
2013

The Limits of Violence: People and Property in Edward Abbey's "Monkeywrenching" Novels

David Thomas Sumner
Linfield College, dsumner@linfield.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.linfield.edu/englfac_pubs



Part of the [American Literature Commons](#)

DigitalCommons@Linfield Citation

Sumner, David Thomas, "The Limits of Violence: People and Property in Edward Abbey's
"Monkeywrenching" Novels" (2013). *Faculty Publications*. Published Version. Submission 5.
https://digitalcommons.linfield.edu/englfac_pubs/5

This Published Version is protected by copyright and/or related rights. It is brought to you for free via open access, courtesy of DigitalCommons@Linfield, with permission from the rights-holder(s). Your use of this Published Version must comply with the [Terms of Use](#) for material posted in DigitalCommons@Linfield, or with other stated terms (such as a Creative Commons license) indicated in the record and/or on the work itself. For more information, or if you have questions about permitted uses, please contact digitalcommons@linfield.edu.

The Limits of Violence: People and Property in Edward Abbey's "Monkeywrenching" Novels

David Thomas Sumner
Linfield College

Abstract

This paper explores Edward Abbey's fiction asking what kind of ethical imperative his monkeywrenching novels offer. While advocating the destruction of property in defense of wilderness, *The Monkey Wrench Gang* draws a clear ethical distinction between the destruction of property in defense of wilderness and the harming of people. Yet the sequel, *Hayduke Lives!*, blurs this ethical line when a security guard is killed during the novel's final eco-sabotage scene. After exploring several possible textual explanations for this apparent change and then interviewing several of Abbey's close friends regarding this issue, the author concludes that the shift does not represent a change in Abbey's worldview, but rather a change in fictional circumstance.

Keywords: Edward Abbey, radical environmentalism, environmental ethics, eco-fiction

Resumen

Este trabajo explora la ficción de Abbey cuestionando qué clase de imperativo ético ofrecen sus novelas "monkeywrenching". Mientras aboga por la destrucción de la propiedad en defensa de la naturaleza, *The Monkey Wrench Gang* también traza una distinción ética clara entre la destrucción de la propiedad en defensa de la naturaleza y el daño a la gente. Pero la secuela, *Hayduke Lives!*, desdibuja esta línea cuando un guardia muere durante la escena final de eco-sabotaje de la novela. Tras explorar las diversas explicaciones textuales posibles para este cambio aparente, y después de entrevistar a varios amigos de Abbey en relación a este asunto, el autor concluye que la variación no representa un cambio en la visión del mundo de Abbey, sino más bien un cambio en las circunstancias de la ficción.

Palabras clave: Edward Abbey, ecología radical, ética medioambiental, eco-ficción

In the pantheon of environmental sainthood, Edward Abbey sits alongside Aldo Leopold, Rachel Carson, Arne Naess, and David Brower. But for a radical fringe, Abbey is patron saint. His beatification came in large part because of his 1975 novel, *The Monkey Wrench Gang*. As Douglas Brinkley notes in his introduction to the Perennial Classics edition of 2000, "like Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle* [*The Monkey Wrench Gang* is] a rousing wake-up call, this time on behalf of

endangered species and old-growth redwoods" (xxi).¹ And, in the beginnings of the radical environmental movement, many heard the wake-up call.

The primary purpose of this paper, however, is not to explore the connection between radical environmentalism and Abbey's fiction, but rather to explore Abbey's fiction itself and to ask what kind ethical imperative is offered in *The Monkey Wrench Gang*, and its sequel, *Hayduke Lives!*. *The Monkey Wrench Gang*, while advocating the destruction of property in defense of wilderness, draws a clear ethical line between people and property, a line that seems to be consistent with Abbey's other work from his master's thesis onward. Abbey's last novel, *Hayduke Lives!*, however, blurs this line in the final chase scene when GEM security guard, Jasper Benson Bundy, is shot and summarily tossed over the canyon rim. On its surface, this shooting appears to represent either a deep change in the author's ethical thinking, or a significant philosophical inconsistency. The reason for such a change is harder to pin down. The text—either in finished or manuscript form—offers no clear answer. However, after examining the available texts and reviewing the various critics, I interviewed four of Abbey's close friends: David Petersen, Doug Peacock, Dave Foreman, and Jack Loeffler. Because of Loeffler's insight, I will argue that Abbey did not see the killing of the security guard as a change in his thinking, but rather a change in fictional circumstance. Furthermore, from Abbey's view the key to understanding the shooting of the security guard as consistent is in understanding the relationship between Hayduke and Jack Burns. Yet, even with Loeffler's claim of a philosophical consistency, the shooting of the security guard still offers an ethical problem and a clear break with the ethical imperatives of the current radical environmental movement.

I

Critics Don Scheese and Paul Lindholdt have both noticed the "Bundy" problem. In "*Desert Solitaire: Counter-Friction to the Machine in the Garden*," Scheese notes that in "all but his most recent work Abbey is systematically careful not to suggest that intentional violence to humans be done in order to defend wilderness" (233). But Scheese, also surprised by the death of the security guard in *Hayduke Lives!*, feels that the fictional shooting "suggests that near the end of his life Abbey was more radical than he had been about the means by which wilderness is to be defended" (233).

Unlike Scheese, Paul Lindholdt argues for a more text-based explanation. Like Scheese, however, he also interprets this event as representing an end-of-life shift in Abbey's thinking, perhaps influenced by a change in the scale of assault on the western

¹ No doubt Abbey would reject environmental or any other type of sainthood. As Wendell Berry writes of Abbey: "No sooner has a label been stuck to his back by a somewhat hesitant well-wisher than he runs beneath a low limb and scrapes it off" (36). Yet, despite this discomfort, Abbey has played a significant role in inspiring others to actions in defense of the more-than-human world. Furthermore, *The Monkey Wrench Gang* played a key role in the genesis of the radical environmental movement.

landscape. In "Rage against the Machine: Edward Abbey and Neo-Luddite Thought," Lindholdt writes:

Some Abbey critics allege that the shooting death of the security guard at the conclusion of *Hayduke Lives!* represents a violation of the gang's code of ethics, too. But several extenuating circumstances moderate that harsh judgment. First, the character who pulled the trigger, Jack Burns, is not a member of the gang and had not learned about or committed to its rules; he is a throwback to Abbey's earlier novels and to the Wild West code that licensed bloodshed. Second, the stakes had changed greatly between the publication of the first book in 1975 and its sequel fifteen years later; forces of technocracy, devastating the West at rapid pace, had reached fantastic proportions..." (115)

Yet, despite this analysis, Lindholdt still sees the shooting as a problem, asserting that according to his ethical metric, *Hayduke Lives!* "falls outside the pale of acceptability" (116).²

After examining the texts and interviewing several of Abbey's closest friends, however, I would argue that neither Scheese nor Lindholdt are completely right. The "Bundy problem" does not represent a sign of increased radicalization late in Abbey's life, as they both speculate. However, Lindholdt is partially right. He correctly asserts, the shooting does not represent "a violation of the gang's code of ethics" because of extenuating circumstances (115). Furthermore, Lindholdt is on the right track when he sees Jack Burns as the key to understanding the shooting. However, Jack Burns is key, not because of his "Wild West code," but because of his relationship with Hayduke.

II

I hope to avoid some of the dangers of ethical criticism here. Ethical criticism can be too narrow—too sectarian, partisan, didactic—for the complexities of fiction. As Wayne Booth notes in *The Company We Keep: An Ethics of Fiction*: "The word 'ethical' may mistakenly suggest a project concentrating on quite limited moral standards" (8). Booth writes, "ethical criticism may be as clumsy as that of the old-style moralists and censors who would ban Kurt Vonnegut because the word 'fuck'" (5). I am attempting to avoid just such a "clumsy" criticism here. Furthermore, writers often rightly resist such ethical evaluation. For example in a 1982 editorial in *Environmental Ethics*, Abbey defends his novel: "please note that *The Monkey Wrench Gang* is a novel...and—I like to think—a work of art. It would be naive to read it as a tract, a program for action, or a manifesto" (*Ethics* 94).³ But it would be equally naive not to recognize that novels and

² Adding to Scheese and Lindholdt, Paul Bryant claims that Abbey's novels are more radical than his essays. See "Edward Abbey and Environmental Quixoticism" (37-39).

³ In this editorial, Abbey is speaking out of both sides of his mouth. After claiming that his book is merely a fiction, he then engages in a robust defense of sabotage also noting that sabotage rightly carried out "has never meant and has never implied the use of violence against living creatures," even going as far as to claim moral justification for the characters of the *Monkey Wrench Gang* (*Ethics* 94). In short, Abbey here and elsewhere (see his letters to other writers in *Postcards From Ed*, especially to Thomas McGuane and

other narratives make arguments, and arguments—as Kenneth Burke notes—translate into “symbolic actions” and “*action* implies the ethical” (11). In other words, what I am attempting here is to respect the fictional complexity of Edward Abbey’s monkeywrenching novels while examining the ethical implications of the world these novels create. To return to Booth, I am trying to employ an ethical criticism that tries “to describe the encounters of a story-teller’s ethos with that of the reader or listener” (8). Broadly, I want to consider how readers concerned with both our obligations to one another and to the more-than-human world should evaluate the fictional actions of the Doc, Bonnie, Hayduke, Seldom Seen, and the other characters in Abbey’s monkeywrenching novels. Furthermore, in the particular case of *The Monkey Wrench Gang*, Earth First! and other radical environmentalists have used the “symbolic actions” of these characters as inspiration for spiking trees and sugaring bulldozers. Therefore, more than most, Abbey’s monkeywrenching novels call for an ethical evaluation.

For such an evaluation, we must first understand the narrative tension Abbey creates between people and property. Whether in the fictional world of a novel or in real life, if you are willing to wreck a bulldozer, spike a tree, or take out a bridge, you always run the risk of not just damaging property, but of hurting people. In *The Monkey Wrench Gang*, Abbey uses this tension—the tension between destroying property and hurting living things—to move the plot forward. He always resolves the tension, however, and outlines an ethical imperative: it’s acceptable to destroy property in defense of wild things, but it is not acceptable to do violence to humans or other living things.

To understand the tension and the ethic, we must look at the text. Early on, around a campfire in the red-rock privacy of the Grand Canyon, the group begins to plan.

“We need a guide,” the doctor said.

“I know the country,” Smith said.

“We need a professional killer.”

“That’s me,” Hayduke said. “Murder is my specialty.”

Seldom Seen, however, is made uncomfortable by Hayduke:

“Hold on here,” Smith said, “I ain’t going along with that kind of talk.”

“Not people, Captain,” the doctor said. “We’re talking about bulldozers. Powershovels. Draglines. Earthmovers.” (69-70)

Two things occur here: one creates tension and the other dissipates it. Hayduke appears as a “professional killer,” putting pressure on the ethical limits of monkeywrenching, while at the same time the enemy is made into a machine. Only by turning the enemy into a machine are the saboteurs able to carry out their task. Doc repeatedly preaches on the machine’s evils. When Smith witnesses the strip mining occurring on the Navajo reservation, he finally understands: “It ain’t people.... It’s a mechanical animal.” “Now you’ve got it,” Doc agrees, “We’re not dealing with human beings. We’re up against the

Annie Dillard) recognizes that an ethical evaluation of fiction is appropriate, and often in his view, necessary.

megamachine. A megalomaniacal megamachine." (167). But he then reasserts the limit. "So long as we follow our cardinal rule," states Doc, "no violence to human beings" (170).

Doc's lectures become so common that two-thirds the way through the novel Abbey quits recording the details and merely writes: "Doc Sarvis gave his celebrated lecture on the megamachine" (305). More importantly, however, Hayduke's innate rashness highlights the dangers of monkeywrenching while Doc's rhetoric of the machine gives the characters their way forward. Despite a commitment to preserving human life, Hayduke is always armed to the teeth. We always wonder if Hayduke will cross the line and disregard human life in his mission to "save the fucking wilderness" (229).

After several disabled bulldozers, power shovels, draglines, and earthmovers, the monkeywrenching moves into high gear. The first wrenching that involves real risk to human life occurs at a strip mine in northern Arizona. Strip mining is a type of surface mining that engages some of the largest and most powerful machinery in mining, producing devastating environmental damage. To access the target minerals, the machines remove the "overburden." In other words, they remove all of the trees, rocks, soil, and other habitat in order to access, in this case, the underlying coal. Once the mining is finished, a moonscape is left behind. Because of the broad devastation that strip mining creates, the wrenchers find such mining particularly offensive. Abbey describes the scene:

Peering through the dust, the uproar, the movement, they could make out a pit some two hundred feet deep, four hundred feet wide, a mile long, walled on one side by a seam of coal, where power shovels ten stories high...gouged the earth, ripped the fossil rock from its matrix of soil and sandstone, dumped it in ten ton bites into the beds of haulers. (172)

The wrenchers figure if they blow a bridge while a train is on it, they will put the operation out of commission for a long time. To get their money's worth, they plan to wait for the automated, unoccupied train to roll onto the bridge before they blow it to "shitaree" (66).

The conflict comes, however, when they realize the automated train has an engineer aboard. Hayduke, from a hill overlooking the tracks, plans to signal Bonnie when the train has moved into the right place. Bonnie will then push the plunger down. But just as the train passes and Hayduke drops his arm to signal Bonnie, "he sees...the face of a man at the open window in the cab of the locomotive...the young man returns Hayduke's wave" (201). Despite all his previous tough talk, when Hayduke sees the young man, he is alarmed at the potential of taking human life. "Heart shocked to a stop, brain blanked dead, Hayduke dives into the earth with hands locked over his skull" (201). The machine has a face.

It's a close call, but because of a delay at the plunger, the young man escapes and no human life is lost. But Abbey pushes his ethic: the train incident emphasizes the risk of human casualties while attempting to preserve the more-than-human world. Naturally, the reader and the characters are relieved when the young man steps safely off of the train. The novel, however, continues to probe the ethical boundaries of eco-

sabotage. Only near the end of the novel does Abbey make clear the ethical line. While trying to escape capture in the maze, the gang is forced to choose between saving the life of the book's villain, Bishop Love, or escape.

Throughout the novel, Bishop Love pursues the gang. As Ann Ronald notes, for the conflict within the novel to be of real interest Abbey must put a face on the machine, and the face he chooses is that of the Bishop (196). Love is a Mormon bishop from the town of Blanding, Utah and is the head of the San Juan County Search and Rescue team.⁴ In addition, Love has investments in mining and drilling, and aspirations to be Utah's governor.

Love and his toadies spend most of their time in beefed-up, four-wheel-drives, racing across the desert in close pursuit of the wrenchers. After several more acts of wrenching, a long car chase ensues ending on foot in a section of the Utah desert called the Fins. As the chase comes to a climax, the wrenchers—exhausted and out of supplies—reach the end of a box canyon. With Love and his crew swiftly gaining on them, Hayduke scratches his way up a sandstone wall and throws a rope down to the others. All four climb out and are ready to escape when they hear someone at the bottom calling for Doc Sarvis. It turns out to be Bishop Love's younger brother, Sam. The Bishop has had a heart attack and he needs the doctor. Unlike the engineer, the life at stake here is not an innocent. This is Bishop Love, the worst environmental thug in the Four Corners. In contrast to the previous incident of the engineer leaping to safety, we are now rooting for the wrenchers and will see Love's death as, perhaps, justifiable. Love not only talks about violence—referring to Hayduke, he has said; "Well first I'll take my needle-nose pliers and remove a couple of his toenails. Then his back teeth. Then I'm gonna ask him where Seldom Seen is, and that Dr. Sarvis" (296). Love has also taken shots at Hayduke. "The bishop cocked his weapon, nodded to his men. They took aim and fired" (298). But despite the Bishop not sharing the wrenchers' ethic, and with escape within reach, Doc still does not hesitate; sure of arrest and prosecution, he grabs his black bag and asks to be lowered. Bonnie, also possessing medical expertise, follows.

Doc and Bonnie's actions make the novel's ethical stance clear: when human life is at stake, no matter whose, they will not hesitate to go to the rescue. Doc and Bonnie, however, are the two least likely to cross the line into true misanthropy. What about Capt. Smith? What about the well-armed, antisocial Hayduke? For George or Seldom Seen to surrender, however, would be of no aid to the Bishop; it only makes sense for them to escape over the top of the sandstone wall. For these two characters, the question of misanthropy persists, but is soon answered.

The chase ends with Smith under arrest and Hayduke holed up in a crevice high on a sandstone wall, surrounded by a small army of officers. Hayduke is also armed and does not hesitate to fire back at the assembled rifleman. However, despite the shower of bullets, being shot at previously, and the many times he has had the cross hairs of his

⁴ The Mormon Church has a lay clergy and the title of Bishop is given to the leader of each congregation. Often, even after completing service, other members of the church will continue address those who have served as "Bishop."

rifle fixed on his pursuers, the closest Hayduke comes to taking life is when he shoots down a helicopter in self-defense; and even when his bullet forces the helicopter to land, no one is hurt.⁵ The irony here is that those assembled in the interest of the human principle of progress and justice have no qualms over killing, while the characters who are trying to expand human ethics to encompass the more-than-human world—Hayduke and the rest of the wrenchers—show the most concern for human life. Even after spending two years in Vietnam, “George Hayduke had never killed a man. Not even a Vietnamese man. Not even a Vietnamese woman. Not even a Vietnamese child” (264). On the contrary, the characters who are firmly planted within an anthropocentric worldview seem not to be bothered by the taking of human life in the name of progress.

The standoff ends with Hayduke seemingly killed. Sam Love, the bishop’s brother, watches as Hayduke’s figure seems “to crawl or slide sideways, half in and half out of the crevice” (407). He then sees, “swept with a storm of bullets, the body ripped and fragmented, chips, rags, splinters, slivers flying off, the arms flopping as if broken” (407). As Abbey’s readers discover, however, amazingly Hayduke escapes, and the novel ends with the monkeywrenchers and the pursuers all in good health. Harm has come to no one.

Despite the happy ending and clear ethical line, Patricia Greiner criticizes the book: “What is missing from *The Monkey Wrench Gang* is a sense of commitment to a carefully thought-out, long-range plan” (11). But Abbey was smarter than to assume his fiction could maintain the level of entertainment, action, humor, and artistic use of language that it does, and also solve all of the world’s environmental problems. He knew the world could do without more didactic fiction. In many ways, the book vents the frustration of those who love the canyon country of the Colorado Plateau. Early in the book, Doc laments such development and echoes Ranger Abbey from *Desert Solitaire* when he states: “The wilderness once offered men a plausible way of life.... Now it functions as a psychiatric refuge. Soon there will be no place to go. Then the madness becomes universal. And the universe goes mad” (63).

The Monkey Wrench Gang may not meet Greiner’s standard and lay out a well-developed, long-range program, but it does have a clear environmental ethic. As Wendell Berry notes: “Mr. Abbey writes as a man who has taken a stand. He is an *interested* writer” (44). *The Monkey Wrench Gang* is fiction and an entertaining novel, but it draws an ethical line in the desert sand between people and property. Furthermore, it argues for a clear limit to violence in defense of wilderness.⁶

⁵ This scene seems to echo one from Abbey’s second novel, *The Brave Cowboy*. In *The Brave Cowboy*, Jack Burns—who appears in *The Monkey Wrench Gang* and *Hayduke Lives!* as the masked man—also shoots down a pursuing helicopter and the pilots are unhurt.

⁶ Often, activists who participate in direct action in defense of the environment are labeled as “eco-terrorists.” In “Eco-terrorism or Eco-tage: An Argument for the Proper Frame,” Lisa Weidman and I trace both the history and its wide-spread acceptance of this term by the print media concluding that because of the consistently careful measures radical environmentalists take to prevent harm to living things, and further because of the politically charged nature of term, “terrorist” should not apply to acts of violence against property. For environmental activists, there is a bright line between property destruction and

III

Like *The Monkey Wrench Gang*, for most of *Hayduke Lives!*, the line between violence to humans and violence to machines remains distinct. For example, here Doc outlines the Code of the eco-warrior, who:

hurts no living thing, absolutely never, and he avoids capture, passing all costs to them, the Enemy. The point of his work is to increase *their* costs, nudge them toward net loss, bankruptcy, forcing them to withdraw and retreat from their invasion of our public lands, our wilderness, our native and primordial home [...] (111)

But unlike *The Monkey Wrench Gang*, in *Hayduke Lives!* someone does get hurt—killed in fact.

Like most sequels, *Hayduke Lives!* has the same characters. Bishop Love is still the villain and despite a change of heart at the end of the first novel, is back to his old ways. Bonnie, Doc, Seldom Seen, and Hayduke are all there. There are a few new ones: Dave Foreman and Earth First!, for example. J. Oral Hatch, RM, Hoyle and Doyle, CIA, Ginny Dick, Ranger and Erika the ecowarrior also join the cast.

The action centers around a huge dragline called the Giant Earth Mover, or GEM, that Bishop Love is bringing into Eden canyon to do some very large-scale strip mining. Like in *The Monkey Wrench Gang*, there are close calls, and the toppling of big machinery over tall cliffs. Unlike in *The Monkey Wrench Gang*, at the climax of *Hayduke Lives!* instead of Doc surrendering to save the Bishop's life, Jasper Bundy gets shot.

After accomplishing their goal of defeating the GEM, Hayduke and Seldom are ready to escape when they find themselves at the business end of a sawed-off shotgun and a snub-nose revolver. Not an entirely new situation, but a new outcome: "This time somebody pulled the trigger. Hayduke saw a blast of red flame in the dark, heard an explosion and saw the Ace man, Jasper Benson Bundy, stagger back a step and crumple like a sack of spilled meal, half his head blown away" (288).

What do we do with this fact? Through the better part of both novels, Abbey has been explicit about the difference between humans and machines. He has also clearly made this distinction in interviews. To his good friend Jack Loeffler, Abbey states: "Sabotage is an act of force or violence against material objects, machinery, in which life is not endangered, or should not be. Terrorism, on the other hand, is violence against living things—human beings and other living things" (*Headed Upstream* 8). Abbey is comfortable with sabotage, but against terrorism. But at the conclusion of this novel, we not only have dead security guard who has been unceremoniously thrown over the edge, but neither Hayduke nor Seldom seem to be troubled by the killing. There's no apparent irony to distance the novel's endorsement of the act, nor any feeling of tragedy or regret.

harm to living things—a strict limit to the use of violence. For additional discussion of radical environmentalism and violence, please see Michael J. Mortimer's "Eco-Terrorism: A Natural Reaction of Violence?" and Lawrence Likar's *Eco-Warriors, Nihilistic Terrorists, and the Environment*, especially chapter five.

There seems to be no real concern about crossing what previously had been a clear ethical line.

IV

As mentioned at the beginning of this paper, there are a few possible textual explanations. For example, as Lindholdt advises, we could look at who does the shooting. Jack Burns, the lone ranger figure we first meet in *The Brave Cowboy*, pulls the trigger. He is not a member of the gang, and in addition to his physical disfigurement, perhaps Burns has been psychologically disfigured by his complete abandonment of community, a large theme in Abbey's work. But this answer seems highly speculative

Just as the published text offers no definitive answer, neither does the original manuscript. The manuscript is typed with Abbey's handwritten revisions. The revisions are interesting, but provide no evidence of significant struggle over the ethics of this scene. With no other way to find a more satisfying answer, I interviewed Abbey's close friends: David Petersen, the editor of *Postcards From Ed*, Abbey's collected letters; Doug Peacock, Abbey's long time friend and the real-life touchstone for the character of Hayduke; Dave Foreman, also a long-time friend and one of the founders of Earth First!; and Jack Loeffler, Abbey's friend since the fifties and regular camping buddy. Of these four, it was only Loeffler who had any real insight into Abbey's thinking about the killing of the security guard in *Hayduke Lives!*.

When I described my project to Petersen, he said, "I don't think that Ed had a change of heart, although I don't remember that part [of the novel] particularly." He felt that the inconsistency was due to how rapidly Abbey wrote *Hayduke Lives!*. Petersen said it was written in a rush at the end of Abbey's life. At that point, Abbey suffered from frequent bleeds from a severe case of esophageal varices. With a young wife and two young children, he was working under a death sentence and wanted to get the book finished to provide them with a bit of financial security. "The book would have been radically different if he had lived," Petersen asserted. "It was a rush job. It was a first draft" (Petersen interview).

Abbey's journal supports those judgments. On February 2, 1989—some six weeks before his death—Abbey wrote: "On page 423 of *Hayduke Lives!* today. I've failed the contract deadline of February first. No matter. Two more weeks will finish this job. I may skip the courtroom trial [scene], however, just in case my guts don't hold out much longer [...] (Doc MacGregor sez I lost at least half my blood that awful Friday and Saturday, only ten or eleven days ago. It seems and feels to me that I may not really recover this time)" (*Confessions* 352). Abbey was clearly aware of his impending death.

Next, I interviewed Doug Peacock. Peacock, along with Loeffler and others, stood watch at Abbey's death and after he passed, helped to carry out Abbey's wishes and bury him illegally in an undisclosed location in the Arizona desert. Peacock served as a Green

Beret medic during the Vietnam War and, as mentioned above, was the real-life prototype for the character of Hayduke.⁷

Like Petersen, Peacock said the shooting of Bundy was less about a change of heart and more about the rush to finish. When I asked him about the ending, he said:

Listen, *Hayduke Lives!*, I had so much difficulty with it, I don't think I finished it.... I carried it along with Abbey's journal notes with me out on one of my long solo desert walks across the Cabeza Prieta, where I've got about nine nights out to read around the camp fire, and I carried *Hayduke Lives!*, and I had a lot of trouble with it. I felt responsible enough for Abbey's legacy that I maybe skimmed the last few pages, but, listen: that book was written—Ed knew he was dying, in the race against death. He was incredibly low on blood. You should consult with a pathologist because that was an anemic book in the most literal sense.

He continued:

[*Hayduke Lives!* is] the last one. He was banging it out on a typewriter, having biweekly esophageal bleeds, where he was so low on blood. He was dizzy standing up and a color—he had kind of a cranky demeanor at that time. It was if he focused it. He was sort of benign towards animals, pets and children. But it could be really caustic and even dark and a little violent towards human beings. He'd just had it with the stuff from society and everything they'd done to everything he loved and I loved, which is, you know, wilderness (Peacock interview)

I also posed the question to Dave Foreman. Dave is named as a character in *Hayduke Lives!*, and was a friend of Abbey's. Abbey wrote the "Forward!" to Foreman's *Ecodefense: A Field Guide to Monkeywrenching*, and Foreman took Abbey out to do some ecotage: "I did take Ed out monkeywrenching once for him to experience tree spiking," he told me. "Because he wanted to research everything." In addition, Clark Abbey, Abbey's wife, gave Foreman the *Hayduke Lives!* manuscript to read prior to its publication "because she was worried that there might be things in it that could cause me [legal] trouble."

Foreman basically agreed with Petersen and Peacock's views, however, he emphasized the inherent danger in monkeywrenching. No matter the intentions, there is always a risk. Of the "Working on the Railroad" chapter in the first book, Foreman said: "I think what he was trying to do was get across the inherent danger there always is when you do this kind of stuff. You can't ensure that everything's going to be okay, and an innocent bystander might get hurt." For Foreman, this explained the death in *Hayduke Lives!*. Of the shooting, Foreman said: "I think what Ed tried to do with that, and that he could have done better if he had more time to work on it, was to again show the inherent danger that no matter how much you may want to stick to certain principles and all, you might nonetheless end up in that kind of situation where it's shoot or be shot" (Foreman Interview).

⁷ In *Walking It Off*, Peacock documents his long, deep and, at times, difficult friendship with Abbey, including the details of Abbey's death and burial.

The most valuable interview, however, was with Jack Loeffler. Loeffler is an aural historian, writer, musician, folklorist, radio producer and sound-collage artist. From their meeting in the 1950s until Abbey's death in 1989, he was one of Abbey's closest friends and confidants. Over the thirty-plus years of their friendship, Loeffler and Abbey regularly embarked on long camping trips where they would walk, swap books around the fire, and discuss all things from the personal to the literary to the political to the philosophical. I never met Abbey, but friends who have met him described him as quiet, a bit reserved, laconic. In our conversation, Loeffler was the opposite: gregarious, warm, loquacious.

When I described the problem to Petersen and Peacock, neither of them particularly remembered that part of the book. Like Foreman, however, Loeffler did. He said "turn to that page. Read it to me." I turned to my copy of the typed manuscript and did as instructed. As noted earlier in the text, Hayduke and Seldom Seen have just successfully destroyed the GOLIATH—"the 4200-W Walking Dragline earthmoving machine" (*Hayduke* 243)—and Hayduke is relieving himself into the void of a canyon.

"Freeze!" barked a strange voice. "Hands behind your head."

Oh shit *no*, groaned Hayduke in his heart. Not now. Not me. Not here. I can't stand a prison cell.... I'll die. The government will kill me quick, sure as shit.

....

"Now turn around slow," the voice continued. "Let's see what we got here."

Hayduke obeyed. He found himself facing an oversize shadowy figure in dark uniform...yes it was, that Ace Security asshole Jasper B. Bundy.... The guard held a short shotgun in his right hand, pointed at Hayduke's belly, and a snubnose revolver in his left. (287-88)

But at this point: "Another man stepped out of the shrubbery, face masked in a bandana, pointing Granddaddy's .44. 'Drop the shotgun mister'" (288).

As the scene proceeds, the masked man shoots the security guard. Abbey seems to recognize the importance of this scene: "This time somebody pulled the trigger," he writes. And even though Smith is "paralyzed by horror," they all help throw the body into the abyss without ceremony (288).

As mentioned earlier, the masked man is Jack Burns, the character from Abbey's second novel, *The Lone Cowboy*, who makes cameos in several other places in the Abbey canon.

Loeffler then asked me: "What does Hayduke say to Burns?" I read: "Thanks for the help, dad" (291).⁸ Loeffler continued:

⁸ It's important to note that in the original manuscript, "brother" is crossed out and "dad" is written in by hand. Jack Burn's response, however, is "You're welcome, son." (Manuscript 472-3). It is impossible to decipher what exactly this revision might mean, but it seems that the father son relationship, as Loeffler claims, is key to understanding the situation. When asked about this in an email, Loeffler responded: "The way I perceive Ed's mind as having worked based on myriad conversations over the decades, and especially when we were hiking around in the Abajos in 1988 when he was writing *Hayduke Lives!* where in a conversation he acknowledged George Washington Hayduke as the father of the modern radical environmental movement after his appearance in MWG. Hayduke's own ancestry in Ed's mind hearkened back to Jack Burns, by now an old man.... I see that moment when Ed crossed out 'brother' not only as the

That's the key. Burns is Hayduke's father. That's the only place where the relationship is made clear.⁹ Abbey was not against all violence. The title of his master's thesis at the University of New Mexico is *The Morality of Violence*. He was not against the use of violence to protect family and friends. Jack Burns is protecting his family. This doesn't represent a change in Abbey's attitude as much as a change in situation. (Loeffler Interview)

So for Loeffler, the worldview in the two "monkeywrenching" novels is not inconsistent; the ethic established in *The Monkey Wrench Gang*, as well as in many of Abbey's interviews, and other writings—an ethic that makes a clear distinction between people and property, that eschews violence to living things while permitting the destruction of machines—runs as a constant from his first work to *Hayduke Lives!*, his last. According to Loeffler, Jack Burns shooting Jasper Bundy does not represent a change in Abbey's outlook, but rather a change in fictional situation.

To return to the question raised at the beginning of this paper, the answer seems to be twofold: first, in *The Monkey Wrench Gang* Abbey does establish a clear ethical line, a line between living things and machinery. Second, although I find each of Abbey's friends offer unique insight into the man, his writing, and his worldview, as an explanation of what seems to many a philosophical inconsistency, I found Loeffler's the most convincing. What on the surface looks to be a change in Abbey's view is more likely a change of situation. It must be noted, however, that even if Loeffler's insight is the best explanation, it does not necessarily rule out Petersen, Peacock, and Foreman's analysis: the novel was rushed; Abbey was anemic while writing, and anemia can darken one's mood; and "no matter how much you may want to stick to certain principles and all, you might nonetheless end up in that kind of situation where it's shoot or be shot" (Foreman Interview). What Loeffler's explanation does provide, however, is a way to see the scene as consistent in Abbey's mind with his other work.

Yet we are still left with the ethical question of justifiable violence against humans. Abbey often compares the threat to wilderness as analogous to a threat to his family. In the interview previously cited, he states:

I feel that when all other means fail, we are morally justified—not merely justified, but morally obligated—to defend that which we love by whatever means available. Just as, if my family, my life, my children were attacked, I wouldn't hesitate to use violence to defend them. By the same principle, if land I love is being violated, raped, plundered, murdered, and all political means to save it have failed, I personally feel that sabotage is morally justifiable. (*Headed Upstream* 8)

moment when Ed realized the father-son relationship between Burns and Hayduke, but also as an epiphany in Ed's own mind when he realized the enormity of what he had wrought over the course of his writing career. He was now into generations flowing one into the other" (E-mail).

⁹ Loeffler is almost right on this. I found another, equally as obscure reference to Hayduke and Burn's relationship in *The Monkey Wrench Gang* (261). But in both references, it is easy to read them as slang rather than a recognition of actual paternity. In addition, as mentioned above, in the original manuscript the typed word "brother" is crossed out and "dad" is written in by hand. I would be less persuaded by Loeffler's analysis without the reference in *The Monkey Wrench Gang*. Besides, the manuscript correction is made in Abbey's own hand, implying that to him the correct relationship was important.

And in a recent email, Loeffler writes: "I have recorded Ed saying that if his family were threatened by violence he would have no compunctions about using violence in return. And he had a .357 magnum to prove it" (E-mail). Furthermore, it seems likely that Abbey perceived the Bundy shooting as defense of family.

In further support of Loeffler's argument for a change in fictional situation rather than a change in outlook, it's important to note how this crisis differs from others faced by the gang: Bundy has the drop on the gang; Bundy is a private security guard, not a police officer, and therefore, there is only corporate power rather than state power legitimizing his position; Burns does the shooting but is not a member of the gang; and if Loeffler's assertion about Hayduke's paternity is correct, Jack Burns sees his son threatened by an armed man.

However, when examined, Abbey's above stated analogy between wilderness and family breaks down, as does the claim that killing is the only way out of the Bundy situation. He is willing to defend both his family and the wilderness, but he limits his defense of wilderness to the destruction of property—to sabotage. I am sure he would recoil at the shooting of loggers who were clear cutting old growth or at someone sending a package bomb to a mining CEO. In fact, his 1959 master's thesis is an examination of just such forms of violence. In "Anarchism and the Morality of Violence," he analyzes both the philosophical foundation and the violent actions of 19th and 20th century anarchists concluding: "The anarchists devoted the chief effort of their lives to the attempt to persuade their fellow men that the "critical situation" had engulfed them and that political violence was therefore justified. But in this effort, for many and various reasons, they failed. And in so far as they failed in this, they also failed to justify violence" (75). It is also hard to believe that if his family were attacked, he would limit his defense to sabotage.

Despite all of the above, I am willing to accept Loeffler's claim that Abbey viewed the shooting as a "shoot or be shot" situation, and therefore, consistent with his personal view of violence and with his other works. But as readers, we still must inquire into the ethics of the shooting. What would be the consequences if Jack Burns held his fire? Hayduke and Seldom would have been arrested, but it seems unlikely anyone would have died. Furthermore, killing a human being to avoid arrest, even a human being working as a security guard for a company bent on environmental destruction, crosses a clear ethical line. And even if Jack Burns is an outlaw character, Abbey establishes no narrative distance from the shooting. The characters are neither shocked nor show regret. Therefore, in the end I still find this scene ethically problematic and inconsistent with the ethical line drawn in the rest of the monkeywrenching narrative.

Without any other textual evidence, and without Abbey being around to ask, we will never know for certain what he was thinking. I do find Loeffler's explanation likely, that in Abbey's mind this represents a change in fictional situation rather than a change in outlook. In the end, however, I still find the killing of Jasper Bundy ethically

unacceptable and contradictory to the life ethic adopted by the radical environmentalists inspired by the "monkeywrenching" novels.

V

As mentioned at the beginning of this article, *The Monkey Wrench Gang*, unlike the vast majority of novels, had—and continues to have—a direct political impact. It inspired—and continues to inspire—many radical environmentalists to act. Whether or not we agree with their actions, groups such as Earth First! took their cue from this novel both in their deeds and their ethic. Just as *The Monkey Wrench Gang* draws a stark line between the machine and living things, so has Earth First! and so have other radical environmental organizations. In *Confessions of an Eco-Warrior*, Foreman makes explicit the Earth First! belief that "Monkeywrenching is nonviolent," adding that "it is aimed at inanimate machines and tools that are destroying life. Care is always taken to minimize any possible threat to people, including the monkeywrenchers themselves" (113). Furthermore, in several articles Bron Taylor argues that because of this underlying assumption about the sacredness of life, any actions from radical environmental groups with intent to maim or kill are highly unlikely ("Religion," "Tributaries," "Threat"). In 1998, Taylor wrote, "Despite the recurrent debates about violence within radical environmental subcultures and the refusal by many activists to rule it out, there is little evidence of violence being deployed to cause injuries or death" ("Religion" 3). Moreover, in recent email correspondence, he assured me there is still no credible evidence of any such violence (E-mail, June 22, 2010).

In the end, even if you are not satisfied by Loeffler's argument for philosophical consistency and you see the killing of the security guard in *Hayduke Lives!* as a violation of the ethic established in *The Monkey Wrench Gang*, in the world of direct action and radical environmentalism, Jasper Bundy's fictional shooting has had no effect. The radical environmental movement has consistently maintained a clear distinction between property and living things, sometimes destroying the former in an attempt to protect the latter. For radical environmentalism, Edward Abbey's "monkeywrenching" novels have provided, and continue to provide inspiration and ethical guidance. The novels are arguments for Dave Foreman's belief that: "Talk is cheap. Action is dear" ("More on Earth First!" 95). As such, *The Monkey Wrench Gang* remains the *Uncle Tom's Cabin* of the environmental movement.

Received 23 May 2013

Revised version accepted 18 September 2013

Works Cited

- Abbey, Edward. "Anarchism and the Morality of Violence." Master's Thesis. University of Mexico, 1959. Print.
- . *Confessions of a Barbarian*. Ed. David Petersen. Boston: Little Brown, 1994. Print.
- . *Desert Solitaire*. Touchstone ed. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1990. Print.
- . "Earth First! and *The Monkey Wrench Gang*." Editorial. *Environmental Ethics* 5.1 (1983): 94-95. Print.
- . *Hayduke Lives!*. 1989. TS. Collection of the U of Arizona Library, Tucson.
- . *Hayduke Lives!*. Boston: Little Brown, 1990. Print.
- . *Postcards From Ed: Dispatches and Salvos from an American Iconoclast*. Ed. David Petersen. Minneapolis: Milkweed Editions, n.d. Print.
- . *The Monkey Wrench Gang*. Perennial Classics. New York: Harper Collins, 2006. Print.
- Berry, Wendell. *What Are People For?* New York: North Point Press, 1990. Print.
- Booth, Wayne C. *The Company We Keep: An Ethics of Fiction*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1988. Print.
- Brinkley, Douglas. Introduction. *The Monkey Wrench Gang*. By Edward Abbey. Perennial Classics. New York: Harper Collins, 2006. xv-xxiv. Print.
- Bryant, Paul. "Edward Abbey and Environmental Quixoticism." *Western American Literature* 24.1 (1989): 37-43. Print.
- Burke, Kenneth. *Language as Symbolic Action*. Berkeley: U of California Press, 1966. Print.
- Foreman, Dave. "More on Earth First! And the Monkey Wrench Gang." Editorial. *Environmental Ethics* 5.1 (1983): 94-95. Print.
- . *Confessions of an Eco-Warrior*. New York: Crown Publishers, 1991. Print.
- Greiner, Patricia. "Radical Environmentalism in Recent Literature Concerning the American West." *Rendezvous* 19.1 (1983): 8-21. Print.
- Likar, Lawrence E. *Eco-Warriors, Nihilistic Terrorists, and the Environment*. Santa Barbara: Praeger Security International, 2011.
- Lindholdt, Paul. "Rage Against the Machine: Edward Abbey and the Neo-Luddite Thought." *Coyote in the Maze: Tracking Edward Abbey in a World of Words*. Ed. Peter Quigley. Salt Lake: U of Utah P, 1998. 106-18. Print.
- Loeffler, Jack. *Adventures With Ed: A Portrait of Abbey*. Albuquerque: U of New Mexico Press, 2002. Print.
- . E-mail to David Sumner. July 18, 2013.
- . *Headed Upstream: Interviews with Iconoclasts*. Tucson: Harbinger House, 1989. Print.
- . Telephone interview. 7 Apr. 2012.
- Mortimer, Michael J. "Eco-Terrorism: a Natural Reaction of Violence?." *Handbook of Globalization and the Environment*. Boca Raton: CRC Press, 2007. Print.
- Peacock, Doug. Telephone interview. 9 Mar. 2012.
- . *Walking It Off: A Veteran's Chronicle of War and Wilderness*. Spokane: Eastern Washington UP, 2005. Print.
- Ronald, Ann. *The New West of Edward Abbey*. Reno: U of Nevada P, 1988. Print.

Sumner, David Thomas and Lisa Weidman. *ISLE: Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment*. Forthcoming, 20.4 (Fall 2013). Print.

Scheese, Don. "Desert Solitaire: Counter-Friction to the Machine in the Garden." *North Dakota Quarterly* 59.2 (1991): 211-27. Print.

Taylor, Bron. "Ecoterrorism." E-mail to David Sumner. June 22, 2010.

---. "Religion, Violence and Radical Environmentalism: From Earth First! to the Unabomber to the Earth Liberation Front." *Terrorism and Political Violence* 10.4 (1998): 1-42. Print.

---. "The Tributaries of Radical Environmentalism." *Journal for the Study of Radicalism* 2.1 (2008): 27-61. Print.

---. "Threat Assessments and Radical Environmentalism." *Terrorism and Political Violence* 15.4 (2003): 173-182. Print.