvement in her death are unsuccessful. The trail of clues that he has left leads the police to him. He is found, and at the end he is executed for her murder.

As the creator of a work of fiction, Dreiser could have selected other circumstances in which Clyde could have failed to save Roberta—a fall, dismemberment by factory machinery, even an automobile accident. But these alternatives would not have presented as forcefully her sense of false security in the crucial chapters. With an open view all around them

on the lake, it seemed that no threat could lurk hidden, as it might in a city or a forest. Roberta is relaxed and trusting, for once untroubled by her worries that Clyde might not wish to marry her. She sings and talks happily as Clyde rows. Her cheerful mood and the mild innocence of the outing in a rowboat heighten the reader's perception of Clyde's depravity. Her death also underscores the danger that she had not seen. Her drowning is prolonged as, struggling and crying, she sinks, rises, and sinks again.

Water and journeys: *An American Tragedy* links them in a very specific way. Odysseus and Captain Ahab voyage on the ocean; Huck, Jim, and Marlow on rivers. By contrast, Clyde and Roberta travel to, not on, a lake. The lake is a destination that the characters visit and leave, rather than the setting of the novel. The outing on the lake is a single episode in the story of their romance. Oceans and rivers draw adventurers, but lakes attract vacationers, who enjoy the views across to the opposite shore and who go swimming or boating with ease and security in protected waters, undisturbed by strong currents, reassured by the land that is always in comfortable proximity should a storm develop. In *An American Tragedy* and other books, this smallness and security prove to be illusory. For Dreiser, lakes serve to demonstrate the contrast between appearance and reality. Clyde sees the dangers in a lake that looks safe to Roberta. This contrast fuels the suspense that grips many readers of the book and viewers of the films based on it: Will Roberta drown? Will Clyde escape?

The lake as a destination in a journey; the suspense that develops as the protagonist and reader grow aware of false appearances; the plot that turns as the narrator reveals that one character has been able to see beneath surfaces: these elements fit together in a variety of books. In one of the great 1940s hard-boiled detective novels, Raymond Chandler's *The Lady in the Lake*, the detective Philip Marlowe, searching for the missing wife of a wealthy man, travels to a lakeside resort in the mountains of southern California. Under a dock near some vacation cabins, he finds a partially decomposed body. Her hair, clothing, and jewelry suggest that she is another woman who recently ran off from her husband, in this case the caretaker of the cabins. Her identity changes twice in the course of the novel before Marlowe, in the final chapters, uncovers the tangled story of greed, lust, jealousy, and deception that led to several murders.

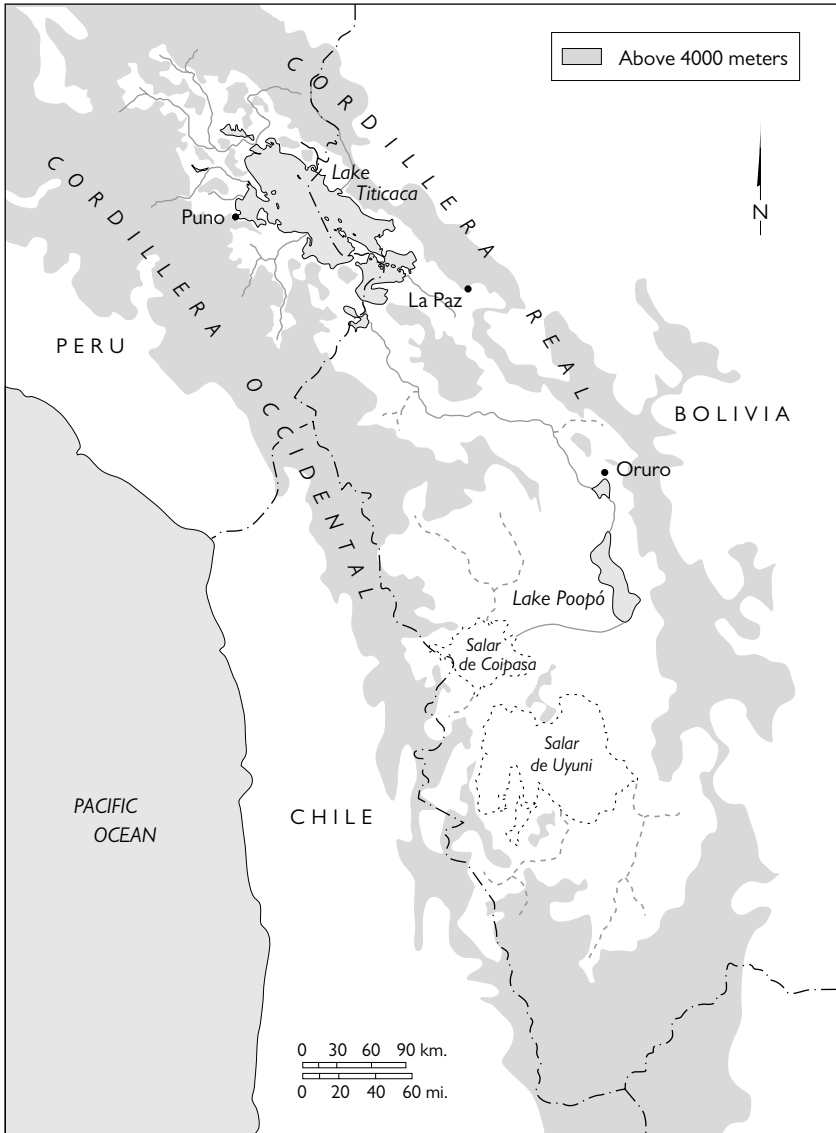
In her novel *Surfacing*, Margaret Atwood develops this contrast be-

tween appearance and reality in a different manner. An artist travels with her lover and another couple to a lake and the cabin in northern Quebec where she spent her summers as a child, but to which she has not returned for many years. The suspense lies in her search. She seeks to learn about her father, who has disappeared at the lake. As the book unfolds, it becomes evident that she is seeking as well to find her inner self and a way of being in her body (she questions both conventional and bohemian forms of diet and sexuality). Boating and swimming on the lake, she observes birds and other people and understands them very differently from her companions, who are doltish filmmakers. Diving into the lake's depths, she sees petroglyphs left by Indians and finds her father's drowned body. These hidden secrets lead her to recognitions about her past and her place in nature. Increasingly alienated from the social world of commerce, violence, and male pride, she becomes invisible to her companions. Because their filmmaking project directs their attention to artificial images and to appearances, they are often unable to see her in the water or in the bushes on the shore. In the final chapters, she decides to conceive a child and to return from the lake to society, where she will start to rebuild her life on new terms—one of the many acts of surfacing in the book. Though Atwood's characters, plot, and style are very different from those of Dreiser or Chandler, her book resembles theirs in the development and resolution of suspense through a character who travels to a lake and who sees beyond appearances.

Written with the author's characteristic restraint, Anita Brookner's *Hotel du Lac* contains less action than the other books, and it is entirely lacking in corpses. Nonetheless, it develops the themes about lakes that are present in *An American Tragedy*, *The Lady in the Lake*, and *Surfacing*. Edith Hope, a writer of romantic novels, travels from her home in London to a comfortable lakeshore hotel in Switzerland in early autumn. The understated suspense centers around two mysteries: why did Edith's friends pressure her to take this trip, and what is the nature of her relationship with David, to whom she keeps writing letters that she does not send? Cautious in facing emotion, Edith allows herself a series of reveries that gradually reveal the answers. She is seeking refuge from the disorder that ensued after she abruptly broke off her engagement to Geoffrey, the wealthy but dull and conventional man whose offer of marriage she

had accepted not out of love or even affection, but out of dissatisfaction with her life and with her stagnating affair with David. Strolling along the lakeshore, visiting a nearby village, and eating in the hotel dining room, she reflects on her past and meets the other guests. Among them is Mr. Neville, whose wife left him a few years earlier. He courts her; he seems to appreciate her distinctive mix of reserve and wit; he proves to be even wealthier than Geoffrey, though neither dull nor conventional. He takes her on an excursion in a boat on the lake. During the trip, he proposes to her, and she agrees to marry him. Back on shore, as she gains a deeper view of the other guests and the lakeshore hotel itself, she discovers the selfish and cruel nature that lies beneath Neville's seeming sophistication and generosity. She has grown more self-aware during her brief stay at the lake. Abandoning Neville, she returns to England, resolved to live her life more fully. Like the artist in Atwood's *Surfacing*, Edith Hope is far less violent than Clyde and Marlowe, the male protagonists of the male novelists Dreiser and Chandler. Nonetheless, she encounters the elements of suspense, appearance, and discovery in the lake-as-destination theme along lines very much like those of the other three characters.

These novels held my attention with their strong characters and plots, their distinctive prose styles, and their significant elements of social critique. However, they did not allay my concerns that it would be difficult to write engagingly about a lake, since they failed to capture the qualities of their respective lakes that I wished to express in writing about Lake Titicaca. I thought back to the lake, my mind turning to Socca, the village that I had visited most often, and to Cirilo Cutipa, the local farmer with whom I stayed when I went there. I recalled the walk that we took so many times. We would descend from the slight rise on which his house was built and continue down a narrow path between fields to the lake. We sometimes followed the curve of the shore to a beach where fishermen kept their boats. On other occasions, we stayed for a while at the edge of the water, conversing or looking out in silence over the lake. Reeds grew in the shallows close to us, and beyond them were the open waters of the lake, stretching many miles to the tall mountains on the distant shore. Cirilo and I usually saw a few fishing boats, their small size



The altiplano in Peru and Bolivia.



Cirilo Cutipa on a ridge between Socca and Ilave.  
Photograph by Ben Orlove.

accentuating the immensity of the lake and of the altiplano, as the great Andean plateau, surrounded by high cordilleras, is known.

The novels, I realized, do not convey the scale of a lake like Titicaca. Its surface area of 8,562 square kilometers makes it nearly four times larger than Lake Mistassini, the largest lake in Quebec, where Atwood set *Surfacing*; more than fourteen times larger than Lake Geneva, the largest lake in the Alps and the one at which *Hotel du Lac* takes place; and many times larger than the lakes in the other novels. One looks across Lake Titicaca not to woods or cabins or docks or small towns, as in these novels, but to distant mountains.

Nor do these books portray the kind of mood one finds in the Andean landscape where Lake Titicaca is situated. The novels each center on the



Two fishermen retrieving gill nets. Photograph by Ben Orlove.

theme of travelers lulled into a false ease that is suddenly disturbed by some surprise or threat. If those lakes are places of vacation and danger, Lake Titicaca is a place of sustenance and of memory. This sustenance was evident in the rhythms of the work that I saw in the village. The seasons dictated the tasks in the fields, and with the herds as well, since the cattle fed on grass on the hills above the village in the rainy season and on reeds from the lake in the dry season. The ability of the land and the lake to nourish human life was demonstrated to me at every meal. Cirilo and the other villagers ate with great relish the soups, stews, and other dishes in which the dozens of varieties of potatoes, grains, and beans appeared, often with fish or meat, in many combinations. This country fare was one of the aspects of village life that they most missed when they traveled to visit a market or to work for a while, and that they most enjoyed when they returned.

Equally evident was the centrality and immediacy of memory to the villagers. In conversation, Cirilo often spoke of his grandparents and of earlier generations, telling of the changes in their houses and their crops,

of the conflicts with neighboring villages and with abusive officials. He would sometimes refer as well to more remote times, a mythic past of strange beings who lived before the Spaniards and even before the Incas in a world without a sun. Indeed, many spots in the landscape were linked to memory. It seemed that for every hill, practically for every cliff or boulder, the villagers could recount a story of an event in the past.

Routine activities such as work and meals, conversations about family and neighbors: it is in the depiction of lives of local people that the novels failed me most completely as models for writing about Lake Titicaca. The drunken caretaker in *The Lady in the Lake*, the self-effacing waiters and shopkeepers in *Hotel du Lac*, the surly, narrow-minded French-Canadians in *Surfacing* are all caricatures. Their routine and limited existence offers in each case a contrast for the suspense and discoveries of the main character. By contrast, I wanted to write about the complexity of the villagers who live on the shores of Lake Titicaca. Their efforts to maintain traditions that outsiders sought to undermine, their fiercely strong attachments to their lands and to their lake, their elaborate sense of dignity and justice, their capacity for storytelling and for humor—all these were qualities that I wanted to convey, requiring a depth utterly absent from the novels.

I found a better model for writing about lakes in a very different book, *Walden*. Neither an adventurer nor a vacationer, Thoreau remains close to home. He settles near a lake in his native Massachusetts. He undertakes many activities—building a cabin, cultivating a garden, strolling through woods, conversing with the residents of the area, simply sitting still. He does not resolve suspense but rather encounters many surprises. Walden Pond intrigues and delights him with the shifting textures of its surface, the variety of shades of blue in its depths, the course of a loon that dives and emerges again and again, and the sudden appearances and disappearances of fish. Though he comes to know it intimately, it always holds something new for him. It is as if lakes have voices and can always speak to us in unexpected ways:

One old man, who has been a close observer of Nature, and seems as thoroughly wise in regard to all her operations as if she had been put upon the stocks [the frame on which boats are hauled out of the water so that they can be repaired] when he was a boy, and he had helped to lay

her keel,—who has come to his growth, and can hardly acquire more of natural lore if he should live to the age of Methuselah,—told me, and I was surprised to hear him express wonder at any of Nature's operations, for I thought that there were no secrets between them, that one spring day he took his gun and boat, and thought that he would have a little sport with the ducks. There was ice still on the meadows, but it was all gone out of the river, and he dropped down without obstruction from Sudbury, where he lived, to Fair-Haven Pond, which he found, unexpectedly, covered for the most part with a firm field of ice. It was a warm day, and he was surprised to see so great a body of ice remaining. Not seeing any ducks, he hid his boat on the north or back side of an island in the pond, and then concealed himself in the bushes on the south side, to await them. The ice was melted for three or four rods from the shore, and there was a smooth and warm sheet of water, with a muddy bottom, such as the ducks love, within, and he thought it likely that some would be along pretty soon. After he had lain still there about an hour he heard a low and seemingly very distant sound, but singularly grand and impressive, unlike any thing he had ever heard, gradually swelling and increasing as if it would have a universal and memorable ending, a sullen rush and roar, which seemed to him all at once like the sound of a vast body of fowl coming in to settle there, and, seizing his gun, he started up in haste and excited; but he found, to his surprise, that the whole body of ice had started while he lay there, and drifted in to the shore, and the sound he had heard was made by its edge grating on the shore,—at first gently nibbled and crumbled off, but at length heaving up and scattering its wrecks along the island to a considerable height before it came to a stand still.

Striking, too, is the difference in organization between *Walden* and the other books. Rather than consisting of a single narrative that moves forward (with occasional flashbacks or foreshadowing), it contains a series of chapters that are separate essays. Some are organized loosely around the cycle of a year rather than the forward movement of a plot; others address economic or historical themes. Thoreau's observations of nature touch off reflections that are connected to each other through their overlapping philosophical, political, literary, and scientific elements. In the other books, the lake is a destination; for Thoreau, it is a presence, one that reveals the manifold aspects of a single truth. The truth that he gradually discovers is that transcendence may be achieved through simple living, personal honesty, and direct contact with nature.

I found a few other books that resemble *Walden*. *Refuge* is a memoir by Terry Tempest Williams, a writer and naturalist whose family has lived in Utah since the early years of Mormon settlement. The book is set on the shores of Great Salt Lake during a period when the lake level is rising, threatening a bird refuge with inundation. At the same time, Williams's mother is dying of cancer. With the exception of the prologue and the epilogue, each of the book's numerous short chapters bears a double name: a kind of local bird and the level of the lake; for example, "White Pelicans. Lake level 4,209.90'." No bird's name is repeated, but the lake level in the last chapter is precisely the same as its level in the first. Some of these chapters center on Williams's seeing the bird for which it is titled; in others, the bird is not mentioned in the body of the chapter, but some attribute of it—its plumage or size or movement—underscores the chapter's mood. The variety of birds echoes the variety of feelings that sweep over Williams as she witnesses her mother's last weeks, and as she reflects on many matters: the nature of illness, the lives of her parents, brothers, and grandparents, the different facets of religion, the efforts of government agencies to manage the natural fluctuations of Great Salt Lake. By the end, the lake has returned to its normal level, and Williams has come to accept her mother's death and to accept as well the different ways in which her relatives responded to it. This acceptance is the truth whose many aspects Williams discovers at the lake where her family has lived for generations.

Thoreau and Williams describe different lakes in different centuries, and they draw on different religious traditions. Nonetheless, they both discover an enduring multifaceted truth within a lake. The very finitude of lakes highlights the nature of this truth. A different view may be seen from each point on shore, at each moment in the day and at each season of the year, and yet the lake is always the same, a single bounded body of water. The different lakes call forth the same qualities of patience, attention, and immediacy; they offer the same possibility of surprise and transcendence. If the central image of nature in *An American Tragedy* and the other novels may be termed "lake as destination," in *Walden* and *Refuge* it may be called "lake as presence."

Mark Slouka's *Lost Lake*, a collection of short stories, certainly belongs

in this latter category as well. The eight longer stories differ in their subjects: a boy discovers why his neighbor, an elderly bird-watcher, captures turtles; an unhappy young wife has an affair with a stranger; a child accidentally drops a watch down the hole in an outhouse; a father and son meet several fishermen at the lake. The four shorter pieces, called “sketches,” depict a variety of objects and events. Yet the stories are connected by the small lake in upstate New York around which a number of Czech immigrants and their descendants have settled. In these stories, the lake, in its many aspects, stirs up old memories that reawaken longing and grief; it also creates hopes for freedom that can never be fully satisfied. The presence that the local people discover in the lake is the persistence of memory and the pain of exile. The lake creates a sense of loss—one of the multiple meanings of the collection’s title—that can lead to bitterness and cruelty but also, on occasion, to the compassion and generosity that make up the small, precious moments of redemption in these stories.

In this series of books on lakes as presences one might even include the Gospels. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John each tell the life of Jesus. Though they vary in many details, they all contain chapters that linger on the shores of the Sea of Galilee—a lake rather than an ocean. The New Testament has the difficult task of conveying the unfolding relationship between the apparently contradictory human and divine natures of Jesus. This relationship has often been seen within Jesus’ body—his temptation in the desert, his suffering on the cross, his ascension into heaven. It can also be seen in Jesus’ relationship to earthly and divine places. His early ministry is linked with this lake as firmly as his birth is associated with the village of Bethlehem, his crucifixion and resurrection with the city of Jerusalem, and the subsequent growth of his church with the journeys of the apostles across the seas to carry his message around the world. The presence of the lake links some of the most important miracles: the calming of the storm, the casting out of demons, the multiplication of the fishes and loaves, the walking on water. At this time of the early ministry, the larger tasks—the redemption of humanity from sin, the establishment of the universal church—still lie ahead, as do the greater miracles of the resurrection and the ascension. It is first necessary for the divine

nature of Jesus to be amply demonstrated. The most majestic features of nature—the ocean, tall mountains, the star-filled night sky—might seem better suited to this task. But it is a lake that provides the combination of finitude and variety, of familiarity and surprise, that itself parallels the awakening understanding, on the part of the humble villagers of the Galilee and the readers of the Gospels, of the divine nature contained within the man.

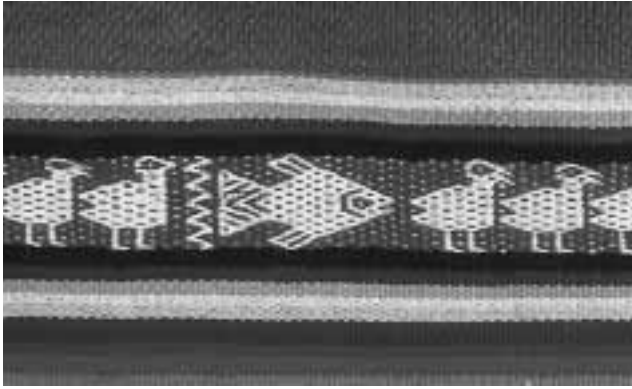
Perhaps even Lake Wobegon holds such a presence. Its breezes and aromas pervade Keillor's fictional reminiscences. Its shores draw young and old to many of the richest moments of their lives. Indeed, its waters gave rise to the community: during the warm spring of 1851, two newcomers were tempted to swim and uncharacteristically removed their clothes. Prudence, the New England missionary, took off her "cumbersome petticoats," Basile, the French-Canadian trapper, his bearskin garments. To their union, consummated in the waters of the lake, were born the first white children in the area. The lake's fish attracted Norwegian immigrants and continue to delight their descendants, who, along with inhabitants of other origins, go fishing in all seasons and all moods. Ice-fishing from chilly shacks, they demonstrate their stalwart persistence. Rowing out before dawn to catch sunfish for a family breakfast on a summer vacation, they show enthusiasm and optimism. The lake allows them to express their capacity to face difficulties and to enjoy small pleasures—the qualities of strength and simplicity that lie at the core of American identity itself.

This second set of books, the lake-as-presence books, assured me that it is possible to write evocatively about lakes. Each of these books portrays with considerable sympathy the people who live by lakes. For all that Thoreau is quick to judge and condemn in the wearing effects of commerce and greed on ordinary people, he finds many individuals whose knowledge of nature and whose simple lives he respects. Williams cherishes her relatives and associates, including the ones whose views differ profoundly from her own. Even Keillor, who often makes fun of Midwestern provincialism, brings a tender affection to his humorous anecdotes. Moreover, the structure of these books—their format of linked essays—suggested that I did not need to present the history of

Lake Titicaca in strict chronological order, and that I could draw broadly from my own stays at the lake, the repeated visits that stretched from 1972 to 1995 and the two periods, of nearly a year each, in the 1970s and 1980s when I lived on the shores of the lake.

In the mass of material in my study, I could see the outlines of a book like these. The thousands of pages of field notes and documents from archives reflected many aspects of the lake, aspects that can, as Thoreau indicated, be both surprising and familiar. They pointed to a single theme: the lake as a sign of the endurance of the villagers themselves. In these remote highlands, the native villagers have struggled to retain their territories and their distinctive way of life in the face of direct conquest and other pressures. They have succeeded in maintaining a fair degree of control over the fields and pastures that compose their lands, but the lake, I came to understand, embodies their tenacity with particular force. The land contains the towns with the lawyers' offices, police stations, and jails from which the government presses on them. The native languages of Quechua and Aymara, spoken openly in the villages, often acquire a taint of backwardness in town. The land contains as well the roads on which vehicles travel, bringing strangers into the villages. But the lake is wholly the villagers'. The forms of national law, even the national language of Spanish, seem not to operate out on the lake. Outsiders lose themselves in the open waters and in the wide, reed-filled marshes where the villagers move freely. The townspeople may look at the lake from afar, but the villagers observe it closely, noting every shift of the weather, tracing the annual rhythm of the lake's rise and fall with the alternation of rainy and dry seasons. They hold the lake in memory as they hold it in view. It is the recollections shared with kin and neighbors, the widely told stories of past events, that shape the history of the lake—a history that is, above all, one of continuity. Despite the many shifts—the new species of fish, the new kinds of boats and gear and markets—families have retained the established rhythms of the work of fishing, and villages have assured that local custom governs the fishermen.

My profession, anthropology, is filled with differing opinions these days. Some might argue that the only reason for an anthropologist who studies indigenous villagers to examine images of lakes in Western litera-



A carrying cloth from Capachica, with a band depicting a trout and coots. Photograph by Ben Orlove.

ture would be to extirpate such images in order to approach the local views more cleanly—or to recognize these images among the ones that have been imposed on the local peoples. Such caution is salutary; in recent decades, anthropologists have become increasingly aware of the pervasive tendency to look at other cultures and to see not these cultures, but rather the images of non-Western cultures fabricated by Western ones. I do wish to recognize that the Andean villagers understand their lake in ways that are distinct from the authors of these books. The individual and family vacations in *Hotel du Lac* and *Lost Lake* are as different from the villagers' collective celebration of festivals as the detective work in *The Lady in the Lake* is from the procedures of village assemblies that deliberate local violations of law. Nor do these books contain myths, like the accounts of stone boats that in ancient times traveled around the lake from sacred islands, or stories of the supernatural beings, like the *qatari*, or sea serpent, in which the villagers believe. Above all, the theme of pristine wilderness in most of the lake books stands in counterpoint to the theme of conquest that is strong in the villagers' minds.

Nonetheless, in reflecting on how lakes are depicted in these books and in the words and lives of the villagers, I am as struck by the similarities as by the differences. The idea that a lake can suggest an abiding presence does not seem to me a Western creation that I chose to adopt and im-

pose. I think of it as a theme shared in several places—perhaps in many places—and developed differently in each. If anthropology rests on uncovering and depicting cultural differences, it also rests on the common humanity of anthropologists and the people whom they study. The relation to landscape, I believe, is one of realms in which this affinity among different people is strongest. In the present era of fascination with the human body, it can be recognized that because anthropologists are born to parents, they can readily study kinship systems; because they fall ill, they can gain insight into healing practices and beliefs. It seems to me that landscape has a similar effect. Much as the capacities of the human body for sexual reproduction and for illness provide commonalities to human cultures, so too does the capacity of the human body to experience the natural world: to walk, above all, in warm weather and cold, under sunny skies and in rain; to feel the utter familiarity of established routes and the great novelty of unknown ones; to tire after long distances and to walk again with restored strength after a rest. I do not wish to assume that these experiences are identical, because they draw on meanings that are immanent in the natural world. Neither do I wish to say that the natural world is an empty vessel into which each culture pours its own set of meanings. I simply wish to suggest that these books aid rather than hinder my efforts to comprehend how the villagers of Lake Titicaca understand their landscapes and their lives; that listening to Thoreau and Williams and Slouka, and even to Keillor, helps me listen to the Andean villagers as well.