ABSTRACT

JODY BLAKE HERRING. ‘A Meaning Which Includes All Things’: Science and Religion in Edward Abbey’s Desert Solitaire. (Under the direction of Professor Anne Baker).

In 1968, after many years of working as a seasonal park ranger in the Arches National Park in Moab, Utah, Edward Abbey released his now seminal work of non-fiction Desert Solitaire to critical acclaim. The book set a precedent for the publication of literature relating to environmental and philosophical issues as it contended with numerous topics including those of science and religion. While the interrelationship between nature, science, and religion was not an entirely new thing in the tumultuous time frame that Abbey’s text was written, said themes did take on new shades as the American consciousness was becoming more aware of man’s interconnectedness with and dependency on nature.

Within the confines of a broader philosophical, scientific and spiritual discussion, Desert Solitaire contends with a number of ideas including but not limited to the following: the general constructs of wilderness and religion; the highly personal and individualized nature of both religion and science; the blending of these two camps amidst poetic originality. Over the course of this essay, I wish to address the merger of science, religion and the environment within this text but, as well, amidst a broader twentieth century context. Additionally, with this essay, I hope to confirm Abbey’s place in the pantheon on writers concerned with great environmental and philosophical themes and showcase the talent and commitment for which he was so well-known.