

praise his country, referred to the Mississippi as "this prince of rivers in comparison of whom the Nile is but a small rivulet, and the Danube a ditch."¹ Thomas Jefferson was most proud of Virginia's Natural Bridge, and of places such as the gorge that the Potomac River cut as it passed through the Allegheny Mountains near the present site of Harper's Ferry, West Virginia. Of the latter he declared in 1784: "this scene is worth a voyage across the Atlantic."² America's nature, if not her culture, would command the world's admiration.

Realizing that natural environment was one of the few bases on which a favorable comparison could be made with other nations, Americans were quick to defend nature in their country against the aspersions of Europeans. Jefferson's *Notes on Virginia* was in part a vindication of the New World from charges of French scientists that its natural products were inferior, even runty. He insisted that his country was second to none where nature was concerned and pointed for evidence to the recently exhumed skeleton of a mammoth, contending that its descendants possibly still roamed the interior of the continent.³ Samuel Williams, a minister with an interest in natural history, argued similarly in his 1794 history of Vermont. "Instead of finding nature but weak and feeble in America," he concluded, "her animals appear to be marked with an energy and a magnitude superior to what is found in Europe."⁴

Americans traveling in the Old World resorted to similar tactics to vindicate their country. In the summer of 1784 Abigail Adams joined her husband, who was serving as his country's representative in Paris. The following year the Adamses moved to London. In spite of her patriotism, the glamor and sophistication of Europe awed Mrs. Adams. Almost desperately she sought ways to reconfirm her faith in America. Nature offered a possibility, which she explored in a letter dated November 21, 1786, to a friend in Massachusetts. "I will not dispute," she remarked, "what every person must assent to; that [in Europe] the fine arts, manufactures, and agriculture have arrived at a greater degree of maturity and perfec-

1. *Prose of Freneau*, ed. Marsh, p. 228.

2. Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia* (New York, 1964), p. 17.

3. *Ibid.*, pp. 37ff.

4. Williams, *The Natural and Civil History of Vermont* (2d rev. ed. 2 vols. Burlington, Vt., 1809), I, 159. For a secondary discussion of this international scientific debate see Ralph N. Miller, "American Nationalism as a Theory of Nature," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 12 (1955), 74-95.

tion." But in some respects she felt the New World had the edge: "do you know that European birds have not half the melody of ours? Nor is their fruit half so sweet, nor their flowers half so fragrant, nor their manners half so pure, nor their people half so virtuous." Still Abigail Adams was only half convinced, and she warned her correspondent to "keep this to yourself, or I shall be thought more than half deficient in understanding and taste."⁵

Such lack of confidence in nature as the ground for nationalism stemmed in part from the realization of Americans that, after all, other countries had impressive birds, fruit, and flowers too. In spite of Freneau, the Danube was not a ditch, nor was there anything wrong with the size or vigor of European animals. And, impressive scenery existed in the Old World to match the views Jefferson extolled. Clearly "nature" was not enough; an attribute unique to nature in the New World had to be found. The search led to the wilderness. In the early nineteenth century American nationalists began to understand that it was in the *wildness* of its nature that their country was unmatched. While other nations might have an occasional wild peak or patch of heath, there was no equivalent of a wild continent. And if, as many suspected, wilderness was the medium through which God spoke most clearly, then America had a distinct moral advantage over Europe, where centuries of civilization had deposited a layer of artificiality over His works. The same logic worked to convince Americans that because of the aesthetic and inspirational qualities of wilderness they were destined for artistic and literary excellence.⁶

After Alexander Wilson's 1804 poem "The Foresters," American letters and oratory contained numerous predictions, sometimes confident, sometimes anxious, that wilderness would inspire a great

5. Philip Rahv, ed., *Discovery of Europe: The Story of American Experience in the Old World* (Garden City, N.Y., 1960), p. 52. The same point is brought out by a Kentuckian in a letter to England: Gilbert Imlay, *A Topographical Description of the Western Territory of North America* (London, 1792), pp. 39-40.

6. In this analysis and that which follows I have drawn on Merle Curti, *The Roots of American Loyalty* (New York, 1946), pp. 30-64; Perry Miller, "Nature and the National Ego" in *Errand into the Wilderness* (Cambridge, Mass., 1956), pp. 204-16; Sanford, *Quest for Paradise*, especially pp. 135-54; and Sanford's "The Concept of the Sublime in the Works of Cole and Bryant," *American Literature*, 28 (1957), 434-48. Especially important for understanding the American conception of the moral influence of nature is Neil Harris, *The Artist in American Society: The Formative Years, 1790-1860* (New York, 1966), Chs. 7 and 8.

praise his country, referred to the Mississippi as "this prince of rivers in comparison of whom the Nile is but a small rivulet, and the Danube a ditch."¹ Thomas Jefferson was most proud of Virginia's Natural Bridge, and of places such as the gorge that the Potomac River cut as it passed through the Allegheny Mountains near the present site of Harper's Ferry, West Virginia. Of the latter he declared in 1784: "this scene is worth a voyage across the Atlantic."² America's nature, if not her culture, would command the world's admiration.

Realizing that natural environment was one of the few bases on which a favorable comparison could be made with other nations, Americans were quick to defend nature in their country against the aspersions of Europeans. Jefferson's *Notes on Virginia* was in part a vindication of the New World from charges of French scientists that its natural products were inferior, even runty. He insisted that his country was second to none where nature was concerned and pointed for evidence to the recently exhumed skeleton of a mammoth, contending that its descendants possibly still roamed the interior of the continent.³ Samuel Williams, a minister with an interest in natural history, argued similarly in his 1794 history of Vermont. "Instead of finding nature but weak and feeble in America," he concluded, "her animals appear to be marked with an energy and a magnitude superior to what is found in Europe."⁴

Americans traveling in the Old World resorted to similar tactics to vindicate their country. In the summer of 1784 Abigail Adams joined her husband, who was serving as his country's representative in Paris. The following year the Adamses moved to London. In spite of her patriotism, the glamor and sophistication of Europe awed Mrs. Adams. Almost desperately she sought ways to reconfirm her faith in America. Nature offered a possibility, which she explored in a letter dated November 21, 1786, to a friend in Massachusetts. "I will not dispute," she remarked, "what every person must assent to; that [in Europe] the fine arts, manufactures, and agriculture have arrived at a greater degree of maturity and perfec-

1. *Prose of Freneau*, ed. Marsh, p. 228.

2. Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia* (New York, 1964), p. 17.

3. *Ibid.*, pp. 37ff.

4. Williams, *The Natural and Civil History of Vermont* (2d rev. ed. 2 vols. Burlington, Vt., 1809), I, 159. For a secondary discussion of this international scientific debate see Ralph N. Miller, "American Nationalism as a Theory of Nature," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 12 (1955), 74-95.

tion." But in some respects she felt the New World had the edge: "do you know that European birds have not half the melody of ours? Nor is their fruit half so sweet, nor their flowers half so fragrant, nor their manners half so pure, nor their people half so virtuous." Still Abigail Adams was only half convinced, and she warned her correspondent to "keep this to yourself, or I shall be thought more than half deficient in understanding and taste."⁵

Such lack of confidence in nature as the ground for nationalism stemmed in part from the realization of Americans that, after all, other countries had impressive birds, fruit, and flowers too. In spite of Freneau, the Danube was not a ditch, nor was there anything wrong with the size or vigor of European animals. And, impressive scenery existed in the Old World to match the views Jefferson extolled. Clearly "nature" was not enough; an attribute unique to nature in the New World had to be found. The search led to the wilderness. In the early nineteenth century American nationalists began to understand that it was in the wilderness of its nature that their country was unmatched. While other nations might have an occasional wild peak or patch of heath, there was no equivalent of a wild continent. And if, as many suspected, wilderness was the medium through which God spoke most clearly, then America had a distinct moral advantage over Europe, where centuries of civilization had deposited a layer of artificiality over His works. The same logic worked to convince Americans that because of the aesthetic and inspirational qualities of wilderness they were destined for artistic and literary excellence.⁶

After Alexander Wilson's 1804 poem "The Foresters," American letters and oratory contained numerous predictions, sometimes confident, sometimes anxious, that wilderness would inspire a great

5. Philip Rahv, ed., *Discovery of Europe: The Story of American Experience in the Old World* (Garden City, N.Y., 1960), p. 52. The same point is brought out by a Kentuckian in a letter to England: Gilbert Imlay, *A Topographical Description of the Western Territory of North America* (London, 1792), pp. 39-40.

6. In this analysis and that which follows I have drawn on Merle Curti, *The Roots of American Loyalty* (New York, 1946), pp. 30-64; Perry Miller, "Nature and the National Ego" in *Errand into the Wilderness* (Cambridge, Mass., 1956), pp. 204-16; Sanford, *Quest for Paradise*, especially pp. 135-54; and Sanford's "The Concept of the Sublime in the Works of Cole and Bryant," *American Literature*, 28 (1957), 434-48. Especially important for understanding the American conception of the moral influence of nature is Neil Harris, *The Artist in American Society: The Formative Years, 1790-1860* (New York, 1966), Chs. 7 and 8.

culture.⁷ Wilson, a Scottish-born ornithologist, pointed out that if "bare bleak heathes and brooks of half a mile can rouse the thousand bards of Britain's Isle," then America's "boundless woods" should stimulate even more distinguished verse. However, Wilson lamented, the "wild grandeur" of the New World was yet unsung.⁸ Many felt that this was only a matter of time. After all, declaimed Daniel Bryan, one need only stand on "the wildest cliffs of Alleghany" in order to begin "warbling . . . the sweetest raptures of Inspiration."⁹

De Witt Clinton agreed that his country could be optimistic about its cultural prospects. After reviewing the artistic achievements of other nations in an address before the American Academy of Art, he asked rhetorically: "and can there be a country in the world better calculated than ours to exercise and 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?" Clinton went on, blending Romanticism and nationalism, to argue that "here Nature has conducted her operations on a magnificent scale." America had mountains, lakes, rivers, waterfalls, and "boundless forests" unequalled in all the world. "The wild, romantic, and awful scenery," he concluded, "is calculated to produce a correspondent impression in the imagination—to elevate all the faculties of the mind, and to exalt all the feelings of the heart." Similar statements were legion. Anyone venturing to suggest that "a man will not necessarily be a great poet because he lives near a great mountain" was shouted down as disloyal to his country.¹⁰

7. On the pressure Americans felt to find a distinctive national character and culture and the role of nature in this process, see Benjamin T. Spencer, *The Quest for Nationality: An American Literary Campaign* (Syracuse, N.Y., 1957), pp. 25 ff.; Hans Kohn, *American Nationalism* (New York, 1957), pp. 41 ff.; Wilson O. Clough, *The Necessary Earth: Nature and Solitude in American Literature* (Austin, Texas, 1964), pp. 58–74; and John C. McCloskey, "The Campaign of Periodicals After the War of 1812 for a National American Literature," *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America*, 50 (1935), 262–73.

8. Wilson, "The Foresters" (West Chester, Pa., 1838), p. 6. Robert Cantwell's *Alexander Wilson: Naturalist and Pioneer* (Philadelphia, 1961), pp. 127–31, discusses the circumstances of the poem.

9. Bryan, *The Mountain Muse* (Harrisonburg, Va., 1813), [p. 9].

10. Clinton in Thomas S. Cummings, *Historic Annals of the National Academy of Design* (Philadelphia, 1865), p. 12; as quoted from Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's *Kavanagh* in Jones, *O Strange New World*, p. 347. Jones, pp. 346–89, contains many insights into the use of nature as a basis for American nationalism.

One of the manifestations of the emphasis on America's wild landscape was a series of illustrated "scenery" albums reflecting the nationalism of nature. In 1820 plans were made for a volume entitled *Picturesque Views of the American Scene* that would show "our lofty mountains . . . the unexampled magnitude of our cata-racts, the wild grandeur of our western forests . . . unsurpassed by any of the boasted scenery of other countries."¹¹ Three issues appeared, and as Romantic interest in nature increased in the subsequent decades, there were numerous similar ventures. Nathaniel P. Willis' text for *American Scenery* characteristically asserted that "Nature has wrought with a bolder hand in America." According to Willis, the American wilderness presented "a lavish and large-featured sublimity . . . quite dissimilar to the picturesque of all other countries."¹² A few years later came *The Home Book of the Picturesque* with a lead essay "Scenery and Mind." Its author, Elias Lyman Magoon, relied heavily on the assumption that nature was a source of revelation: in his final paragraphs he thanked God "that there are yet wild spots and wildernesses left . . . whence thought may take the wildest range." Such places, Magoon believed, "have ever developed the strongest patriotism, intensest energy, and most valuable letters of the world."¹³ Another instance of this variety of publishing endeavor was *The Scenery of the United States Illustrated*. As usual there was an introductory essay defending the American landscape as being "as wild, romantic, and lovely as can be seen in any other part of the world. And, certainly, our forests," exulted its author, "fresh as it were, from the hands of the Creator, are, beyond dispute, incomparable."¹⁴

Confident trumpeting obscured the anxiety many Americans felt about the relation of their country to Europe.¹⁵ In spite of their hopes and official pronouncements, nationalists could but covertly regard the Old World as the mecca of all that was tasteful, refined, and creative. Theirs was the dilemma of provincials who desired

11. As quoted in Frank Weitenkampf, "Early American Landscape Prints," *Art Quarterly*, 8 (1945), 61.

12. Willis, *American Scenery* (2 vols. London, 1840), 1, v. William Bartlett did the lavish engravings for the book, popularly known as "Bartlett's Views."

13. Magoon, *The Home Book of the Picturesque* (New York, 1852), pp. 37–38.

14. Anonymous, *The Scenery of the United States Illustrated* (New York, 1855), p. 1.

15. Cushing Strout, *The American Image of the Old World* (New York, 1963), especially pp. 62–85, has explored this tension in detail.

cultural independence and yet were unable to tear their eyes from the European sun or to resist going abroad for training and inspiration. It was especially difficult to ignore the Old World's long history and rich accumulation of custom and tradition which stood in such sharp contrast to America's comparative rawness. No one could deny that Europe was enjoying a brilliant artistic renaissance based on two thousand years of cultural development at the same time that the New World was discovered.

Washington Irving gave this provincial dilemma classic expression. He was already a well-known literary figure and the subject of considerable American pride when in 1815 he sailed to the Old World. In England Irving felt the pull of conflicting emotions, and he expressed them in one portion of his *Sketch Book* (1819-20). On the credit side of "my own country," Irving itemized the "charms of nature" including "her valleys, teeming with wild fertility . . . her boundless plains . . . [and] her trackless forests." He concluded: "no, never, need an American look beyond his own country for the sublime and beautiful of natural scenery." But Europe had much to recommend it, in Irving's estimation: qualities that depended on the absence of the same wildness that glorified America. He was especially impressed with "the accumulated treasures of age"; the chronicle of man's past achievements that the landscape reflected. "I longed to wander," Irving declared, "over the scenes of renowned achievement—to tread, as it were, in the footsteps of antiquity—to loiter about the ruined castle—to meditate on the falling tower—to escape, in short, from the commonplace reality of the present, and lose myself among the shadowy grandeurs of the past."¹⁶ The Romantic temperament that attracted him to wilderness also made Europe's history appealing.

For seventeen years Irving remained overseas, and his countrymen could not suppress the idea that he had turned his back on America. In fact, however, Irving's patriotism persisted and, in a corner of his mind, an urge for wilderness remained. In 1832, just before sailing for the United States, he wrote to his brother of his desire to see the American West "while still in a state of pristine

16. *The Sketch-Book*, Irving's Works, Geoffrey Crayon edition (27 vols. New York, 1880), 2, 16-17. Irving's biography and further analysis of his relationship to Europe can be found in William L. Hedges, *Washington Irving: An American Study, 1802-1832* (Baltimore, 1965) and George S. Hellman, *Washington Irving Esquire: Ambassador at Large from the New World to the Old* (New York, 1925).

wildness, and behold herds of buffaloes scouring the native prairies." After landing in New York, Irving joined a party of commissioners to Indians in the Kansas and Oklahoma territories. This contact with the wilderness had special meaning for a man recently returned from Europe. Several weeks of camping convinced him that nothing could be more beneficial to young men than the "wild wood life . . . of a magnificent wilderness." He added: "we send our youth abroad to grow luxurious and effeminate in Europe; it appears to me, that a previous tour on the prairies would be more likely to produce that manliness, simplicity, and self-dependence most in unison with our political institutions."¹⁷ If Irving's purpose in such a statement was to vindicate himself from the stigma of a long, voluntary stay in Europe, as critics at the time alleged, the contrast of Old World and New on the basis of wildness was effective. Still, Irving disdained his own advice and in 1842 recrossed the ocean for four more years. Ambivalence rather than hypocrisy explains his conduct. Like many of his contemporaries, Irving's loyalties were divided. The civilized refinement of the Old World and the wildness of the New were both magnetic.

The antiquity of Europe that attracted Washington Irving was, of course, unanswerable, yet it occurred to other writers that its implication might be reversed. By the 1830s some intellectual patriots were seizing on America's very lack of history—its wilderness condition—as an answer to Europe's claims and their own doubts. On his tour of the West in 1833, for instance, Charles Fenno Hoffman paused to confess that he venerated "a hoary oak" more than "a mouldering column." These symbols of New World and Old suggested a more emotional contrast:

What are the temples which Roman robbers have reared,—what are the towers in which feudal oppression has fortified itself,—what are the blood-stained associations of the one, or the despotic superstitions of the other, to the deep forests which the eye of God has alone pervaded, and where Nature, in her unviolated sanctuary, has for ages laid her fruits and flowers on His altar! What is the echo of roofs that a few centuries since rung with barbaric revels, or of aisles that pealed the anthems of painted pomp, to the silence that has reigned

17. Irving, *A Tour of the Prairies*, ed. John Francis McDermott (Norman, Okla., 1956), p. xvii, 55. The original edition was 1835.

in these dim groves since the first fiat of Creation was spoken.¹⁸

Employing wilderness, Hoffman invested America with a history. Moreover, in comparing robbers, blood, despotism, and barbarity with sanctuaries and altars, he left no doubt about his conviction that the American heritage was more innocent and moral. Unable to duplicate Europe's castles and cathedrals, Hoffman dispensed with them by substituting wilderness.

After Irving and Hoffman, travelers with Romantic tastes frequently expressed the idea that America's wilderness constituted an advantage over other countries. A few individuals like Joel T. Headley had actually seen the Alps and were willing to pronounce the Adirondacks superior. Others less well informed were still satisfied that "the Alps, so celebrated in history and by all travellers and admirers of mountain landscape, cannot . . . present a scenery more wild, more rugged, more grand, more romantic, and more enchantingly picturesque and beautiful, than that which surrounds [Lake Tahoe]." Sometimes American defense became impassioned: "a fig for your Italian scenery!" shouted one patriot, "this is the country where nature reigns in her virgin beauty . . . this is the land to study nature in all her luxuriant charms . . . to feel your soul expand under the mighty influences of nature in her primitive beauty and strength!"¹⁹ Again wilderness was the nationalists' trump.

So much effort in the early nineteenth century went into calling for and worrying about a national style that there was little actual progress toward achieving one. Gradually, however, American letters and art acquired some distinction and distinctiveness. New-World themes were essential, and wilderness fulfilled this requirement. Romantics invested it with value while nationalists proclaimed its uniqueness. Creative minds soon found uses for wilderness in poetry, fiction, and painting.

William Cullen Bryant was one of the first major American writers to turn to wilderness. In his precocious poem, "Thana-

18. Hoffman, *Winter in the West*, pp. 193-94. For an indication of the way such ideas permeated popular culture see Ruth Miller Elsen, *Guardians of Tradition: American Schoolbooks of the Nineteenth Century* (Lincoln, Neb., 1964), pp. 35-40.

19. Headley, *Adirondack*, pp. iv, 146; Edwin Bryant, *What I Saw in California*, p. 228; Lanman, *Summer in the Wilderness*, p. 171.

topsis" (1811), he referred to "the continuous woods where rolls the Oregon." Four years later Bryant revealed his full acceptance of the Romantic mood when he advised anyone who had seen enough of "sorrows, crimes, and cares" of civilized life to "enter this wild wood and view the haunts of Nature." He also grasped the moral and religious significance of wild country: "A Forest Hymn" (1825) began with the idea that "the groves were God's first temples" and Bryant professed his own intention of retiring to "the woody wilderness" for reassurance and worship. Proud that his country had such places, Bryant declared in a poem celebrating Monument Mountain in the Berkshires that "thou who wouldst see the lovely and the wild mingled in harmony on Nature's face, ascend our rocky mountains." In 1833 "The Prairies" sounded a paean to the isolation and vastness of the Great Plains. Bryant concluded with an expression of the delight that he felt in being "in the wilderness alone."²⁰ Forty years later he was no less enthusiastic. In 1872 he edited and wrote the introduction for *Picturesque America*, a scenery album, and took the opportunity to declare that "we have some of the wildest and most beautiful scenery in the world." Why travel to Switzerland, Bryant wondered, when there was an abundance of wild mountains in the American West.²¹

Novelists also responded. In James Kirke Paulding's *The Backwoodsman* of 1818, the protagonist, a "hardy swain," left the Hudson Valley to roam "in western wilds." The story deliberately alerted American writers to the literary potential of the frontier. Looking west, rather than to Europe, Paulding thought, would be "the means of attaining to novelty of subject."²² Initially James Fenimore Cooper disregarded this advice. His first novel, *Precaution*, (1820) was a patent imitation of the English manners-and-mores genre. *The Spy*, of the following year, used the American Revolution as a setting and was well received. But with *The Pio-*

20. The quotations are from *The Poetical Works of William Cullen Bryant*, ed. Parke Godwin (2 vols. New York, 1883), 1, 19, 23, 102, 133, 228-32. In the light of the debate on the quality of nature in the New World compared to Europe's see Ralph N. Miller, "Nationalism in Bryant's 'The Prairies,'" *American Literature*, 21 (1949), 227-32.

21. Bryant, ed., *Picturesque America* (2 vols. New York, 1872), 1, iii. Bryant's relation to nature is elaborated upon in Norman Foerster, *Nature in American Literature* (New York, 1923), pp. 1-19, and Donald A. Ringe, "Kindred Spirits: Bryant and Cole," *American Quarterly*, 6 (1954), 233-44. The most recent biography is Albert F. McLean, Jr., *William Cullen Bryant* (New York, 1964), see especially pp. 39-64.

22. Paulding, *The Backwoodsman* (Philadelphia, 1818), pp. 3, 7.

neers (1823) Cooper became a national literary hero. In this first native best-seller and the four other highly popular Leatherstocking tales that followed in the next eighteen years,²³ he discovered the literary possibilities of wilderness. Wild forests and plains, as Cooper both knew and imagined them, dominate the action and determine the plots of these novels. The Leatherstocking stories and the other early "backwoods" novels of Robert Montgomery Byrd, Timothy Flint, and William Gilmore Simms were preeminently American fiction because they bore the stamp of the unique in the American environment.

From the standpoint of the nascent American appreciation of wilderness, it was significant that although Cooper was concerned with the advance of civilization into the west, he did not portray wild country as a loathsome obstacle to be conquered and destroyed. Instead Cooper took great pains to show that wilderness had value as a moral influence, a source of beauty, and a place of exciting adventure. Natty Bumppo, or Leatherstocking, became the mouthpiece for the standard Romantic conventions regarding the sublimity and holiness of wild nature. Indeed Natty is his own best evidence, since lifelong exposure to the woods has given him an innate goodness and moral sense. His nobility and that of many of Cooper's savages caused them to cringe before the evils of settlers and settlements. In *The Pioneers* Natty flees from the town to the solitude of the forest and reports that no city dweller can "know how often the hand of God is seen in the wilderness." He also slaps at Europe, contending in *The Prairie* (1827) that in contrast to the virgin New World the Old should really be called "a worn out, and an abused, and a sacrilegious world." Both Natty and Cooper believed in "the honesty of the woods!"²⁴

Cooper indirectly dignified wilderness by deprecating those insensitive to its ethical and aesthetic values. Although set on the frontier, his Leatherstocking novels held no brief for exploitation. Pioneers who wastefully slash the forest and its creatures, such as Billy Kirby in *The Pioneers*, the family of Ishmael Bush in *The Prairie*, and Hurry Harry in *The Deerslayer* (1841) occupied the

23. James D. Hart, *The Popular Book: A History of America's Literary Taste* (Berkeley, Cal., 1961), pp. 80-82.

24. Cooper, *The Pioneers*, Mohawk edition (New York, c. 1912), p. 302; Cooper, *The Prairies*, Rinehart edition (New York, 1950), pp. 246, 275. Cooper's idea of noble savagery is discussed in Fred A. Crane, "The Noble Savage in America, 1815-60" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Yale University, 1952), Ch. 5.

lowest positions in Cooper's elaborate social scale. Leatherstocking, on the other hand, was the ideal pioneer because he honored the wilderness and used it respectfully. Cooper put his condemnation of the exploiter into Leatherstocking's mouth: "they scourge the very 'arth with their axes. Such hills and hunting grounds as I have seen stripped of the gifts of the Lord, without remorse or shame!" Natty was near the end of his trail at this point. He had retreated beyond the Mississippi, but the tide of settlement was not far behind. On his deathbed he summarized his reaction: "how much has the beauty of the wilderness been deformed in two short lives!"²⁵

While Cooper could appreciate the strength of Natty's position, his own attitude was more complex. Attraction to wilderness and sadness at its disappearance was only a part of his thinking. Cooper knew that civilization also had its claims and that ultimately they must prevail. The elimination of wilderness was tragic, but it was a necessary tragedy; civilization was the greater good. To be sure, in its crude, frontier stage civilized society might contain persons of much less worth than Leatherstocking and even many Indians, but to Cooper this was only semi-civilization. In time he knew that refined gentlemen and ladies would evolve, people such as Captain Middleton and Inez de Certavallos of *The Prairie*, Judge Marmaduke Temple and Oliver Effingham of *The Pioneers*, and, one suspects, Cooper himself. This was the elite whose sense of law and beauty lifted man above the beast. Even Natty Bumppo, for all his virtues, lacked the social status to fraternize on such levels. To have them, Cooper made clear, was worth the price of losing wilderness.²⁶ He had reached the pioneers' conclusion without using the pioneers' rationale, without condemning wilderness. For Cooper it was not a case of good versus evil, light fighting darkness, but of two kinds of good with the greater prevailing. The Leatherstocking novels gave Cooper's countrymen reason to feel both proud and ashamed at conquering wilderness.

25. Cooper, *Prairie*, pp. 80, 290.

26. The outlines of this interpretation as it concerns the Indian and the frontiersman have been drawn in Pearce, *Savages of America*, pp. 200-12; Smith, *Virgin Land*, pp. 59-70, 220-24; Moore, *Frontier Mind*, pp. 159 ff.; and Donald A. Ringe, *James Fenimore Cooper* (New York, 1962). Two excellent shorter pieces are Roy Harvey Pearce, "The Leatherstocking Tales Re-examined," *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 46 (1947), 524-36, and Henry Nash Smith's "Introduction" to Cooper's *The Prairie*, Rinehart edition (New York, 1950), pp. v-xx. Lillian Fischer, "Social Criticism in Cooper's Leatherstocking Tales: The Meaning of the Forest" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Yale University, 1957) is less useful.

In 1823, the year of Cooper's *Pioneers*, a young man gave up a shaky career as a portrait painter in frontier Ohio and turned his considerable talents to depicting, as he put it, "the wild and great features of nature: mountainous forests that know not man."²⁷ Over the next several decades, Thomas Cole attracted wide attention as a celebrant of the American wilderness. His landscapes added art to poetry and fiction as a medium through which his countrymen could be instructed in the glories of the native landscape. But as with Cooper, Cole's love of wilderness was at times clouded over with doubts and offset by an antipodal attraction to civilization. Cole the Romantic enthusiast, pantheist, and inspirer of the Hudson River School was not the whole man. Fortunately, he wrote as well as painted, and his letters, journals, and essays reveal a mind engaged in a dialogue with itself about the advantages and limitations of America's wilderness.

Cole immigrated to the United States from England in 1818 as a youth of seventeen and settled with his family in the upper Ohio Valley. The beauty he perceived in the wild forests of that region moved him deeply and determined his choice of career. With hopes of translating his feelings into pictures, Cole went to New York in 1825 and quickly discovered the Catskill Mountains. Three scenes, hesitatingly exhibited in a gallery, excited the artistic community and encouraged Cole to pursue his art. In the next four years he ranged, note and sketch books in hand, through the wildest regions he could find. Wilderness had a religious as well as an aesthetic significance for him, and he exulted with Romantic abandon in what he saw. The outcome of this Catskill period were paintings such as "Mountain Sunrise," "Landscape with Tree Trunks," and "View Near Ticonderoga," dramatic compositions filled with precipitous cliffs, dark gorges, and surging storm clouds.²⁸ These and "North-

27. As quoted in James Thomas Flexner, *That Wilder Image: The Painting of America's Native School from Thomas Cole to Winslow Homer* (Boston, 1962), p. 39. Compare Cole's statement in Louis Legrand Noble, *The Life and Works of Thomas Cole*, ed. Elliott S. Vesell (Cambridge, Mass., 1964), p. 62. Noble's account, originally published in 1853, is the best biographical notice.

28. These pictures are reproduced and Cole's work discussed in Frederick A. Sweet, *The Hudson River School and the Early American Landscape Tradition* (New York, 1945), pp. 55-69. Also pertinent are Wolfgang Born, *American Landscape Painting* (New Haven, 1948), pp. 24 ff.; Walter L. Nathan, "Thomas Cole and the Romantic Landscape" in *Romanticism in America*, ed. George Boas (New York, 1961), pp. 24-62; and Oliver W. Larkin, *Art and Life in America* (rev. ed. New York, 1960), pp. 200 ff. Two dissertations supplement the published material: Kenneth James

West Bay, Lake Winnepesaukee, N.H." broke with landscape painting tradition by either omitting any sign of man and his works or reducing the human figures to ant-like proportions. Wilderness dominated the canvas, and Cooper and Bryant joined in the applause of Cole as a contributor to the rising vogue of wild nature and to American nationalism. According to a fellow artist, Cole "studied to embody whatever was characteristic of the singular grandeur and wildness of mountain, lake, and forest, in the American wilderness."²⁹

Although Cole wrote in the late 1820s that "pleasures spring like flowers within the bosom of the wilderness" and declared that he always returned from the mountains to the city "with a presentiment of evil," at times he dreaded the wilds. The line between the sublime's delightful horror and genuine terror was thin. Once in the Catskills, Cole experienced a violent thunderstorm. At first, according to his journal, he gave himself up to the wildness of the elements and he pronounced the situation "romantic." But as the fury increased, ecstasy changed to apprehension. When the storm departed, Cole was relieved to see "in a neighbouring dell, the blue smoke curling up quietly from a cottage chimney."³⁰ In the fall of 1828 the artist journeyed to the White Mountains and recognized conflicting emotions in the presence of wilderness. In his journal he generalized: "man may seek such scenes and find pleasure in the discovery, but there is a mysterious fear [that] comes over him and hurries him away. The sublime features of nature are too severe for a lone man to look upon and be happy."³¹ A later, unpublished poem, "The Spirits of the Wilderness," reiterated the point that wilderness alone could not cheer and revive; love and friendship were necessary too.³² The impulse to solitude and wildness and

LaBudde, "The Mind of Thomas Cole" (University of Minnesota, 1954), and Barbara H. Deutsch, "Cole and Durand: Criticism and Patronage, A Study of American Taste in Landscape, 1825-1865" (Harvard University, 1957).

29. Daniel Huntington as quoted in Noble, *Cole*, pp. 56-57. Compare the similar tribute from William Cullen Bryant: *A Funeral Oration Occasioned by the Death of Thomas Cole* (New York, 1848), p. 14. On the similarities of the two men, which included a love of wilderness, see Ringe, "Kindred Spirits," 233-44. James A. Beard, "Cooper and His Artistic Contemporaries," *New York History*, 35 (1954), 480-495, discusses the friendship and mutual artistic debt of Cole and Cooper.

30. Noble, pp. 40, 43-45.

31. As quoted in Flexner, *That Wilder Image*, p. 40. Compare Noble, p. 67.

32. Thomas Cole Collection, New York State Library, Albany, N.Y. Box 6, Folder 2.

the attractiveness of society and civilization pulled Cole and his art in different directions.

The same disturbing conflicts that Cole had felt in the Catskills and White Mountains reappeared on a large scale in his relation to Europe. By 1829 he had acquired the patronage to finance a trip abroad, but his American admirers, and probably Cole himself, had doubts. Would not exposure to the Old World lure him away from the American wilderness as a subject for art? His friend, Bryant, certainly recognized the danger, and in 1829 wrote "To Cole, the Painter, Departing for Europe." Its import was that throughout his travels Cole must strive to "keep that earlier, wilder image bright."³³

Cole remained overseas, principally in London, Paris, and Florence, three years, and, as Bryant suspected, the grandeur of Europe was not lost upon him. Although he did not hesitate to comment critically on contemporary painters, the Old Masters were above reproach. Like Washington Irving, Cole was especially sensitive to the thick crust that history and tradition had deposited on European scenery. "Although American scenery is often so fine," he asserted, "we feel the want of associations such as cling to scenes in the old world. Simple nature is not quite sufficient. We want human interest, incident and action to render the effect of landscape complete." Yet Cole struggled, almost desperately, to resist this train of thought. In 1832 he wrote from Florence that the canvas he was sending home would cause its viewers to "give me credit for not having forgotten those sublime scenes of the wilderness . . . scenes whose peculiar grandeur has no counterpart in this section of Europe."³⁴ At the same time, however, he was also painting castles, and aqueducts, and ruined temples.

Back in America, Cole continued to explore these tensions. He organized his thoughts in an "Essay on American Scenery" read on May 16, 1835, before the National Academy of Design. Drawing on his observations abroad, Cole reported that "in civilized Europe the primitive features of scenery have long since been destroyed or modified . . . crags that could not be removed have been crowned with towers, and the rudest valley tamed by the plough." Everywhere the landscape bespoke man's imprint and his "heroic deeds." "Time and genius," said Cole, "have suspended an imperishable halo" over Old World scenes. This was "glorious," but Cole quickly

33. *Works of Bryant*, I, 219.

34. Noble, p. 219; Cole to J. L. Morton, Jan. 31, 1832 in Noble, pp. 99-100.

added that Americans need not feel inferior. While lacking a storied past, "American scenery . . . has features, and glorious ones, unknown to Europe. The most distinctive, and perhaps the most impressive, characteristic of American scenery is its wildness." For one thing, this meant that in the native landscape the associations were not of man but of "God the creator." The wilderness exhibited His "undefiled works, and the mind is cast into the contemplation of eternal things."³⁵ Moreover, Cole wrote a few weeks later, in America "all nature . . . is new to art [not] . . . worn by the daily pencils of hundreds; but primeval forests, virgin lakes and water falls."³⁶

As a nationalist Cole vindicated wilderness, but as the awed provincial he had another opinion. In the same address in which he had rejoiced in his country's lack of ploughed fields and mountain castles, he proudly predicted a future strikingly similar to Europe's: "where the wolf roams, the plough shall glisten; on the gray crag shall rise the temple and tower—mighty deeds shall be done in the new pathless wilderness." In a similar vein Cole anticipated the time when the wild shores of the Hudson River would be covered with "temple, and tower, and dome, in every variety of picturesqueness and magnificence."³⁷ After renouncing the Rhine, Cole recreated it on the Hudson.

Cole, as Cooper, could not completely affirm the American wilderness. As Bryant anticipated, Europe had dimmed "that earlier, wilder image." More precisely, the European experience led Cole to idealize a combination of the wild and the civilized. "The Oxbow," a view of the Connecticut River valley from Mt. Holyoke painted in 1836, serves as an example. The left half of the picture is a rugged cliff with the shattered tree trunks and dark, violent clouds that Cole used to represent wilderness. On the right, along the far side of the river, is a vista of rural bliss. Manicured fields and neat groves separate well-kept homes while a warm sun bathes the countryside in a pleasant light. Cole's divided canvas implied the idea Henry David Thoreau accepted as axiomatic: man's optimum environment is a blend of wildness and civilization. In his five-panel "The Course of Empire," painted in 1836, Cole made his

35. Cole, "Essay on American Scenery," *American Monthly Magazine*, I (1836), 4-5.

36. Noble, p. 148.

37. Cole, "Essay on American Scenery," 9, 12.

point another way. Here, in sequence, we see a wilderness giving way to a pastoral society and then to a glorious civilization. But in the fourth painting new savages sack the great city, and in the fifth wilderness conditions are gradually returning as the cycle is completed. Vitality, Cole implied, was sapped in proportion to the distance a society departed from its wild roots. The intent was clear: Cole hoped to instruct his countrymen in the importance of appreciating their wilderness heritage.

Thomas Cole died prematurely in 1848, but by then American landscape painting was fully prepared to embrace the American wilderness. In 1855 Ashur B. Durand, a pioneer with Cole in the Hudson River School, called forthrightly for a wilderness art. "Go not abroad then in search of material for the exercise of your pencil," he wrote in the *Crayon*, "while the virgin charms of our native land have claims on your deepest affections." America's "untrodden wilds," Durand continued, "yet spared from the pollutions of civilization, afford a guarantee for a reputation of originality that you may elsewhere long seek and find not."³⁸ As his contribution Durand had already painted "Kindred Spirits" as a memorial to Cole. It showed the painter and William Cullen Bryant discussing the beauties of a wild mountain gorge.

In the art of Frederic E. Church, a student of Cole, the American wilderness received triumphant portrayal. The turning point in Church's development as an artist was an 1856 camping trip of eight days into the Mt. Katahdin region of northern Maine. The immediate result was "Sunset," a portrayal of a Maine lake and surrounding mountains. In the foreground a crude road and a few sheep are the only reminders of civilization. Four years later Church painted the magnificent "Twilight in the Wilderness" which in many ways was a realization of the promise of the American setting as an inspiration to art. All traces of the pastoral have vanished as the viewer looks from a spruce-covered cliff, over a river, to Katahdin-like mountains in the distance. The scene is suffused with the light of a brilliant sunset suggestive of the apocalyptic expectations a virgin continent aroused.³⁹

38. Durand, "Letters on Landscape Painting: Letter II," *Crayon*, 1 (1855), 34-35. On Durand see Barbara H. Deutsch, "Cole and Durand: Criticism and Patronage, A Study of American Taste in Landscape, 1825-1865" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard University, 1957) and Frederick A. Sweet, "Ashur B. Durand, Pioneer American Landscape Painter," *Art Quarterly*, 8 (1945), 141-60.

39. David C. Huntington's *The Landscapes of Frederic Edwin Church* (New York, 1966), pp. 71-83, discusses his wilderness art and reproduces the paintings in question.

In the latter half of the nineteenth century a second generation of landscapists took their palettes and their national pride across the Mississippi; in the wilderness of the Far West they found subjects for both. Within a few years of his first visit to the Rocky Mountains in 1858, Albert Bierstadt was depicting the peaks and canyons of that region on colossal canvases. Responding to public acclaim, Bierstadt in time painted all the famous early showplaces: Yosemite, Yellowstone, and the Grand Canyon. His exaggerated, dramatic style provoked some criticism, but represented a sincere attempt to communicate his intense excitement in the western landscape.

Thomas Moran rivaled Bierstadt as a painter of the wilderness. He too used huge canvases and dazzling colors in an effort to express his emotions. A genuine explorer, Moran participated in the 1871 Yellowstone expedition of Ferdinand V. Hayden (see Chapter 7), and his art assisted the campaign for the establishment of the national park. Subsequently, Moran ranged throughout the West, painting Wyoming's Teton Range (Mt. Moran bears his name), California's Sierra, and the Mountain of the Holy Cross in Colorado. When Congress in 1874 appropriated \$10,000 for one of Moran's paintings of the Grand Canyon to hang in the Senate Lobby, the American wilderness received official endorsement as a subject for national pride. On some of his western trips Moran's companion was William H. Jackson, a pioneer landscape photographer, whose artistic medium soon became a potent new force in directing American attention to wilderness as a source of nationalism.⁴⁰

40. Sweet, *Hudson River School*, pp. 96-112; Flexner, *That Wilder Image*, pp. 295-302; John C. Ewers, *Artists of the Old West* (New York, 1965), pp. 174-94. For Moran, Thurman Wilkins' *Thomas Moran: Artist of the Mountains* (Norman, Okla., 1966) is definitive. The William Henry Jackson Papers, State Historical Society of Colorado, Denver, and his autobiography *Time Exposure* (New York, 1940), shed light on the early history of wilderness photography while Ansel Adams' "The Artist and the Ideals of Wilderness" in *Wilderness: America's Living Heritage*, ed. David Brower (San Francisco, 1961), pp. 49-59, is a recent interpretation of the camera's role by a photographer whose work has helped create a new genre.