Abstract
This project traces the history of the production and reception of American nature writing between 1860 and 1909. It diverges from contemporary approaches to the genre by examining the essays of John Burroughs, John Muir, and their peers not as records of heartfelt encounters with the natural world, but rather as works that were written, published, and sold for profit, and that reached readers only after having passed through the book and magazine trades. By taking this unorthodox approach, I revise commonly held assumptions about the nature writing’s emergence at the end of the nineteenth century. First, I challenge the notion that the genre became an increasingly prominent feature in American literary culture primarily because readers were concerned about the natural world. Building on recent work by Lawrence Buell, I show that nature writing emerged also through the efforts of several elite literary institutions whose influence strongly determined its form, its audience, and the cultural capital it represented. Second, I show that Burroughs, not Henry David Thoreau, was the instrumental figure in the genre’s history before 1900. Only as Burroughs gained national prominence in the 1870s and 1880s did the importance of both Thoreau and nature writing become increasingly well defined. Finally, I show that nature writing has played a more varied and significant role in American literary culture than is generally assumed. At the turn of the twentieth century, the genre participated in numerous and sometimes conflicting cultural discourses: not only the emergence of the conservation movement, but also the reification of what Santayana termed the “genteel tradition,” the emergence of a decidedly middlebrow culture, the articulation of New England’s regional identity, and the definition of a generally “American” identity that purported to speak for all parts of the expanding nation. The internal contradictions are obvious; their existence is hardly surprising. Then, as now, nature writing served a range of people and institutions in multiple ways.
John Burroughs and the Place of Nature helps extend the map of America's cultural landscape during the period 1870-1920 by recovering an unfairly neglected practitioner of one of his era's most effective forces for change: nature writing. © 2006 by The University of Georgia Press. All rights reserved. Thoreau and Burroughs join Whitmer, Alexander Agassiz, and Sarah Orne Jewett. Emerson's august Nature joins Maria Pool's Tenting at Stony Beach (1865), which, according to the advertisement, promises readers a full account of "a summer passed in a tent on the seacoast by two ladies; their adventures, experiences, and thoroughly good time." The emergence of American nature writing, 1860-1909: John Burroughs, Henry David Thoreau, and Houghton, Mifflin and Company. Открыть. lupferec032.pdf (1.957Mb). This project traces the history of the production and reception of American nature writing between 1860 and 1909. At the turn of the twentieth century, the genre participated in numerous and sometimes conflicting cultural discourses: not only the emergence of the conservation movement, but also the reification of what Santayana termed the "genteel tradition," the emergence of a decidedly middlebrow culture, the articulation of New England's regional identity, and the definition of a generally "American" identity that purported to speak for all parts of the expanding nation. Among these were the author Henry David Thoreau. In 1845, Thoreau took up residence at Walden Pond and began to write. The result was Walden, which touted simple living, communion with nature, and self-sufficiency. We must learn to reawaken and keep ourselves awake, not by mechanical aids, but by an infinite expectation of the dawn, which does not forsake us in our soundest sleep. I know of no more encouraging fact than the unquestionable ability of man to elevate his life by a conscious endeavor. It is something to be able to paint a particular picture, or to carve a statue, and so to make a genre includes the writings of the seminal Henry David Thoreau, who wrote his classic Walden, in 1854. Among the few books that Thoreau considered worthy of his bookshelf was a copy of Gilbert White's A Natural History of Selbourne. Along with Walden, Thoreau wrote a number of essays and letters, including A Natural History of Massachusetts, which begins: "Books of natural history make the most cheerful winter reading. Thoreau was encouraged to write more natural science and less Survey of Literature Modern British and American Nature Writing 11. John Stewart University of Central Florida 12/05. philosophy by some of his contemporaries because of his keen powers of observation and. Henry David Thoreau's writing and life have been claimed as inspiration for a remarkably diverse group of people that includes artists, writers and politicians from many countries and eras. Among them are John Cage, Robert Frost, Ghandi, John F. Kennedy, Jack Kerouac, Sinclair Lewis, Henry Miller, Marcel Proust, Man Ray, Diego Rivera, Robert Louis Stevenson, Gene Tunney, N. C. Wyeth and Frank Lloyd Wright. Chronology. 1817 Born 12 July in Concord, Massachusetts, to John and Cynthia (Dunbar) Thoreau. 1828-33 Attended Concord Academy. 1833-37 Attended Harvard College.