

## *Foreword*

*I Only Went Out for a Walk: Finding my Wilderness Soul on a California Ranch*

Doyle Hollister

2018

Montecito, CA: Dos Cuervos Publishing

The tradition of European Romanticism in the 18th and 19th centuries offered, both in its poetry and philosophy of Nature, a compensation for the rapidly developing goals, assumptions, and capabilities of the scientific revolution. Whereas the scientific mind sought to understand and overcome nature through causal analysis and dialectical materialism, separating out mind from body and mind from matter, the Romantics envisioned a world in which mind and nature were inseparably locked in a mutual embrace. “Spousal verse” was how Wordsworth described his poetry, referring to just that, the creative relatedness between soul and world. Whereas the progenitors of the European Enlightenment tended to regard imagination as tantamount to irreality, and stripped Nature bare of human imagination that it might be seen objectively for how it is, the Romantics valued imagination as world-creative—“in our life alone does Nature live,” Coleridge wrote. Whereas the trajectory of human development for the Enlightenment was an arrow pointed straight up into the future (“progress”), the Romantics envisioned themselves and their culture to be on a circuitous journey in which separation and alienation from the self and the world was a necessary stage along the way in the greater journey towards conscious wholeness.

If I had to place Doyle Hollister’s very personal book within a larger cultural context, I would pick Romanticism. Shimmering with poetic description that paints vividly heartfelt stories of connection between imagination and nature, Doyle’s writing, like that of the Romantics who came before, is a compensation for a technological society that we and our children are increasingly caught up in, perhaps even unconsciously addicted to.

Wordsworth’s epic poem, his masterpiece, is “The Prelude,” which is subtitled “Growth of a Poet’s Mind.” In this poem Wordsworth tracks his psychological development from childhood, particularly focusing on the role that Nature, and his experiences of communion with Nature as a child, played in his psychological development. The growth of a poet’s mind—for both Wordsworth and Hollister – necessarily involves loss and painful alienation from childhood merger experiences with nature, and conscious steps taken through creativity (for example writing *The Prelude*, or *I Only Went Out for a Walk*) to circle back again to those merger experiences as an adult. Placed within Doyle’s decades long work as a therapist, his writing gives weight to the theory that personal relationship is not the only factor in human development. Solitude, in Doyle’s amazing stories, is

not isolation but communion, relationship, an opening through which the archetypal imagination comes alive and carries him towards an unknown goal that only becomes visible in hindsight, the goal of the self. Not a nostalgic wish to return to childhood, *I Only Went Out for a Walk* is a mature reflection on the ways in which a contemporary adult with one foot planted firmly in Western civilization, raising a family, creating a full time practice as a Marriage Family therapist, paying taxes and saving money for retirement, using technology all the time in his everyday life, might at the same time also be allowed to circle back again to the wild self and value the role it played, and continues to play, in the “Growth of a Poet’s Mind.”

I write this on the day that SpaceX launched Falcon Heavy, the world’s most powerful rocket, into space on its maiden voyage. About four minutes after launch, heading out into deep space, the rocket jettisoned a white nose cone, revealing its payload: Elon Musk’s Tesla Roadster with “Starman,” a mannequin astronaut, in the driver’s seat. Perhaps Starman is a symbol, an expression of the possibility that we may ourselves leave the earth in the near future and take our civilization into space, never to return, the image of the trajectory of the Western mind. Contemporary technology is so stunning, so truly awesome, that it has co-opted the words “future” and “progress.” Yet, if you can even for a second imagine Doyle Hollister seated next to Starman in a space-bound Tesla roadster then you do not know Doyle. Doyle’s writing draws a line pulling down on Starman’s upward flight, a tension pulling down and back again, drawn down by love for the human experience of Earth.

Perhaps those who do not climb aboard in the Tesla next to Starman will prove in time to belong to the past and to regression. But perhaps not. The hidden questions that haunt Doyle haunt many people today. Have we have lost something essential to our humanity through our culture’s one-sided identification with technological progress? If so, can we find it again? Is it possible to marry the civilized with the indigenous mind and by doing so not leave the earth but recreate our experience of self and world? In merger with the natural world, Mother becomes the territory of earth, wind, and sea that speaks to Doyle and nurtures him. Doyle’s amazing and beautiful stories offer us his personal experiences, if not answers, to questions that many of us may also find gnawing from within. As we read these stories, we may find again the value of being a human animal in a natural habitat—not an “environment” but a home that is made soulful by the experience of soul within it.

—Thomas Elsner,  
J.D., M.A, Jungian analyst