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From Mountain Gothic to Forest Gothic and Luminism: Changing Representations of Landscape in the Leatherstocking Tales and in American Painting

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In landscape description in his Leatherstocking saga, James Fenimore Cooper sought to capture the romantic enchantment of the bygone wilderness. His focus was on the sublime features of the natural environment. In his early

Leatherstocking novels, especially in *The Last of the Mohicans* (1826), he relied on mountain Gothic to celebrate the sublimity of America's wild places. In his later tales, *The Pathfinder* (1840) and *The Deerslayer* (1841), he switched from mountain Gothic to forest Gothic and also to luminism. Mountain Gothic emphasizes the rugged verticality of the rocky terrain. It is a ragged landscape, marked by dramatic peaks and chasms. Forest Gothic looks to the interior of wooded groves. The enclosed landscape is pictured like the interior of a Gothic cathedral, the filtered light and shadows enhancing the romantic effect. In luminism the topography is horizontal; and instead of chiaroscuro, the emphasis is directly on the light itself. Cooper's travels in Europe from 1826 to 1833 provided the catalyst for the transformation in his representation of landscape. In concluding, I will show similarities between the changes the author underwent as a literary landscape painter and changes American landscape painters subsequently experienced.

While fishing in Otsego Lake, in *The Pioneers*, Natty Bumppo reminisces about a place he would "climb" to "up on the Cattskills" and look out over "all creation." He recalls the spectacular view of the Hudson River region—of mountain peaks such as "High-peak" and "Round-top," as well as "the hills in the Hampshire grants" and "the highlands of the river." Moreover, "being the best part of a mile in the air," he tells of "having men's farms and housen at your feet, with rivers looking like ribands," and smaller mountains "seeming to be haystacks of green grass under you." Nearby he could visit Kaaterskill Falls. It ushers out of a "hollow" in a "cleft" in the mountains, he explains. "The first pitch is nigh two hundred feet, and the water looks like flakes of driven snow, afore it touches the bottom," and then "the stream gathers together again for a new start, and maybe flutters over fifty feet of flat-rock, before it falls for another hundred, when it jumps about from shelf to shelf, first turning this-away and then turning that-away, striving to get out of the hollow" to the "plain" below. "I have never heard of this spot before: it is not mentioned in the books," says Oliver Edwards. "To my judgement, lad, it's the best piece of work that I've met with in the woods," says Natty, "and not a dozen white men have ever laid eyes on it."¹

This fictive conversation took place in 1794. In 1815, Timothy Dwight visited the still little known mountain setting.² His enthusiasm for the "stupendous and awful grandeur" of the "precipice," and also for Kaaterskill Falls, with its "elegant volume of mist" and "succession of rainbows," was recorded in *Travels in New England and New York*, posthumously published in 1822.³ That was probably the same year that Cooper visited the site that came to be known as Pine Orchard and researched Natty's evocation of "all creation," perhaps lodging at the new dormitory overlooking the Hudson Valley.⁴ *The Pioneers* was published February 1, 1823. On the following Fourth of July opening ceremonies were conducted for a hotel that would replace the dormitory and come to be known as the Catskill Mountain House.⁵ In the years that followed affluent tourists flocked to the hotel, writers described the falls and valley view, the setting was pictured repeatedly in

American scenery books, and painted by the likes of Frederick Church, Thomas Cole, Jasper Cropsey, Sanford Gifford, Winslow Homer, and Jervis McEntee.⁶ We have to be cautious about equating the opinions of the backwoods fictional hero with those of his urbane literary creator, but it seems reasonable to surmise that in 1823 Cooper shared Natty's high regard for Kaaterskill Falls and the Pine Orchard prospect, as would most visitors for years to come.

The onset of America's romantic fascination with nature coincided with the postcolonial project of establishing a separate national identity based on the attributes and accomplishments of the new republic. The development of literature and art in America was a crucial component of the campaign for cultural independence, self-respect, and republican honor. America's romantic landscapes would prove to be a primary resource for republican creativity and cultural nationalism as the nineteenth century unfolded. This was epitomized in the 1820s in literature by Cooper's early Leatherstocking novels; in art by Cole's paintings; and for tourists by the setting of the Catskill Mountain House. In America, the desire to pay homage to nature's endowment frequently blurred the distinction between artist, writer, and tourist; their roles interconnected, often overlapped, and sometimes were indistinguishable.⁷ Cooper was not an artist with a paintbrush, of course, but he did paint with words; even as a tourist he experienced and wrote about what he saw with a painter's eye for composition and aesthetics.

One of the early institutions providing a forum for America's fledging romanticism was the Bread and Cheese Club, founded by Cooper in New York City in 1822. The club's members included editors, other writers, art patrons, and also artists such as William Dunlap, Asher B. Durand, Henry Inman, John Wesley Jarvis, Samuel F. B. Morse, Robert Weir, John Vanderlyn, and later Thomas Cole. Sharing values and ideas, the relationship of artists and writers was one of reciprocity. During the next few years scenes in Cooper's novels provided the subject matter for numerous paintings, while Cooper's relationship with the artists sharpened his visual sensibility.⁸

However deeply devoted to nature we might be today, we need to exercise a great deal of historical imagination to comprehend the profound meaning of landscape for Cooper and his generation, for we do not share the ideological, nationalistic, aesthetic, and spiritual assumptions underpinning their love of landscape. "The period eye" is a concept developed by the art historian Michael Baxandall to denote the visual concordance of artists and writers in particular cultures at particular times in history. What and how they see is directed by a cluster of significant values and formative experiences that they share.⁹ "The period eye" turned the attention of Cooper and numerous American painters to the landscape of the New World. This concept speaks to the similarity in their depiction of landscape, including composition and aesthetics. It also speaks to their romantic values, republican ideas, corresponding experiences, nationalistic aspirations, and reverential attitudes toward the natural environment in a God-

centered universe.

Cooper's first three Leatherstocking books appeared in the years immediately following the creation of the Bread and Cheese Club: *The Pioneers* (1823), *The Last of the Mohicans* (1826), *The Prairie* (1827). In each, the romantic landscapes are artfully drawn, with the world of nature central to the story. Notably absent, however, is the routine use of the aesthetic terms *sublime*, *beautiful*, and *picturesque* found in his later work. Nonetheless, these terms were embedded in the transatlantic romantic culture and influenced the way Cooper looked at landscape.

Though not labeled as such, the romantic landscape in *The Last of the Mohicans* clearly features the aesthetics of the sublime.¹⁰ As the narrative unfolds, Hawkeye leads a party through a landscape of cliffs and chasms, rugged mountains and deep gorges on a journey to Fort William Henry at Lake George. Pursued by Huron warriors, they seek safety for a night in a cave on an island in the Hudson River at Glens Falls. Lined with "tall trees" that "appeared to totter on the brows of the precipice," at this point the "river was confined between high and cragged rocks," writes Cooper, before "it tumbled into caverns" (48). For Cora and Alice Munro, "the wild charms" of the falls are "romantic," but they also have "a painful sense of their real peril," for in "the impenetrable darkness" they are "afraid" to "move along the broken rocks, lest a false step should precipitate them down some one of the many deep and roaring caverns" (49-50). When their hiding place is discovered by their enemies, Duncan Heyward engages in "a fierce struggle" with a warrior to see who "should cast the other over the dizzy height"; both "tottered on the brink of the precipice" before "the Indian" finally fell "down the irrecoverable precipice" (71). After captivity and escape, the party follows a "route" in the direction of "the mountains" that lay "deep within the shadows" that "were cast from their high and broken summits," through a landscape that is "ragged with rocks, and intersected with ravines" (139). Climbing upward, they "reached the verge" of a "precipice"; from the "dizzy height" of this mountain—that "ran off towards the Canadas, in confused and broken masses of rock"—they finally see Lake George, "embellished by fantastic head-lands" (140).

Toward the end of the novel, Hawkeye and the Mohicans now pursue the Hurons, who have taken Cora captive. Their leader, Magua, hauls Cora up a steep mountain and through the "dark and gloomy passages" of a cave; the interior of this "place, seen by its dim and uncertain light, appeared like the shades of the infernal regions, across which unhappy ghosts and savage demons were flitting in multitudes" (335). Outside again, Cora refuses to continue, and they stop "on a ledge of rocks, that overhung a deep precipice, at no great distance from the summit of the mountain" (336). These and other phrases associated with this episode—"dangerous crags" (337), "the very edge of the giddy height," "the brow of the precipice" (338)—convey a feeling of sublimity based on the excitement and danger that mountain heights and abysses called forth. Leading the rescuers,

"Uncas appeared, leaping frantically, from a fearful height, upon the ledge." But when Hawkeye arrived, "the ledge was tenanted only by the dead" (337), the reader already having witnessed the tragic death of Cora and Uncas on these heights.

The geologic formations in the most romantic landscapes in *The Last of the Mohicans* are vertical. The mode is mountain Gothic. In this usage, the overall effect of a wild, threatening, and chaotic landscape might evoke the Gothic; or, more particularly, jagged peaks or ridges might recall Gothic architecture or Gothic ruins.¹¹ In the 1820s, Cooper used mountain Gothic to express his admiration for America's dramatically precipitous, sublime landscape. The prime example in *The Pioneers*, of course, was Natty Bumppo's invocation of "all creation" in his discourse on the "glorious view" from the outcrop at Pine Orchard, followed by his reverential description of the nearby "'Leap'" that came to be known as Kaaterskill Falls (293). Mountain Gothic landscapes, like these, were essential to the author's appreciation of his native landscape in its full romantic glory.

The Prairie, the last novel begun before Cooper traveled abroad, would seem to be a most unlikely source of mountain Gothic scenery. In this "barren" and "boundless" setting, "the eye became fatigued with the sameness and chilling dreariness of the landscape," writes Cooper.¹² Yet there is one very conspicuous mountain Gothic feature in this landscape, for "a single, naked, and ragged rock arose" above "the monotonous rolling" grasslands. The "summit and crags" of this extraordinary rock add sublimity to the otherwise unappealing landscape (85). Significant portions of the narrative take place on "the summit" of this "ragged fortress," occupied by Ishmael Bush and his clan (87). In one nighttime scene, "the citadel of Ishmael, stood insulated, lofty, ragged, and nearly inaccessible. A bright, flashing fire, burning on the centre of its summit," enhances the romantic atmosphere, illuminating the faces of the "semi-barbarous" Ishmaelites, while everything "beyond was enveloped" in "an impenetrable body of darkness." Self-conscious of the romantic picture he composed, Cooper observes: "A painter would gladly have seized the moment, to transfer the wild and characteristic scene to the canvass" (120-21). Near the end of the story, Cooper composed another Gothic picture. In the eerie "light of the moon," Abiram White can be seen high on the face of this rock, hanging from a "willow" tree and "swinging, in the wind" (364).¹³

In Cooper's early fiction, the most soaringly romantic American landscapes had mountain Gothic properties. The sublime was linked to their theatrical verticality. In his first two wilderness tales, *The Last of the Mohicans* and *The Prairie*, dramatic, vertical features in the landscape also were indispensable to the narrative itself, functioning as Gothic sets on which major episodes in the story were staged.

When Cooper set sail for Europe, June 1, 1826, with his partially completed

manuscript of *The Prairie*, mountain Gothic was the source of his heartfelt and passionate romantic enthusiasm for the natural features of the New World. In this regard, the literary landscape artist and the American patriot were one and the same. Just before sailing, on May 29th, at a farewell banquet given by the Bread and Cheese Club, Cooper was repeatedly toasted as a source of national pride. His accomplishments fulfilled patriotic hopes of the post-revolutionary generation. The principal speaker, Charles King, praised Cooper for looking "with a poet's fancy and a painter's eye upon the grandeur and magnificence of our mountain scenery, the varied tints and glorious sunshine of our autumn skies and woods, our rushing cataracts, and mighty rivers, and forests co-eval with nature."[14](#)

If anything, Cooper's Bread and Cheese Club fascination with artists and the arts intensified in Europe. His family immediately became "great hunters after the Gothic," he reported, finding "splendid" Gothic "ruins" and "remarkable" Gothic cathedrals.[15](#) They settled in Paris, a treasure-trove for the art enthusiast, where Cooper visited museums, studied the architecture, sought out public monuments and sculpture, and went bargain shopping for old paintings.

Though captivated and exhilarated by art objects that outshone all that he had known back home, early in his stay in Europe in *Notions of the Americans*, published June 20, 1828, Cooper reaffirmed his patriotic pride in the excellence of American scenery. Once again the mode is mountain Gothic. Guiding readers up the Hudson to the Highlands, the narrator praises "the glorious scenery" to be seen (175): "Rocks, broken, ragged and fantastic; forests, through which disjointed precipices are seen forming dusky back grounds; promontories; dark, deep bays; low, sylvan points; elevated plains; gloomy, retiring vallies, pinnacles, cones, ramparts that overhang and frown upon the water, and in short almost every variety of form in which the imagination can conjure pictures of romantic beauty are assembled here." While much of this "romantic beauty" remains linked to vertical sublimity (176), upriver he finds "views that may compete with any of Italy" and "scenery" that "is picturesque" (177), further reinforcing the impression that landscapes in America accord well with those in Europe.[16](#) Soon after *Notions* was published, on July 14, 1828, Cooper left his European residence in Paris on an extended tour that would take him to Switzerland, Italy, and Germany. While he continued to be very attentive to the more traditional arts, his travels heightened his formal interest in another aesthetic form: landscape scenery.

Cooper's immediate delight in Swiss scenery is apparent in his travel journal, but evidence of national pride is also visible in his patriotic defense of American scenic places. For example, Cooper found the scenery at Thun "beautifully picturesque," but thought "the lake itself inferior to Lake George," which he had romanticized in *The Last of the Mohicans*. Likewise, no matter how "delicious" the setting, Cooper did not think the waterfall at Staubbach was "as beautiful" as "the Cattskill leap"[17](#) that Leatherstocking had rhapsodized about in *The Pioneers*. After a season in Switzerland and sporadic work on a new novel, Cooper traveled

to Florence in October 1828. By the following spring he had finished writing *The Wept of Wish-ton-Wish*, a wilderness romance set in Puritan New England. Vertical features enhance the wild, mountain Gothic landscape of this tale; in addition, Cooper pointed out similarities between the fictional valley of Wish-ton-Wish in early Connecticut and geography he encountered in the upper Rhone River region of Switzerland. Most specifically, he compared the reclusive Submission's "giddy eyrie"—where "the rocks" assumed their "wildest" and "most confused" appearance—to a "Swiss hermitage" he had seen "overhanging the village of St. Maurice, in the Canton of le Valais," likewise "perched upon" a "high and narrow ledge."¹⁸ Cooper moved from Florence to Sorrento. It was there that he underwent an aesthetic conversion; becoming fully cognizant of the superiority of Old World scenery,¹⁹ he never again used mountain Gothic to picture his native landscape.

Cooper spent four months at the Bay of Naples, from August through November 1829, completing his next novel, *The Water-Witch*. After moving to Rome and briefly visiting Venice, Cooper left for Germany in May 1830, obtaining a printer for *The Water-Witch* in Dresden. The novel's appearance, soon after his return to Paris in August 1830, marked a turning point in his career as a literary landscape painter. The initial books he published while living in Europe—*The Prairie* (1827), *The Red Rover* (1828), *Notions of the Americans* (1828), *The Wept of Wish-ton-Wish* (1829)—had New World settings, as in part did *Water-Witch*. But also partly set abroad, *The Water-Witch* sharply distinguished between America's "new," low lying, densely forested coast, and Italy's, which "teems with the recollections of three thousand years," backed by "ragged and rocky mountains, with the indescribable play of golden and rosy light upon their broken surfaces." Unmindful that he had just begun to differentiate, Cooper stated that only those with "fertile brains" would fail to see the difference.²⁰ These Old World scenes were blessed with picturesque associations, vertical features, and were well suited to the mountain Gothic mode, unlike his own land, he now realized.

The final books Cooper authored in Europe had European settings: *The Bravo* (1831) in Italy, *The Heidenmauer* (1832) in Germany, and *The Headsman* (1833) in Switzerland. The tales were historical romances, staged at sites that he had visited in his travels and inspired by features that had struck his fancy.

Informed by visits to Switzerland in 1828 and 1832, *The Headsman* shows Cooper's great enthusiasm for European aesthetic categories. The finest scenery is an "exquisite" mixture of "the noble, the beautiful, and the bewitching"²¹—the sublime, the beautiful, and the picturesque. The narrative follows a band of travelers across Lake Lemman [Lake Geneva] and high up into the mountains. As the travelers climb upward, the scenic focus increasingly is on the "savage and sublime nature" (41) of mountain heights, revealing Cooper's revised understanding of what constitutes mountain Gothic. It is a jagged, rocky landscape of "perpendicular precipices" and "perpendicular eminences" (130). Reminiscent of topographical detail in *The Last of the Mohicans*, at one point the

travelers enter a basin "surrounded by naked and rugged rocks" and "high pinnacles," the "path" disappearing "through a narrow gorge around the brow of a beetling cliff" (303). The rugged verticality recalls mountain Gothic descriptions in *The Last of the Mohicans*, but the *scale* was different. The "scale" of these mountains was "stupendous" (67), Cooper repeatedly informs his readers. In *The Headsman*, the author sought to communicate "the grandeur of the scale on which Nature has displayed her power among the Alps" (309); for here "nature" had "acted" on a "scale" that was truly "sublime" (130), unlike the Adirondacks or the Catskills in New York.

Cooper left for Europe a hero of republican belles-lettres. He was the "genius" who "rendered our native soil classic ground," said Chancellor James Kent at the farewell banquet. When he returned to New York, November 4, 1833, shortly after the publication of *The Headsman*, he was unabashedly more enthusiastic about the romantic landscapes of the Old World than the New. At the 1826 farewell banquet, King had raved about Cooper's "exquisite delineation" of "our" landscape.²² Now Cooper seemed to be denigrating the landscape and assaulting national pride.

Europe changed the way he saw America. In *Home As Found* (1838), Cooper provided a fictionalized account of his own homecoming. Edward Effingham, just back from Europe, sails up the Hudson River by the same Highlands that the author had romanticized in *The Spy* (1821) and *Tales For Fifteen* (1823),²³ and lavishly praised in 1828 in *Notions of the Americans*. Upon seeing the Highlands again, Effingham confesses: "these rocks strike my eyes as much less imposing than formerly. The passage is fine," he concedes, "but it is hardly grand scenery."²⁴ Much like a grownup revisiting scenes from his youth, the heights appear to him to be smaller and less commanding. For the author and his character, the rite of passage to maturity in landscape appreciation took place in Europe. Ever afterward, European scenery became the frame of reference for Cooper for evaluating scenery at home.

In Cooper's European travel book comments about comparative scenic experiences, the New World seemed to be a poor cousin to the Old World. Reviewers took offense, complaining that he had "ridiculed American scenery."²⁵ Deeply disturbed by his criticism of our "scenery," one reviewer of Cooper's Italian travel book exclaimed, "our mountains are nothing, our lakes nothing!" In excoriating Cooper for thus "vilifying" his own "country," this reviewer asked: "Why does he not return to his admired Italy?"²⁶

On relative landscape merits, Cooper wrote that Americans "shrink from telling the truth." Accordingly, with imprudent candor, in his Italian travel book he stated: "Our lakes will scarcely bear any comparison with the finer lakes of Upper Italy," and he found "our mountains" to be "insipid" when comparing "hues and forms" (94). Well aware that such "comparisons are little likely to find favour" in

America, in *Gleanings in Europe: Switzerland* (1836), in the most telling blow of all, he baldly stated that the view "from the terrace" of "Pine Orchard" in "the Kaatskill, will bear no comparison" with the view from "the Righi Staffel" (113). "I now tell you," he continued, "the Pine Orchard will compare with the Righi, only as the Kaatskill will compare with the falls of Trenton" (114).

Given the cultural significance of Pine Orchard, Cooper's words were tantamount to sacrilege. In the heyday of romantic tourism, affluent travelers went on "pilgrimages" to "sacred places."²⁷ Blessed with a bottomless past, their European counterparts might choose among abundant shrines where setting combined with the work of time and ancient associations to create a picturesque effect. Lacking such choices, American romantic sightseers frequently sought indigenous shrines in the work of nature, whose unaided artistry became a source of pride for patriots seeking aesthetic parity with Europe.²⁸ While some romantic travelers took side trips to the Connecticut Valley or White Mountains, by the late 1820s the main route for the American Grand Tour began with a steamboat ride up the Hudson Valley, the traveler stopping first at the Highlands and then at the Catskill Mountain House, before continuing on to Niagara Falls with the help of the Erie Canal; though there were several ways to return, Lake George was often on the itinerary.²⁹ Early Cooper novels had helped enshrine the Highlands, the Mountain House prospect, Kaaterskill Falls, and Lake George.³⁰ After visiting Europe, Cooper appeared irreverential and unpatriotic.

In *Home As Found* Aristabulus Bragg foolishly calls the Templeton heights "the handsomest mountains in the known world." Just back from Europe, Eve Effingham disputes Bragg's grandiose claim; she grants, nonetheless, that the local mountains are "very beautiful" (13). Her view is also Cooper's, who uses the aesthetic term *beautiful* to characterize the Hudson and Mohawk valleys as well as the scenery around Templeton.³¹ Such landscapes lack the grandeur of the sublime and embellishments of the picturesque.³²

In his Italian travel book, Cooper noted that "geese" were not "swans"; America's landscapes might be "beautiful" he conceded, but they looked rather ordinary when judged by the more compelling aesthetic standards of the sublime and picturesque (95). This verdict is not surprising, since his aesthetic categories were European cultural constructions of European scenery. Developed in the eighteenth century with an eye to rural Britain, the aesthetic category *picturesque* was quickly adapted to Italian and Swiss scenes containing irregular fields, quaint villages, old buildings, or crumbling ruins, while the lakes and mountains of Italy and Switzerland came to epitomize scenic sublimity.

By the opening of the 1830s the aesthetics of the sublime and picturesque had become the measure of Cooper's romantic appreciation of nature. Assuming that these European landscape standards were universal, he continually praised Old World views and criticized his native land. Landscape that was merely beautiful lacked the romantic enchantment needed for historical romance. After *The Water-*

Witch, Cooper published fifteen more books in the 1830s, but not one New World historical romance. To restore the romantic enchantment that historical romance required he had to find a way to adapt European aesthetic terms to American conditions. His solution appears in his literary landscape art at the opening of the 1840s.

"Never" before, wrote Honoré de Balzac, in his review of Cooper's 1840 novel, *The Pathfinder*, did the printed word "approach so closely to painting. This is the school that literary-landscape painters ought to study; all the secrets of the art are here."³³ If not "all," at least some of "the secrets" of Cooper's mature "art" were disclosed in this novel for the first time. *Pathfinder* opens with a discursive talk on the sublime in which Cooper links "sublimity" to "vastness" and, in turn, to a poetic response to "the depths of the illimitable void," to the ocean's "expanse" and "grandeur," to "the obscurity of night," and to "images that the senses cannot compass."³⁴ Where the picturesque is mainly visual and pertains to landscape that human beings have altered, the sublime in *Pathfinder* involves visual and very powerful emotional responses to the wild natural world: to unbounded spaciousness, forest interiors, peacefulness and serenity, tumultuous storms, darkness, and danger.³⁵ In all these instances sublimity in *Pathfinder* is linked to indigenous qualities or characteristics of American wilderness.

Unlike the vertical sublimity of Europe's mountainous landscapes, large-scale scenic sublimity in *Pathfinder* is primarily horizontal. It is linked to the "seemingly interminable water" of Lake Ontario and to the "apparently endless forest." Instead of exhibiting pinnacles and chasms, the landscape now appears to be a "broad carpet of leaves" (109). It is evident, on closer inspection, that the bold and precipitous mountain Gothic features of Cooper's earlier landscapes have been replaced by forest Gothic enclosures.³⁶ In a typical forest Gothic scene characters walk "beneath the leafy canopy" and "through a vast natural vault, that was upheld by myriads of rustic columns" (15). The "sublimity" of the wilderness is marked by "solitude" and "grandeur" and the crucial fact that the "natural objects" are "undisturbed" by "man" (110). However, as in Cooper's earlier work sublimity is also associated with peril. In one nighttime "scene," for example, "Mabel [Dunham] felt her blood thrill in her veins, and her cheeks flush, as the canoe shot into the strength of the stream": the "overhanging woods" are forest Gothic, with the "sublimity" enhanced by other "accessaries," especially the "insecurity" (90) of the characters who are threatened by Indians and the treacherous Oswego River.

In *The Deerslayer* (1841), as in *Pathfinder*, the threat of danger adds to the sublimity of the wilderness. Moreover, in *Deerslayer*, as in *Pathfinder*, the broader vistas are horizontal, and the enclosed, woodland scenes are often forest Gothic. One forest Gothic scene takes place in "an open space" that is "canopied by leaves." Here the "arches of the woods, even at high noon, cast their sombre shadows" down below, while "the brilliant rays of the sun that struggled through the leaves contributed to mellow" and "to illuminate" the setting. Showing

familiarity with European thought about the arboreal origins of Gothic church architecture, Cooper's notes that it "was probably from a similar scene that the mind of man first got its idea of the effects of gothic tracery and churchly hues" (466-67). Europeans had long recognized similarities between forest groves and Gothic cathedrals, their tree trunks like clustered columns, their arched leafy ceilings like cathedral vaults, and the broken light issuing through the foliage suggested the religious sublimity and romantic enchantment fostered by stained glass windows.³⁷ In the "temple of nature" pictured in Cooper's novel, "light and shadow" similarly combine to produce a forest Gothic "effect" (467).

But in *Deerslayer* shadows are less important than light, and not broken light filtered through Gothic enclosures, but unobstructed light upon the lake and in the sky. When *Deerslayer* first looks upon the Glimmerglass he sees "a glorious picture" that "lay bathed in the sun-light" (36). Light is central to the landscape—not for effect as chiaroscuro, but more literally as part of the meaning or content. Light shines, dazzles, flickers, glows, illuminates. The mutable temperament of light, landscape, and human emotion are irresistibly entwined: the "softened light" of early "morning-tide" is "soothing and calm" (332); the abrupt appearance of "the sun" evokes "sudden wonder" or "deep joy" (430); while "gleams of pale light" in "the star-lit night" symbolize "faintness of hope" (406).

The romantic landscape in *Deerslayer* is lovingly painted in varying moods connected to the changing light of day or night, providing a stark contrast and sharp rejoinder to the human violence that occurs. After the first Indian attack, Cooper notes that the "scene" was "altogether soothing, and of a character to lull the passions into a species of holy calm"—the "boundless woods were sleeping in the deep repose of nature, the heavens were placid, but still luminous [emphasis added] with the light of the retreating sun, while the lake looked more lovely" than before (82). When *Deerslayer* kills his first foe, Cooper rhapsodizes about the "beauty" of the just arisen sun's light "on this, as yet, unchristened sheet of water" (129). As *Deerslayer* approaches a dangerous rendezvous, Cooper pictures the "beautiful sheet of water" as "glittering like a gem, in the last rays of the evening sun," the entire setting "lighted up with a sort of radiant smile" (148). After a Huron woman is senselessly murdered, Cooper lauds the "sublime thoughts" preceding "the rising of a summer sun," noting that objects coming into focus have an "unearthly" appearance, "first dim and misty; then marked in, in solemn background," followed by "the witchery" of increasing light, "finally" becoming "mellow, distinct, and *luminous* [emphasis added], as the rays of the great centre of light diffuse themselves in the atmosphere" (324). When "evening arrived" closing another day, Hetty Hutter, also a victim of violence, is buried in "the limpid water" of Lake Glimmerglass (536), whose gentle sublimity is manifested on the still, luminiscent surface for which it is named.

Cooper's use of the word "*luminous*" was fortuitous since artistic luminism was first given a name by John I. H. Baur in 1954.³⁸ Nonetheless, the compositional and expressive characteristics of many of the literary landscape paintings in

Deerslayer show a striking resemblance to the style of landscape painting that has come to be known as luminism.³⁹ Like luminism, landscape composition in *Deerslayer* is horizontal, unframed and open-ended, yet of modest, undramatic proportions. The landscape itself is impersonal, mostly devoid of activity, somewhat abstract and almost featureless, with emphasis placed on parallel linear planes of lake, forested shoreline or low hills, and sky. Furthermore, "lake, hills and heavens" exhibit a "distinctiveness" (428) common to luminist work. In luminism, and in Cooper's novel, as we have seen, time of day is clearly marked, with special emphasis given to day-break and evening twilight. The lake is pictured, as in many luminist paintings, without "a single ripple, on its glassy surface" (364); even the "light air scarce descended as low as the bed of the lake, hovering over it," Cooper explained, "as if unwilling to disturb its deep tranquility" or "ruffle its mirror-like surface" (144). Though the "sweet repose" (35) is periodically shattered by human enmity, as in luminism, "stillness" and "silence" (112) predominate. Cooper's word paintings of this "sublime solitude" (55), to recite Baur's characterization of luminist art, are "rapt, lyrical, filled with a sense of awe."⁴⁰ Most importantly, of course, as we have also seen, the pictures in *Deerslayer* are dominated by light. A "flood of glorious light" upon the lake calls to mind the "radiant" (129) light of classical luminism, while "softened light" creating "a liquid lucidity" in "the atmosphere" (332) prefigures the "diffuse" (324) light of atmospheric luminism.⁴¹

In *Pathfinder* and *Deerslayer* Cooper overcame the aesthetic quandry he had gotten into in Europe. Drawing on indigenous characteristics of American wilderness, he reconceptualized sublimity to fit landscapes that lacked dramatic vertical features. He substituted European forest Gothic for European mountain Gothic. Other qualities or attributes of his American sublime were also drawn from European aesthetic traditions. Light, darkness, obscurity, boundlessness, solitude, silence, astonishment, reverence, awe, and terror were all named as a source of the sublime by Edmund Burke in 1757 in *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*.⁴²

At the opening of the 1840s Cooper had finally found a workable American sublime. It was based on what had been a defining characteristic of the New World: wilderness. In his new formulation, sublime scenery is wild and completely natural; picturesque scenery, by contrast, is unnatural in that it has been modified by human activity. The picturesque sites in *Pathfinder* and *Deerslayer* are fortresses because everything beyond is wilderness. Since picturesque effects were less dependent on natural features than on associations linked to the passage of time, they posed a problem in a fresh New World landscape. In *Pathfinder* and *Deerslayer* Cooper skirted the problem of newness by locating picturesque sites at fortresses where desperate struggles in the wilderness took place in a legendary past.⁴³

Likewise, in Cooper's next wilderness romance, *Wyandotté* (1843), the untrammelled wilderness is the source of the sublime, with picturesque touches

added by the settlers around their fortified habitation. Moreover, like *Pathfinder* and *Deerslayer*, *Wyandotté* takes place in the previous century. But the present remained problematic. "There is a wide-spread error on the subject of American scenery," Cooper announced in the opening sentence of the novel. If one is "accustomed to the terrific sublimity of the Alps, the softened and yet wild grandeur of the Italian lakes, or the noble witchery of the shores of the Mediterranean," our "country is apt to seem tame, and uninteresting." Cooper could never shake this notion. The new nation lacked the sublime "grandeur" of European views and "high finish" or "picturesqueness" resulting from "the works of man."[44](#)

Cooper's mature aesthetic appreciation of his native land thus contained two patterns. In romances mythologizing a time when trackless forests covered much of eastern America, the perilous, unbounded wilderness provided a generic source of the sublime; in the midst of the wilderness a few fortified outposts of civilization yielded associations for the picturesque. In his own day, however, he noted that little wilderness was left in the East as a source of sublimity,[45](#) while the very newness of the landscape precluded the time-wrought picturesque artifacts found in historical romance.

For the most part, the picturesque for Cooper was closely tied to Europe. Yet in addition to boundless wilderness, sublime landscapes might be found—as Albert Bierstadt, Frederic Church, and Thomas Moran would later show—in vertical formations wherever there was grand and awesome scenery. Besides Europe, this included tropical volcanoes, polar ice fields, and America's mountain West. Cooper's later fiction contained literary landscape paintings of sublime scenery in various corners of the world: in *The Wing-and-Wing* (1842) he would locate "the sublime" in Mediterranean islands like "Corsica and Sardinia" which "resemble vast fragments of the Alps"; in *The Crater* (1847) in the "sublime sight" of a "ragged and noble" South Pacific volcano "in all its glory"; and in *The Sea Lions* (1849) "the sublime powers of nature" are displayed in Antarctic ice formations, which, despite "terrors and dangers," so delighted "the beholder" that the "glorious Alps themselves, those wonders of the earth, could scarcely compete in scenery."[46](#) Sublime scenery also might be found in the Rockies and the Sierras, Cooper surmised.[47](#) But when it came to the role of nature and landscape in the creation of a national culture, Cooper's gaze was fixed upon the East.

When Europeans first looked at nature in the New World the familiar loomed large, for they were guided in their encounter by Old World forms and expectations. As they became aware of variation and novelty, the Old World remained the measure of their encounter; in Richard White's words, they saw and understood "American nature through strategies of difference/similarity and presence/absence."[48](#) The Old World gave meaning to the New, but the Old World was also affected and transformed by the encounter. This dialogue between worlds continued over centuries, eventually drawing Cooper and other Americans

into the crosscurrents of European romanticism.

When Cooper arrived in the Old World, he noted the familiar in his travel journals—as had Europeans in their first response to nature in the New World—and in picturing New World landscape in *Notions of the Americans* and *Wept of Wish-ton-Wish*, he recorded the resemblance between scenery back home and what he saw in Europe. His appreciation of American landscape was forever altered during his visit to the Bay of Naples. Thereafter his comparisons were less favorable to the New World. Much like Europeans in their earliest encounters with America, Cooper thought in terms of "difference/similarity and presence/absence." However, with postcolonial deference to the older civilization, he rued the differences and absences in the landscape of his homeland.

Like Cooper, numerous writers, artists, art publicists, patrons, and collectors returned from Europe in the antebellum years exhilarated by their travels while exceedingly self-conscious of differences and absences in the young republic. Noting the difference in landscape and particularly the absence of picturesque embellishments, like Cooper, they called for artful improvement, considering it their patriotic duty to edify the masses and uplift republican civilization.⁴⁹ Unlike Cooper, eastern wilderness was still a source of sublimity for most returning travelers,⁵⁰ but the absence of great pinnacles and chasms in the mountains of the East raised questions of verisimilitude for the mountain Gothic style.

By midcentury encroaching civilization motivated artists to go further afield to northern New England and the Adirondacks for wild mountain grandeur. Out west there was a vast wilderness; moreover, the presence of mountains that could be likened to the Alps afforded sublimity seekers New World pinnacles and chasms. In the decades after midcentury some artists—along with writers and tourists—headed west with renewed dedication to mountain Gothic in what proved to be the grand finale for romantic realism as a *serious* style of painting. Seeking and finding the Old World in the New, they delighted in the alpine heights and deep gorges.⁵¹ Back east styles began to change. Artists, critics, connoisseurs, and collectors looked across the Atlantic for new directions. The appellation "Hudson River School" was conferred in the late nineteenth century; it spoke to an imitative, provincial romanticism that fortunately was being replaced by more sophisticated European styles.⁵²

For most of the next century, nineteenth-century American landscape painting was written out of serious art history. By the 1980s, a renewed interest stimulated scholarship by art historians.⁵³ Their work helps us read Cooper's literary landscape paintings, and it may also be the case that Cooper's struggle to find a satisfactory basis for representing and appreciating American landscape provides us a window of understanding into a mid-nineteenth-century transformation in American landscape painting.

It can hardly be a coincidence that soon after Cooper began employing forest Gothic and luminism in his landscapes, many American artists followed suit. Most noticeably, in the decades after midcentury a number of American landscape painters moved in the direction pointed to in *Pathfinder* and *Deerslayer*; forsaking mountain Gothic, like Cooper, they reenvisioned the topography of the East and reformulated the aesthetics of the sublime.⁵⁴ With a little leap of the imagination one could believe that Frederic Edwin Church's 1860 luminist masterpiece *Twilight in the Wilderness* was painted to illustrate a sunset over the rippleless Lake Glimmerglass in *Deerslayer*; or that Worthington Whittredge's 1864 classic forest Gothic painting *The Old Hunting Grounds* was inspired by the final sequence in the novel when Leatherstocking and Chingachgook return fifteen years later and among the relics of the past find a decaying canoe in the now deserted wilderness. There is no reason to believe that Cooper's novel inspired either painting, and it is quite unlikely that the artists were directly influenced by the author. A more likely explanation for this concurrence in landscape description in Cooper's wilderness novels of the 1840s and landscape painting in the decades that followed is encapsulated in the notion of "the period eye," calling our attention to the constellation of shared historical circumstances, ideas, beliefs, values, needs, and experiences of the writer and the artists.

In recent years art historians have made us aware of the role of luminism in meeting the deep-felt need for an aesthetically satisfying eastern American sublime. Despite her own extensive scholarship, Barbara Novak admits that the source of luminism is "mysterious," leaving her to wonder why it occurred "with such emphatic frequency" in America.⁵⁵ She does advance a possibility, however, noting compositional similarities in Claude Lorrain and Dutch landscape painters.⁵⁶ Like American artists who traveled abroad, Cooper admired and was influenced by European landscape painting.⁵⁷ But the luminist style, no doubt, had multiple sources. Cooper and the artists certainly were influenced by the physical setting itself as well. Adopting the strategy of "difference/similarity and presence/absence," they compared and contrasted the landscape of the Old World and the New. Cooper's enthusiasm for landscape in the Old World inspired him to look more carefully than he ever had before at landscape on both sides of the Atlantic. Compared to Switzerland and Italy, the terrain at home now seemed undramatic, characteristically more horizontal than vertical. He was also fascinated by the warmth and softness of Italian light, so different from the light at home. In *The Water-Witch*, he noted that our "evening sky wants the pearly light, the rosy clouds and the soft tints" that "melt into each other" in Naples, but "far excels in the vividness of the glow, in the depth of the transitions, and in the richness of colors." The former was "more delicate," the latter "more gorgeous!"⁵⁸ The excellence of our light, he learned in Italy, lay in its brilliance and luminosity. While Novak grants that luminism was not "exclusive to America," she nonetheless calls it "one of the most truly indigenous styles in the history of American art."⁵⁹ Whether her claim is excessive matters less than the fact that for many artists, as well as Cooper, the luminist style met needs "indigenous" to

landscape depiction in America.

The concurrent appearance of forest Gothic landscape painting in America in the 1850s and 1860s has attracted less attention than luminism.⁶⁰ But a number of artists returned from Europe and also painted woodland interiors, with light filtered through canopies of leaves and branches often supported by pillar-like tree trunks. Most obvious were George Inness and Worthington Whittredge.⁶¹ Others included Albert Bierstadt, Asher Durand, Martin Johnson Heade, George Hetzel, John Frederick Kensett, Thomas Moran, and William Trost Richards.⁶² Unlike luminist paintings, which tended to be horizontal, forest Gothic paintings were almost always vertical. Their settings were sometimes wilderness enclosures and sometimes forest groves whose arched openings revealed distant mountain or bucolic vistas. By the twentieth century, likening a forest grove to a cathedral had become a romantic cliché.⁶³ In 1876 Mark Twain was already poking fun at the overuse of forest Gothic in popular romantic literature: Tom Sawyer, Huck Finn, and Joe Harper run away to be pirates and spend a romantic first night in a forest enclosure, their camp fire throwing "its ruddy glare upon the pillared tree trunks of their forest temple, and upon the varnished foliage and festooning vines."⁶⁴ Cooper and mid-century American landscape painters gauged what they saw through the romantic lenses that Twain sought to shatter. After sightseeing in the Old World, their adoption of forest Gothic and luminism served to validate their romantic devotion to nature in the New World.⁶⁵

The writer and the artists were tied to nature in the New World and a romantic outlook and larger civilization that originated overseas. A trip to Europe was a standard rite of passage. Awestruck by the art, physical artifacts, and natural features of the landscape, if anything, their romantic worldview was reinvigorated, even reified. But the experience was transformative as well. In comparing and contrasting worlds, they saw the New World differently. The turn to luminism and forest Gothic was part of a creatively significant chapter in the history of a postcolonial society struggling to find its artistic voice, enabling returning travelers to translate their altered perceptions of American scenery into styles through which they could venerate and express their romantic delight in their native landscape.

Notes

¹. James Fenimore Cooper, *The Pioneers, or the Sources of the Susquehanna: A Descriptive Tale*, hist. introd. and explanatory notes by James Franklin Beard, text established by Lance Schachterle and Kenneth M. Andersen, Jr. (1823; Albany: SUNY Press, 1980), 291-94. On the accuracy of Leatherstocking's description of the view from Pine Orchard, see Roland Van Zandt, *The Catskill Mountain House* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1966), 26.

². Kenneth Myers points out that as late as 1819 "few New Yorkers had heard of the wonders of the Catskills, and there were no comfortable accommodations in

the mountains." See Myers, "The Catskills and the Creation of Landscape Taste in America," in *The Catskills: Painters, Writers, and Tourists in the Mountains, 1820-1895*, ed. Myers (Yonkers: Hudson River Museum of Westchester, 1987), 32.

[3.](#) Timothy Dwight, *Travels in New England and New York*, ed. Barbara Miller Solomon. 4 vols. (1821-22; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1969), IV, 122-23. Vols. I and II appeared in 1821, III and IV in 1822.

[4.](#) Myers, "Catskills and the Creation of Landscape Taste," 36; Van Zandt, *The Catskill Mountain House*, 26. Susan Fenimore Cooper, *Pages and Pictures from the Writings of James Fenimore Cooper* (New York: W. A. Townsend, 1861), 122.

[5.](#) Van Zandt, *The Catskill Mountain House*, 34, 71.

[6.](#) Van Zandt, *The Catskill Mountain House*, 41-42, 170-88.

[7.](#) Alan Wallach, "Making a Picture of the View from Mount Holyoke," in *American Iconology: New Approaches to Nineteenth-Century Art and Literature*, ed. David C. Miller (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 81; Kevin J. Avery, "Selling the Sublime and the Beautiful: New York Landscape Painting and Tourism," in *Art and the Empire City: New York, 1825-1861*, eds. Catherine Hoover Voorsanger and John K. Howat (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 109-19.

[8.](#) On Cooper's relationship with artists, see: James Franklin Beard, "Cooper and His Artistic Contemporaries," in *James Fenimore Cooper: A Re-Appraisal*, ed. Mary E. Cunningham (Cooperstown: New York State Historical Association, 1954), 114, 116-19; James T. Callow, *Kindred Spirits: Knickerbocker Writers and American Artists, 1807-1855* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1967), x, 12, 52, 90, 91, 145; Albert H. Marckwardt, "The Chronology and Personnel of the Bread and Cheese Club," *American Literature*, 6 (Jan. 1935), 389-99; James D. Wallace, *Early Cooper and His Audience* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 168, 179-80.

[9.](#) Michael Baxandall, *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth Century Italy; a Primer in the Social History of Pictorial Style* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), Ch. 2. "The Period Eye," 29-108; also see Wanda M. Corn, *The Great American Thing: Modern Art and National Identity, 1915-1935* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), xxii.

[10.](#) On images of sublimity in nature in *Mohicans*, see Steven Blakemore, "'Without a Cross': The Cultural Significance of the Sublime and Beautiful in Cooper's *The Last of the Mohicans*," *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, 52 (June 1997), 31, 33.

[11.](#) For a discussion of mountain Gothic, see Simon Schama, *Landscape and Memory* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1995), 463-78.

[12.](#) James Fenimore Cooper, *The Prairie: A Tale*, ed. with hist. introd. by James P. Elliott (Albany: SUNY Press, 1985), 13. Subsequent quotes from *The Prairie* are noted in parentheses in the text.

[13.](#) On the Gothic mode in *The Last of the Mohicans* and *The Prairie*, see Donald A. Ringe, *American Gothic: Imagination and Reason in Nineteenth-Century Fiction* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1982), 108-110; Donald A. Ringe, "The Last of the Mohicans as a Gothic Novel," *James Fenimore Cooper: His Country and His Art*, 6 (1987), 41-53.

[14.](#) *New-York American* (May 30, 1826), 2.

[15.](#) Cooper to Mrs. George Pomeroy, 24 July 1826, *The Letters and Journals of James Fenimore Cooper*, ed. James Franklin Beard. 6 vols. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960-68), I, 149, 150.

[16.](#) John Seelye notes that Cooper used a "European Romantic aesthetic" in Notions to praise the Hudson Valley; he argues, however, that a different landscape aesthetic is used to praise the Mohawk Valley and Erie Canal: "a uniquely American ideal, neoclassical in its celebration of balance and proportions but thoroughly modern in its love of utility." Thus the "Mohawk Valley resembles a French plain. It pleases because it is an orderly and balanced mixture." See Seelye, *Beautiful Machine: Rivers and the Republican Plan, 1755-1825* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 314, 308. But elsewhere Cooper strongly preferred the romantic to the practical and was not a champion of neoclassical landscape. In his travel account he found the French plains monotonous and "fatiguing," and, for the most part, faulted French landscape for being "greatly deficient" in romantic features. See *Gleanings in Europe: Switzerland*, hist. introd. and explanatory notes by Robert E. Spiller and James F. Beard, text established by Kenneth W. Staggs and James P. Elliot (1836; Albany: SUNY Press, 1980), 14, 15. Subsequent quotes from *Switzerland* are noted in parentheses in the text. In "American and European Scenery Compared," in *The Home Book of the Picturesque: or American Scenery, Art, and Literature* (New York: George P. Putnam, 1852), 53, James Fenimore Cooper wrote: "Stiffness and formality, indeed, impair the beauty of nine-tenths of the French landscapes." Subsequent quotes from "American and European Scenery Compared" are noted in parentheses in the text.

[17.](#) Cooper, 4 Aug. 1828, *Letters and Journals*, I, 274, 275.

[18.](#) James Fenimore Cooper, *The Wept of Wish-ton-Wish* (1829; New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1906), 337, 338.

[19.](#) For a discussion of Cooper's landscape conversion while living at the Bay of Naples, see Allan M. Axelrad, "Epiphany at Ischia: The Effect of Italy on James Fenimore Cooper's Literary Landscape Painting," *James Fenimore Cooper: His*

Country and His Art, 9 (1993), 5-8.

[20.](#) Cooper, *The Water-Witch*, (1830; New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1906), 281, 280.

[21.](#) James Fenimore Cooper, *The Headsman* (1833; New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1906), 69. Subsequent quotes from *The Headsman* are noted in parentheses in the text.

[22.](#) *New-York American* (May 30, 1826), 2.

[23.](#) James Fenimore Cooper, *The Spy: A Tale of the Neutral Ground*, hist. introd. James P. Elliott, explanatory notes James H. Pickering, text established James P. Elliott, Lance Schachterle, and Jeffrey Walker (1821; New York: AMS Press, 2002), 393; James Fenimore Cooper, *Tales For Fifteen* (New York: C. Wiley, 1823), 43-44, 88-89.

[24.](#) James Fenimore Cooper, *Home As Found*, introd. Lewis Leary (1838; New York: Capricorn, 1961), 115. Subsequent quotes from *Home As Found* are noted in parentheses in the text.

[25.](#) *Albany Evening Journal* (Nov. 22, 1841), 2.

[26.](#) *The American Monthly Magazine*, XII (July 1838), 79, 78, 75.

[27.](#) In *Sacred Places: American Tourist Attractions in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 3-11, John F. Sears uses the language of religious pilgrimage to explain romantic tourism at this time.

[28.](#) Perry Miller, "The Romantic Dilemma in American Nationalism and the Concept of Nature," *Harvard Theological Review*, 48 (Oct. 1955), 247.

[29.](#) Avery, "Selling the Sublime and the Beautiful," 109-19; Edward Halsey Foster, *The Civilized Wilderness: Backgrounds to American Romantic Literature, 1817-1860* (New York: Free Press, 1975), 8, 21; Beth L. Lueck, *American Writers and the Picturesque Tour: The Search for National Identity, 1790-1860* (New York: Garland, 1997), 15-18; Myers, "Catskills and the Creation of Landscape Taste," 38; Bruce Robertson, "The Picturesque Traveler in America," in *Views and Visions: American Landscape before 1830*, ed. Edward J. Nygren (Wash. D.C.: Corcoran Gallery, 1986), 199; Sears, *Sacred Places*, 4, 56-57. Such tours were possible but more difficult before the canal opened in 1825. In Cooper's 1823 tale "Imagination" in *Tales For Fifteen*, a young man, young woman and her aunt take the tour in 1816, going by steamboat from New York City to Albany and then by horse and carriage to the Falls. They return by way of Montreal and Lake Champlain.

[30.](#) For example, Leatherstocking's celebration of the scenic wonders of the Pine Orchard region was repeatedly recited in Catskill Mountain guide books and travel narratives; see Myers, "Catskills and the Creation of Landscape Taste," 35-36; Van

Zandt, *The Catskill Mountain House*, 25.

[31.](#) Cooper, *Home as Found*, 12, 13, 121, 127, 133. He also used variations of the term beautiful ("beauty," "beauties," "beautifully") to characterize this scenery, 117, 119, 125, 195, 201, 205. An exception results from an enormous old tree known as the "Silent Pine" in which the "fearful" and "grand" combine to produce the "sublime," 202. The context of the picturesque is European: "the picturesque bourgs of Switzerland," 127. Templeton is a thinly disguised representation of Cooperstown. On the appropriateness of the beautiful for the Hudson River, also see Cooper, *Gleanings in Europe: France*, hist. introd. and explanatory notes by Thomas Philbrick, text established by Philbrick and Constance Ayers Denne (Albany: SUNY Press, 1983), 4-5.

[32.](#) On his return from Europe, Cooper showed what could be done, remodeling Otsego Hall, and Christ Church in the Gothic style, and picturesquely redesigning the grounds of Otsego Hall, just as John Effingham redesigned the grounds of the Wigwam in *Home As Found*.

[33.](#) Honoré de Balzac, Review of *The Pathfinder* in *Paris Review*, July 25, 1840, trans. K. P. Wormeley, in *Fenimore Cooper: The Critical Heritage*, eds. George Dekker and John P. McWilliams (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973), 197.

[34.](#) James Fenimore Cooper, *The Pathfinder, or The Inland Sea*, ed. with an hist. introd. by Richard Dilworth Rust (1840; Albany: SUNY Press, 1981), 7. Subsequent quotes from *The Pathfinder* are noted in parentheses in the text.

[35.](#) Sublimity in *Pathfinder* also is associated with religious piety.

[36.](#) Donald Ringe points out that landscape description in *The Pathfinder* and *The Deerslayer* is different from earlier Leatherstocking Tales, with more emphasis placed on "the bright expansive side of the American landscape." He thus concludes that Cooper abandoned the Gothic mode. See Donald A Ringe, *American Gothic: Imagination and Reason in Nineteenth-Century Fiction* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1982), 110. I agree Cooper sees the landscape differently in these novels, with a heightened emphasis on light. But instead of abandoning the Gothic mode, I believe he switched from mountain Gothic to forest Gothic.

[37.](#) For discussion of the forest Gothic tradition in Europe, see Robert Pogue Harrison, *Forests: The Shadow of Civilization* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 178; Joseph Rykwert, *On Adam's House in Paradise: The Idea of the Primitive Hut in Architectural History* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1972), 75-103; Schama, *Landscape and Memory*, 226-39; Keith Thomas, *Man and the Natural World: A History of the Modern Sensibility* (New York: Patheon, 1983), 216.

[38.](#) John I. H. Baur, "American Luminism: A neglected aspect of the Realist Movement in nineteenth-century American Painting," *Perspectives USA*, 9

(Autumn 1954), 90-98.

[39.](#) On the characteristics of luminism, see: Baur, "American Luminism," 90-98; Doreen Bolger Burke and Catherine Hoover Voorsanger, "The Hudson River School in Eclipse," in *American Paradise: The World of the Hudson River School*, introd. John K. Howat (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1987), 76-77; Angela Miller, *The Empire of the Eye: Landscape Representation and American Cultural Politics, 1825-1875* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), 243-88; David C. Miller, "The Iconology of Wrecked or Stranded Boats in Mid to Late Nineteenth-Century American Culture," in *American Iconology: New Approaches to Nineteenth-Century Art and Literature*, ed. Miller (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 186-208; Barbara Novak, *American Painting of the Nineteenth Century: Realism, Idealism, and the American Experience*, 2nd ed. (New York: Harper & Row, 1979), 92-137; Barbara Novak, *Nature and Culture: American Landscape and Painting, 1825-1875*, rev. ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 18-44, 232-35; Barbara Novak, *Nineteenth-Century American Painting: The Thyssen-Bornemisza Collection* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1986), 27-30; Oswaldo Rodriguez Roque, "The Exaltation of American Landscape Painting," in *American Paradise*, 42-48; Vincent Scully, *New World Visions of Household Gods & Sacred Places* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1988), 114-18; Ila Weiss, *Poetic Landscape: The Art and Experience of Sanford R. Gifford* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1987), 13-20; John Wilmerding, ed., *American Light: The Luminist Movement, 1850-1875* (New York: Harper & Row, 1980); Bryan Jay Wolf, *Romantic Re-Vision: Culture and Consciousness in Nineteenth-Century American Painting and Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 245-47.

[40.](#) Baur, "American Luminism," 98.

[41.](#) On the movement from "classical" to what she calls "aerial-luminism" or atmospheric luminism, see Weiss, *Poetic Landscape*, 13-20. On atmospheric luminism also see: Angela Miller, *The Empire of the Eye*, 244; Roque, "The Exaltation of American Landscape Painting," 47. Another similarity can be seen in the tale's postscript which anticipates the empty beach and decaying boat motif often found in luminist landscapes after midcentury: the "Ark" was "stranded" and "decaying" on a "sandy" "point," and abandoned canoes "had been thrown as waifs upon the beach" (546-47). See David C. Miller, "Iconology of Wrecked and Stranded Boats," 186-208.

[42.](#) In claiming the importance of Burke's aesthetic views for Americans, Charles L. Sanford notes that "ten different American editions" of Burke's book appeared between 1800 and 1856. See Sanford's *The Quest For Paradise: Europe and the American Moral Imagination* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1961), 137. On the Burkean sublime in *Mohicans*, see Blakemore, "'Without a Cross': The Cultural Significance of the Sublime and Beautiful in Cooper's *The Last of the Mohicans*," 27-57.

[43.](#) In *Cooper's Landscape: An Essay on the Picturesque Vision* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), Blake Nevius argues that *The Pathfinder* and *The Deerslayer* exemplify Cooper's reliance on the aesthetics of the picturesque in his representation of American landscape. In finding differently, I believe that the picturesque for Cooper required some form of artful addition to the natural landscape. In his wilderness tales, fortresses (like the island outpost in *The Pathfinder* and Floating Tom Hutter's castle in *The Deerslayer*) served this purpose. See Axelrad, "Epiphany at Ischia," 13-16.

[44.](#) James Fenimore Cooper, *Wyandotté* (1843; New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1906), 1, 2.

[45.](#) Cooper, "American and European Scenery Compared," 64.

[46.](#) James Fenimore Cooper, *The Wing-and-Wing* (1842; New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1906), 166-67; James Fenimore Cooper, *The Crater or Vulcan's Peak*, ed. Thomas Philbrick (1847; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962), 174; James Fenimore Cooper, *The Sea Lions* (1849; New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1906.), 201, 204-05.

[47.](#) Cooper, "American and European Scenery Compared," 52, 56, 64.

[48.](#) Richard White, "Discovering Nature in North America," *Journal of American History*, 79 (Dec. 1992), 879.

[49.](#) Neil Harris, *The Artist in American Society*, especially Ch. Six "European Travel: From Perceptions to Conceptions," 145-68.

[50.](#) Novak, *Nature and Culture*, 215.

[51.](#) See Anne Farrar Hyde, *An American Vision: Far Western Landscape and National Culture, 1820-1920* (New York: New York University Press, 1990), 53-146. While artists, writers, and tourists began to visit the Rockies and Sierras in the 1850s, their numbers increased significantly with the completion of the transcontinental railroad in 1869.

[52.](#) Kevin J. Avery, "A Historiography of the Hudson River School," in *American Paradise: The World of the Hudson River School*, introd. John K. Howat (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1987), 3-8.

[53.](#) For an excellent overview of this recovery of American art, see Corn, "Coming of Age," 188-207.

[54.](#) On the changing sublime in American landscape paintings, see: Novak, *Nature and Culture*, 34-44; Angela Miller, *Empire of the Eye*, 243-88; David C. Miller, "Iconology of Wrecked or Stranded Boats," 191-95; Earl A. Powell, "Luminism and the American Sublime," in *American Light*, 69-94. Thomas Cole died in 1848, but

his perception of American mountains was also affected by his travels abroad. Before he went to Europe, his New York and New England wilderness scenes were often mountain Gothic; afterward, he employed mountain Gothic in allegorical landscapes, but not in actual representations of American scenery.

[55.](#) Novak, *Nineteenth-Century American Painting*, 28.

[56.](#) Novak, *Nature and Culture*, 28-32; Novak, "On Defining Luminism," in *American Light*, 24-25.

[57.](#) For example, see Cooper's journal entry, 24 June 1833, in Cooper, *Letters and Journals*, II, 392; Cooper, *Gleanings in Europe: Italy*, 132.

[58.](#) Cooper, *The Water-Witch*, 281. In the introduction to *Gleanings in Europe: Italy*, xxxiv, xlv, Conron and Denne note that Cooper's "habit of mensuration" enabled him "to restore topographical accuracy to the perception of landscape" and "concentrate with greater clarity than previous travelers upon the complex and often momentary coalescences of form, light, shadow, and color," preceding "by more than a decade what Barbara Novak calls 'the mensurational inclinations' of the American luminist landscape painters."

[59.](#) Novak, "On Defining Luminism," 24; Barbara Novak, *American Painting of the Nineteenth Century: Realism, Idealism, and the American Experience*, 2nd Ed. (1969; New York: Harper & Row, 1979), 95. For discussion of differences among art historians about the uniqueness and character of luminism, see Avery, "A Historiography of the Hudson River School," 14-16; Corn, "Coming of Age: Historical Scholarship in American Art," 196; and especially Theodore E. Stebbins, Jr., who points to a number of European artists who previously had utilized elements of luminism in their work, in "Luminism in Context: A New View," in *American Light*, 211-34.

[60.](#) Schama discusses American forest Gothic in *Landscape and Memory*, 195-201. At the time that Cooper lived in Dresden (May to August 1830), the preeminent European forest Gothic painter, David Caspar Friedrich, had a studio in the city. While Cooper was known to frequent artists' studios, there is no evidence that he visited Friedrich's. Moreover, Friedrich's forest Gothic paintings used fir trees to represent the exterior of the Gothic cathedral, while Cooper and American artists used the interior of the woods (usually hardwood rather than fir) to represent the interior of the Gothic cathedral.

[61.](#) Examples include paintings like *The Huntsman or A Vista* (1850), *Midsummer Greens* (1856), *Road Through the Woods or Woodsmen* (1855-58), *A Woodland Path or The Woodchopper* (1865), *Going Out in the Woods* (1866), and *Wood Interior* (1869) by George Inness; and *The Glen* (1862), *The Pool* (1862), *The Old Hunting Grounds* (1864), *Pine Cone Gatherers* (1866), *Gathering Twigs* (1866), *The Woods of Ashokan* (1868), *Boys Fishing in a Pasture Stream* (1868), *Brook in the Woods* (1868-

70), and *The Trout Pool* (1868-70) by Worthington Whittredge.

[62.](#) Examples include paintings like *The Mountain Brook* (1863) and *White Mountains, New Hampshire* (1863) by Albert Bierstadt; *Forest in the Morning Light* (1855), *In the Woods* (1855), and *Woodland Glen* (c. 1855) by Asher Durand; *Woodland Scene* (1850-55) by Martin Johnson Heade; *Rocky Gorge* (1869) by George Hetzel; *Trout Fisherman* (1852) by John Frederick Kensett; *Autumnal Woods* formerly titled *Under the Trees* (1865), and *A Woodland Temple* (1867) by Thomas Moran; and *June Woods* (1864) by William Trost Richards. Barbara Gallati states that Durand's "*In the Woods* signals the reorientation of American landscape painting in the mid-1850s," while pointing out that in such paintings "the arching branches of aged trees transform the inner reaches of the forest into natural equivalents of vaulted cathedral spaces." See Gallati, "Mapping a National Identity: American Painting before the Civil War," in *America: The New World in 19th-Century Painting*, ed. Stephan Koja (New York: Prestel Verlag, 1999), 29. Conron also comments on the interest in painting forest interiors after 1850, however, he believes that the architectural model is the Gothic villa, not the cathedral; see Conron, *American Picturesque*, 139-40, 164.

[63.](#) See Bil Gilbert, "To be a champion, a tree must measure up to high standards," *Smithsonian*, 27 (Oct. 1996), 120; Harrison, *Forests*, 178.

[64.](#) Mark Twain, *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, foreword and notes by John C. Gerber, text established by Paul Baender (1876; Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 102.

[65.](#) Cooper occasionally used forest church architecture imagery prior to his trip to Europe. In *The Pioneers*, for example, the "underwood" of a forest is cleared for the production of maple sugar. The scene, he writes, "might be likened to the dome of a mighty temple, to which the maples formed the columns, their tops composing the capitals, and the heavens the arch" (224). However, this scene is generically romantic; it is neither specifically associated with the aesthetics of the sublime nor with Gothic church architecture. Visiting Gothic cathedrals in Europe was the catalyst for the adaptation of forest Gothic to American landscape. Before such comparisons had become commonplace in American art, other writers, like Cooper, also returned from Europe and expressed their delight in America's wooded landscape with forest Gothic imagery. For example, upon returning in 1832 after seventeen years in Europe, Washington Irving traveled into America's wilderness where he was "overshadowed by lofty trees" whose "trunks" were "like stately columns." He "was reminded," he reported, "of the effect of sunshine among the stained windows and clustering columns of a gothic cathedral." The "grandeur and solemnity" in America's "forests" thus awakened "the same feeling" he "experienced" in the "vast and venerable" cathedrals of Europe; Washington Irving, *A Tour on the Prairies*, ed. and introd. John Francis McDermott (1835; Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1956), 41.

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