American Beauty: Nineteenth-Century Landscapes

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AMERICAN BEAUTY:
NINETEENTH-CENTURY LANDSCAPES

by

Kate Gelshenen Rafferty

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ABSTRACT
AMERICAN BEAUTY: NINETEENTH-CENTURY LANDSCAPES

by

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Under the Supervision of Professor Tanya Tiffany

Using Thomas Cole’s 1836 “Essay on American Scenery” as a touchstone, “American Beauty” argues that Cole’s influence on American landscape painting goes well past the second generation of Hudson River artists, to include painters such as George Inness, Alexander Wyant, Edmund Darch Lewis and other late nineteenth-century artists. These artists had different life experiences, different technique and for the most part a different spiritual outlook. Yet the fundamental message of Cole’s essay—that citizens and artists should value American scenery for its pristine wildness—carries through to the end of the century and is evident in their art. Cole’s “Essay” is visionary in its insistence on the need for an American, as opposed to European, school of art.
For my parents and
for Dr. Elisabeth Roark, whose love of art history inspired mine
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Finally, acknowledgments would be incomplete without mentioning the vision of Charles and Sarah Allis. The permanent collection of the Charles Allis Art Museum is their legacy; it contains a number of gems, nineteenth century landscapes among them, and in choosing this exhibition topic I was motivated in part by a desire to bring attention to the extraordinary Charles Allis collection.
American Beauty

*Nineteenth-Century Landscapes*

*Can there be a country in the world better calculated than ours to exalt the imagination—to call into activity the creative powers of the mind, and to afford just views of the beautiful, the wonderful and the sublime? Here, nature has conducted her operations on a magnificent scale...This wild romantic and awful scenery is calculated to produce a corresponding impression on the imagination.*

- De Witt Clinton, Governor of New York, around 1816

**Introduction**

It was landscape painting, and specifically a style that came to be known as the Hudson River School, that first defined American art. Before the Hudson River School, artists in the United States painted in a manner emulating European traditions. And it was Thomas Cole (1801-1848) more than any other single artist who defined American landscape painting. Cole is widely considered the founder of the Hudson River School and the father of American landscape painting. He is known for the dramatic romanticism of his work. When New York Governor Clinton spoke of “[t]his wild romantic and awful scenery,” he addressed the same qualities in the American landscape that Cole sought to capture in his paintings. In “Essay on American Scenery,” which Cole first presented to the American Lyceum Society in New York in 1835 and published in the January 1836 issue of *The American Magazine*, the artist extolled the virtues of nature and exhorted his fellow countrymen to “cultivat[e] a taste for scenery,” and “be awakened to . . . a keener perception of the beauty of our existence.” In the ensuing decades, many painters followed Cole’s advice, painting *en plein air* the Northeastern landscape, especially the Hudson Valley and New England.
By the mid-nineteenth century, Cole’s principles existed alongside a new generation of Hudson River artists, who had a different experience of the world, natural and otherwise. Using Cole’s 1836 “Essay on American Scenery” as the touchstone, *American Beauty* showcases the work of a selection of American landscape painters from the second half of the nineteenth-century. The exhibition includes works by W. G. Wall (1792-1864), Edmund Darch Lewis (1835-1910), Alexander Helwig Wyant (1836-1892), George Inness (1825-1894), Winslow Homer (1836-1910), Homer Dodge Martin (1836-1897), William Baptiste Baird (1847-1899), William Merritt Chase (1849-1916), Ralph Albert Blakelock (1847-1919), John Francis Murphy (1853-1921), Carle John Blenner (1862-1952), and Charles Treddup (1864-1936). It traces the evolution of American nineteenth-century landscape painting from its romantic beginnings with Cole to the more sober and realistic renderings of mid- and late-century artists, who had lived through the Civil War, studied in Europe, and brought a new aesthetic to their work when they returned home.

Since the 1970s, scholarship on American art has provided important insight into the cultural context of nineteenth-century American landscape painting. In this exhibition I will argue that reverence for American scenery—Cole’s key message – served as the guidepost for the landscape artists whose works are shown here, despite shifts in the political and cultural environment, and despite significant aesthetic changes as Romanticism gave way to Luminism, Tonalism and Realism.
**Historiography**

Nineteenth-century American landscape painting in general, and Cole in particular, have long fallen in and out of favor with critics, collectors and exhibitors. First, recognition and interest in American landscape was slow to develop. When Cole was starting to paint, the genre of landscape painting was considered inferior, ranking far beneath history painting. As late as 1834, Cole remarked: “Will you allow me here to say a word or two on landscape? It is usual to rank it as a lower branch of the art, below the historical. Why so? Is there a better reason, than that the vanity of man makes him delight most in his own image?” Despite the attention paid to Cole’s landscapes by the New York art world, very few prominent painters chose landscape as their genre in the first half of the nineteenth century. As a preeminent artist, Cole almost singlehandedly created the market for American landscape paintings through his ardent writings and speeches praising the uniqueness of America’s landscape. After his death, artists such as Asher B. Durand, Cole’s only student Frederick Edwin Church, and others claimed the spotlight. However by the 1870s the Hudson River style had lost its allure. Art critic Clarence Cook wrote of the New York artists in 1883:

Nothing more alien to what is recognized as art everywhere, outside of England at least, has ever existed anywhere, than the now defunct or moribund school of landscape, once so much delighted in as the American school, but now so slightlying spoken of as the Hudson River School. It has a historical value, and specimens of it deserve to be collected in the museum of the future as characteristic of the pleasant and peaceful if a trifle tame and tedious days “before the war.” Nevertheless the hope may be expressed that in the museum of the future it will not be thought necessary to collect these specimens by the gross . . . Historical value of a certain mild sort these pictures have; but artistic value they never had, nor can any turn in the Wheel of Fashion or Fortune ever make them seem artistic to a future generation.
That same year, commentator Robert Jarvis wrote in *The Art Amateur* that the “National Academy of Design appears to be in its last throes,” and that the Hudson River School has almost died out.” He characterized them harshly as “denying in the press the first principles of painting, sneering at Corot and Millet and Rousseau, and snubbing the unfortunate young men who had had the conscience to get themselves taught something of art before setting up as artists.”

By the end of the century, in competition with other genres and new aesthetic approaches, landscape painting had declined in popularity. William H. Truettner and Alan Wallach have pointed out that a full one hundred years passed between the 1848 Thomas Cole Memorial Exhibition and the next monographic exhibition of Cole’s work, held in 1958 at the Wadsworth Athenaeum in Hartford, Connecticut. Scholarly attention followed a similar course. Kevin J. Avery noted in 1987 that “only two small books dealing specifically with the Hudson River School have appeared since 1947 . . . both designed mainly for a popular audience.” As recently as 2002, in a review of the Tate Britain exhibition *American Sublime: Landscape Painting in the United States 1820-1880*, art historian Barbara Novak wrote of the lack of scholarly and museum attention to American landscape:

Even in this country, American art of the pre-modern period has been consistently left out of surveys of Western art. It is rarely taught as a separate subject in college curricula. Though the nineteenth century is generally recognized as the great era of Western landscape painting, American paintings of this period are rarely if ever included in major landscape exhibitions. Cole, Frederic Church, and Fitz Hugh Lane are not invited to share the stage with Caspar David Friedrich, John Constable, and J.M.W. Turner.

Novak’s point notwithstanding, by the second half of the twentieth century the long dry spell was ending. Cole and the Hudson River School were “rediscovered.”
some major museums held exhibitions of American landscape art, and the subject of nineteenth-century American landscape began to be explored by scholars, Novak a pioneer among them. In addition to the lives and work of individual artists, scholars have explored a range of issues, among them: the extent to which Cole and landscape painting defined America; the definition and boundaries of the Hudson River School; the relationship between art and cultural context; and especially Cole himself, who was the acknowledged American artist-philosopher of his generation. Among other topics, Cole scholars have addressed his history paintings versus his landscapes; his philosophy; his religiosity; his “nationalism;” and his role as the father of the Hudson River School. Oswaldo Rodriguez Roque, William Truettner, Barbara Novak and Angela Miller have led the scholarship on Cole. Other scholars who stand out in having shaped understanding of nineteenth-century American landscape include Kevin J. Avery, John K. Howat, John Wilmerding, and Theodore E. Stebbins. All of these scholars have highlighted the importance of the evolution of American art. Contemporaneous sources such as *The Crayon* and *Harpers Magazine*, then called *Harpers Weekly*, provide invaluable insight into thinking at the time about all of these issues.
Thomas Cole – Essay on American Scenery

It is a subject that to every American ought to be of surpassing interest; for, whether he beholds the Hudson mingling waters with the Atlantic – explores the central wilds of this vast continent, or stands on the margin of the distant Oregon, he is still in the midst of American scenery – it is his own land; its beauty, its magnificence, its sublimity – all are his; and how undeserving of such a birthright, if he can turn towards it an unobserving eye, an unaffected heart!
- Thomas Cole, Essay on American Scenery, 1836

Cole’s Essay is many things. It is a hymn to America’s wild and beautiful rural landscapes. It is a window into the soul of a sincere, idealistic artist. It is a philosophical treatise on beauty and art, and a passionate statement in the divinity of nature. It describes in loving tones and exalted language the elements of American landscape, specifically the landscape of the northeast America. It urges those who have ignored nature to embrace its wondrous beauty. It begins and ends with his insistence on “the importance of cultivating a taste for scenery.” Cole encouraged Americans to cultivate their taste for natural environments in the same way that farmers cultivate their land. Americans who had not yet acquired this taste should cultivate it in themselves; Americans who had already acquired it had a social and even spiritual responsibility to cultivate it among those who had not. Perhaps most fundamentally, Cole’s Essay is an argument for American landscape rather than English or European landscapes, and by inference, American landscape painting over theirs. It is an argument emphasizing the wildness of America’s natural beauty. It is also a declaration of American artistic independence.

Nature and Goodness

For Thomas Cole, art, nature, goodness and God were intertwined. He wrote that “[t]he good, the enlightened of all ages and nations, have found pleasure and consolation
in the beauty of the rural earth. Prophets of old retired into the solitudes of nature to wait
the inspiration of heaven.” Cole also contended that art is the true and imagined
realization of both nature and God. He argued that immense pleasure can be gained from
both nature and art, stating that it gives the mind “a foretaste of immortality, and thus
prepare[s] it for performing an exalted part amid the realities of life.” More than once in
his Essay he credited art with improving our natures--art carried with it “the power to
mend our hearts” and “soften our manners.” It created “that disposition of mind which
tends towards kindness and benevolence.” He believed rural nature had the same
benevolent effect on man, writing:

The delight such a man experiences is not merely sensual, or selfish, that passes
with the occasion leaving no trace behind; but in gazing on the pure creations of
the Almighty, he feels a calm religious tone steal through his mind, and when he
has turned to mingle with his fellow men, the chords which have been struck in
that sweet communion cease not to vibrate.  

Conversely, he bemoaned the fate of those who have not yet awoken to natural
beauty:

For those whose days are all consumed in the low pursuits of avarice, or the
gaudy frivolities of fashion, unobservant of nature's loveliness, are unconscious of
the harmony of creation—

Heaven's roof to them
Is but a painted ceiling hung with lamps;
No more--that lights them to their purposes—
They wander 'loose about;' they nothing see,
Themselves except, and creatures like themselves,
Short lived, short sighted.  

In addition to lamenting those who are “unobservant of nature's loveliness” and
urging appreciation of America’s magnificent scenery, Cole equated the beautiful with
the good: “There is in the human mind an almost inseparable connection between the
beautiful and the good, so that if we contemplate the one the other seems present . . .”
Nature not only held the key to individual salvation but was the antidote to the “meager utilitarianism” and “senseless idolatry” of the times. Cole was an idealist, distressed by “the spirit of our society…accumulating in order to aggrandize.” As scholar Oswaldo Rodriguez Roque has noted: “Cole’s fidelity to observed fact, combined with his concern for idealization and the expression of lofty ideas, became the key ingredients of the American landscape style of the mid-nineteenth century.”

Cole lived in a time of social and economic transformation, when “[t]he historical development of the United States took the form of a confrontation between mankind and the environment, an epic of transformation. Inevitably, the interaction – sometimes violent collision – of nature and culture is the major preoccupation of American landscape painting.” Nature and natural resources certainly were a preoccupation of Thomas Cole. He felt that most Americans failed to see the beauties of wild nature not because they were too busy pursuing the noble work of progress but because they were too preoccupied with making money. In his Essay, Cole bemoaned “the apathy with which the beauties of external nature are regarded by the great mass, even of our refined community.” It is not surprising, given Cole’s beliefs, that his paintings were so fervent and aspirational.

Elements of Landscape

To promote his ideals, Cole embarked on an impassioned description of the elements of American landscape that contribute to its magnificence. Most of Cole’s “Essay on American Scenery” is devoted to describing American scenery: wildness, mountains, water (lakes, waterfalls, rivers), forests, and sky. Cole wrote that “perhaps the most distinctive, the most impressive, characteristic of American scenery is its wildness.”
He praised America’s wildness over that of Europe, where the “primitive features of scenery have long since been destroyed or modified.” Writing about lakes, he asked, “[W]hat land is so rich?” Of New England’s lakes, he said “they are the chosen places of tranquility,” and though “it might seem unnecessary to mention this; but independent of the pleasure we all have in beholding pure water, it is a circumstance which contributes greatly to the beauty of landscape; for the reflections of surrounding objects, trees, mountains, sky, are most perfect in the clearest water; and the most perfect is the most beautiful.” Of the region’s fall colors, he wrote: “[E]very hill and dale is riant in the luxury of color—every hue is there, from the liveliest green to deepest purple, from the most golden yellow to the intensest crimson.” These features figure prominently in his earliest landscapes. “The artist looks despairingly upon the glowing landscape, and in the old world his truest imitations of the American forest, at this season, are called falsely bright, and scenes in Fairy Land.” This section of the Essay, containing the elements of landscape, can be seen as a primer for the landscape artists who followed. Cole also directed his Essay at a broader audience, however.

America versus Europe

Throughout the Essay, Cole praised American (primarily Northeastern) landscapes. From the outset, he challenged his audience to “appreciate the treasures of their own country.” It is not that he expected them to think any less of the “glorious scenes of the old world . . . No! But I would have it remembered that nature has shed over this land beauty and magnificence, and although the character of its scenery may differ from the old world’s, yet inferiority must not be inferred…” He continued to compare the elements of American nature with those of Europe. He acknowledged that the
Alleghenies and the Catskills were not as high as the Alps, or as picturesque or grand, but he pointed out that those American ranges, unlike European mountains, were covered with forests, and had beautiful autumn foliage. Similarly, because of its climate, America had all the skies: “the blue unsearchable depths of the northern sky . . . the silver haze of England, and the golden atmosphere of Italy.” He compared the Hudson –“a natural majesty”–with the Rhine, and its “venerated ruins” and “palaces of princes.” Significantly, he also imagined a time when the Hudson’s “ample waters shall reflect temple, and tower, and dome in every variety of picturesqueness and magnificence.” In other words, he contemplated an America in Europe’s image: England and Europe were the standard against which he measured America, and he argued that America should not be found wanting.

Similarly, in another part of the Essay, Cole discussed the absence of places with historical and legendary “associations” in American scenery. As Alan Wallach has noted, “Like the English Romantics, Cole believed that landscape acquired greater interest if it embodied literary and historical associations, a point fundamental to his argument in his ‘Essay on American Scenery.’” Mark Sullivan underscored this observation when he wrote of Americans of the period:

They felt insecure when English or French friends told them that one of the key elements of a sublime or picturesque landscape was the human associations attached to it, or that Niagara Falls and the Hudson River were beautiful yet somehow deficient because the story of humanity’s progress was not clearly visible in such places.31

Cole clearly felt the need to address the perception that America had inadequate historical and literary associations. He asserted that America did in fact have such places, but “Milton and Petrarch have not hallowed them by their footsteps and immortal verse,”
and that “American associations are not so much of the past as of the present and the future.” He was determined that American scenery should be deemed worthy, both for her untouched wilderness, and because American culture would catch up to Europe’s degree of historical and literary association in the future. The important point is that, to Thomas Cole, worthy meant equal to Europe. The reader is left to wonder if Cole was addressing his fellow countrymen or rather European artists and critics. Cole’s desire to validate America and its art is clear.

Cole concluded with a regret that the landscape was being “desecrated by what is called improvement, which, as yet, generally destroys Nature’s beauty without substituting that of Art,” and a reminder of the importance of cultivating a taste for scenery. Taken as a whole, the Essay was a manifesto for nature, an argument for America and a primer for landscape painting. In one essay, Cole established himself as the nation’s leading philosopher-artist and landscape painter.

Context

It is important to consider the context in which Thomas Cole wrote his seminal essay. Art critics of the period--primarily British or European--scoffed at American painting, and gave it little consideration.32 As Arne Neset has shown, Europeans saw American culture as simply the fusion of many European nationalities living in the United States, with art that was “provincial and amateurish.”33 It is also very possible that Captain Basil Hall’s 1829 publication, Travels in North America in 1827 and 1828, reinforced European perceptions of American art. A well-known English traveler and writer, Hall disparaged American aesthetic sensibilities, writing for instance that its people were “as insensible to the beauties of nature, as we had reason to fear, from their
public exhibitions, they were to the graces of art.” While there is no specific record of Cole having read Hall’s work, Rodriguez Roque is certain he had. “That Cole could have remained impervious to the storm unleashed on both sides of the Atlantic by the captain’s Travels is inconceivable. No literate American at that time would have been ignorant of the Englishman Basil Hall or what his name stood for.” Finally, it is worth noting that British scorn for American culture was not limited to the visual arts. The Reverend Sydney Smith wrote in the Edinburgh Review in 1820 that Americans had “done absolutely nothing for the Sciences, for the Arts, for Literature, or even for the statesman-like studies of Politics or Political Economy. . . In the four quarters of the globe, who reads an American book? Or goes to an American play? Or looks at an American picture or statue?” As a result, defining an American style of painting became extremely important and the pressure on American artists to distinguish themselves on the world stage must have been profound.

Beyond the imperative to prove themselves artistically, American artists, and Cole in particular, took on the task of defining their fledgling nation. For Cole and his followers, the wilderness they painted was imbued with and representative of the religion and moral principles of his exciting new country. They were eager to elevate it to the level of European art. As John K. Howat put it: “The Europeans, deeply rooted in their ageless ancestral lands, seem to have, to own, or calmly accept a place in landscape, while we Americans have been, and still are, discovering our heritage and finding a resting place in it.”

Nor were painters the only artists engaged in defining America. The mid-nineteenth century was a time of artistic renaissance, and authors such as William Cullen
Bryant, James Fenimore Cooper, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau and others were using words to elevate American scenery in much the same way that Cole used paint:

[A] recurrent theme was the contrast of America’s simple rural values with the supposed decadence of urban Europe. Celebrating the grandeur of native scenery especially fulfilled the psychological needs of a nation bent on greatness. National pride in the rude native scene as opposed to effete European civilization helped to produce our first school of landscape painting as well as the nature writing of Bryant, Cooper, Emerson, and Thoreau.39

It was a time of lofty ideas, when “the religion of nature was the national religion,”40 and painters, writers, philosophers, and ministers associated with each other and tackled the issues of the day together.41

How could American artists demonstrate national pride? Struggling to define America’s national identity in a very young country, Cole encouraged artists to emphasize America’s natural beauty—its mountains, fields and rivers. In paintings by Cole and others, images of American wilderness stood for America. Cole described America as an “untouched Eden.”42 As Barbara Novak put it, “If we had no culture, we had at least our ancient trees.”43

Similarly, if America had no history it at least had its future. Cole writes in his Essay:

Yet American scenes are not destitute of historical and legendary associations—the great struggle for freedom has sanctified many a spot, and many a mountain, stream and rock has its legend, worthy of poet’s pen or the painter’s pencil. But American associations are not so much of the past as of the present and the future. . . And in looking over the yet uncultivated scene, the mind’s eye shall see far into futurity. Where the wolf roams, the plough shall glisten; on the gray crag shall rise the rise temple and tower—mighty deeds shall be done in the now pathless wilderness; and poets yet unborn shall sanctify the soil.44

Even as he once again extols the virtues of wilderness, he does so in reference to Europe.
It is this reverence for American wildness, as well as the desire to be seen as equals with their European counterparts, that inspired the next generations\textsuperscript{45} of American landscape painters even as they forged their own artistic paths.
Cole and the next generations

As Arne Neset has explained, “The scholarly discipline of art history has primarily been the history of innovation and new departures in art.” Accordingly, it is the job of scholars to differentiate the “new departures” from what went before. Though seemingly set in stone, Cole’s position as the father of American landscape is constantly chipped away at, as scholars continue to differentiate later artists from him and his legacy. Scholarly inquiry by its nature is a process that asks: what defines this moment, this artist, this painting, this movement? Each answer is a narrowing, a distinction. Recent scholars have retained and refined the distinction between the “generations” of landscape artists exploring how each was artistically, politically, and culturally different from Thomas Cole, who nonetheless remains in scholarship the fixed point against which others are measured. Art historian Angela Miller has questioned the entire notion of an “American” school on several grounds, including that the Hudson River School was so regionally based at a time when the chasm between North and South predominated. With all this narrowing of the concept of a national school of landscape painting, what does it mean that Thomas Cole is its founder?

What are the ways in which Thomas Cole remained relevant to the artists who followed him? Did his work continue to have meaning for artists in the second half of the century? I will explore how Cole’s “Essay on American Scenery” affected nineteenth-century American landscape, especially the work of the Luminists, and how the Essay points us toward a reading of “American” that allows for the notion of a national landscape school, despite the differences between the generations, despite the regional
divisions in the country and despite Cole’s inability to put England and Europe out of his mind.

*Continuum of nineteenth-century landscape painters*

Before tackling those issues, it may be helpful to review nineteenth-century American landscape painters. The artists represented in this exhibition, for the most part, painted during the second half of the nineteenth century. Some are considered Hudson River School artists, most not. Most were not yet born when Cole’s work was first noticed and celebrated. Since the dividing lines between one generation and the next are significant as scholars seek to identify what ties artists together and defines their work, it is worth reviewing those categorizations. It is generally accepted that the first generation of Hudson River School painters included, at the least, Cole, Thomas Doughty, and Asher B. Durand. William Guy Wall is of the same generation and also painted in the Catskills, but is not generally named as Hudson River School. It is also generally accepted that Frederick Edwin Church (1826-1900), Sanford Robinson Gifford (1823-1880), Jasper Francis Cropsey (1823-1900), John Frederick Kensett (1816-1872) and Thomas Worthington Whittredge (1820-1910) are “second generation” Hudson River School, as is Albrecht Bierstadt (1830-1902), though both Bierstadt and Church created monumental landscapes not depicting the Hudson River Valley. George Inness is considered to have started in the Hudson River tradition, and then to have changed his aesthetic approach.

This designation of Hudson River School comes from a mix of history (who was considered part of the group by critics of the period), painting style, geography (choosing the views of the Hudson River, literally), and affinity to Cole and his vision. Durand
painted alongside Cole, Wall was a contemporary who also went to the Catskills, and Church was Cole’s apprentice for two years, living and studying with him in the Catskills. Casilear, Kensett, Gifford, Whittredge, Cropsey, and Bierstadt all had a direct lineage from Cole, some spending time with him in the Catskills, and others traveling in Europe with Durand or acknowledging their debt to him in other ways. The second generation was younger and though they initially painted Hudson River scenery, they subsequently abandoned the wild majesty of Cole’s Romanticism for the moody tones of what came to be called Luminism and Tonalism, discussed below.

*Luminism and Tonalism—Artists and Scholars*

Luminism is a term used to describe small-scale landscape and seascape paintings meticulously executed “to produce pure and exquisite states of light and atmosphere.” John I. H. Baur, then Curator of American Art at the Brooklyn Museum, was the first to use the term Luminism in 1954. Martin Johnson Heade (1819-1904), Fitz Hugh Lane (1804-1865), Kensett and Gifford are the four artists most closely associated with the designation, with Church considered their “spiritual father.” Lewis, Cropsey and Thomas Moran (1837-1926) are also considered to have produced Luminist works. Baur, Barbara Novak, John Wilmerding, and Theodore E. Stebbins, Jr. have led the scholarship on Luminism, considered a movement by some and a mode of painting by others. As Rodriguez Roque has written:

A considerable degree of intellectual confusion exists regarding this alternative tradition, which commonly is known by the rubric Luminism. Some have sought to place the Luminist style outside the Hudson River School tradition altogether, while others have attempted to explain it as the culmination of the preoccupation with light that had animated Hudson River School painting since the days of Thomas Cole.
In Wilmerding’s *American Light*, Novak parses Luminism’s elements (structure, horizontal alignment, light, absence of brushstroke) and argues that it is less a movement than “a mode to which an artist had recourse whenever it was formally and philosophically viable.” In the same work, Stebbins agrees that Luminism was never a movement, maintaining that there were very few Luminist painters (again mentioning only Heade, Lane, Gifford and Kensett) and that even among these painters’ works, there were very few truly Luminist paintings. He calls Luminism a “stylistic phenomenon: one of the divergent courses the Hudson River School took late in life,” going on to call it a “dead end—and a retrogressive, British-oriented one at that.” Stebbins divides Luminism into two periods, the first from 1855-65 when Kensett and Lane, for instance, looked to Church, and the second from 1865-75, when Heade, Gifford and Kensett looked to J. M. W. Turner for inspiration. Miller, who laments the ways in which the second generation embraced art in the service of nationalism, sees the luminism of Kensett and Gifford as the feminization of the Hudson River School, the creation of “a visual universe purged of time, progress and history.” Kevin J. Avery argues: “Whether Luminism is to be regarded as ‘an alternative tradition’ to that of the Hudson River School, or, more generously, as the School’s ‘culminating’ or ‘closing phase,’ it has clearly supplanted the School historically as the primary representative of native expression in American nineteenth-century painting.”

Certainly, when compared with Cole’s Hudson River School style there is ample evidence of the distinctiveness of Luminism as an artistic path, but the question of Luminism’s place in relation to the Hudson River School remains unresolved. Clearly, these artists drew on different experiences than their predecessors. They likely had read
Darwin and possibly questioned the divinity of nature. “The ideas that had been at the core of the entire Hudson River School tradition lost their immediacy as [the Luminists] confronted, first, a new Darwinian science that made it difficult to see the hand of the Creator operating behind every leaf and rock, . . .” However, there is still some scholarly support for Luminism’s connection to Cole and his Essay. Wilmerding, who wrote about the early possible sources for Luminism, including Washington Allston, William Sidney Mount and George Caleb Bingham, settled especially on Cole:

To Cole what distinguished the American landscape from Europe’s was its wildness, because it had not yet been altered or ravaged by past civilizations . . . In Cole’s more direct transcriptions of nature, such as his Catskill paintings done later in his career, there is a new openness of composition as well as an attention to more specific light effects. Both these aspects anticipate the full-blown treatment by his luminist successors. He himself remarked about the symbolic and observed features of light at day’s end: ‘At sunset the serene arch is filled with alchemy that transmutes mountains, and streams, and temples, into living gold.’

Novak and Rodriguez Roque also lent weight to the connection between Cole and Luminism. In a 1972 *American Art Journal* article, Novak connects the dots between “luminist quietism” and Cole, citing his experience of the sublime as the “spirit of repose, and the silent energy of nature.” In his Essay, Cole wrote that he “would not be understood that these lakes are always tranquil, but that tranquility is their great characteristic,” and that the sky was “[t]he soul of all scenery, in it are the fountains of light, shade and color.” In agreement with Novak, Rodriguez Roque noted: “Atmosphere—the palpable representation of space, with its sublimated contents…is the indissoluble link that connects the luminism of Kensett, Heade, and Gifford with the Hudson River School.” Kevin J. Avery similarly argued:

That painters like Kensett, Gifford and Heade chose not to tread the histrionic paths of Cole, Church and Bierstadt did not sufficiently differentiate their basic aims from those of louder talents. Outwardly at least, and up to the 1870s. there
existed among the academic landscape painters little of the discord that might have engendered styles consciously dissenting from certain basic conventions—among them a general fidelity to the features of a specific place; a carefully constructed composition of those features, however elaborate or simple the artist chose to make it; and a high degree of finish.

In other words, Cole’s imprimatur was still apparent in the works of the Luminists.

By contrast, “tonalists” such as George Inness and James Abbott McNeill Whistler (1834-1903), along with Alexander Wyant and Ralph Albert Blakelock, have not always been considered in the lineage of Cole. Tonalism, a derivative of the French Barbizon School, involved the use of muted colors such as blue, brown or grey to create a misty atmosphere that infused the entire painting. It is unclear who first used the term, but by the early 1900s it appears in reviews.66 Like Luminism, it is not referred to as a school of art, but rather a style of painting used in a specific time period.

Inness’ early landscapes were executed in the Hudson River tradition. After spending time in Europe studying the work of the Barbizon artists, however, he embraced a softer, more emotional style;67 it is these later paintings that he is most known for.

Lloyd Goodrich, writing in the *North American Review* in 1938, noted that Inness was the opposite of his Hudson River contemporaries—with a sense of nature “as a thing lived with, as part of man’s daily environment,” not as “the romantic cult of solitude and wildness . . . This intimate sense of nature was to be his special contribution to the art of his time.”68

Still, even after his return from Europe, Inness held on to his connection to Cole, as Rachael Ziady DeLue pointed out in *George Inness and the Science of Landscape*:

Inness rarely discussed American painters, preferring to comment on the art and artists of Europe. In the interview “A Painter on Painting,” he spoke of Decamps, Couture, Gérome, Troyon, Meissonnier, Corot, Delacroix, Rousseau, Daubigny, Turner, Constable, and Michelangelo; Allston was the only American painter that
warranted more than one or two lines. When he did speak of American art, he
singly out Cole for praise, comparing the latter to the old masters and saying that
“there was a lofty striving” in his art “though he did not technically realize that
for which he reached.” If combined with what he characterized as Durand’s
“intimate feeling of nature,” Inness suggested, Cole’s project would be complete.
Cole had throughout his career sought to develop a higher and more noble
landscape style, and Inness surely looked to his example. Inness did not wish to discard Hudson River objectivism but rather to add to it
what seemed its opposite. His subjective bias and nervous structure encouraged
him towards imaginative release, but his desire to escape from the imperfections
of the individual into oneness with God called him back to exterior nature.

Scholar James Thomas Flexner agreed: “Twenty years later, painters who returned from
Europe with similar acquisitions were convinced that they had found final answers. But
Inness was one with the Hudson River School in believing that the first duty of
repatriated student was intensively to reexamine the American landscape.”70 Flexner
found connections to Cole not only in Inness’ attachment to American scenery but also in
his religiosity:

Inness, Homer Dodge Martin, and William Merritt Chase73 all figured in the 1877 split
from the National Academy, which was still dominated by Hudson River School artists.

Chase was a Munich- and Paris-trained artist who was given gallery space over the strong
objections of Hudson River landscapists including John Casilear. Martin and Inness were
among those who responded by joining the newly founded Society of American Artists, a
competing academy with more progressive views and inclusive policies.74 Still, Martin
and Inness are linked with Cole. Truettner, for instance, referred to “the simple, direct
canvases’ of Cole’s early years [as opposed to his history paintings], and those in which a quiet poetry revealed the spiritual ancestry of Homer Dodge Martin and George Inness . . .”

Winslow Homer and Ralph Albert Blakelock were less connected to Cole. Homer, whose roots were in illustration, often painted human subjects in his landscapes.

Homer, who had seen more of the fighting than most painters, came out of the Civil War with a passionate desire to return to nature. This was the typical reaction not of genre but of landscape artists. However, he continued, in the illustrators’ manner, to combine the two modes. “A quiet little fellow,” as a friend wrote, who nevertheless “liked to be in the thick of things,” he was by preference an observer of his fellow men even as he was by species an observer of clouds and trees. Without any of Cole’s literary symbolism, he saw man and nature at a single glance, and in seemingly impersonal images he found what was for him the essence of personal expression.

Blakelock’s work has generally been overlooked in favor of accounts of his insanity and poverty, but he too appears to have little or no direct connection to Cole’s vision or art. As Francis D. Klingender pointed out, “Blakelock’s view of nature was akin to that of a late 18th century French traveler in America who wrote, ‘…all this apparatus of rude and shapeless Nature, which Art attempts in vain, attacks at once the sense and thoughts and excites a gloomy and melancholy admiration.’ ”

Nevertheless, we can still see the next generations—even those whose work was very different stylistically—following in Cole’s footsteps in the larger sense. Many of the artists in the second half of the nineteenth century may have studied in Europe, and their work reflected that study, but they are known for their panoramic representations of American scenery. They may have painted light and air differently than Cole, but they adhered to his view, expressed in his Essay, that American skies are “fraught with gorgeousness and sublimity,” that it is the sky “that makes the earth so lovely at sunrise,
and so splendid at sunset. In the one it breathes over the earth the crystal-like ether, in the other liquid gold.” They may have changed the palette and tone in their paintings, but Cole’s sense of “tranquility and peace” is still present. DeLue notes that critics at the time saw the larger picture:

Most artists and critics, following Asher B. Durand’s pronouncements in the series “Letters on Landscape Painting” (1855) and Thomas Cole’s in his “Essay on American Scenery” (1835), advocated the direct study of nature and adherence to its actual forms. Although critics in the 1870s no longer insisted that pictures be minute and polished transcriptions of nature – given the direction taken by a good deal of landscape art at the time, such insistence would have been futile – they did still insist that landscape painters produce believable and real-seeming views based in the appearances of the natural world.”

It can be argued that the natural inclination of scholars to categorize painters and their artistic style—whether they are Hudson River or not, and if so why, and if not why not—has obscured the larger question of the impact of Cole’s vision, expressed in “Essay on American Scenery.” Neither stylistic, nor philosophic, nor experiential differences, however pronounced, are able to trump his more transcendent, visionary and enduring pronouncements on scenery, art and the definition of a young nation.

The “national” aspect of Cole’s standing as father of American landscape has been thrown into question by those who ask, reasonably, how a fraternity of artists from the North can presume to be “national” in the context of a country coming apart at the seams as it approached and entered into civil war. It is important to recall that during Cole’s time the states/former colonies had much more individual and regional cohesiveness than the nation as a whole. Cole and other Hudson River artists who sought to create a national identity through their art were themselves bound by regionalism: they painted almost exclusively in the Northeast, primarily in New York, and until 1869 the National Academy of Design only allowed New York artists as members. So the new
“national” identity was *de facto* a Northeast identity, at least in the cultural realm. The answer to the question lies in how the Essay is interpreted—whether as inward looking, addressed towards Cole’s fellow citizens, in which case a claim to represent the whole country might be overreaching—or as outward looking, aimed at Europe, in which case he is speaking broadly for all on the American side of the Atlantic, using the Northeast as the example with which he is most familiar. I argue that the Essay was written primarily to a European audience.

Cole’s position as father of American landscape rests in part on American landscape being considered the first *national* art movement. The notion of nineteenth-century landscape art defining America has itself traveled a bumpy critical road. For a good portion of the past half-century, scholars thought of Cole’s work as a lens through which the United States could chart its cultural development and follow the mood and philosophy of our nation during its early years. That notion has been challenged more recently, either as insufficiently nuanced, biased toward the Northeast, or incorrectly assuming that Cole’s work was an accurate symbol of American culture given the upheaval of the time—or all three. Truettner has argued that scholarship “for the most part has failed to recognize how effectively the design of [Hudson River] landscapes masks national conflict. Instead we are told ‘that idyllic views of nature represent the mood of America in the 1840s and 1850s,’” a notion he disagrees with.79

Scholar Angela Miller went deeper in *Empire of the Eye*, a rich and reasoned study that challenges head-on prevailing scholarship on the connections between Cole and the Hudson River artists and national identity. She wrote of the “nationalist myth—that the physical environment itself produced national character,” arguing that the second
generation used “nature, often devoid of human presence, as a symbolic substitute for the republic.” In addition to dismissing the notion of a “national” art movement that was entirely Northern at a time when the country was divided, Miller made a convincing argument that the second generation’s nationalist stance bore no resemblance to Cole’s hymn to America, that their work in essence served the cause of rising nationalism, expansionism, and American exceptionalism, whereas Cole’s was infused with uncertainty, criticism of American society and universal truth.

Cole wrote his Essay in a period of national idealistic hope for the United States. The generations who followed faced a country that was decidedly not politically united. It is natural that their invocations of country had a different ring than Cole’s. As an example, Durand, Cole’s contemporary and compatriot, wrote in 1855, in his second “Letter on Landscape Painting”:

> If it be true—and it appears to be as far as English scenery is concerned—that Constable was correct when he affirmed that there was yet room for a natural landscape painter, it is more especially true in reference to our own scenery…Go not abroad then in search of material for your pencil, while the virgin charms of your native land have claims on your deepest affections…I desire not to limit the universality of the Art, or require that the artist shall sacrifice aught to patriotism; but, untrammeled as he is and free from academic or other restraints by virtue of his position, why should not the American landscape painter, in accordance with the principle of self-government, boldly originate a high and independent style, based on his native resources?

His disclaimer about not sacrificing art to patriotism notwithstanding, Durand’s use of the phrase “in accordance with the principle of self-government” puts his advice to young artists in an entirely different and more blatantly nationalist category than Cole’s. The section of Cole’s Essay devoted to the magnificence of American scenery is, as discussed earlier, a point-by-point comparison with Europe and its scenery, a resounding plea to the Europeans to take America and its artists seriously. In many ways,
the tone of this section is reminiscent of a grown child addressing a parent, independent but still very much seeking approval. Nowhere does Cole’s focus on American scenery point to the need to forge a national identity. That seems presumed in Cole’s hopeful celebration of the magnificent, wild scenery. Similarly, when he says “Before entering into the proposed subject, in which I shall treat more particularly of the scenery of the Northern and Eastern States,” and goes on to reference scenery from New York and New England only, one would be hard pressed to read into his Essay anything beyond his greater knowledge and appreciation of the area where he lived and worked and therefore his use of that area as an example to make his argument. As Miller has pointed out, for Cole’s successors, American meant Northern, with all the cultural and economic symbolism that carried in the mid-nineteenth century. But for Cole, American did not mean Northern. It meant not European. Just as Cole became the artist against whom his successors were measured, England and Europe remained, for Cole, the standard against which American art was measured. Though his painting was localized in the Northeast, and his examples were from the Northeast, in his defense of American scenery surely he was speaking of the whole country as against Europe. In this way at least, the idea of a national school of art still has merit. Even Miller concedes: “It was no small success to create an art form fluid enough to serve the multiple and shifting needs of nationalist sentiment in the decades during which the very concept of nation remained problematic.”

Overall, the distinctions identified and elucidated by scholars about the artists who followed Cole give us a rich, textured and still evolving picture of the way in which landscape art developed in the nineteenth century. The artistic and philosophic
distinctions—the different cultural contexts in which later artists worked, the luminist and tonalist qualities to their paintings, the lack of an overt religiosity to the work of many of the later artists, the conflation of nationalism with their art—can exist within the larger frame of American scenery. It is a scenery that is wild, pristine, composed of mountains, water, forests and sky, that stretches from one coast to the other and from Thomas Cole through the turmoil of the Civil War to the end of the century.
Edmund Darch Lewis

*View of Philadelphia from Belmont Plateau*

Oil on canvas
54 x 40 inches
1873

From the collection of the Minnesota Marine Art Museum
W.G. Wall

Woodcutters at Work

Oil on canvas

11 1/2 x 15 1/2 inches

19th century

From the collection of the Grohmann Museum at Milwaukee School of Engineering
William Baptiste Baird

*Untitled*

Oil on board

12 1/4 x 17 1/4 inches

19th century

From the collection of the Wright Museum of Art, Beloit College
Carle John Blenner
*Cottage Scene*
Oil on canvas
15 3/4 x 19 7/10 inches
From the collection of the Wright Museum of Art, Beloit College
Alexander Wyant

*In the North Woods*

Oil on canvas
35 x 28 inches
19th century

From the collection of the Wright Museum of Art, Beloit College
William Merritt Chase

Landscape

Oil on wood panel

9 1/2 x 19 1/5 inches

1885

From the collection of the Wright Museum of Art, Beloit College
Charles Tredupp Jr.
Nocturnal Scene
Oil on canvas
24 1/8 x 36 inches
19th century

From the collection of University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee
George Inness
Summer
Oil on canvas
11 1/2 x 21 1/2 inches
19th century
From the collection of the Charles Allis Art Museum
Ralph Albert Blakelock
Evening
Oil on canvas
11 x 15 inches
19th century
From the collection of the Charles Allis Art Museum
George Inness
After the Storm
Oil on canvas
15 1/2 x 20 inches
19th century
From the collection of the Charles Allis Art Museum
George Inness
The Approaching Storm Near the Adirondacks
Oil on canvas
12 1/8 x 15 1/2 inches
19th century
From the collection of the Charles Allis Art Museum
Alexander Wyant
Summer
Oil on canvas
16 x 12 inches
19th century

From the collection of the Charles Allis Art Museum
George Inness
In the Catskills
Oil on canvas
11 1/2 x 17 1/2 inches
19th century
From the collection of the Charles Allis Art Museum
Winslow Homer
Cliff at Prout’s Neck, East Coast of Saco Bay,
Town of Scarborough Maine
Oil on canvas
14 x 20 1/4 inches
1881

From the collection of the Charles Allis Art Museum
Ralph Albert Blakelock
Landscape and River with Indian in Canoe
Oil on canvas
8 x 6 inches
19th century
From the collection of the Charles Allis Art Museum
Alexander Wyant
Sunset
Oil on canvas
11 1/2 x 9 1/2 inches
19th century
From the collection of the Charles Allis Art Museum
Homer Dodge Martin
The Adirondack Camp
Oil on canvas
14 x 22 inches
19th century
From the collection of the Charles Allis Art Museum
Notes

2. In this essay I use the term American art to refer only to art that comes from the European tradition, not, e.g., African slave art or Native American Indian art.


8. The “hierarchy of genres, established by the French Royal Academy, was based on the notion of man as the measure of all things. Landscape and still life were the lowest because they did not involve human subject matter. History was highest because it dealt with the noblest events of human history and with religion.” The hierarchy was established in the seventeenth century, establishing the following order: history, portrait, genre, landscape and still life. Tate Museum Online Resources Glossary, http://www.tate.org.uk/learn/online-resources/glossary/g/genres.


12. In fact, the term Hudson River School wasn’t used until the mid-1880s, and then derogatorily. Avery, “Historiography,” 6.

13. Clarence Cook, “Art in America in 1883,” Princeton Review II (Ma 1883), 311-20, cited in Avery, “Historiography,” 6. Avery goes on to quote a writer, possibly Cook, commenting on the donation of John Frederick Kessett’s work after his death to the Metropolitan Museum of Art; the writer approvingly alleges that the donated works had been “consigned to the cellar” and that he couldn’t imagine that the “the whirligig of time will ever bring about for them a full revenge.” Avery, “Historiography,” 8.


15. Prices for landscapes fell accordingly. There was a sharp decline in the commercial value of landscapes from the 1860 to the 1890s; paintings sold for a third as much as they had previously. After 1910, works by George Inness, Alexander Helwig Wyant and Homer Dodge Martin commanded high prices, but already those by John Frederick Kessett and Thomas Cole did not. The disparity lessened somewhat with time but the lack of interest continued through the 1950s. Avery, “Historiography,” 9-10.


21. Oswaldo Rodriguez Roque is known for his work on Cole generally and on Cole’s View from Mount Holyoke, Northampton, Massachusetts (The Oxbow); Barbara Novak pioneered work on American landscape artists, including about the nationalist interpretations of Cole’s work, and about Luminism; William Trutner has argued against splitting Cole’s body of work in two--historical and landscape—and suggested that scholars reconsider Cole’s history paintings (which, unlike the landscapes, remain out of favor); and Angela Miller, in Empire of the Eye, explores Cole and his successors in the context of the history and political culture of the times, and challenges the very notion of a “national” artistic identity in the years leading up to the Civil War. Many others have made significant contributions to the scholarship on Cole as well, including Elwood C. Parry III, Christine Stansell and Sean Wilentz, who considered Cole’s paintings in light of the turmoil of the Jacksonian era leading up to the Civil War; and Alan Wallach who has examined Cole’s work in the context of the patronage system, still very much alive in Cole’s day.

22. Avery has traced scholarly writing on the Hudson River School, while also writing in depth about specific artists such as Sanford R. Gifford and Frederic Church. Howat has written on the Hudson River School in general and on Frederic Church in particular. Wilmerding and Stebbins, along with Novak, are leading writers about Luminism.


24. Cole, “Essay.” Unless otherwise noted, all quotations in this section are from the Essay on American Scenery, which is not paginated.

25. Ferber, Hudson River School, 68.


32. Despite the attempt at the beginning of the nineteenth century to create “an art with a recognizably American stamp . . . British cultural hegemony was hard to overthrow,” and landscape painters were unable “to make a radical break” with English painting. Rodriguez Roque, “Exaltation,” 21-22.


34. Neset, Arcadian Waters, 3.


38. See Rodriguez Roque, “Exaltation,” 21: “Not only did the creation of a distinctive style of landscape painting hold enormous significance as a manifestation of increasing maturity in the field of art, but it was also a palpable embodiment of a host of ideas either deeply held or deeply pondered by the American people at the time. Major human concerns—relating to God, nature and morality, as well as to the nation’s mission and future, the management of its resources, and the achievement of its social stability and happiness—all found their way into works of art.”


42. Wilton, American Sublime, 49.

43. Barbara Novak, American Painting, 41.

44. Cole, “Essay.”

45. Because second generation still carries with it an implied “of the Hudson River School,” and not all landscape artists are Hudson River School, I use the term “next generations” to denote American landscape artists painting in the second half of the nineteenth century, Hudson River School or not.

46. Arne Neset, Arcadian Waters, 16.

47. The school was a “loose-knit group of artists,” whose work explored the “natural world defined as a resource for spiritual renewal and as an expression of cultural and national identity.” Ferber, Hudson River School, 13. The work of the artists was often large-scale and “marked by dramatic forms and vigorous technique.” Avery, Kevin J., “The Hudson River School,” in Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000–. http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/hurs/hd_hurs.htm (October 2004).


50. See Ferber, *Hudson River School*, 68: Cole had moved out of New York City to the town of Catskill. His studio there remained a pilgrimage site for artists after his death in 1848, and today is a National Historic Site.


61. Charles Darwin’s *On the Origin of Species* was published in 1859, introducing the theory of evolutionary biology; the notion that nature was God’s creation was no longer the only explanation.


81. See Miller, *Empire of the Eye*, 225: “The strongly northern bias of the appeal to nationalism in the 1850s is apparent in the fact that by midcentury, New York City had monopolized the artistic and publishing institutions that disseminated American art and shaped its political content . . . In short, the definition of a national landscape was being produced in the Northeast.”

82. See Miller, *Empire of the Eye*, Chapter 4.


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Appendix

Essay on American Scenery
Thomas Cole

_The American Monthly Magazine_ 1 (January 1836)

[I. Introduction]

The essay, which is here offered, is a mere sketch of an almost illimitable subject—American Scenery; and in selecting the theme the writer placed more confidence in its overflowing richness, than in his own capacity for treating it in a manner worthy of its vastness and importance.

It is a subject that to every American ought to be of surpassing interest; for, whether he beholds the Hudson mingling waters with the Atlantic—explores the central wilds of this vast continent, or stands on the margin of the distant Oregon, he is still in the midst of American scenery—it is his own land; its beauty, its magnificence, its sublimity—all are his; and how undeserving of such a birthright, if he can turn towards it an unobserving eye, an unaffected heart!

Before entering into the proposed subject, in which I shall treat more particularly of the scenery of the Northern and Eastern States, I shall be excused for saying a few words on the advantages of cultivating a taste for scenery, and for exclaiming against the apathy with which the beauties of external nature are regarded by the great mass, even of our refined community.

[1. The Contemplation of Scenery as a Source of Delight and Improvement]

It is generally admitted that the liberal arts tend to soften our manners; but they do more—they carry with them the power to mend our hearts.

Poetry and Painting sublime and purify thought, by grasping the past, the present, and the future— they give the mind a foretaste of its immortality, and thus prepare it for performing an exalted part amid the realities of life. And _rural nature_ is full of the same quickening spirit—it is, in fact, the exhaustless mine from which the poet and the painter have brought such wondrous treasures—an unfailing fountain of intellectual enjoyment, where all may drink, and be awakened to a deeper feeling of the works of genius, and a keener perception of the beauty of our existence. For those whose days are all consumed in the low pursuits of avarice, or the gaudy frivolities of fashion, unobservant of nature's loveliness, are unconscious of the harmony of creation--

Heaven's roof to them
Is but a painted ceiling hung with lamps;
No more—that lights them to their purposes--
They wander 'loose about;' they nothing see,
Themselves except, and creatures like themselves,
Short lived, short sighted.
What to them is the page of the poet where he describes or personifies the skies, the mountains, or the streams, if those objects themselves have never awakened observation or excited pleasure? What to them is the wild Salvator Rosa, or the aerial Claude Lorrain?

There is in the human mind an almost inseparable connection between the beautiful and the good, so that if we contemplate the one the other seems present; and an excellent author has said, "it is difficult to look at any objects with pleasure--unless where it arises from brutal and tumultuous emotions--without feeling that disposition of mind which tends towards kindness and benevolence; and surely, whatever creates such a disposition, by increasing our pleasures and enjoyments, cannot be too much cultivated."

It would seem unnecessary to those who can see and feel, for me to expatiate on the loveliness of verdant fields, the sublimity of lofty mountains, or the varied magnificence of the sky; but that the number of those who seek enjoyment in such sources is comparatively small. From the indifference with which the multitude regard the beauties of nature, it might be inferred that she had been unnecessarily lavish in adorning this world for beings who take no pleasure in its adornment. Who in grovelling pursuits forget their glorious heritage. Why was the earth made so beautiful, or the sun so clad in glory at his rising and setting, when all might be unrobed of beauty without affecting the insensate multitude, so they can be "lighted to their purposes?"

It has not been in vain--the good, the enlightened of all ages and nations, have found pleasure and consolation in the beauty of the rural earth. Prophets of old retired into the solitudes of nature to wait the inspiration of heaven. It was on Mount Horeb that Elijah witnessed the mighty wind, the earthquake, and the fire; and heard the "still small voice"--that voice is YET heard among the mountains! St. John preached in the desert;--the wilderness is YET a fitting place to speak of God. The solitary Anchorites of Syria and Egypt, though ignorant that the busy world is man's noblest sphere of usefulness, well knew how congenial to religious musings are the pathless solitudes.

He who looks on nature with a "loving eye," cannot move from his dwelling without the salutation of beauty; even in the city the deep blue sky and the drifting clouds appeal to him. And if to escape its turmoil--if only to obtain a free horizon, land and water in the play of light and shadow yields delight--let him be transported to those favored regions, where the features of the earth are more varied, or yet add the sunset, that wreath of glory daily bound around the world, and he, indeed, drinks from pleasure's purest cup. The delight such a man experiences is not merely sensual, or selfish, that passes with the occasion leaving no trace behind; but in gazing on the pure creations of the Almighty, he feels a calm religious tone steal through his mind, and when he has turned to mingle with his fellow men, the chords which have been struck in that sweet communion cease not to vibrate.

In what has been said I have alluded to wild and uncultivated scenery; but the cultivated must not be forgotten, for it is still more important to man in his social capacity--necessarily bringing him in contact with the cultured; it encompasses our homes, and, though devoid of the stern sublimity of the wild, its quieter spirit steals tenderly into our
bosoms mingled with a thousand domestic affections and heart-touching associations--human hands have wrought, and human deeds hallowed all around.

And it is here that taste, which is the perception of the beautiful, and the knowledge of the principles on which nature works, can be applied, and our dwelling-places made fitting for refined and intellectual beings.

[2. The Advantages of Cultivating a Taste for Scenery]

If, then, it is indeed true that the contemplation of scenery can be so abundant a source of delight and improvement, a taste for it is certainly worthy of particular cultivation; for the capacity for enjoyment increases with the knowledge of the true means of obtaining it.

In this age, when a meager utilitarianism seems ready to absorb every feeling and sentiment, and what is sometimes called improvement in its march makes us fear that the bright and tender flowers of the imagination shall all be crushed beneath its iron tramp, it would be well to cultivate the oasis that yet remains to us, and thus preserve the germs of a future and a purer system. And now, when the sway of fashion is extending widely over society--poisoning the healthful streams of true refinement, and turning men from the love of simplicity and beauty, to a senseless idolatry of their own follies--to lead them gently into the pleasant paths of Taste would be an object worthy of the highest efforts of genius and benevolence. The spirit of our society is to contrive but not to enjoy--toiling to produce more toil-accumulating in order to aggrandize. The pleasures of the imagination, among which the love of scenery holds a conspicuous place, will alone temper the harshness of such a state; and, like the atmosphere that softens the most rugged forms of the landscape, cast a veil of tender beauty over the asperities of life.

Did our limits permit I would endeavor more fully to show how necessary to the complete appreciation of the Fine Arts is the study of scenery, and how conducive to our happiness and well-being is that study and those arts; but I must now proceed to the proposed subject of this essay--American Scenery!

[II. The Elements of American Scenery]

There are those who through ignorance or prejudice strive to maintain that American scenery possesses little that is interesting or truly beautiful--that it is rude without picturesqueness, and monotonous without sublimity--that being destitute of those vestiges of antiquity, whose associations so strongly affect the mind, it may not be compared with European scenery. But from whom do these opinions come? From those who have read of European scenery, of Grecian mountains, and Italian skies, and never troubled themselves to look at their own; and from those travelled ones whose eyes were never opened to the beauties of nature until they beheld foreign lands, and when those lands faded from the sight were again closed and forever; disdaining to destroy their trans-atlantic impressions by the observation of the less fashionable and unfamed American scenery. Let such persons shut themselves up in their narrow shell of prejudice--I hope
they are few,—and the community increasing in intelligence, will know better how to appreciate the treasures of their own country.

I am by no means desirous of lessening in your estimation the glorious scenes of the old world—that ground which has been the great theater of human events—those mountains, woods, and streams, made sacred in our minds by heroic deeds and immortal song—over which time and genius have suspended an imperishable halo. No! But I would have it remembered that nature has shed over this land beauty and magnificence, and although the character of its scenery may differ from the old world’s, yet inferiority must not therefore be inferred; for though American scenery is destitute of many of those circumstances that give value to the European, still it has features, and glorious ones, unknown to Europe.

[1. Wildness]

A very few generations have passed away since this vast tract of the American continent, now the United States, rested in the shadow of primeval forests, whose gloom was peopled by savage beasts, and scarcely less savage men; or lay in those wide grassy plains called prairies—

The Gardens of the Desert, these
The unshorn fields, boundless and beautiful.

And, although an enlightened and increasing people have broken in upon the solitude, and with activity and power wrought changes that seem magical, yet the most distinctive, and perhaps the most impressive, characteristic of American scenery is its wildness.

It is the most distinctive, because in civilized Europe the primitive features of scenery have long since been destroyed or modified—the extensive forests that once overshadowed a great part of it have been felled—rugged mountains have been smoothed, and impetuous rivers turned from their courses to accommodate the tastes and necessities of a dense population—the once tangled wood is now a grassy lawn; the turbulent brook a navigable stream—crags that could not be removed have been crowned with towers, and the rudest valleys tamed by the plough.

And to this cultivated state our western world is fast approaching; but nature is still predominant, and there are those who regret that with the improvements of cultivation the sublimity of the wilderness should pass away: for those scenes of solitude from which the hand of nature has never been lifted, affect the mind with a more deep toned emotion than aught which the hand of man has touched. Amid them the consequent associations are of God the creator—they are his undefiled works, and the mind is cast into the contemplation of eternal things.

[2. Mountains]

As mountains are the most conspicuous objects in landscape, they will take the precedence in what I may say on the elements of American scenery.
It is true that in the eastern part of this continent there are no mountains that vie in altitude with the snow-crowned Alps—that the Alleghanies and the Catskills are in no point higher than five thousand feet; but this is no inconsiderable height; Snowdon in Wales, and Ben-Nevis in Scotland, are not more lofty; and in New Hampshire, which has been called the Switzerland of the United States, the White Mountains almost pierce the region of perpetual snow. The Alleghanies are in general heavy in form; but the Catskills, although not broken into abrupt angles like the most picturesque mountains of Italy, have varied, undulating, and exceedingly beautiful outlines—they heave from the valley of the Hudson like the subsiding billows of the ocean after a storm.

American mountains are generally clothed to the summit by dense forests, while those of Europe are mostly bare, or merely tinted by grass or heath. It may be that the mountains of Europe are on this account more picturesque in form, and there is a grandeur in their nakedness; but in the gorgeous garb of the American mountains there is more than an equivalent; and when the woods "have put their glory on," as an American poet has beautifully said, the purple heath and yellow furze of Europe's mountains are in comparison but as the faint secondary rainbow to the primal one.

But in the mountains of New Hampshire there is a union of the picturesque, the sublime, and the magnificent; there the bare peaks of granite, broken and desolate, cradle the clouds; while the vallies and broad bases of the mountains rest under the shadow of noble and varied forests; and the traveller who passes the Sandwich range on his way to the White Mountains, of which it is a spur, cannot but acknowledge, that although in some regions of the globe nature has wrought on a more stupendous scale, yet she has nowhere so completely married together grandeur and loveliness—there he sees the sublime melting into the beautiful, the savage tempered by the magnificent.

[3. Water]

I will now speak of another component of scenery, without which every landscape is defective—it is water. Like the eye in the human countenance, it is a most expressive feature: in the unrippled lake, which mirrors all surrounding objects, we have the expression of tranquillity and peace—in the rapid stream, the headlong cataract, that of turbulence and impetuosity.

[a. Lakes]

In this great element of scenery, what land is so rich? I would not speak of the Great Lakes, which are in fact inland seas—possessing some of the attributes of the ocean, though destitute of its sublimity; but of those smaller lakes, such as Lake George, Champlain, Winnepisiogee, Otsego, Seneca, and a hundred others, that stud like gems the bosom of this country. There is one delightful quality in nearly all these lakes—the purity and transparency of the water. In speaking of scenery it might seem unnecessary to mention this; but independent of the pleasure that we all have in beholding pure water, it is a circumstance which contributes greatly to the beauty of landscape; for the reflections
of surrounding objects, trees, mountains, sky, are most perfect in the clearest water; and the most perfect is the most beautiful.

I would rather persuade you to visit the "Holy Lake," the beautiful "Horican," than attempt to describe its scenery—to behold you rambling on its storied shores, where its southern expanse is spread, begernmed with isles of emerald, and curtained by green receding hills—or to see you gliding over its bosom, where the steep and rugged mountains approach from either side, shadowing with black precipices the innumerable islets--some of which bearing a solitary tree, others a group of two or three, or a "goodly company," seem to have been sprinkled over the smiling deep in Nature's frolic hour. These scenes are classic--History and Genius have hallowed them. War's shrill clarion once waked the echoes from these now silent hills--the pen of a living master has portrayed them in the pages of romance--and they are worthy of the admiration of the enlightened and the graphic hand of Genius.

Though differing from Lake George, Winnisisisgee resembles it in multitudinous and uncounted islands. Its mountains do not stoop to the water's edge, but through varied screens of forest may be seen ascending the sky softened by the blue haze of distance--on the one hand rise the Gunstock Mountains; on the other the dark Ossipees, while above and far beyond, rear the "cloud capt" peaks of the Sandwich and White Mountains.

I will not fatigue with a vain attempt to describe the lakes that I have named; but would turn your attention to those exquisitely beautiful lakes that are so numerous in the Northern States, and particularly in New Hampshire. In character they are truly and peculiarly American. I know nothing in Europe which they resemble; the famous lakes of Albano and Nemi, and the small and exceedingly picturesque lakes of Great Britain may be compared in size, but are dissimilar in almost every other respect. Embosomed in the primitive forest, and sometimes overshadowed by huge mountains, they are the chosen places of tranquillity; and when the deer issues from the surrounding woods to drink the cool waters, he beholds his own image as in a polished mirror,--the flight of the eagle can be seen in the lower sky; and if a leaf falls, the circling undulations chase each other to the shores unvexed by contending tides.

There are two lakes of this description, situated in a wild mountain gorge called the Franconia Notch, in New Hampshire. They lie within a few hundred feet of each other, but are remarkable as having no communication--one being the source of the wild Amonoosuck, the other of the Pemigiwasset. Shut in by stupendous mountains which rest on crags that tower more than a thousand feet above the water, whose rugged brows and shadowy breaks are clothed by dark and tangled woods, they have such an aspect of deep seclusion, of utter and unbroken solitude, that, when standing on their brink a lonely traveller, I was overwhelmed with an emotion of the sublime, such as I have rarely felt. It was not that the jagged precipices were lofty, that the encircling woods were of the dimmest shade, or that the waters were profoundly deep; but that over all, rocks, wood, and water, brooded the spirit of repose, and the silent energy of nature stirred the soul to its inmost depths.
I would not be understood that these lakes are always tranquil; but that tranquillity is their
great characteristic. There are times when they take a far different expression; but in
scenes like these the richest chords are those struck by the gentler hand of nature.

[b. Waterfalls]

And now I must turn to another of the beautifiers of the earth--the Waterfall; which in the
same object at once presents to the mind the beautiful, but apparently incongruous idea,
of fixedness and motion--a single existence in which we perceive unceasing change and
everlasting duration. The waterfall may be called the voice of the landscape, for, unlike
the rocks and woods which utter sounds as the passive instruments played on by the
elements, the waterfall strikes its own chords, and rocks and mountains re-echo in rich
unison. And this is a land abounding in cataracts; in these Northern States where shall we
turn and not find them? Have we not Kaaterskill, Trenton, the Flume, the Genesee,
stupendous Niagara, and a hundred others named and nameless ones, whose exceeding
beauty must be acknowledged when the hand of taste shall point them out?

In the Kaaterskill we have a stream, diminutive indeed, but throwing itself headlong over
a fearful precipice into a deep gorge of the densely wooded mountains--and possessing a
singular feature in the vast arched cave that extends beneath and behind the cataract. At
Trenton there is a chain of waterfalls of remarkable beauty, where the foaming waters,
shadowed by steep cliffs, break over rocks of architectural formation, and tangled and
picturesque trees mantle abrupt precipices, which it would be easy to imagine crumbling
and "time disparting towers."

And Niagara! that wonder of the world!--where the sublime and beautiful are bound
together in an indissoluble chain. In gazing on it we feel as though a great void had been
filled in our minds--our conceptions expand--we become a part of what we behold! At
our feet the floods of a thousand rivers are poured out--the contents of vast inland seas. In
its volume we conceive immensity; in its course, everlasting duration; in its impetuosity,
uncontrollable power. These are the elements of its sublimity. Its beauty is garlanded
around in the varied hues of the water, in the spray that ascends the sky, and in that
unrivalled bow which forms a complete cincture round the unresting floods.

c. Rivers]

The river scenery of the United States is a rich and boundless theme. The Hudson for
natural magnificence is unsurpassed. What can be more beautiful than the lake-like
expanses of Tapaan and Haverstraw, as seen from the rich orchards of the surrounding
hills? hills that have a legend, which has been so sweetly and admirably told that it shall
not perish but with the language of the land. What can be more imposing than the
precipitous Highlands; whose dark foundations have been rent to make a passage for the
deep-flowing river? And, ascending still, where can be found scenes more enchanting?
The lofty Catskills stand afar off-the green hills gently rising from the flood, recede like
steps by which we may ascend to a great temple, whose pillars are those everlasting hills,
and whose dome is the blue boundless vault of heaven.
The Rhine has its castled crags, its vine-clad hills, and ancient villages; the Hudson has its wooded mountains, its rugged precipices, its green undulating shores—a natural majesty, and an unbounded capacity for improvement by art. Its shores are not besprinkled with venerated ruins, or the palaces of princes; but there are flourishing towns, and neat villas, and the hand of taste has already been at work. Without any great stretch of the imagination we may anticipate the time when the ample waters shall reflect temple, and tower, and dome, in every variety of picturesqueness and magnificence.

In the Connecticut we behold a river that differs widely from the Hudson. Its sources are amid the wild mountains of New Hampshire; but it soon breaks into a luxuriant valley, and flows for more than a hundred miles, sometimes beneath the shadow of wooded hills, and sometimes glancing through the green expanse of elm-besprinkled meadows. Whether we see it at Haverhill, Northampton, or Hartford, it still possesses that gentle aspect; and the imagination can scarcely conceive Arcadian vales more lovely or more peaceful than the valley of the Connecticut—its villages are rural places where trees overspread every dwelling, and the fields upon its margin have the richest verdure.

Nor ought the Ohio, the Susqueharmah, the Potomac, with their tributaries, and a thousand others, be omitted in the rich list of the American rivers—they are a glorious brotherhood; but volumes would be insufficient for their description.

[4. Forests]

In the Forest scenery of the United States we have that which occupies the greatest space, and is not the least remarkable; being primitive, it differs widely from the European. In the American forest we find trees in every stage of vegetable life and decay—the slender sapling rises in the shadow of the lofty tree, and the giant in his prime stands by the hoary patriarch of the wood—on the ground lie prostrate decaying ranks that once waved their verdant heads in the sun and wind. These are circumstances productive of great variety and picturesqueness—green umbrageous masses—lofty and scathed trunks—contorted branches thrust athwart the sky—the mouldering dead below, shrouded in moss of every hue and texture, from richer combinations than can be found in the trimmed and planted grove. It is true that the thinned and cultivated wood offers less obstruction to the feet, and the trees throw out their branches more horizontally, and are consequently more umbrageous when taken singly; but the true lover of the picturesque is seldom fatigued—and trees that grow widely apart are often heavy in form, and resemble each other too much for picturesqueness. Trees are like men, differing widely in character; in sheltered spots, or under the influence of culture, they show few contrasting points; peculiarities are pruned and trained away, until there is a general resemblance. But in exposed situations, wild and uncultivated, battling with the elements and with one another for the possession of a morsel of soil, or a favoring rock to which they may cling—they exhibit striking peculiarities, and sometimes grand originality.

For variety, the American forest is unrivalled: in some districts are found oaks, elms, birches, beeches, planes, pines, hemlocks, and many other kinds of trees, commingled—clothing the hills with every tint of green, and every variety of light and shade.
There is a peculiarity observable in some mountainous regions, where trees of a genus band together—there often may be seen a mountain whose foot is clothed with deciduous trees, while on its brow is a sable crown of pines; and sometimes belts of dark green encircle a mountain horizontally, or are stretched in well-defined lines from the summit to the base. The nature of the soil, or the courses of rivulets, are the causes of this variety;—and it is a beautiful instance of the exhaustlessness of nature; often where we should expect unvarying monotony, we behold a charming diversity. Time will not permit me to speak of the American forest trees individually; but I must notice the elm, that paragon of beauty and shade; the maple, with its rainbow hues; and the hemlock, the sublime of trees, which rises from the gloom of the forest like a dark and ivy-mantled tower.

There is one season when the American forest surpasses all the world in gorgeousness—that is the autumnal;—then every hill and dale is riant in the luxury of color—every hue is there, from the liveliest green to deepest purple from the most golden yellow to the intensest crimson. The artist looks despairingly upon the glowing landscape, and in the old world his truest imitations of the American forest, at this season, are called falsely bright, and scenes in Fairy Land.

[5. Sky]

The sky will next demand our attention. The soul of all scenery, in it are the fountains of light, and shade, and color. Whatever expression the sky takes, the features of the landscape are affected in unison, whether it be the serenity of the summer's blue, or the dark tumult of the storm. It is the sky that makes the earth so lovely at sunrise, and so splendid at sunset. In the one it breathes over the earth the crystal-like ether, in the other liquid gold. The climate of a great part of the United States is subject to great vicissitudes, and we complain; but nature offers a compensation. These very vicissitudes are the abundant sources of beauty—as we have the temperature of every clime, so have we the skies—we have the blue unsearchable depths of the northern sky—we have the upheaved thunder-clouds of the Torrid Zone, fraught with gorgeousness and sublimity—we have the silver haze of England, and the golden atmosphere of Italy. And if he who has travelled and observed the skies of other climes will spend a few months on the banks of the Hudson, he must be constrained to acknowledge that for variety and magnificence American skies are unsurpassed. Italian skies have been lauded by every tongue, and sung by every poet, and who will deny their wonderful beauty? At sunset the serene arch is filled with alchemy that transmutes mountains, and streams, and temples, into living gold.

But the American summer never passes without many sunsets that might vie with the Italian, and many still more gorgeous—that seem peculiar to this clime.

Look at the heavens when the thunder shower has passed, and the sun stoops behind the western mountains—there the low purple clouds hang in festoons around the steeps—in the higher heaven are crimson bands interwoven with feathers of gold, fit for the wings of
angels—and still above is spread that interminable field of ether, whose color is too beautiful to have a name.

It is not in the summer only that American skies are beautiful; for the winter evening often comes robed in purple and gold, and in the westering sun the iced groves glitter as beneath a shower of diamonds—and through the twilight heaven innumerable stars shine with a purer light than summer ever knows.

[III. The Want of Associations]

I will now venture a few remarks on what has been considered a grand defect in American scenery—the want of associations, such as arise amid the scenes of the old world.

We have many a spot as umbrageous as Vallombrosa, and as picturesque as the solitudes of Vaucluse; but Milton and Petrarch have not hallowed them by their footsteps and immortal verse. He who stands on Mont Albano and looks down on ancient Rome, has his mind peopled with the gigantic associations of the storied past; but he who stands on the mounds of the West, the most venerable remains of American antiquity, may experience the emotion of the sublime, but it is the sublimity of a shoreless ocean unislanded by the recorded deeds of man.

Yet American scenes are not destitute of historical and legendary associations—the great struggle for freedom has sanctified many a spot, and many a mountain, stream, and rock has its legend, worthy of poet's pen or the painter's pencil. But American associations are not so much of the past as of the present and the future. Seated on a pleasant knoll, look down into the bosom of that secluded valley, begin with wooded hills—through those enamelled meadows and wide waving fields of grain, a silver stream winds lingeringly along—here, seeking the green shade of trees—there, glancing in the sunshine: on its banks are rural dwellings shaded by elms and garlanded by flowers—from yonder dark mass of foliage the village spire beams like a star. You see no ruined tower to tell of outrage—no gorgeous temple to speak of ostentation; but freedom's offspring—peace, security, and happiness, dwell there, the spirits of the scene. On the margin of that gentle river the village girls may ramble unmolested—and the glad school-boy, with hook and line, pass his bright holiday—those neat dwellings, unpretending to magnificence, are the abodes of plenty, virtue, and refinement. And in looking over the yet uncultivated scene, the mind's eye may see far into futurity. Where the wolf roams, the plough shall glisten; on the gray crag shall rise temple and tower—mighty deeds shall be done in the now pathless wilderness; and poets yet unborn shall sanctify the soil.

[IV. Conclusion]

[1. The Destruction of Beautiful Landscapes]

It was my intention to attempt a description of several districts remarkable for their picturesqueness and truly American character; but I fear to trespass longer on your time
and patience. Yet I cannot but express my sorrow that the beauty of such landscapes are quickly passing away--the ravages of the axe are daily increasing--the most noble scenes are made desolate, and oftentimes with a wantonness and barbarism scarcely credible in a civilized nation. The wayside is becoming shadeless, and another generation will behold spots, now rife with beauty, desecrated by what is called improvement; which, as yet, generally destroys Nature's beauty without substituting that of Art. This is a regret rather than a complaint; such is the road society has to travel; it may lead to refinement in the end, but the traveller who sees the place of rest close at hand, dislikes the road that has so many unnecessary windings.

[2. We Are Still in Eden]

I will now conclude, in the hope that, though feebly urged, the importance of cultivating a taste for scenery will not be forgotten. Nature has spread for us a rich and delightful banquet. Shall we turn from it? We are still in Eden; the wall that shuts us out of the garden is our own ignorance and folly. We should not allow the poet's words to be applicable to us--

Deep in rich pasture do thy flocks complain?
Not so; but to their master is denied
To share the sweet serene.

May we at times turn from the ordinary pursuits of life to the pure enjoyment of rural nature; which is in the soul like a fountain of cool waters to the way-worn traveller; and let us

Learn
The laws by which the Eternal doth sublime
And sanctify his works, that we may see
The hidden glory veiled from vulgar eyes.