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# Representing Wilderness in the Shaping of America's National Parks: Aesthetics, Boundaries, and Cultures in the Works of James Fenimore Cooper, John Muir, and their Artistic Contemporaries

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**Representing Wilderness in the Shaping of America's National Parks:  
Aesthetics, Boundaries, and Cultures in the works of James Fenimore Cooper,  
John Muir, and their Artistic Contemporaries**

By

Alana J. Jajko

A Thesis

Presented to the Faculty of  
Bucknell University


In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the  
Degree of Master of Arts in English

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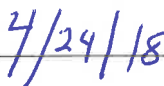
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## Abbreviations:

<i>ABI</i>	<i>America's Best Idea</i> , Ken Burns
<i>EY</i>	<i>James Fenimore Cooper: The Early Years</i> , Wayne Franklin
<i>LL</i>	<i>John Muir: His Life and Letters and Other Writings</i> , John Muir, Terry Gifford, ed.
<i>LN</i>	<i>Letters and Notes on the Manners, Customs, and Conditions of the North American Indians: Written during Eight Years' Travel (1832-1839) Amongst the Wildest Tribes of Indians in North America</i> , George Catlin
<i>LY</i>	<i>James Fenimore Cooper: The Later Years</i> , Wayne Franklin
<i>MP</i>	<i>Modern Painters</i> , John Ruskin
<i>OED</i>	<i>Oxford English Dictionary</i>

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## ABSTRACT

This project studies the works of James Fenimore Cooper, John Muir, and their artistic contemporaries in relation to the shaping of America's national parks and what it means for the parks and their attending wilderness to be symbolic of the nation. It seeks to reveal the national parks as artistic representations of a constructed wilderness, while also emphasizing the physical experience of the natural world as a means of supplementing our subjective views. Through the lenses of aesthetics, boundaries, and cultures, I narrow my study to focus on three distinct perspectives by which we can understand the national parks and wilderness.

The first chapter follows Cooper's personal and fictional narratives, placing him in conversation with early conservation, nineteenth-century artists, and the disappearance of Native cultures—in effect, foreshadowing representations and policies that would eventually come to define America's national parks. The second chapter traces Muir's history alongside the formative years of the national parks, emphasizing how he bolsters and develops the ideas that Cooper introduces, providing a basis for how we experience wilderness in the parks today. This includes his personal experiences with nature, his political activism regarding the parks, and his encounters with the Natives of California and Alaska—which in their own ways all demonstrate integrated environments of humans alongside nature. The epilogue reflects on the engagement of communities with the national parks today, how Cooper and Muir have shaped those experiences, and how the technology of an advancing world becomes another factor to consider within the human-nature relationship.

I pose the national parks as shared places where we as individuals can reflect on our personal encounters with nature, while also recognizing the deeper collective history that attends these preserved wilderness areas. Wilderness has been a defining aspect of America for centuries, but the wilderness of the national parks represents an authentically more complicated past. Understanding this past allows for deeper reflection not only of national identity, but of self-discovery, as we decide what values to bring to our own experiences in the national parks, and how we might individually contribute to the ever-evolving concept of wilderness.



Albert Bierstadt, *Looking Up the Yosemite Valley*, 1865-67

*“What do we wish? — To be whole. To be complete. Wildness reminds us what it means to be human, what we are connected to rather than what we are separate from.”*

—Terry Tempest Williams, Statement regarding the Utah Public Lands Management Act of 1995

## INTRODUCTION

Place is something that is always changing, influenced by people and cultures and the forces of nature, shaped by life itself as it grows and develops. Some people feel a comfort in calling one place home, while others exhibit a need to travel from place to place, sometimes returning to places to find landscapes completely changed. A place is something alive. It is not just a space to be occupied, but something that interacts with the world at large—from the tiniest microscopic miracles to the tumultuous events that move masses of earth. Humans have studied place for centuries from ventures of self-discovery to mythical and religious narratives of creation to scientific analysis of landscapes in this world and beyond. In the words of philosopher and phenomenologist Edward Casey, “to realize how much intelligent and insightful thought has been accorded to place in Western philosophy is to begin to reappraise its unsuspected importance as well as its fuller compass” (xi). One of the more primordial forms of place is that which we have deemed wilderness. It has been a topic of fascination for ages—a source of folklore and legend in the earliest forms of literature to a setting of fantasy, mystery, and adventure, even as the development of civilization has made the traditional expectations of wilderness harder to come by.

In a word, wilderness is my topic—more specifically the wilderness of the United States. Being of a spirit fascinated with landscape, I have experienced the wilds of more than one place. In traveling to Europe and parts of Asia, I noticed that the wilderness there had a distinctly different feel from the wilds of America. The landscapes seemed old, dry, almost worn from the years of life that had changed them from the seeds of their

youth. America, on the other hand, in the experience of my travels, still embodied a wilderness that felt fresh—lush and vast and sublime compared to the relic of the eastern hemisphere's ancient wilds. While in reality the wilderness of the world has universally aged, America's wilderness is different in the sense that we have seen it transform from a relatively unpopulated continent to a hub of civilization, when judged by European standards during the time of the New World "discovery." In recent history (on the grander scale of time) America was considered by Europeans and Euro-Americans to be wild in its entirety, even with the presence of Native inhabitants. As this perceived untamed landscape began to shrink to western expansion and civilization, a desire to protect the sanctity of nature arose.

From the start, early explorers, artists, and writers have endeavored to capture the essence of each natural wonder. As the American wilds became more and more popular, they were preserved, shaped, and sanctioned off as state and national parks. Yet the desire to capture them continued—represented in sublime paintings, adventure novels, nature journals, and photographs. In *Sacred Places: American Tourist Attractions in the Nineteenth Century*, John Sears argues that "[t]ourism played a powerful role in America's invention of itself as a culture. . . . it provided a means of defining America as a place and taking pride in the special features of its landscape" (4). He equates the tourist experience to that of the pilgrim—both embarking on deliberate journeys to be awed and inspired by some landmark, be it manmade or natural (5-6). Thus, with the birth of the national parks came a new kind of pilgrimage that sought to transcend difference and unite the nation under a common feeling of liberation, and as the

popularity of tourism in America grew, so too did the outpouring of related art and literature.

The American wilderness stirred something in people, and still does today. While the creation of national parks established something symbolic of America, their representations inspired people to get out and experience the places for themselves with an insatiable desire to feel a resonance with them. With grand landscapes such as these, comes a longing to possess them in some way, to become a part of them. America's wilderness, like all wilds before, had acquired the allure of mystery and adventure. Our understanding of wilderness has always been the result of culture, of art and literature, produced by humankind in an attempt to comprehend the incomprehensible—but it is something constructed, and though this fabrication helps our understanding, it reaps certain consequences.

It is my goal with this thesis to explore in ecocritical, aesthetic, and historical contexts, American literature and visual art as they relate to the formation of the national parks and of the wilderness as icons for America. Two central figures to the discussion will be James Fenimore Cooper and John Muir, nineteenth-century American writers whose representations often depict the natural world interacting with civilization. I will also address the works of artists like Thomas Cole, George Catlin, and William Keith, in conjunction with Cooper and Muir, as well as the writings of Susan Fenimore Cooper, James Fenimore's daughter and a distinguished writer and naturalist of her time. Early Euro-American writers, artists, and explorers had established an American vision of an untouched natural wilderness. However, in reality, the continent had been inhabited by

American Indians long before European discovery, and was already being cultivated by new settlers as the myth developed in the eighteenth century. Cooper and Muir developed a more nuanced version of the wilderness myth to some extent, recognizing pockets of natural sanctity but also a human contact with the wilderness areas. This interaction of society with wilderness could be spiritually uplifting to humans and beneficial to both humans and nature, but it could also be mutually destructive. While the idea of a pristine wilderness was circulated by Euro-Americans who sought to define the new nation, it was the human experience within these wilds that would exemplify the reality of the United States as an interactive environment of humankind and nature. With the Euro-American drive for progress intruding on the wilderness, and the fear of unknown danger that an unexplored continent surely posed, however, the budding nation would seek a middle ground for the two to successfully coexist.

In studying the works of Cooper, Muir, and their artistic contemporaries in light of history and theory concerning nature, personhood, culture, and the parks, this project reflects on the shaping of the national parks as a potential intermediary to maintaining the delicate balance between humans and nature. Early efforts toward developing the national parks began as soon as 1832, with the setting aside of Hot Springs Reservation, Arkansas, under President Andrew Jackson. Soon to follow would be the creation of Yosemite Park in 1864 by Abraham Lincoln, of Yellowstone as the first official national park in 1872 under Ulysses S. Grant, the expansion of national parks and other protected lands under Theodore Roosevelt between 1901 and 1909, and finally the establishment of the National Park Service in 1916 under Woodrow Wilson. Spanning the lifetimes of both

Cooper and Muir, the parks would not only place boundaries to curb progress and preserve wilderness, but would also allow for a setting where society could experience the wilds that were becoming so iconic of a new nation.

Theorists including Edmund Burke, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and Emmanuel Levinas will be central to my study of aesthetics, boundaries, and cultures, as I seek to reveal the merits and problems of the national parks as icons for America's identity. I will also confront the issue of American Indians in relation to early Indian removal policy and their exclusion from the national parks. Their experiences and connection to the natural world brought into question the ethical responsibility for society to preserve nature when the preservation of Native culture was ignored. The parks became, like the writings of Cooper and Muir, technologies for symbolic representation.<sup>1</sup> Today they stand as works of art in themselves, illustrative of an evolving American ideal, reminiscent of a history laced with conflict, and yet evocative of the effort to attain a harmony between humankind and nature.

There are a number of important terms and ideas central to my thesis, which I would like to clarify here. For this project, the most important are a series of myths that saturate our conceptions of wilderness, these being (1) that wilderness is a pristine, untouched natural setting free from human influence, and (2) humans beings are

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<sup>1</sup> Charles Peirce, a mid to late 19th century American philosopher, was interested in developing a connection between cultural and human signs and the environment in his semiotics. According to Alfred Siewers in *Re-Imagining Nature*, Peirce saw a "triadic process of relationship" within the "confluence of Sign (or text), Object (or environment), and Interpretant" that could include "author" and "reader" (11). Throughout this thesis, I see the works of Cooper, Muir and others as "Sign," the National Parks as "Object," and all people interacting with the parks and this thesis as "Interpretants"—all participating in a similar relationship of semiotics where the parks become symbolic of that triadic relationship.

something separate from the natural world. These statements, though widespread, are myths because, as theorist Raymond Williams puts it, “the idea of nature contains an extraordinary amount of human history” (70). As addressed earlier, the idea of wilderness as something isolated from human presence evolved from European and Euro-American perceptions popularized by writers and artists of the Romantic movement and beyond. One myth led to another and human beings came to be thought of as something completely separate from the natural world. Preceding Romanticism, wilderness had been widely conceived as a hostile and unforgivable place. As Romanticism emerged, so, too, did a renewed appreciation of wilderness as a place close to God the Creator, full of beauty and wonder.<sup>2</sup> What this new vision had to offer was an alternative to the civilized world of humankind, in short, an escape from society. For example, as historian Roderick Nash points out, Romantic writers like Lord Byron often created heroes whose “disenchantment with civilization led them to value the solitude of wild places” (50). Thus, the popularization of wilderness resulted from an urge to escape the human world, leading to its conception as a place free from human influence. The people participating in this new definition of wilderness, however, were people of a class and position “who did not face wilderness from the pioneer’s perspective” (51). In America, the people who

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<sup>2</sup> The Romantic interpretation of wilderness was renewed in the sense that older traditions also maintained a vision of wilderness as a sacred, soteriological place. Dating to classical antiquity and earlier, definitions of wilderness have fluctuated between bad and good, demonic and divine, for centuries. Some versions even interpret wilderness as a place of twofold possibility, providing equal chances of hostility and salvation. As Judith Adler explains, “[a]ssociated with divine curse, exile, and death . . . wild spaces [in some religious traditions] are also marked as sites of refuge, purification, divine alliance, and the birth of a nation” (13). Thus perceptions of wilderness have always been, and still are, susceptible to cycles of change and evolution. Raymond Williams also notes this tendency of the natural world when he claims, “nature’ has a nominal continuity, over many centuries, but can be seen, in analysis, to be both complicated and changing, as other ideas and experiences change” (67).



were truly experiencing wilderness were farmers and settlers engaging in a battle to cultivate these places and make them inhabitable.<sup>3</sup> Yet, as William Cronon explains, wilderness remained “the landscape of choice for elite tourists” (*The Trouble* 78). While the Romanticism that this group sought out focused on wilderness as an exciting alternative to civilization, these writers could not always ignore the hostile side of nature that the pioneers faced every day. Nash details, for example, how writers like William Byrd, who was also a British planter and founder of Richmond, Virginia, faced the possibility of feeling like a “barbarian or in danger of reverting to one” when encountering wilderness. Byrd “saw and deplored people who had absorbed the wildness of their surroundings” (52)—and so the idea of humans and nature side-by-side became all the more undesirable. After the Revolutionary War, when the United States had become its own nation, these ideas of humans and nature and wilderness were at their peak. In seeking something that could set apart the new nation, Nash explains how “American nationalists began to understand that it was in the *wildness* of its nature that their country was unmatched” (69). In effect, the Romantic wilderness became something uniquely associated with the American landscape.

The popularization of a Romantic wilderness as a place that offers an escape from civilization, while also posing a sense of fear and danger to human beings, thus resulted in the myths we still hold fast to today—myths that have worked to separate humans from nature both literally and in the minds of Americans for centuries. I would like to,

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<sup>3</sup> William Cooper, James Fenimore Cooper’s father, was one such pioneer, having founded Cooperstown when the landscape of upstate New York was considered to be the frontier between civilization and wilderness.

however, reconsider myth, as historian Karl Jacoby does when he emphasizes that myth is “not necessarily false” and is rather influenced by cultural circumstances, meant to “provide its listeners with a way of finding order and meaning in the world” (270).<sup>4</sup> While this contemplation reveals myths, like that of the wilderness, as cultural constructs, it also provides a more positive outlook that illuminates the myths’ “clear connection to reality,” though it may be distorted or simplified (270). While I seek to destabilize these myths and reconsider their legitimacy as we encounter the American wilderness of the past, present, and future, I do acknowledge that these myths also developed in an effort to better understand the natural world and our relationship to it. I offer national parks as places where human beings can safely interact with nature in a new perception of American wilderness that incorporates both humans and nature, destabilizing the myths of humans and nature as separate entities and instead posing them as integrated parts of a unified whole. Cronon argues that “wilderness offers us the illusion that we can escape the cares and troubles of the world in which our past has ensnared us” (*The Trouble* 80). My goal is to break this illusion, stage the American wilderness as a source for historical learning, and, as a result, foster a new appreciation for relationships between humans and nature across cultures in the national parks and beyond.

The thesis will be structured as two main chapters, chronologically and geographically organized with a focus on James Fenimore Cooper from the Eastern

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<sup>4</sup> Additionally, the myth of wilderness provides individuals with a means of finding order and meaning within themselves. There is an ancient history of wilderness as a place of self-discovery. As Adler explains, “[f]or heirs of this tradition, [like Cooper, Muir, and many of their contemporaries], empty wilderness continues to beckon for cultivating interiority and struggling to know the self” (26). Thus the myth of wilderness as a place of solitude far from civilization offered a site for reflection on more than one level.

United States in the first chapter and a study of John Muir from the Western United States in the second. Richard Grusin in *Culture, Technology, and the Creation of America's National Parks* explains Frederick Law Olmsted's design of Yosemite National Park to "conceptualize the nation on an East-West axis," with the purpose of shifting the national mentality "away from the South and trauma of the Civil War and toward the West and the expanding [and unified] nation" (24-25). My decision to incorporate both Cooper and Muir reflects this mentality not only from an East-West direction, but also chronologically, as the nineteenth century saw the nation restabilize and seek to define its post-Civil War self. Each of these two chapters is divided thematically into three subsections that will focus on aesthetics, boundaries, and culture. The aesthetic lens aims to provide a deeper analysis of the means and representations through which we most often encounter nature, the boundaries lens highlights the permeability but usefulness of the divide that we establish between ourselves and nature, and the culture lens offers a method of historical learning and acknowledgement of the consequences to which this divide has contributed. Together, the three subsections of each chapter combine to provide a holistic reflection on wilderness as a symbolic representation of America as we experience it in the national parks. The two chapters will be followed by an epilogue that looks ahead to where America's national parks stand today in relation to the themes that appear in Cooper and Muir, including the creation of a national park network along the Susquehanna River with the cooperation of the Haudenosaunee (also known as the Iroquois) Confederacy.

Chapter One addresses Cooper and his works as precursory to the kind of thinking that led to the establishment of America's national parks. His *Leatherstocking Tales* memorialize a vision of America centered on its wilderness, but not without complications. While the wilderness might have been an ideal Euro-American symbol for representing the nation, we see Cooper struggle with real concerns that come with the presence of civilization, primarily his sense of a constant tension between the progress of society and a pristine state of wilderness, as well as between the presences of indigenous and colonial cultures. Where these two binaries intersect, one nearly always succumbs to the other, revealing the impossibility of maintaining a wilderness separate from humankind and the consequences that follow. The tension reveals a necessity for an all-encompassing symbol like the national parks to reveal the mythic construction of wilderness and serve as an alternative where humans and nature can sustainably coexist.<sup>5</sup> Additionally, a discussion of Cooper's American Indian representations reveals his writings as a means of translating the human-to-human ethical responsibility to the natural world, although it unfortunately did not do enough to promote action against the tragedy that Natives faced with Indian removal policy in the nineteenth century. Later, the parks would at once become a kind of artwork for framing Cooper's pastoral-Arcadian vision for America as a whole, while also serving as an intermediary between society and wilderness, and upholding an ethical responsibility for wilderness

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<sup>5</sup> Throughout this thesis, I refer to sustainability in the multifaceted sense that Leslie Paul Thiele describes in his book *Sustainability*. According to Thiele, "Sustainability is an adaptive art wedded to science in service to ethical vision. It entails satisfying current needs without sacrificing future well-being through the balanced pursuit of ecological health, economic welfare, social empowerment, and cultural creativity" (4-5).

preservation. Within these bounds, visitors could experience America's wilds without the danger of damaging them. Cooper's works not only stimulated a need for the parks as a material justification for understanding the relationship between humans and nature, but also introduced the tools required for their success.

Chapter Two studies the formative years of the national parks, with a focus on John Muir and his writing as foundational for increasing the popularity of the parks during their early years. Adhering to the themes of aesthetics, boundaries, and cultures, this chapter reconsiders how the parks came to address these three topics and the problems that arose in preserving the values of each. Like Cooper, Muir continually found himself torn between a passion for wilderness and a need for society. Over the course of his lifetime, he came to realize that both were needed for the individual to maintain a fulfilled life. In some ways, Muir even came to embody Cooper's hero, Natty Bumppo, as the course of his life continually placed him on the boundaries between two worlds—civilization and wilderness. In studying Muir, I also consider the evolution of his thinking in comparison to Cooper's, tracing a combination of their ideologies to those embodied by the creation of the national parks. For example, whereas Cooper recognizes the qualities of the sublime at the intersection of society and wilderness, Muir rather feels a spiritual connection with the natural world in which he believed that an unusual combination of faith and science could lead to a greater understanding of the human relationship to the world around us. I also address the controversy around boundaries that occupied Muir's final years of defending the wilderness against the damming of the Tuolumne River in the Hetch Hetchy Valley that threatened the boundaries of Yosemite

National Park, along with a deeper analysis of how boundaries function historically at the crossroads of society and nature. A final segment addresses the discourse underlying the treatment of American Indians during the formative national park years of Muir's time and beyond. During the early years of Yosemite, for example, park officials deliberated over the presence of Natives within park bounds—initially allowing a population to remain, but eventually creating regulations that would gradually phase Native communities out of the park to create, ironically, a more “authentic” wilderness. In more recent years, efforts have been made for American Indian rights within parklands that have been met with some success, including their collaboration in shaping new national park projects such as the Susquehanna historic river corridor in partnership with Haudenosaunee (or Iroquois) Confederacy. While indigenous people endured a long period of abuse and upheaval, I intend to trace this history to a point where the inclusion of Native cultures within the parks might finally reveal the collaboration of society and wilderness in a revised version of America's iconic national parks.

The epilogue to this thesis will take a brief look at Cooper and Muir together, from twenty-first century perspectives, to trace the trajectory that the idea of America's wilderness has taken over the years, and look ahead to more recent representations and where the national parks stand today. Points for discussion will include the evolution of technology in representing the parks aesthetically, the boundaries of the parks and their continued state of change, the gradual inclusion of Native cultures within park bounds, and the national parks as built environments that help to establish the acceptance of the human-nature coexistence as a symbol for America—a development that I trace in this

thesis through the works of Cooper and Muir, their artistic contemporaries, and the history of representing the nation.

It is my hope with this thesis to contribute new perspectives to ecocriticism that seek to find the common ground between humans and nature, but also to re-define how individuals experience the wilderness of America's national parks. My audience not only encompasses scholars in the environmental humanities, but people who seek out meaning in wilderness on a more personal experiential level. Historically, wilderness is a place of self-discovery—a place where the lone soul escapes to explore his/her identity apart from civilization. I argue, however, that wilderness, especially that of the national parks, can additionally serve to symbolically represent America as a nation. Writer and philosopher Roger Scruton says of the national parks that “they are successful because they appeal to a natural motive—the shared love of a shared place.” He continues, “nobody seems to have identified a motive more likely to serve the environmentalist cause than this one, of the shared love for our home” (15). This project is intended to pose the national parks as such shared places where we as individuals can reflect on our personal encounters with nature while also recognizing the deeper collective history that attends these preserved wilderness areas. Wilderness has been a defining aspect of America for centuries, but the wilderness of the national parks represents an authentically more complicated past. Understanding this past allows for deeper reflection not only of national identity, but also of self-discovery, as we decide what values to bring to our own experiences in the national parks, and how we might individually contribute to the ever-evolving concept of wilderness.

As a final note, I must also acknowledge my own hand in offering a constructed vision for the national parks via my creative act in staging them as places symbolic for the experience of wilderness and the United States. Throughout this thesis, I also include my own drawings and photographs interwoven with literary, historical, and aesthetic studies all related to the parks. Considering my own representations of the national parks, my inclusion of artwork and literature related to the “wilderness” of the parks, and my staging of the parks themselves as technologies for representation, I must highlight the impossibility of evading this construction that dates back to ancient Greece with Plato’s *Ion*—a foundational text that contemplates the source of creative inspiration. There is an unattainability of communicating the objective truth of things when it comes to art and literature, or any form of human expression.

To invoke Plato’s allegory of the cave from his work *Republic*, all we see are the shadows on the cave wall rather than the object itself or the sun that casts the shadow— or, in the case of wilderness, all we can communicate are representations of the real thing rather than the thing itself. Yet, just as the prisoners of the cave escape from their chains to face the blinding incomprehensibility of the sun, we must try to make the effort to pull ourselves away from these representations and experience the reality of wilderness. In my own experience, the national parks are places where the symbolic constructions of wilderness meet the physicality of striving towards that real experience. They are a mediator where the symbolic meets reality. In drawing this conclusion, I am connecting with literary and aesthetic studies, and also drawing on environmental semiotics, as developed from the work of Charles Peirce, in which the relationship between



symbolism, the physical environment, and the reception of human communities and cultures all interact.<sup>6</sup> Again, in offering this method of understanding the national parks, I am creating another subjective lens through which we might view wilderness. However, in drawing attention to this construction, I emphasize the physicality of the environment as a space where we might receive a glimmer of truth to attend the myriad of art, literature, and history that attends our knowledge of the national parks and wilderness at large. In this way, we might not only come to understand what it means for the national parks to be symbolic for the United States as a nation, but also strive to appreciate the experience of wilderness in and of itself.

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<sup>6</sup> See also Timo Maran's work on "nature-text," entitled "Towards an Integrated Methodology of Ecosemiotics: The Concept of Nature-Text."

## CHAPTER 1

### **James Fenimore Cooper and the Quest for American Identity: Setting a Precursor for the National Parks**

As one of the first great American novelists, James Fenimore Cooper memorialized a vision of America as a grand, Romantic wilderness. The untamed scenery that he depicts in his novels is free and sweeping and sublime—but it does not come without its complications. In his *Leatherstocking Tales*, Cooper establishes wilderness as an icon for America, but in doing so he also grapples with the difficulties of trying to define “wilderness,” especially as it changes under the influence of cultural circumstances. At the heart of my analysis is a study of Cooper’s works that seeks to reveal his thinking as precursory to the establishment of America’s national parks. Aesthetically, Cooper creates an ideal American wilderness, yet he falls prey to the Platonic problem of representation and the idea that literature and art cannot truly replicate actual experience. While trying to contain wilderness within these Romanticized bounds, he also expresses real concerns for the destruction that occurs when wilderness comes into contact with civilization, when boundaries are breached. Conceptions of wilderness that separate humans and nature were predominant in Cooper’s time as they often are today, and Cooper struggles with the consequences of this divide where none should naturally exist. And finally, in his characterizations, Cooper embodies concerns regarding tensions among preservation, society, and wilderness in the face of Native Americans.

In exploring the aesthetics, boundaries, and cultures of Cooper and his work, I intend to reveal how these complications suggest the need for an all-encompassing

symbol like the national parks to negotiate the exchange and reconcile the divide between humans and nature. Cooper's dilemma calls for another kind of representation closest to the real experience of America's wilds, something that can mediate the bounds between society and wilderness, and something that can satisfy the desires for preservation. The national parks could come to represent a combination of physical and aesthetic representation to meet these requirements. This chapter contends that James Fenimore Cooper set the foundations for a developing American identity where society and wilderness could coexist, where the former could experience the latter without infringing upon its natural sanctity. In this way, Cooper and his works become precursory to national parks as places central and necessary to making this identity of America possible and preserving it for years to come.

At the time in which Cooper was writing, the national parks had yet to exist, but small moves for preservation had begun to materialize throughout the nation. While Yellowstone has been documented as the first national park (established in 1872), and the National Park Service did not officially develop until 1916, the very first unofficial national park in the United States was Hot Springs, Arkansas in 1832, right in the midst of Cooper's writing career. According to Ronald A. Foresta in *America's National Parks and Their Keepers*, "Hot Springs, Arkansas was withdrawn from claims in 1832 and was run as a park by the federal government thereafter. It was a part of the original charge of the NPS although it did not become a national park until 1921" (12). Initially set aside as Hot Springs Reservation under President Andrew Jackson, the area was preserved in order to protect the natural, thermal springs, and surrounding mountains; according to the

original legislation, it was “reserved for the future disposal of the United States, and shall not be entered, located, or appropriated, for any other purpose whatsoever” (U.S. Congress, *An Act authorizing* 505). Unfortunately, no controls were put into action by Congress, and the area was quickly developed with people and businesses (Shugart). This failure of preservation in Cooper’s time (and during the administration of a President whom he supported) demonstrates early examples of the tensions that can occur when society meets wilderness. Cooper’s own writing in this era itself suggests the delicate balance that was needed in order for the two to coexist. It is possible that he draws attention to this balance as a way to counteract the divide that had been established between humans and nature as a consequence of the wilderness myth. As we will see, these tensions become a prominent theme throughout his *Leatherstocking Tales*—a theme that seems to call for an intermediary between wilderness and society to redefine the divide, which Theodore Roosevelt and other readers of Cooper translated into the form of a regulated national park system.

Even after Cooper’s time, his works continued to influence environmental thinkers as the United States stepped closer and closer to establishing a National Park Service. Theodore Roosevelt, who served as President of the United States during the years 1901-1909, was one such figure who found inspiration in Cooper’s tales. During a family trip to the Adirondacks in the summer of 1871, young Roosevelt, at age twelve, discovered the *Leatherstocking Tales*. Douglas Brinkley explains in *The Wilderness Warrior: Theodore Roosevelt and the Crusade for America*:

Pretending to be Natty Bumppo, [Roosevelt] carefully studied salamander markings, finding them hidden under water-soaked logs. To the bafflement of his parents he gathered more than 100 species of lichens and fungi under rocks and in dense undergrowth. He brought out from caves unusual samplings of moss to scrutinize back at home under a magnifying glass. And, of course, there was daily talk of bears. (41)

During that summer in the Adirondack Park and the White Mountains, with Cooper's novels by his side, Roosevelt experienced some of the most formative moments of his life towards becoming a naturalist and environmental enthusiast. Years later, during his presidency, Theodore Roosevelt carried these values through to his actions of establishing forest reserves and national parks, as well as "An Act for the Preservation of American Antiquities" that allowed for a president to designate "historical landmarks, historic and prehistoric structures, and other objects of historic or scientific interest . . . to be national monuments" (U.S Congress, *An Act for* 225). As Brinkley points out, Roosevelt, in reading Cooper, had read "what in retrospect are the two most important American conservationist novels of the nineteenth century, narratives that dealt, in part, with imperative calls to create forest reserves through visionary natural resource management: *The Pioneers* (1823) and *The Prairie* (1827)" (40). With Roosevelt's later advocacy for forest reserves and national parks, his work as president thus sought to put a check upon the disappearing wilderness that concerns Cooper in the novels that Roosevelt had read. Through a lens of aesthetics, boundaries, and culture, this chapter follows Cooper's personal and fictional narratives, placing him in conversation with early

conservation, nineteenth-century artists, and the disappearance of Native cultures—in effect, foreshadowing representations and policies that would eventually come to define America’s national parks.



### **Cooper’s Aesthetic Representations:**

#### **The Consequences of an American “Wilderness”**

In an era when Romanticism and theories of the aesthetic were percolating in circles of prominent thinkers, it is not surprising that Cooper’s representations of wilderness uphold these values. Especially at the forefront of the aesthetic discussion were philosophers such as Edmund Burke and Immanuel Kant, whose descriptions of the sublime and the beautiful in the eighteenth century became central to aesthetic theory. In this section, I trace the role of wilderness in the writings of Burke and other figures who were contributing to the aesthetic conversation. In comparing these examples to Cooper’s own representations in his *Leatherstocking Tales*, I hope to explore the consequences of envisioning a sublime American wilderness, especially in regards to the complications of attaining that aesthetic experience. With his striking descriptions of the American landscape, Cooper creates an ideal vision; however, with this endeavor he faces problems of representation that distance the image from its original form. In striving to depict an identity for America in its wilderness, Cooper and his contemporaries, like artist Thomas

Cole, were faced with the impossibility of capturing the irreplaceable physical experience of it. While some might see this unattainability as a failure, I argue that the ongoing struggle instigated a need for an American icon that the world could physically and emotionally experience, uniting the material wilderness with the human reaction to it. I suggest that this experience, which Cooper sought to recreate for readers in his novels, could be embodied in something yet to come like the national parks. As I examine the presence of wilderness in aesthetic theory, comparing these descriptions to those of Cooper's, and highlighting the impossibility of attaining the aesthetic experience in art and literature, I intend to propose the struggles of Cooper and his contemporaries as a step in the chain of representation towards the national parks as an entity that could more closely embody the aesthetic experience.

Edmund Burke's *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* appeared in 1757. While it is often overshadowed by Burke's Revolutionary writings, its influence can be clearly traced in important works of the Romantic period as well as later discussions of aesthetic theory. Throughout this work, Burke strives to differentiate and define ideas of the sublime and the beautiful, often associating each with traits of the natural world. As Adam Phillips comments, "*Enquiry* would link the experience of certain kinds of 'great' literature with the experience of that other recently fashionable eighteenth-century pleasure, the natural landscape" (x-xi), thus making nature a central entity to aesthetics, especially in literature. Immanuel Kant's later work *Critique of the Power of Judgement* includes an entire section entitled "On the Dynamically Sublime in Nature," which discusses the power of the sublime in nature to

“elevate the strength of our soul” and “[raise] the imagination” (438-9). While Kant’s assertions here are highly transcendental, Burke’s are more materially grounded and focused on the bodily experience of nature in which the senses are wholly enveloped by the sublime. In studying Cooper’s representations of wilderness, I rely primarily on Burke as a foundational figure of aesthetic theory, and since Kantian theory refuses the acknowledgement of an aesthetic experience, because it is incomprehensible,<sup>7</sup> Burke’s physiologically-based theory becomes a more appropriate lens through which we might analyze the experience of Cooper’s landscapes.<sup>8</sup>

Burke primarily describes his idea of the sublime as a twofold entity. In *Enquiry*, he clarifies this trait of the sublime by explaining how some languages use the same word to “signify indifferently the modes of astonishment or admiration and those of terror” (54). Often, Burke claims, this confusion occurs due to the “kindred emotions which attend fear and wonder” (54). Thus, something that is sublime must produce these conflicting sensations within the individual who experiences that object. Interestingly, the German word for “wilderness” almost literally describes this dual experience of Burke’s sublime. In *Wilderness and the American Mind*, Roderick Nash explains, “According to Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm and their advisors, *Wildnis* has a twofold emotional tone. On

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<sup>7</sup> According to Kant, “That is sublime which even to be able to think of demonstrates a faculty of the mind that surpasses every measure of the senses” (433). Of experiencing the sublime, he claims that there are “two actions of this faculty: apprehension (*apprehensio*) and comprehension (*comprehensio aethetica*). There is no difficulty with apprehension, because it can go on to infinity; but comprehension becomes ever more difficult the further apprehension advances, and soon reaches its maximum...and there is in the comprehension a greatest point beyond which it cannot go” (434).

<sup>8</sup> With an emphasis on the bodily experience of aesthetics, Burke explains, “Of *feeling* little more can be said than that the idea of bodily pain, in all the modes and degrees of labor, pain, anguish, torment, is productive of the sublime; and nothing else in this sense can produce it” (79). Yet he also acknowledges that “pain can [also] be a cause of delight” (122). Thus, the physical experience in the face of the sublime, according to Burke, can induce a full range of emotions that encompass both body and mind.



the one hand it is inhospitable, alien, mysterious, and threatening; but on the other, beautiful, friendly, and capable of elevating and delighting the beholder” (4). Nash derives this definition from the Grimm brothers’ *Deutsches Wörterbuch*, the largest and most comprehensive dictionary of the German language in existence. Though it was published in 1854, after Cooper wrote his novels, the twofold definition may have been influenced by the topic of wilderness as central to discussions of the sublime that began with Burke and continued with the German Romantics and others involved in the aesthetic conversation. Kant’s descriptions of the sublime in nature also contain the double entendre:

Bold, overhanging, as it were threatening cliffs, thunder clouds towering up into the heavens, bringing with them flashes of lightning and crashes of thunder, volcanoes with their all-destroying violence, hurricanes with the devastation they leave behind, the boundless ocean set into a rage, a lofty waterfall on a mighty river, etc., make our capacity to resist into an insignificant trifle in comparison with their power. But the sight of them only becomes all the more attractive the more fearful it is . . . (438)

Since Kant was a German philosopher, it is likely that the Grimm brothers’ definition of “wildnis” was influenced by passages like this one in Kant’s *Critique of the Power of Judgement*, which appeared in 1790. Cooper, as an intellectual, would have been aware of such aesthetic discussions and, as Wayne Franklin explains, he also spent some time in Germany in 1830 to see to the production of a German translation of his book *The Water-*

*Witch* (LY 88). As we will see, Cooper's descriptions of wilderness, like the German definition, often coincide with qualities of the sublime.

The one instance throughout *Enquiry* in which Burke uses the term "wilderness" directly is when he describes the sublime experience of the individual in the face of a wild animal. He explains, "We have continually about us animals of a strength that is considerable, but not pernicious. Amongst these we never look for the sublime; it comes upon us in the gloomy forest, and in the howling wilderness, in the form of the lion, the tiger, the panther, or rhinoceros" (60-1). A scene from Cooper's novel *The Pioneers* depicts an experience not unlike Burke's description when the lead female character Elizabeth Temple and her companion Louisa Grant find themselves confronting a wild panther in the woods beyond the town of Templeton. Like Burke's animal, whose "strength is considerable, but not pernicious," the old dog, Brave, courageously sacrifices his life to protect the girls—but his efforts fail to match the sublime power of the wild cat, for "age, and his pampered life, greatly disqualified the noble mastiff for such a struggle" (308). Up until the death of Brave, Elizabeth is able to experience both the awe and terror of the struggle behind the safety of the dog's protection, "her eyes fixed on the animals, with an interest so horrid, and yet so intense, that she almost forgot her own stake in the result" (308). As soon as she is at the mercy of the panther, however, Elizabeth is frozen with horror, and the delicate twofold moment of sublimity succumbs to the real fear of danger. As Burke explains, "When danger or pain press too nearly, they are incapable of giving any delight, and are simply terrible; but at certain distances, and with certain modifications, they may be, and they are, delightful, as we every day

experience” (36-7). In other words, the sublime can only be experienced at a safe distance. Cooper’s detailed account of the panther in *The Pioneers* embodies all at once the likelihood of the sublime to appear in the wilderness, its twofold sensation of both terror and awe, the fleeting nature of that experience, and the necessity for distance in order to maintain that delicate aesthetic moment.<sup>9</sup>

I would also draw attention to the fact; however, that a delicate but interactive balance between humans and nature, Elizabeth and the panther, is necessary in order for that aesthetic experience to occur in the first place. If the sublime is synonymous with wilderness (as the German definition of “wildnis” and this example suggest), then that same human-nature interaction necessary of the sublime must also be a condition of wilderness—casting aside the traditional human-nature division of the wilderness myth. An intermediary, like the national parks, would later serve as a material basis for initiating the wilderness/sublime experience while also providing a safe, but flexible, boundary between humans and nature in order to keep the experience in balance when the two agents of the encounter interact. In this way, an experience like Elizabeth’s could be safely maintained for both her and the panther, which ends up being killed by Cooper’s hero Natty Bumppo.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> As a pivotal scene in the novel, the encounter with the panther has also been represented visually in paintings by a number of artists (see figures below). Perhaps it is it Cooper’s ability here to evoke the terror of the sublime that has inspired so many to try to capture the moment of intense emotion that overwhelms the bodies and minds of Cooper’s characters. Drawn to the fear and awe of the textual representation, the artists likely found the scene to be a prime subject for engaging the senses visually from Cooper’s imaginative portrayal.

<sup>10</sup> According to Sarah Gibbens of *National Geographic*, as of January 22, 2018, the “Eastern cougar subspecies was officially declared extinct in the U.S. and removed from the endangered species list by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.” Known by many names, including “cougar, puma, mountain lion, and catamount,” Cooper’s panther is included in the Eastern cougar category. The species, however, has long been considered unofficially extinct as its sightings have been scarce for the last 100 years. Gibbens



(Left) John Quidor, *Leatherstocking's Rescue*, 1832

(Right) George Loving Brown, *Leatherstocking Kills the Panther*, 1834

In another instance, we might consider Burke's description of the sublime in regards to the effect that its physical appearance has upon the individual—i.e. the way in which light and color have the ability to initiate the sublime experience. Cooper's description of the landscape in the opening scene of *The Pioneers* adheres quite closely to Burke's analysis. Where Burke asserts, "A perpendicular has more force in forming the sublime, than an inclined plane, and the effects of a rugged and broken surface seem stronger than where it is smooth and polished" (66), Cooper describes a similar landscape:

The mountain on which they were journeying was covered with pines, that rose without a branch some seventy or eighty feet, and which frequently doubled that height, by the addition of the tops. Through the innumerable vistas that opened

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explains: "Beginning in the 1800s, European settlers began rounding up and killing off cougars in the northeast. Some were trapped and killed for their fur while others were culled to prevent the cats from interfering with livestock." With Natty's slaying of the panther in *The Pioneers*, Cooper depicts these very practices. Many conservationists, like Mark Elbroch, however, see this official extinction as a good thing, removing the "loopholes and complications of introducing a species where they're listed as endangered" and paving the way for Western cougars to head east and repopulate Eastern cougar domain (Gibbens).

beneath the lofty trees the eye could penetrate, until it was met by a distant inequality in the ground, or was stopped by a view of the summit of the mountain which lay on the opposite side of the valley to which they were hastening. The dark trunks of the trees, rose from the pure white of the snow, in regularly formed shafts, until, at a great height, their branches shot forth horizontal limbs, that were covered with the meagre foliage of an evergreen, affording a melancholy contrast to the torpor of nature below. To the travellers there seemed to be no wind; but these pines waved majestically at their topmost boughs, sending forth a dull, plaintive sound, that was quite in consonance with the rest of the melancholy scene. (19)

While the image of the pines towering at a height far above the landscape speaks to Burke's "perpendicular" and "rugged" qualities of the sublime, Cooper's "innumerable vistas" also coincide with Burke's vastness, where "greatness of dimension, vastness of extent or quantity, has the most striking effect" (66). Additionally, while Burke argues that a "quick transition from light to darkness, or from darkness to light, has yet a greater effect [of the sublime]" (73), Cooper also describes a contrast in which "The dark trunks of the trees, rose from the pure white of the snow." This contrast, along with the "rest of the melancholy scene" (19), all harken back to Burke's insistence upon a scene that is "dark and gloomy" (*Enquiry* 75). Throughout the *Leatherstocking Tales*, Cooper continually paints scenes like this one that embody nearly every aspect of the Burkean sublime. In this instance, he even records the effects upon the individual as Elizabeth Temple again experiences twofold sensations when encountering the sublime. She looks

with both “inquisitive, and, perhaps, timid glances, into the recesses of the forest” (19), drawn to its grandeur yet repelled with fear of the unknown in its dark “recesses.” However, as in the case of the moment with the panther, Elizabeth’s experience with the sublime of the landscape is also fleeting.

Other events soon interrupt her contemplation of the landscape until later in the chapter when the sleigh upon which our character rides comes within view of civilization. Where the sublime experience of the panther dissipates to the total envelopment of fear, the sublimity of the landscape here likewise vanishes with the sense of comfort and delight that emerges with signs of civilization. Elizabeth beholds the village of Templeton in the Otsego Valley, “the picture she had so often studied, with delight, in childhood.” The rugged landscape becomes “formed into terraces and hollows that [admit] of cultivation,” and the “habitations of man” interrupt the dense darkness of the forests (40). In a moment, the sublimity of the landscape succumbs to the presence of society. Again, however, humans and nature, Elizabeth and her environment, must interact in order for the aesthetic experience to be had in the first place, and the national parks could eventually provide places to safely negotiate interactions like this one. An acknowledgement of this exchange as a requirement of the sublime, and accordingly wilderness, could then be realized, challenging the wilderness myth and invoking a more authentic understanding of the human-nature relationship.

Considering these two scenes in *The Pioneers*—the encounter with the panther and readers’ first glimpse of the Otsego valley—it seems that when humankind and wilderness meet, one inevitably yields to the other and the aesthetic experience cannot be

maintained. The balance that should naturally exist between humans and nature becomes compromised by predominant ideas of wilderness and society as separate and distinct entities, and Cooper struggles with his own natural inclination to bring the two together. Because of this imbalance that interrupts the aesthetic experience, one problem that Cooper faces in the representation of America's wilderness is the inability to authenticate the sublimity of nature when it coincides with society. Not only does the content of his novel relay this complication, but the creation of the work itself speaks to the age-old Platonic predicament of representation. According to Plato's *Ion*, art and literature can never achieve that which is real—the products of the mind are the result of some source of divine inspiration, and as soon as we represent these objects in the form of art or literature, they become removed from that original state and thus further from what is real (13). In representing these landscapes, Cooper participates in Plato's chain of removal from that original idea of the American wilderness. He faces the problem of never really being able to achieve the actuality of what he is representing, a philosophy that brings us to the argument that the only way to truly understand America's wilderness would be to experience it for oneself.

Around the same time that Cooper was writing his *Leatherstocking Tales*, artist Thomas Cole was also moved deeply by the wilds of America and came to New York, as Roderick Nash explains, with the “hopes of translating his feelings into pictures” (78). Like Cooper's descriptive visuals of the landscape, the paintings that Cole produced also represent the very qualities of Burke's aesthetic sublime. He was even commissioned in 1827 to recreate a scene from Cooper's *The Last of the Mohicans*. The painting exhibits a

striking visual of his perception of Cooper's work. The image, shown below, captures Burke's "greatness of dimension" (66), the "rugged" faces of "perpendicular" cliffs (66), and an overall "gloomy" or "dark" visage, which Burke argues "is more productive of sublime ideas than light" (73). While, Nash explains, Cole often tried to depict a true wilderness by "omitting any sign of man and his works or reducing the human figures to ant-like proportions" (79), as he does in the painting below, he still does not escape the problem of representation. A painting, no matter how grand or sublime, does not have the ability to render the experience of the physical wilderness, nor can it escape the intersection of society and wilderness, since it is a representation created by the hand of humankind. Thus, while Cooper's literary depictions become one step removed from the original idea of America's wilderness, Cole's artistic recreations of Cooper's landscape add an additional step down from that original form in Plato's chain of removal. America's physical wilderness becomes the closest thing we can experience to that original form, Cooper's wilderness in his *Leatherstocking Tales* becomes one step removed, and Cole's *Landscape Scene from "The Last of the Mohicans"* serves as yet another interval from the source of inspiration. An aesthetic encountered vicariously through art and literature fails to capture the very material basis that inspires the dual emotional reaction. Cooper's novels and Cole's paintings could represent a diluted aesthetic for readers and viewers, but in order to more holistically feel the aesthetic effects of America's wilderness, individuals would require something that allowed them to physically have the experience for themselves.





Thomas Cole, *Landscape Scene from "The Last of the Mohicans,"* 1827

The task of capturing America's wilderness in art and literature became important to figures like Cooper and Cole because it was precisely the wildness of the continent that made it distinct from the rest of the world. Additionally, as Nash explains, many Americans believed that "because of the aesthetic and inspirational qualities of wilderness they were destined for artistic and literary excellence" (69), making the representation of America's wilds a duty to developing the nation's identity. The problem still resides, however, in the Platonic chain of removal. Nash also mentions that, at this time, many suspected that "wilderness was the medium through which God spoke most clearly," which gave America "a distinct moral advantage over Europe, where centuries of civilization had deposited a layer of artificiality over His works" (69). If we equate this God in the wilderness with Plato's "divine source" of inspiration, the works of Cooper

and Cole are not so far removed from depicting that original form. In Plato's *Ion*, Socrates explains,

Sometimes quite a long chain of iron rings hangs suspended one from another; but they're all suspended by the power derived from that stone. So too the Muse herself causes men to be inspired and possessed, and through these inspired men a chain of others are possessed and suspended. (13)

While Plato's theories are metaphysically-based, I offer an application of his ideas to my own materially-grounded scenario. Suppose, in the case of Cooper and Cole, this "stone" or this "Muse" is America's idea of wilderness. If we choose to situate this wilderness as the divine source of inspiration, the problem then only lies in that one step of removal of that "ideal" from the "real" physical experience of America's wilds, bringing us at last to the national park.

According to Plato's writings, any authentic representation becomes impossible due to the chain of removal from the "real" thing. In my example, the physical wilderness is the "real" thing, and it is compromised by the "ideal" conception of wilderness—an almost false, constructed Muse that has served to inspire art and literature that often communicates a mythic wilderness isolated from humans. While, to some extent, the "ideal" has also compromised the "real" of the wilds in the national parks, they are physical embodiments and thus closest to inspiring a more authentic aesthetic. Thus, in order to comprehend the full sublimity of America's wilds, the nation needed a place to make this experience possible for the masses. In *Culture, Technology, and the Creation of America's National Parks*, Richard Grusin summarizes the views of Frederick Law

Olmsted, a landscape architect who once reflected on Yosemite's "aesthetic effect on its visitors."<sup>11</sup> Grusin explains how Olmsted believed that "neither words nor pictures could describe the sublimity of Yosemite" (28), a claim that reinforces the idea that America's wilderness had to be experienced first-hand. The planning of a national park, however, under the hand of a landscape architect turns that park—with its borders, pathways, roads, and scenic pull-offs—into an unnatural representation in itself. Thus, Grusin proposes that America's national parks "function as technologies of representation not unlike painting, photography, cartography, or landscape architecture" (10). Like Cooper's novels and Cole's paintings, the national park becomes a representation, falling into a slight removal from the "real" American wilderness, inspired by the "ideal." Whereas a painting has its frame, and a novel has its pages, the park is then contained inside topographic borders within the bounds of representation. What is different about the national parks, however, is that while they are slightly removed from the "real" wilderness, swayed by America's "ideal" conceptions of wilderness, they are physical spaces, which places them closer to the "real" on that liminal spectrum between the two. As a result, the parks are a step closer to that original "real" source and perhaps the

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<sup>11</sup> Best known for his work on designing Central Park in New York City with his business partner Calvert Vaux, Olmsted was an American landscape architect of the 19th Century who "originated the rural park movement in the United States" with a "drive to set aside areas of unusual scenic beauty for popular enjoyment" (Roper xiii). In addition to Central Park, other accomplishments included projects like Golden Gate Park in San Francisco, Niagara Reservation in Niagara Falls, and the oldest system of public parks and parkways in Buffalo, New York, among many more. Under Olmsted's influence, "landscape design shifted its sights from decorative to social aims; land was to be arranged not only for scenic effect but also to serve the health, comfort, convenience, and good cheer of everyone who used it" (xiii). In regards to the national parks, Olmsted was also an early leader of the conservation movement, in favor designating the Yosemite Valley and Mariposa Big Tree Grove as public reserves, as well as serving as the park's commissioner once Congress passed the grant (282-283).

closest step possible, given the deep saturation of an “ideal” wilderness into American culture.

While Cooper’s novels constantly represent an effort to bring wilderness and society together in a world that persists in a separation, they also offer a middle ground between the two by depicting a pastoral vision for America, in effect a narrative suggestion of Arcadian synthesis to be developed further by his daughter Susan Fenimore Cooper. Aaron Sachs summarizes the vision for Arcadia that the Coopers sought in *Arcadian America*:

Our forebears were obsessed with the possibilities of Arcadia—that ancient society of solid rural values, of pastoralists who wandered free over a broad countryside of mountain meadows and forest glens, yet who also, somehow, established the kinds of stable civic institutions that ennobled Aristotle’s Athens. Arcadia seemed within reach to Americans who paused in the quieter corners of particular landscapes, on the back acres of farms, in parks and gardens, where the atmosphere was restful, where nature and culture seemed at peace with each other. (5)

If successful in reality beyond literature, this vision could provide a relief to the tensions of society and wilderness by enacting a symbiotic relationship between the two within a garden community. Leo Marx in *The Machine in the Garden*, explains the origins of a pastoral America in Thomas Jefferson’s *Notes on Virginia*, published in 1785 (88).

According to Marx, Jefferson advocates

the small, family-sized farm. Ordinarily he does not think about farms as productive units . . . He is devoted to agriculture largely as a means of preserving rural manners, that is, “rural virtue” . . . he rejects productivity and, for that matter, material living standards, as tests of good society. The loss of what nowadays would be called “national income,” he explains, “will be made up in happiness and permanence of government.” (126-127)

Thus, a pastoral community would be key to preserving a virtuous society. This Jeffersonian ideal for a democratic small-town America is reflected not only in Cooper’s novels, but also, in his own allegiances to “old Jeffersonian Democratic Republicans” which led him to become a supporter of the democracy upheld by Andrew Jackson (Franklin, *LY* 15-16). A middle society like this one could alleviate the mutually destructive interactions between civilization and wilderness; however, something like the national park was still needed to serve as an intermediary between the two. For the pastoral community to be successful, the wilderness would have to be preserved from too much cultivation, not only for its resources, but for its sublime beauty that first inspired the Jeffersonian vision for a pastoral America. The national park thus additionally stands as a kind of artwork which retains that original stimulus for the first vision for America—the sweeping landscapes and vistas significant of the vast possibility for a virtuous nation.

While aesthetic writings like Burke’s *Enquiry* fed Cooper’s imaginative and emotive descriptions of the landscape, Burke also published political works like *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790) that contributed to this sociopolitical ideal for the new nation. In *Reflections*, Burke, like Cooper, recognizes a need for a middle

ground between natural and civilized states: “The nature of man is intricate; the objects of society are of the greatest possible complexity: and therefore no simple disposition or direction of power can be suitable either to man’s nature, or to the quality of his affairs” (59). Burke, rather, advocates for something between the civil and savage, a “subdivision” or “little platoon” (44) much like the Jeffersonian ideal, where pastoral communities allow for a more expansive and organic society. Burke explains, “Public virtue, being of a nature magnificent and splendid, instituted for great things, and conversant about great concerns, requires abundant scope and room, and cannot spread and grow under confinement, and in circumstances straightened, narrow, and sordid” (223). Hence, the sprawling pastoral community envisioned by both Jefferson and Cooper becomes the ideal place for developing a sense of what Burke terms “public virtue.”

Again, in order for this type of society to succeed, the wilderness that Cooper memorializes in his *Leatherstocking Tales* would need the protection of certain boundaries to keep the cultivation of civilization in check. The National Park Service could fulfill these requirements to a certain extent; however, it would become just one part of the ongoing struggle for attaining that ideal pastoral community. The conservation history of future generations of Americans would involve trying to work out how to practically implement a pastoral vision through public action and ownership or public-private partnerships, given the American economic system—something I will address further in the next sub-section and the chapter to follow. There would be no perfect way to implement a symbol for America, but the national parks could provide protected

pockets of wilderness that would uphold the original vision, while also providing another attempt at articulating the reality of the human-nature relationship.

In representing these American wilds in his novels, Cooper began shaping an identity for the nation that revolved around wilderness. While his striking descriptions inspired other American writers and artists, like Thomas Cole, none could fully surpass the loss of embodied experience that occurs with representation. Cooper's efforts created a need for something yet to come that could embody the sensation that he strove to encapsulate. The national park, as a form of representation built from nature itself, could be the very material justification required. It would provide an experience closest to encountering the real physical and sublime wilderness of America, and do justice to Cooper's literary paintings of America's identity. As a representation, the national park, like Cooper's sublime writings, falls into the intersection of wilderness and society—drawing attention to the impossibility of separating the two. In the examples above, we see the consequences of maintaining that divide through the failure to maintain an aesthetic experience when humankind and wilderness interact; one always surrenders to the other, making the sublime an elusive entity difficult to hold in any representation. The only thing keeping these sublime moments in balance are the intricate boundaries that at once check the progress of society and preserve the sanctity of America's wilds. These boundaries serve not as impenetrable barriers, but rather permeable filters that reconcile the divide between humans and nature and pave the way for interactive environments as a basis for the "real" experience of the American wilderness. The painting's frame, the

book's pages, and the park's borders thus become tools for maintaining an aesthetic distance necessary for experiencing that wilderness.



**Cooper's Tools for Coexistence:  
Reconciling Human-Nature Boundaries**

In representing wilderness, Cooper could not escape the divide that had long been established between humans and nature. While he was drawn to the idea of a sublime wilderness, he also faced the difficulties of trying to capture its physical origin, which, if achieved, might have revealed the constructedness of the wilderness myths he grappled with. As we saw in the previous section, the interactions between society and wilderness that Cooper depicts in his Leatherstocking Tales repeatedly impair the aesthetic experience, during which one overtakes the other and the delicate state of sublime emotions is thrown off balance, either slipping into the safety of civilization or the complete terror of an imposing wilderness. The complication is not only evident in Cooper's content, but in the creation of the novels themselves. By putting his civilized hand in the recreation of something so natural as the wilderness, Cooper crosses the boundary on another level—his representations always one step removed from the “real” experience of wilderness because of the inescapable influence of the “ideal.” This paradox between humankind and wilderness, however, only moves from Cooper to continue with artists like Cole and other writers who also attempted to frame the



landscape within the bounds of societal constructions like art and literature. The national park as a type of landscape text becomes a step closer to enabling one to fully experience the American wilds; however, it too has its borders—the difference is how these bounds function flexibly between human and natural agency, a balance impossible to achieve in a painting or novel.

In this section, I intend to reevaluate Cooper's and Cole's attempts at exploring these boundaries in relation to the influence of Jean-Jacques Rousseau and his foundational theories about human nature, highlighting further tensions between society and wilderness present in Cooper's *The Pioneers* and Cole's *Course of Empire*, and analyzing how the national parks serve as a basis for better understanding these tensions. While Rousseau's and Burke's ideologies are traditionally seen as being in opposition to one another, each has elements that inform Cooper's vision for America and its interaction with the landscape. With a creative melding of the two—the pastoral of Burke and the social theories of Rousseau—Cooper's own unique ideology for an America of both civilization and nature begins to take form. These examples will reveal the fine line that exists between society and wilderness, where one can succumb to the other in an instant, highlighting why a balance maintained by boundaries is necessary to achieving a sustainable interactive environment between humans and nature. The exploration that results will propose national parks as a representation that reconciles this divide and reinvents these boundaries as a network necessary to the benefit of both society and wilderness.

Cooper's knowledge of Rousseau can be traced back to his fascination with the novel as a basis for what biographer Wayne Franklin calls a "social experiment" (LY 408). Much of Cooper's inspiration for this kind of writing came from books like Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* and Johann Wyss' *Swiss Family Robinson*, "as well as other texts that had used and commented upon the Crusoe myth, especially Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Social Contract* and *Emile*" (LY 409). Rousseau was an influential French philosopher of the eighteenth century whose political writings impacted the Enlightenment across Europe as well as certain aspects of the French Revolution. In his *First Discourse* or the *Discourse on the Sciences and Arts* (1750), Rousseau claims that the race for knowledge has corrupted society toward a path of moral decline; rather than serving the betterment of society, advances in the sciences and arts have instead moved intellectuals to make advances in their work for ambition and greed (Dunn 1-3). Three years later, in 1753, Rousseau released his *Second Discourse on the Origin and Foundation of Inequality Among Mankind*, in which he sought to provide an explanation for this amoral society where inequality was rampant. Central to this work is a consideration of the natural state of humankind, in which Rousseau ponders the evolution from a primitive society to one that is civilized. He traces the path from the savage state to the civil state, recognizing that while the civil state has become morally corrupted, the complete autonomy of the savage state is not advisable either. Thus, like Cooper, Rousseau is also faced with complications involving society and an original wild state of nature. One way or another, neither entity on its own is desirable. Instead, in his *Social Contract* of 1762, Rousseau proposes a middle ground—as Susan Dunn summarizes: a

“relatively small community of citizens living in “peace, unity, and equality” without complex laws” (12). Given Cooper’s familiarity with this work, a closer look at the town of Templeton and its characters in *The Pioneers* under the lens of Rousseau’s ideal society and his descriptions of the civil and savage states will reveal Cooper’s representations as a liminal plane where the boundaries between humankind and nature, and perhaps Rousseau’s ideal community, are under experimentation.

Before unveiling traces of Rousseau in *The Pioneers*, it is important to first note a few instances where Cooper’s own political writings overlap with those of Rousseau. In 1838, Cooper published a political essay entitled *The American Democrat*.<sup>12</sup> Like Rousseau in much of his writing, Cooper uses this work as a space to explore the social forces that shape and corrupt society from its natural state of being. Among these common musings we find a consideration of the inequalities of society, the accumulation of property or ownership as a societal condition, and the different kinds of liberty that one experiences in a savage state versus a civil one. For Rousseau, education is one such element of society that “not only produces a difference between those minds which are cultivated and those which are not, but even increases the difference which is found among the former in proportion to their culture” (111), thus increasing inequality on a number of levels. Likewise, Cooper also realizes inequality as central to society when he deduces that “artificial inequalities are the inevitable consequences of artificial

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<sup>12</sup> Another of Cooper’s works that focuses on political themes is *The Bravo*, which he wrote during his time in France in the years 1830-1831. Though the novel was set in Venice, Italy, Cooper was instead inspired by the French situation at the time, during which he experienced the July Revolution of 1830. Major themes that Cooper sought to address were the tensions between a social elite and the lower classes and an overall corrupt republic (Franklin *The Later Years* 97).

ordinances, and in founding a new governing principle for the social compact, the American legislators instituted new modes of difference” (*The American Democrat* 41). In other words, inequality, in any form of civilized society, is inevitable. While education can be one source of society’s inequalities, both Cooper and Rousseau also acknowledge the accumulation of property as another condition of society’s corruption. Rousseau claims, “The first man, who after enclosing a piece of ground, took it in his head to say, *this is mine*, and found people simple enough to believe him, was the real founder of civil society” (113). Cooper concurs and develops the Rousseauian idea when he says, “The rights of property being an indispensable condition of civilization, and its quiet possession every where guaranteed [*sic*], equality of condition is rendered impossible” (39). Thus, for both Rousseau and Cooper, inequality also stems from that civilized desire to possess property. This Rousseauian sense of the ownership of land becomes a major theme throughout *The Pioneers*. Continually, Cooper’s characters refer to Native Americans as the “original owners” (83) of the town and its wilderness, and so, when newcomer Oliver Edwards is suspected of being a half-breed, the general conversation repeatedly returns to his potential right as one of the land’s “ancient possessors” (280), one who “claimest descent from the native owners of the soil” (345). It isn’t until later chapters that we discover his right to the land on another level, by “civilized” law. Before Marmaduke Temple, a Colonel Effingham owned the town and the surrounding lands. Forced to flee during events leading up to the American Revolution, Effingham left all his property in the care of Marmaduke. Oliver Edwards, as it turns out, is Effingham’s son—who, by hereditary right, would be the lawful owner. After events unfold, Judge

Temple willingly restores what is proper by uniting the two families with the marriage of his daughter Elizabeth and the young Effingham. This juggling of ownership rights from the Natives as “proper owners” (142) to the “validity of the claims that have transferred the title to the whites” (345) to hereditary merit reveals the complex nature that comes with the social construction of possession.<sup>13</sup> It complicates the plot to reveal the corruption that ownership can cause, and also speaks to the idea of ownership as a tool for social mobility—increasing the chances for inequality in a society, as both Rousseau and Cooper delineate. The town of Templeton, however, also becomes a ground for testing this inequality. For example, our narrator claims of Templeton that “The freedom of manners that prevailed in the new settlements, commonly leveled all difference in rank, and with it, frequently, all considerations of education and intelligence” (*Pioneers* 396). Thus, we see in Templeton potential for society to exist without such inequalities and distinctions of ownership.

Judge Temple, for the time he is “owner” of the land, additionally complicates the desirability of ownership in recognizing on occasion the danger that his ownership poses to the beautiful wildness of the land. For much of the novel he is caught between a desire for progress and concern for the preservation of nature. Looking to the future “on the

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<sup>13</sup> This question of ownership also speaks to the “discovery doctrine,” which sought to answer the question: “What rights did Europeans acquire, and indigenous peoples lose, upon the discovery of the New World?” (Robertson x). According to Lindsey Robertson in *Conquest by Law*, the 1823 decision of the Supreme Court of the United States in *Johnson v. M’Intosh* claimed the answer to this question to be “ownership of all discovered lands” (x). In other words, “Discovery converted the indigenous owners of discovered lands into tenants on those lands. The underlying title belonged to the discovering sovereign” (x). Robertson also explains how “the most complete form of ownership was ownership in ‘fee simple.’ Owners of land in fee simple held their land until they or their heirs chose to relinquish it. The land was freely alienable (meaning it could be sold or given away) and inheritable” (96). These laws—and the question of their morality—are all at play in the managing of native-hereditary-legal ownership that Cooper portrays in *The Pioneers*.

improvements that posterity were to make in his lands . . . where others saw nothing but a wilderness, towns, manufactories, bridges, canals, mines, and all the other resources of an old country were constantly presenting themselves” (321). Yet in moments where society oversteps certain bounds, Temple also expresses concerns for the consequences that progress may have. Such instances include the mass shooting of pigeons<sup>14</sup> who have arrived for spring when Judge Temple laments in seeing “nothing but eyes, in every direction, as the innocent sufferers turn their heads in terror” (250), as well as the excessive capture of fish when he also reflects “like all the other treasures of the wilderness, they already begin to disappear before the wasteful extravagance of man” (260). Thus, while Judge Temple does have grand visions with his ownership of the soil, he also expresses hesitations when it comes to the impact that his society has on the natural sanctity of wilderness. These competing sentiments reflect some of Cooper’s own struggles with wilderness and civilization, as historian Roderick Nash explains:

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 . . . For Cooper it was not a case of

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<sup>14</sup>According to Barry Yeoman of *Audubon Magazine*, 2014 marked the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the passenger pigeon’s extinction. While pigeon migrations once consisted of imposing magnitudes of flocks, as is depicted in *The Pioneers*, “researchers have agreed that the bird was hunted out of existence, victimized by the fallacy that no amount of exploitation could endanger a creature so abundant.” Though it was too late to prevent the passenger pigeon’s extinction, the phenomenon did help ignite the spark for contemporary environmentalism. Yeoman cites Stanley Temple, a professor emeritus of conservation at the University of Wisconsin: “The extinction was part of the motivation for the birth of modern 20th century conservation.” In depicting the mass shooting of pigeons, Cooper foresees a need for environmental intervention through the conservation to come.

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. (77)

In creating Judge Temple, Cooper expresses his own grappling with the coexistence of society and wilderness. As Nash explains and as previous examples have shown, one was always in danger of causing destruction to the other if ever the two should meet. These early concerns, however, set the stage for preservation, demonstrating how ownership introduced boundaries that could create interactive environments and be used to contain the progress of society and protect the wilderness of America that Cooper so admired.

On a more personal level, Cooper's own experience with an encounter known today as the Three Mile Point dispute may have driven these sentiments surrounding ownership. The conflict revolved around a piece of property known as Myrtle Grove (or the Three Mile Point), which had been privately owned by the Cooper family since William Cooper wrote out his will in 1808 (Franklin, *LY* 195). With his consent, the public had been able to use the land for recreation "as long as it did no damage and did not interfere with the family's enjoyment of [the place]" (196). After a long absence during his travels through Europe, however, James Fenimore returned to Cooperstown in 1837 to find that his favorite childhood spot at Myrtle Grove had been vandalized—his father's fishing houses "pulled to pieces" or "burned" as well as "great injury" done to a "Myrtle Grove tree closely associated with Judge Cooper's memory" (196-7). Due to the family's absence and the public's unrestricted use of the property for thirty-six years, the citizens of Cooperstown had developed the impression that Myrtle Grove was public

property. Angered by the disrespectful use of the land and wanting to “protect the property” Cooper issued a message to the public:

The public is warned against trespassing on the three mile point, it being the intention of the subscriber rigidly to enforce the title of the estate of which he is the representative, to the same. The public has not, nor has it ever had, any right to the same, beyond what has been conceded by the liberality of the owners. (197)



*Cooperstown from Three Mile Point*, Louis Remy Mignot, 1850

The dispute created resentment between Cooper and the people of Cooperstown, and resulted in larger lawsuits to follow, but the points to stress here are the intersection of private and public property and the boundaries necessary to preserve and protect the landscape. Like Cooper’s private ownership and protection of the Three Mile Point with the illusion of public ownership, the government’s ownership of the national parks serves



as a means to preserve America's wilds while at the same time establishing an illusion of public ownership for all those who visit. Thus, in a way, the Three Mile Point dispute illustrates an early example of limiting society's use of natural landscapes for the sake of their protection and moderated use for years to come—a mission upheld by the national parks today that serves to protect America's wilds while also providing for the enjoyment of the public.

A check on society's progress was not only necessary for the preservation of wilderness, but also for concerns that too much progress by humankind could only lead to a fall. According to Rousseau, another quality that distinguishes society is “the faculty of improvement,” from the French word “*perfectibilité*, which means the capacity to make progress” (96). He asserts that this “unlimited faculty is the source of all man's misfortunes; that it is this faculty, which, in a succession of ages, produces his discoveries and mistakes, his virtues and his vices, and, in the long run, renders him both his own and nature's tyrant” (96). In other words, the ability to improve also produces the possibility for a greater demise. In 1836, Thomas Cole created a series of paintings entitled *The Course of Empire*<sup>15</sup> that embodies the very progression of such an event. Each of the five paintings, pictured below, depicts a stage in the “the inevitable historical cycle,” beginning with wilderness, transitioning to the pastoral, then “a brief moment of glory, followed by downfall and ruin” (O'Brien 167). The subtitles, reflecting each step in the rise and fall of civilization, include *The Savage State*, *The Arcadian or Pastoral*

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<sup>15</sup> “James Fenimore Cooper called it ‘a great epic poem’ and concluded that *The Course of Empire* was ‘the work of the highest genius this country has ever produced’” (Qtd. in O'Brien 70).

*State, The Consummation of Empire, Destruction, and Desolation.* In the midst of painting this series, Cole also presented a lecture to the annual meeting of the National Academy of Design in New York, where he proposed that “the most distinctive, and perhaps the most impressive, characteristic of American scenery is its wilderness.” He also reflected:

It is the most distinctive, because in civilized Europe the primitive features of scenery have long since been destroyed or modified—the extensive forests that once overshadowed a great part of it have been felled—rugged mountains have been smoothed, and impetuous rivers turned from their courses to accommodate the tastes and necessities of a dense population . . . . And to this cultivated state our western world is fast approaching; but nature is still predominant, and there are those who regret that with the improvements of cultivation the sublimity of the wilderness should pass away: for those scenes of solitude from which the hand of nature has never been lifted, affect the mind with a more deep toned emotion than aught which the hand of man has touched. (Qtd. in Powell 66)



Thomas Cole, *The Savage State*  
(*The Course of Empire*), 1833-36



Thomas Cole, *The Arcadian or Pastoral State*  
(*The Course of Empire*), 1833-36



Thomas Cole, *The Consummation of Empire*  
(*The Course of Empire*), 1833-36



Thomas Cole, *Destruction*  
(*The Course of Empire*), 1833-36



Thomas Cole, *Desolation*  
(*The Course of Empire*), 1833-36

Like Cooper, Cole also had his concerns regarding the disappearance of wilderness to the progress of civilization. He saw the wilds as a symbol for America, but also recognized the tensions accompanying its existence alongside civilized society and the impossibility of completely separating the two. Rather than focusing on the loss of wilderness in his paintings, however, Cole sought to emphasize the consequences as, what Earl Powell calls, a “moral history lesson for a young government and country” (Powell 67)—too much advancement would lead to a decline, allowing wilderness to reign once again as America’s true and natural state. In a way, the overall chronology of Cooper’s *Leatherstocking Tales* also embodies the consequences of progress beginning with Natty’s first experiences of a relatively untouched wilderness in *The Deerslayer*, progressing with events of civilized characters surviving in the wilderness in *The Last of the Mohicans* and *The Pathfinder*, continuing with the first establishment of society clashing with wilderness in *The Pioneers*, and ending with the hostile and unforgivable landscape that results from the wastefulness of civilization in *The Prairie*. As Hugh MacDougall notes in his essay “‘Their Waste Has Done It All’: *The Prairie* as a Post-Apocalyptic Novel,” *The Prairie*’s “desolate landscape is the apocalyptic result of the

‘wasty ways’ of men, essentially the very ways that Natty had condemned in the pioneer settlers of Templeton.” The desert waste of the western prairielands was, thus, according to Cooper in *The Prairie*, a result of civilization’s overuse of resources and overall negative ecological impact. The theme of the rise and fall of empires is especially present when Natty Bumppo converses with Dr. Obed Bat. “Look into the plains of Egypt and Arabia,” the doctor explains, “their sandy deserts teem with the monuments of their antiquity; and then we have also recorded documents of their glory; doubling the proofs of their former greatness, now that they lie stripped of their fertility” (*The Prairie* 264). Here, we once again see the consequences that progress not only has on wilderness but also on civilization itself, as, to return to Rousseau, society becomes its “own and nature’s tyrant” (96) if it is not kept in balance by certain bounds.

While Rousseau and Cooper both recognize property ownership and its ambitions as a condition of society (with Rousseau as a strong critic), Cooper and Cole emphasize the fine line that exists between necessity and progressing that ownership too far.<sup>16</sup> It is important to keep in mind, however, that this sanctioning of ownership also introduces boundaries that could serve to aid in the coexistence of society and wilderness with the creation of national parks as a government property. An additional factor that both Rousseau and Cooper address that results in a mediator for society and wilderness, are the kinds of liberties that dominate in the savage as opposed to the civil state. Rousseau

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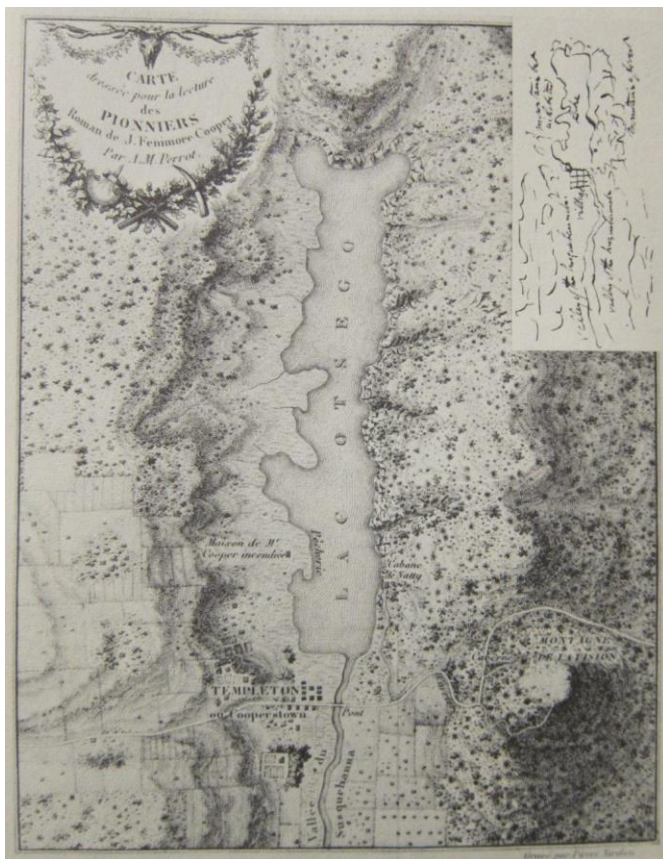
<sup>16</sup> To summarize the social ideologies for each figure: Rousseau envisions a utopia of the natural state to heal corruption, though he recognizes it as unachievable; Cole foresees the fall of civilization which will result in a post-apocalyptic rule of nature; and Cooper expresses concerns regarding the intersection of society and nature in which he both fears total destruction brought about by progress and hopes for a state where society and nature can coexist. Cooper is thus caught somewhere in between the views of Rousseau and Cole.

acknowledges a natural liberty in which the individual has an “unlimited right to anything that tempts him and he can attain.” On the other hand, he also describes a civil liberty in which one has a “moral freedom, which alone enables man to be truly master of himself” rather than a slave to natural impulses (167). In Cooper’s *American Democrat*, the natural form of liberty seems more desirable. He understands it to be “such a state of the social compact as permits the members of a community to lay no more restraints on themselves, than are required by their real necessities, and obvious interests” (43). This natural state of liberty that both Cooper and Rousseau describe is often termed “negative liberty” in the context of political and social philosophy. It is usually “attributed to individual agents” and characterized by “the absence of obstacles, barriers or constraints” (Carter). In other words, there is no external force limiting one’s freedom. In *The Pioneers*, however, Cooper also seems to acknowledge the necessity for laws in civilized society that restrain otherwise natural liberties. Just as Rousseau claims, “Laws are properly only the conditions of civil associations” (179), Cooper, through Judge Temple, also accepts that “laws alone remove us from the condition of the savages” (*Pioneers* 383) and that living “on the skirts of society, it becomes doubly necessary to protect the ministers of the law” (369). In *The Pioneers*, one of the laws at hand is Judge Temple’s decree “to prosecute all, indiscriminately, who kill deer out of season” (297). While it is a law that speaks to the preservation of wild things, Natty Bumppo, whose nearly savage state endows him with a sense of that natural liberty, cannot resist the natural desire to hunt a buck that crosses his path. Natty, as a character of liminality between wilderness and civilization, attempts to adhere to the laws by paying the fine—however, events

following the deer-killing soon escalate to a situation that places him in jail. In the end, Natty recognizes that Templeton and its soil are becoming more civilized and, being “form’d for the wilderness” (454), he cannot remain in a place succumbing to the laws of society. In traveling west, however, Natty also embodies the inevitable progress of civilization, “opening the way for the march of the nation across the continent” (456). His character, at once portraying the natural freedom of wilderness and society’s movement westward, becomes another representation of Cooper’s concerns regarding the crossroads of civilization and wilderness, as well as a realization that they are inseparable—contrary to popular ideas of wilderness at the time.

If we look at *Map Showing the Setting for The Pioneers*, by A.M. Perrot for Volume 18, *Oeuvres Completes de J. Fenimore Cooper* (Paris 1828), we can see the characterization of Natty on the cusp of two worlds. Templeton is distinctly laid out in a grid pattern surrounded by a larger grid of developed farm area. This structured layout gradually fades into a more organic shape, as the waves of topography and scattered trees mark the areas of untouched wilderness outside of Templeton’s specified bounds. On this map, Natty’s cabin is placed where the lines of society fade into the shapeless mass of wilderness. The location signifies Natty’s place in between worlds, and Cooper’s own desire for the two to successfully coexist. Not only does this map visually depict the crossroads of civilization and wilderness, but it also shows traces of Cooper’s political values for property ownership and laws that reside in the lines drawn on the land. With these Rousseauian ideas of ownership and liberty, Cooper thus introduces potential tools for reconciling the sometimes mutually destructive coexistence of humans and nature and

for preserving the established boundaries in order to maintain that balance between the two.



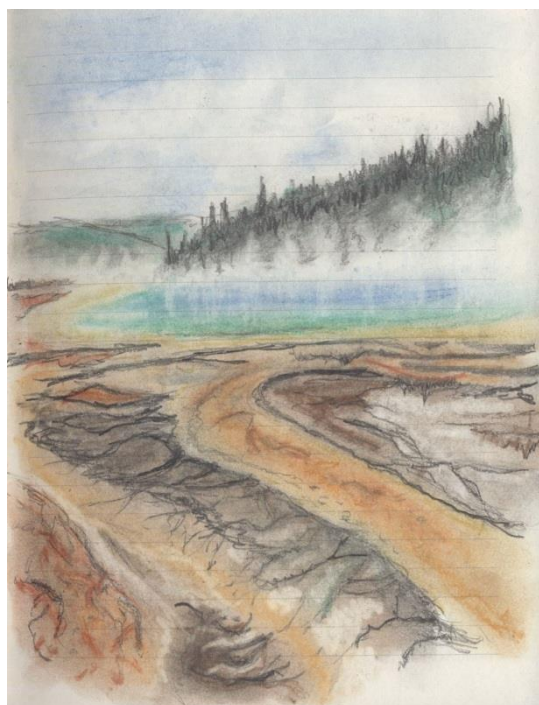
A.M. Perrot, *Map Showing the Setting for The Pioneers*, for Volume XVIII, Gosselin's edition of Cooper's *œuvres Complètes*. The inset is Cooper's sketch correcting an earlier version of the map, 1828

While this political experimentation of property ownership and laws in *The Pioneers* does not necessarily succeed in the preservation of wilderness, Cooper introduces a means by which the nation might attempt to reconcile the concerns of society encroaching upon America's wilds. Property ownership and laws become tools that establish the moderate bounds necessary for the coexistence of humans and nature.

The national parks were eventually established using these same ideas. Renowned as America's first national park, Yellowstone was set aside for preservation through a



legislation entitled “Act Establishing Yellowstone National Park” in 1872.<sup>17</sup> Prescribing specific bounds and naming rivers and natural landmarks, the Act set aside the area of Yellowstone to be “reserved and withdrawn from settlement, occupancy, or sale under the laws of the United States.” It would be “under the exclusive control of the Secretary of the Interior” who would make “rules and regulations” for the “care and management” of the park and its assets in order to maintain the “retention of their natural features.” This Act, however, was twofold. While preserving the sanctity of America’s wild landscape, the legislation also recognized Yellowstone as a “public park or pleasuring-ground for the benefit and enjoyment of the people,” also allowing for “small parcels of ground” that “shall require the erection of buildings for the accommodation of visitors” (“Document 50”). Thus, the law that created the first official national park acknowledged Yellowstone as a middle ground where the people could experience the wilderness within boundaries that could both serve the safety of visitors and the preservation of nature. Yet to be addressed, however, is



Alana Jajko, *Chalk Pastel Drawing of the Grand Prismatic Spring, Yellowstone National Park*, 2014

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<sup>17</sup> Though I address Yellowstone here, Hot Springs, Arkansas was the first unofficial national park, established under President Andrew Jackson in 1832, during Cooper’s time, as Hot Springs Reservation.

the question of how these boundaries serve to reconcile and unite wilderness and society differently from and more successfully than Cooper's novels or Cole's paintings because they involve a physical landscape.

Richard Grusin, who, as I have established, sees the parks as a technology for representing nature, recognizes the delicate bounds that make the system work. Under the ownership of the government, the wilderness of the national park becomes a canvas for the landscape architect whose task it is to frame the natural features and make them accessible to the public. However, in order to preserve a "truer" experience of wilderness, these landscape architects must at some point "relinquish their artistic control to the agency of nature" (31), something impossible to do in a book or painting. In a way, this transferal of agency conceals the artificial bounds created by humans, moving the representation of the national park even closer to that authentic experience of wilderness. The necessary borders, which at once keep society at a safe distance for experiencing the sublime and preserve the wilds that produce this experience, are somewhat freed from the problem of representation that occurs in books and paintings because the agency of nature masks these borders by making them flexible.

To summarize, Grusin explains how Olmsted conceptualizes national parks as "works of landscape architecture in which the act of creating the park conceals the agency of the government in creating or designing the park as well as simultaneously requiring that the agency of nature prevail if it is to be maintained as a park" (46). Thus, while these boundaries become a system for making the coexistence of civilization and wilderness possible, they must be delicately balanced by a shift in agency between

humankind and nature if they are to succeed. I do acknowledge that the transferal to natural agency in order to hide manmade structures does serve to perpetuate the myth of a pristine wilderness untouched by humankind; however, these efforts, once exposed, reveal the inescapable role that humans play alongside nature within the national parks—ironically counteracting the façade that is meant to uphold those original myths. In an effort to achieve the “ideal” of an isolated wilderness, the parks in actuality expose the “real” interactiveness of that environment.

Grusin also identifies a kind of “illusion” of ownership that can be induced in park visitors, which can be identified with Cooper’s Rousseauian exploration of ownership. While Cooper and Rousseau view ownership as a condition of civilization that threatens to accelerate the greed and ambition of acquiring more property, the kind of ownership engendered in the national parks is one that exists only in the feeling it arouses. Grusin explains how Olmsted used the “promenade” as a tool for inducing this kind of sensation:

Olmsted likens the promenade’s “position of relative importance” in a public park to that which “a mansion should occupy in a park prepared for private occupation”. . . the promenade allows “the visitor, who, in the best sense is the true owner” of the park, to “concentrate on features of natural, in preference to artificial beauty.” (32)

In addition to Grusin’s and Olmsted’s delineations, I suggest that this kind of experience in the national park also induces an ownership related to national identity. While early writers and artists like Cooper and Cole certainly set the stage for wilderness as an icon

for America, the experience of the national park encapsulates that ownership of pride in one's nation for maintaining such a treasured landscape, a feeling where nature and culture overlap. The national park, with its intricate boundaries that mediate wilderness and civilization, not only becomes the unifying symbol that Cooper and Cole envisioned but also a place where people can safely experience the sublimity of nature and begin to understand the intricacies of the human-nature relationship demonstrated by the tensions and concerns that both Cooper and Cole express in their works.

Responding to the types of concerns that are addressed in Rousseauian philosophy, Cooper experiments with inequalities, property ownership, natural liberties, and civilized laws that introduce methods by which wilderness and civilization might not impose on each other and instead looks toward reconnecting them as integrated parts of a single environment. While his *Leatherstocking Tales* struggle with the possible outcomes and often show that these tools do little to ease the battle, a study of the national parks can reveal them as instances where Cooper's methods initiate boundaries that make the coexistence of society and wilderness possible, and, for the most part, successful. By implementing the tools that Cooper introduces, the parks provide a physical place for reflection both individually and as a nation, one that has potential for destabilizing previous myths that depict human-nature interactions as destructive and realizing a harmony between the two. They do so by demonstrating a coexistence that is not damaging but instead mutually beneficial, becoming places where the wilds of America can be protected and preserved from the progress of society, but also places accessible to citizens and visitors who can experience and appreciate the sublime beauty of these

wilds. With flexible boundaries created by both human and natural agency, the experience of the park rouses a consolidating sense of American identity. It is one where wilderness and civilization are no longer at odds, but can exist in a harmony that Cooper might have been trying to achieve and would have revered.



**Native Culture in Cooper and its role in Environmental Preservation:  
The Ethical Experience in the Face of a Combined Other**

If the national parks are to be a symbol for America, in the sense that they ultimately, once unmasked, exemplify an interactive environment in which the iconic American wilderness and its citizens might coexist, to what extent should they represent the culture of the Native people? The natural features of the wild landscape historically have taken precedence in the parks; however, representations of Native Americans in art and literature often associate them with the land in a way that sees the two as inseparable. Using Emmanuel Levinas' theories of ethical responsibility in the face of the Other, I hope to demonstrate a way in which the works of Cooper and others on Native Americans preserve a means of experiencing another face of American identity across time. While the corruption of progress pushed Natives from their ancestral homes in the early days of the nation, this preservation in art and literature helped to create a lasting tribute to their memory that today resonates with many of the national parks. Of the number of resources relevant to the topic, this study will address James Fenimore

Cooper's representation of Chingachgook in *The Pioneers*, Andrew Jackson's Indian Removal Act of 1830, Susan Fenimore Cooper's encounters with American Indians in her published nature journal *Rural Hours*, and the portraits and writings of American painter, author, and traveler of the nineteenth century, George Catlin.

The many cultures of Native American tribes are something unique to the United States. In these early accounts of America represented in art and literature, Natives and wilderness are often portrayed hand-in-hand. Just like America's wilds, Native Americans also faced the dangers of civilization's unchecked progress; however, despite their deep connection with wilderness, the American government did not initially give them a place in the national parks, and even displaced them. Representations, like that of Cooper and many others, could contribute to a lasting account of their memory. Additionally, these depictions have highlighted a moral obligation to the plight of Natives that, when confronted, have the ability to initiate an ethical experience from the stories and histories that attend the visage of each representation. It is this experience that has eventually led people to recognize the importance of Native Americans and the richness of their culture, which is today finally accounted for in many of the national parks. I would additionally suggest that these representations of American Indians alongside wilderness have helped to extend that ethical responsibility to the landscape, contributing to the drive for preserving America's wilds although unfortunately it did not do enough during the nineteenth century to stop the subjugation of indigenous peoples. Through the face of the Native American Other in the nineteenth century, the white gaze realized a human connection to the landscape but overlooked their own human-to-human

connection with Native cultures, in effect allowing for the suffering of many American Indian races to proceed for the sake of what white society deemed progress. Today, it is my hope that by revisiting art and literature depicting American Indians, we can develop an overdue sense of ethical responsibility to acknowledge and atone for those wrongs.

In discussing the ethical dilemma of the nation's relation to Native Americans, as represented first by Cooper and other writers and artists, it is first important to gain a general understanding of Levinas' philosophy about ethics and the face of the Other. This "Other" becomes significant not only for the sake of Levinasian terminology but also for the sense of "otherness" with which indigenous peoples have historically been represented by whites. Though Levinas was writing more than a century after Cooper and his contemporaries, his theoretical approach to ontology and ethics is something that transcends time with its focus on humanism. *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority* (1961) explores the specifics of these topics. Central to his theory is the idea that an ethical responsibility derives from a face-to-face confrontation that one experiences with the Other. It is through this interaction that one is able to come into being, yet it is an experience that precedes language and any named recognition. In the words of Levinas, "preexisting the plane of ontology is the ethical plane" (201). The exchange of expression that resides in the faces results in a transcendent moment before language and being that initiates an ethical responsibility for the Other.

This bond between expression and responsibility, this ethical condition or essence of language, this function of language prior to all disclosure of being and its cold splendor, permits us to express language from subjection to a preexistent thought,

where it would have but the servile function of translating that preexistent thought on the outside, or of universalizing its interior movements. (200-201)

This moment of transcendence, Levinas explains, is called “infinity.” While in traditional ontology the experience in the face of the Other results in a return to the Same in an event of totality, Levinas’ theory rather proposes that infinity maintains a separation between the Other and the Same where subjectivity arises and the ethical responsibility for the Other is suspended in a space between the two. While the key initiator of this experience resides in the “presence before a face” or “expression” (50-51), the idea of infinity, in its transcendence of time and place, allows for a continually evolving sense of ethics that exists beyond the physicality of the face. My study of the Coopers’ and Catlin’s account of Natives in the nineteenth century explores the ability of representations to translate across time the faces of Others who have suffered due to the capitalism and racism in the guise of civilization and progress. While the bodily face-to-face encounter is no longer a factor, the works of James Fenimore Cooper, Susan Fenimore Cooper, and George Catlin convey faces that can later be imagined and experienced outside of time,<sup>18</sup> invoking that ethical responsibility for the plight of Native Americans centuries later. As Levinas contends, “When man truly approaches the Other he is uprooted from history” (52). Thus, in the represented faces of America’s indigenous people, a moral obligation arises that has been carried across the course of history.

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<sup>18</sup> Cronon in his essay “Telling Tales on Canvas” also acknowledges the ability of ethnographic artists to drive paintings “away from history and into timelessness” (58). I address his idea in more detail later in this chapter during my discussion of Catlin (see page 81).



In *The Pioneers*, Cooper's representation of Chingachgook traces a history of subjection upon the Native that has shaped his identity from younger years of glory to his old age among white society in Templeton:

We have already mentioned the baptismal name of this ancient chief; but in his conversation with Natty, held in the language of the Delawares, he was heard uniformly to call himself Chingachgook, which, interpreted, means the "Great Snake." This name he had acquired in his youth, by his skill and prowess in war; but when his brows began to wrinkle with time, and he stood alone, the last of his family, and his particular tribe, the few Delawares, who yet continued about the head-waters of their river, gave him the mournful appellation of Mohegan.

Perhaps there was something of deep feeling excited in the bosom of this inhabitant of the forest by the sound of a name that recalled the idea of his nation in ruins, for he seldom used it himself—never, indeed, excepting on the most solemn occasions; but the settlers had united, according to the Christian custom, his baptismal with his national name, and to them he was generally known as John Mohegan, or, more familiarly, as Indian John.

As a representation of the Other, Chingachgook is subject to the names given to him—"Great Snake" as the warrior name of his youth, "Mohegan" as a signification of the last of his family, and "John" as a baptismal name under Moravian influence. His own people, the Delawares, and the society of the settlers have all had some kind of influence

over the perceived identity of Chingachgook.<sup>19</sup> “From his long association with the white-men, the habits of Mohegan, were a mixture of the civilized and savage states, though there was certainly a strong preponderance in favour of the latter” (85).<sup>20</sup> Here, we also see evidence that society has imposed upon Chingachgook’s Native identity, as we do in later moments when we discover his religious affiliations with the Moravians. In this interaction between the “self” and the “other,” the dualism of domination and subordination is often inevitable. In her essay “Call and Response: The Question of the Human/Non-Human Encounter,” Sarah Reese quotes Val Plumwood on the topic: “What Plumwood is talking about is the Euro-American tendency to deliberately construct the other as ‘alien’ for the purpose of domination,” thus paving the way for the “manipulation and distortion of the other’s identity” (240). Reese also recognizes, however, that Levinas rather approaches the other “both as different and as a subject in its own right” (240) with neither self nor other dominating. What is missing in Plumwood’s model, she claims, is “the space for response (or denial of response)” where the encounter becomes “dialogic” (241). In the case of Chingachgook’s subjugation, that redeeming response arises from the ethical responsibility experienced by the reader. Through Chingachgook, Cooper depicts the rise and fall of a Native race due to the hostilities and

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<sup>19</sup> I do realize it is important to differentiate between the appropriate names given to him by his own people and the imposed names forced upon him by white culture.

<sup>20</sup> Cooper does not hesitate to depict the corruption of Chingachgook by white men. Later in *The Pioneers*, a scene at the pub reveals the character of Richard Jones urging him to drink alcohol: “Here, John, is a mug of cider, laced with whiskey. An Indian will drink cider, though he niver be athirst” (158). “Here, John; drink, man, drink” (163). Events progress until Chingachgook is “not himself,” reduced to a drunken state with a “grin of idiocy” on his face (166)—an image of a Native who has become victim to the vices of white society. By the end of the novel, however, Cooper portrays Chingachgook in his former glory as a Delaware warrior, speaking his Native tongue and exhibiting the rich culture of his people.

progress of civilization. This portrayal provides a means by which the reader might imagine the face of Chingachgook as the Other, and experience that ethical responsibility for the historical hardship of American Indians outside of time.

On another level, Cooper's representation of Chingachgook embodies a kind of experience of the Other with the land surrounding Templeton. As I mentioned in the previous section on boundaries, Cooper's characters continually refer to the Native tribes of the area as the "original owners of the soil" (83), as if the people of Templeton feel a sense of the ethical wrongdoing of their own Euro-American civilization. Levinas resonates with this sentiment of possession and dispossession when he explains, "The presence of the Other is equivalent to this calling into question my joyous possession of the world" (75-76). Though Levinas speaks of possession on a more spiritual plane, his notion calls into question the ownership of property on a nonmaterial level that paves the way for understanding ethical ownership. While the settlers have certainly claimed the land lawfully and are exploiting it physically, their ethical right to the land remains problematic. Elizabeth Temple vocalizes this sentiment when she declares, "I grieve when I see old Mohegan walking about these lands like the ghost of one of their ancient possessors, and feel how small is my own right to possess them" (280). This being said, the wilderness becomes another factor tying Chingachgook and his ancestors to the ethical responsibility in the face of the Other.

Near the end of *The Pioneers*, Chingachgook reflects upon the day when "his tribe gave away the country" to the "Fire-eater" whom they loved and respected, and laments how "he has seen the land pass away from the Fire-eater, and his children, and

the child of his child, and a new chief set over the country” (401). His anger at what has passed almost suggests a failure to fulfill an ethical obligation to the land, since it has unrightfully progressed from one hand to another, subject to the changes imposed by civilization just like Chingachgook himself. In this way, both Chingachgook and the wilderness of the Otsego Valley fall into the category of otherness, both vulnerable to the progress of society. In his final moments of reflection, Chingachgook responds to Elizabeth’s inquiry about what happened to his family, “Where is the ice that covered the great spring? It is melted, and gone with the waters. John has lived till all his people have left him for the land of spirits; his time has come, and he is ready” (402). Expressing a kinship with the natural courses of the land, his people disappearing like ice in the stream, Chingachgook encourages that deep connection of the indigenous peoples of America to its wilderness. In some ways, Chingachgook experiences the wilderness as an Other. He laments the harmful ways of the imposing settlements, and recognizes the disappearing wilderness as a mirror of the plight of his own people. A sign from the natural world signals his death, as well as a joining of his soul with the Other of the wilderness:

a flash, which sent its quivering light through the gloom, laying bare the whole opposite horizon, was followed by a loud crash of thunder, that rolled away among the hills, seeming to shake the foundations of the earth to their centre. Mohegan raised himself, as if in obedience to a signal for his departure, and stretched his wasted arm toward the west. His dark face lighted with a look of joy; which, with all other expressions, gradually disappeared; the muscles stiffening as

they retreated to a state of rest; a slight convulsion played, for a single instant, about his lips; and his arm slowly dropped by his side, leaving the frame of the dead warrior reposing against the rock with its glassy eyes open, and fixed on the distant hills, as if the deserted shell were tracing the flight of the spirit to its new abode. (422-423)

This moment evokes a transcendence and perhaps a return to the same, where the otherness of Chingachgook and the wilderness are truly united. With his death, he and wilderness, as a “self” and the “other,” come into being in an experience of totality where “the other is reduced to the same” (47). In these final chapters of *The Pioneers*, Cooper’s visualizations symbolize the analogous relationship to be had between the disappearing wilderness and the Native American people. Both seem to suffer at the hand of civilization, yet both serve as a means by which white society might experience an ethical epiphany to redeem the corruptions of the past. Thus, in Cooper’s representations, Native Americans and the American wilderness become a combined face of the Other to which an audience might respond with that ethical obligation to compensate for the subjugation of these now important American symbols.

Cooper’s daughter, Susan Fenimore Cooper, also expresses an experience in the face of the Other that suggests a deep connection between American Indians and wilderness. In her book *Rural Hours*,<sup>21</sup> she often celebrates a cooperative of wilderness

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<sup>21</sup> Published in 1850, Susan Fenimore’s book catalogues her day-to-day observations of the natural world and the goings-on in her community of Cooperstown, NY. It was read with interest by later figures involved in natural science and environmentalism like Charles Darwin and Henry David Thoreau. According to Rochelle Johnson in her book *Passions for Nature*, “Even in Cooper’s day, leading scientists noticed her insightful treatment of these [natural] subjects: in an 1862 letter from Englishman Charles Darwin to American botanist Asa Gray, Darwin Asks Gray if he is familiar with Cooper’s “capital account

and society in a garden or farming community, in part inspired by the values of the indigenous people. Features of the natural world continually occupy her thoughts alongside musings regarding Native cultures:

At this season the sap very frequently moistens the trunk and limbs of sugar maples very plentifully, in spots where there is some crevice through which it makes its way; one often sees it dropping from the branches, and probably the Indians first discovered its sweetness from this habit. (7)

The purple martin is another bird belonging to our Western World . . . and the Indians also cut off the top branch of a sapling, near their wigwams, and hang a gourd or calabash on the prongs for their convenience. (36)

The feathers of these beautiful birds are said to be frequently used by the Indians to ornament their calumet, or Pipe of Peace. (191)

Thus, often when Susan Fenimore notes a tree or a bird, the experience summons to her thoughts the Indians who first roamed the wilderness that she records. To the Other of the wilderness, the Other of the Native is closely tied. She even comments that “the important natural features of this country are known by fine Indian words, uniting both sound and meaning,” explaining how

no words can be better for the purpose than those of Mississippi, Missouri, Ohio, Alabama, Altamaha, Monongahela, Susquehannah, Potomac. The lakes, almost without an exception, are well named, from the broad inland seas of Huron,

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of the battle between *our* and *your* weeds” (38). Additionally, Johnson refers to a journal entry of Thoreau’s in which he writes: “A newspaper authority says a fisherman giving his name has caught a loon in Seneca lake NY 80 feet beneath the surface with hooks set for trout. Miss Cooper has said the same” (214).

Michigan, Erie, Ontario, to the lesser sheets of water which abound in the northern latitudes of the Union . . . (303)

Even through names, the bond between the natural features of America and the local American Indians is inseparable. While this connection runs the risk of dehumanizing the Native tribes, it also affords a cultural means for engaging the natural world and interpersonally developing a human understanding of it. The Native closeness to the land, the ability to make use out of its natural resources, and live conservatively alongside wilderness, is something that Susan Fenimore admires and aspires to in her own community. Both Coopers, Susan and her father James, recognize an integration of Natives and nature into a combined category of otherness. Through this relation, the ethical responsibility for Native Americans extends to the wilderness. In other words, while the Coopers' writings allow readers to experience an ethical responsibility for the indigenous people represented, they also allow for the audience to experience a vicarious responsibility for nature that also translates through their visage. These multiple levels of the ethical experience unpack as an intersubjective engagement with nature through the human being in a cooperative that inspires thoughts of preservation and conservation that were eventually carried through to the establishment of national parks.

Wayne Franklin explains that James Fenimore Cooper's inspiration for Native American figures like Chingachgook came, in part, from books by Moravian missionary John G. E. Heckewelder, who likely provided Cooper's translation for the name

Chingachgook and additional insight into Native American culture (EY 473).<sup>22</sup> Two books in particular that Cooper had read were Heckewelder's *An Account of the History, Manners, and Customs, of the Indian Nations, who once Inhabited Pennsylvania and the Neighboring States* (1818) and *A Narrative of the Missions of the United Brethren among the Delaware and Mohegan Indians* (1820). Cooper himself had also, as Wayne Franklin explains, "enjoyed some degree of personal interaction with members" of Native communities "who continued to frequent Cooperstown and the Cooper house as late as the 1840s" (473). His daughter Susan Fenimore notes a number of instances of encountering Natives in *Rural Hours*. In one entry, she describes three "Oneida squaws" who visited the house with the intention of selling their woven baskets:

They came slowly towards the door, walking singly and silently, wrapped in blankets, bareheaded and barefooted. Without knocking or speaking, they entered the house with a noiseless step, and stood silently near the open door . . . . They were, indeed, very silent and unwilling to talk, so that it was not easy to gather much information from them; but their whole appearance was so much more Indian than we had been prepared for, while their manners were so gentle and womanly, so free from anything coarse or rude in the midst of their untutored ignorance, that we were much pleased with the visit. Later in the day we went to

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<sup>22</sup> According to Edwin Stockton, "Heckewelder mentioned that Mohican John (sometimes referred to as Joshua or Tschoop) was one of the first two Indians who were baptized at Bethlehem in the year 1742. He was, like Chingachgook, proficient in the English language and often interpreted the missionaries' sermons to the Delawares" (148). Stockton also translates from German the Moravian historians Otto Uttendörfer and Walther Schmidt, who state "Tschoop received by baptism the name of John and was a true teacher of his people. He lies buried in the 'God's Acre' of the Moravia Congregation at Bethlehem. He is the 'Last Mohican,' for Cooper, on the basis of the information of the Brethren, is said to have drawn the character of Chingachgook in his *Leather-Stocking Tales* after" (151).



their camp, as they always call their halting-place; here we found several children and two men of the family. These last were evidently full-blooded Indians, with every mark of their race stamped upon them; but, alas! not a trace of the "brave" about either. Both had that heavy, sensual, spiritless expression, the stamp of vice, so painful to behold on the human countenance. (108-109)

Susan Fenimore is struck by the appearance of the group "in the midst of a civilized community with the characteristics of their wild race still clinging to them" (108). Like her father, she recognizes the town in which she lives as a place that "was so lately their own" (108). At this point in time, as Susan notes, there were already many parts of the country where an Indian was never seen, and those who did wander into town rarely represented the "brave" (109) of their old races, as they were corrupted by the touch of white civilization. This being said, it is unlikely that James Fenimore's personal encounters with Natives gave him insight to relatively untainted culture that he describes in his novels, and, as a result, much of his source material presumably relied on the Heckewelder books. Susan Fenimore's recordings, however, do capture the essence of the encounter in a Levinasian sense that can only be experienced in the face of the Other. Due to the Natives' "silen[ce]" and "unwilling[ness] to talk" She gains an understanding of them outside of the confines of language, focusing instead on "appearance," "manners," and "countenance."

While the Coopers' first-hand meetings with the remaining tribes of the region could not exemplify an entirely traditional American Indian culture, they did allow James Fenimore Cooper to comprehend a sense of the Other that he translates for the audience

in his novels through white, Native, and wilderness interactions. Together, this first-hand experience and the Heckewelder books allowed Cooper to relay a sense of life on the frontier where Euro-American settlers and Native Americans were frequently mixing. In later years, however, Heckewelder had many critics, due to, what Paul Wallace calls, “his emotional surrender to prejudice” which “lowered his reputation among scholars.” Wherever his sympathies were engaged among competitive tribes, Heckewelder became incapable of reporting objectively. His account of relations between the Delawares and the Iroquois, in particular, were biased, and we can see evidence of his partiality through Cooper’s own contrast “between the noble Delawares and treacherous "Mingoes" (Iroquois)” (497). As Wallace points out, the world’s “alternating conceptions of the red Indian as a fiendish savage on the one hand and, on the other, a noble but retarded child who unhappily can never grow up to adapt himself to civilized ways and must therefore vanish from the earth” (497) derive largely from the characterizations depicted by Heckewelder and Cooper.

These two personas of Native Americans are expressed in extremes by Cooper’s staunchest critic, Mark Twain, in his essay “The Noble Red Man,” published in 1870. According to Twain, “in books,” the savage is noble, “tall and tawny, muscular, straight and of kingly presence; he has a beaked nose and an eagle eye.” Yet, from “personal observation,” Twain claims that the “natural self” of the savage is “little, and scrawny, and black, and dirty; and, judged by even the most charitable of our canons of human excellence, is thoroughly pitiful and contemptible.” While Twain probably aims to satirize Cooper’s “noble savage,” his own depictions of the American Indian represent

the other end of the stereotypical spectrum with Natives depicted as degenerates. Cooper's representations had some problems of inaccuracy due to his reliance on Heckewelder, but Twain's view of Natives took on a more prejudiced trajectory due to his own racist opinion of Native Americans based on a more "ethnocentric strain of Euroamerican anthropological writing, supposedly more 'realistic,' that saw Indians almost eugenically as a degraded race" (Rickard).<sup>23</sup> If Chingachgook with his honorable good-naturedness is representative of Cooper's noble savage, then Twain's racism can be exemplified by his character Injun Joe in *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, whom he describes as a "murderin' half-breed" (56). The two representations become foils of one another—Chingachgook the romantic hero and Injun Joe the satirical villain—each reflecting the writers' respective feelings toward American Indians.

In her book *Moving Encounters*, Laura Mielke summarizes this issue when she writes about Herman Melville's *The Confidence-Man* (1857): "the Indian-lover and the Indian-hater," she says, "alike dehumanize American Indians as either pathetic objects of benevolent programs or the atavistic perpetrators of unspeakable violence against white America" (13). Mielke, however, proposes a third possibility, in which we can read works, like Cooper's, with a focus on the "moving encounter" as a "critical middle ground between a naive acceptance of sentimentalism and a prejudiced dismissal of all sympathy as suspect" (10). To clarify, "moving encounters," according to Mielke, are

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<sup>23</sup> One such figure who, like Twain, criticized Cooper was Governor Lewis Cass of Michigan Territory whose opinion of the Indian fell into "the school of the invader, the hunter of men, the settler who came to dispossess the native and forgive himself for treaty violations. Those of this school saw the red man only as harried, savage beings who lingered on the half-decayed rim of the acculturating process and who mere doomed to give way sooner or later, but the sooner the better" (Parker).

scenes in which representatives of the two “races,” face-to-face in a setting claimed by both, participated in a highly emotional exchange that indicated their hearts had more in common than their external appearances or political allegiances suggested. The moving encounter proposed the possibility of mutual sympathy between American Indians and Euro-Americans, of community instead of division. (2)

To return to Levinas, Mielke’s “face-to-face” encounter is not unlike the ethical exchange that occurs during the Levinasian experience in the face of the Other. Both evoke a moral responsibility that precedes language and lies primarily in the experience. In order to make the moving encounter effective, however, Mielke also highlights the necessity for an intermediary to translate “linguistic[ly], cultural[ly], [and] affective[ly]” (2).

In Cooper’s *Leatherstocking Tales*, this middleman becomes Natty Bumppo. With his cultural ambiguity between white ancestry and Native values, he serves as, Mielke argues, “a cultural intermediary who oversees and facilitates Indian-white encounters” (37). In terms of Levinas, I would also suggest that he functions as an agent of infinity in perpetuating that ethical experience. As Mielke explains, Natty’s translations between races in *The Prairie* are never word-for-word, and instead emphasize “that to understand the Other, one must interpret his emotions” (46). Rather than focusing on language, it is the feeling of the encounter that translates most effectively. According to Mielke, Natty’s death in *The Prairie* then symbolizes the demise of native-white relations. His legacy, however, lives on in Cooper’s novels as a means by which we might “better understand the complex history of colonial and national relations between American Indians and

Euro-Americans” (10). Through works like Cooper’s *Leatherstocking Tales*, Mielke aims to revive the “language of fellow-feeling in the interest of social justice” and emphasize “living American Indian cultures and a shared history of the Americas” (14). Her analysis of the “moving encounters” of native-white relations aligns with this study of Cooper’s novels under a Levinasian lens of ethical responsibility. In fact, we might even consider the novels themselves as an intermediary that, like Natty, translates that experience across the centuries.

While the wrongs of the past cannot be completely amended, Cooper memorializes the rise and fall of the native-white relationship and extends a feeling of moral responsibility across time to atone for the crimes against indigenous people. The connection that Cooper recognizes between American Indians and wilderness also extends a need for an intermediary that could highlight the significance of nature and preserve it from the progress of civilization, which became increasingly damaging for both America’s wilderness and its Native cultures over time. His textual examples of intermediacy lay the groundwork for a topographic median to be established through conservation, where the national park could serve as an intermediary for society and wilderness, much as Natty does for white society and the indigenous people in *The Leatherstocking Tales*. Cooper’s representation of Natty thus introduces a structure by which coexistence is made possible through an unspoken translation of ethical responsibility. The national park thus translates a mutual importance that America’s society and its wilderness have for one another in a coexistence that defines the nation.

Returning to the crimes against the Native people, one that instigated a long period of hardship for American Indians became President Andrew Jackson's Indian Removal Act of 1830. While Cooper did not explicitly oppose the law, it can be inferred from his recurring tropes of possession and dispossession that he had reservations regarding the displacement of Indians as racism and capitalism depicted as progress pushed them further west. During the time in which Cooper wrote the five Leatherstocking Tales—*The Pioneers* (1823), *The Last of the Mohicans* (1826), *The Prairie* (1827), *The Pathfinder* (1840), and *The Deerslayer* (1841)—the United States debated and Congress adopted the policy of Indian Removal. Months after this policy was approved, Jackson made an address to Congress reflecting on the prospects for the endeavor. Clearing certain areas of Indian populations, he said, would “enable those States to advance rapidly in population, wealth, and power.” Not only did he look forward to this act as a moment of “progressive change” for civilization, but he also highlighted it as a policy beneficial to the natives as well. Offering “new and extensive territory” to the Native people, in addition to funding the “whole expense of his removal and settlement,” the act was something that Jackson saw as profitable to all—a mindset that spoke clearly to the drive for progress that Cooper continually warns against in his representations of wilderness and society (“President”).

As a supporter of Jacksonian Democracy, however, Cooper was likely caught in a contradiction between the benefits that the policy promised for the common white man and the wrongful removal of the Native people. On some level, he may have even supported the idea of Indian Removal, though not for the sake of progress. As Steven

Blakemore explains in his essay “Cooper and the Indian Imaginary,” for Cooper, relocating Indians meant preservation of their culture away from the waves of progressing civilization. Blakemore finds his evidence in Cooper’s *Notions of the Americans* (1828), a semi-nonfictional travel narrative that Cooper wrote in epistolary form from the perspective of a fictional European bachelor. In one of the letters, the writer explains how natives have “become victims to the abuses of civilization,” and how “they are rigidly honest; nearly always so, unless corrupted by much intercourse with the whites (278, 281). Hence, it is their contact with white civilization that damages their race. He then continues on to describe the logistics of the Indian removal policy, concluding, “If the plan can be effected, there is reason to think that the constant diminution in the numbers of Indians will be checked, and that a race, about whom there is so much that is poetic and fine in recollection, will be preserved” (286). Thus, Cooper’s thoughts on Indian Removal were driven by a vision for protecting Native races and their cultures by isolating them from white society, though he also foresaw an inevitability that “amalgamation of the two races would in time occur” (287)—assimilation by the American Indians being the final outcome.

Contrary to the government’s favorable promises and Cooper’s hopes that it would preserve Native cultures, the Indian Removal Act of 1830 marked the start of a series of devastating removals, the most infamous being the 1835-1838 relocation known as the “Trail of Tears,” when thousands perished of disease and starvation along the way. Progress was thus not advantageous to all, as Cooper depicts with his own tales of Native

races vanishing alongside wilderness. Franklin explains that the disappearance of American Indians

from the landscapes of his tales did not express [Cooper's] wish: rather, it reflected his realistic assessment of what was actually happening to Indian life in its old, precontact form as settlers moved west. As he mourned the fate of the noble forest that fell before the woodchopper's relentless axe, he also lamented the destruction of Indian culture. (*EY* xxx)

Rather than vocalizing an opposition to Jackson's Indian Removal policies, Cooper instead remained silent. He relays his concerns indirectly through his novels, mourning the ramifications of progress for both wilderness and the American Indians. Just as civilization was showing its detrimental effects for the pristine American wilderness, so too was it devastating the rich culture and existence of the indigenous people. Even Susan Fenimore recognized the detrimental effects of civilized society upon Native Americans:

a savage race is almost invariably corrupted rather than improved by its earliest contact with a civilized people; they suffer from the vices of civilization before they learn justly to comprehend its merits. It is with nations as with individuals—amelioration is a slow process, corruption a rapid one. (112)

Both James Fenimore Cooper and his daughter Susan lament the impossibility of coexistence between Natives and white society while still seeking to preserve Native culture symbolically in their writings.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Susan Fenimore's quote here also hints at an eventual "solution" in assimilation. Blakemore explains, "Since Cooper believed that the Native Americans must remain totally isolated from the white population, something only possible in the government sanctioned reservation system, in order to maintain their "Indianness"—something he acknowledged was problematic since they would inevitably be in contact with



While the period of Indian Removal exemplifies an instance of catastrophic intermediacy, Cooper's sentiments are pulled in two directions, opening a potential middle ground: introducing a need for something to preserve diverse cultural relationships and an America where wilderness, society, and Native Americans could coexist. His *Leatherstocking Tales* serve as an imaginary intermediary that at once preserves a trajectory for Native-white-wilderness relations under the influence of progress and also translates the ethical anxieties that attended these movements. Looking ahead once again to the national parks, the Coopers' representations of Natives and the natural world illustrate a desire for preservation of Native people and land but also the danger of their erasure, a dilemma that the national parks themselves would grapple with for generations. Under the pressing advancement of civilization, the Coopers realize a need for preservation, and while the bond they recognize between American Indians and wilderness presents the danger of dehumanizing Natives it also has the effect of humanizing nature—translating that human ethical responsibility to the nonhuman entity of the natural world. This is not to equate humanizing nature with preserving it, but rather to point out how humanizing nature helps us to relate to nature on a basic human level, in effect inspiring an urge to protect and preserve it.

Just as James and Susan Fenimore Cooper recognized a need for preserving Native cultures against the corruptions of progressing white civilization,<sup>25</sup> so too did

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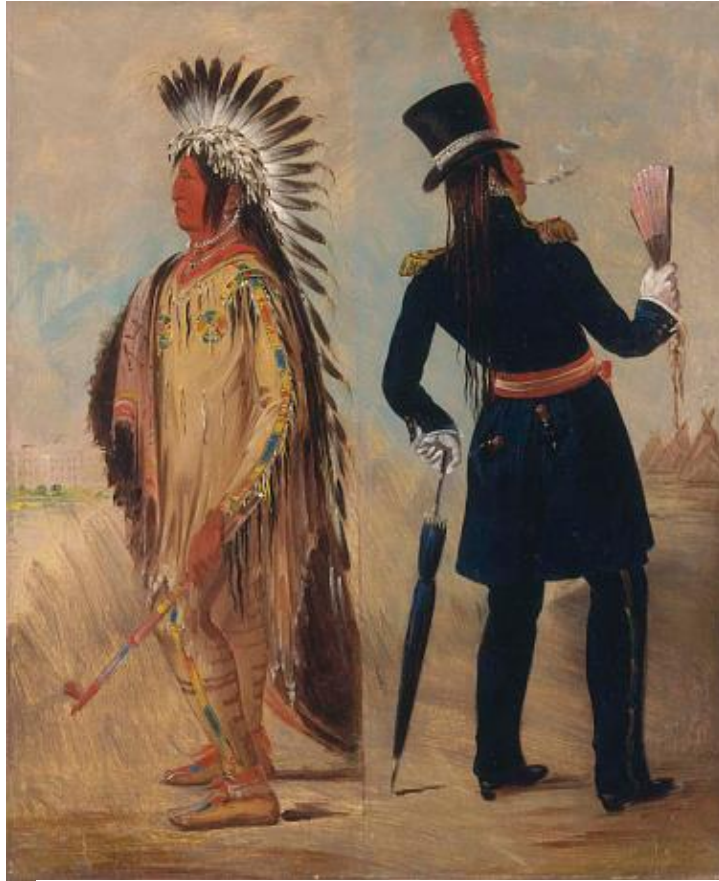
whites at some point—his only solution, as we will see, was the total assimilation of the Native Americans into the white population—precisely the opposite of what was being proposed in the 1830 legislation. Cooper, like others, wrestled with the cultural contradictions of his time.”

<sup>25</sup> This need is evident, for example, in James' representations of Chingachgook in *The Pioneers* and his support of Indian Removal for the sake of cultural preservation in *Notions of the Americans*, as well as Susan's observations of Native races “corrupted” by white society in *Rural Hours*.

artist George Catlin acknowledged the problem. Having traveled amongst tribes of Native Americans from 1830-1839, Catlin painted more than five hundred scenes and portraits of American Indians and western landscapes. Additionally, he put together a collection of *Letters and Notes* in which he recorded his experiences and observations while traveling. For his representations, Mielke explains, Catlin preferred what he called the Natives of the “Far West” as opposed to the “degraded American Indians of the frontier” who had been corrupted by the vices of civilization (120-121) and “fallen victims to whiskey, the small-pox, and the bayonet” (Catlin, *LN* 1: 4-5). His subject would be “the untainted American Indian in his natural environment . . . whose virtues are preserved through isolation from Euro-Americans” (121)—an occurrence that Cooper himself probably never experienced personally.

Catlin’s one famous exception became a portrait entitled *Wi-jún-jon, Pigeon’s Egg Head (The Light) Going To and Returning From Washington*, which depicts the story of Wi-jún-jon, an Assiniboine leader who was invited in 1831 to represent his tribe in Washington, D.C. With a divided canvas, Catlin depicts a two-sided portrait of the Native, before and after his visit, warning against the damaging effect of white society upon Native cultures. As Laura Mielke explains, “The returning Wi-jún-jon fits the description of the degraded Indian of the frontier whose bastardized clothing and alcohol consumption make him not civilized but pathetic” (132-133). On the left side of the painting, Wi-jún-jon is a dignified, authentic Indian, but on the right he is tainted by his contact with white civilization. Catlin sought to expose the problem of Indian/Euro-American contact that had created the overwhelming racist opinion of Indians as brutish

savages, and instead highlight the richness of their cultures and a sense of fellow humanity. William Cronon also points out how Catlin's paintings are intended to "capture a few fleeting glimpses of the world we are about to lose." In other words, like Cooper with his novels, Catlin with his paintings sought to preserve the Native cultures that he saw disappearing. According to Cronon, "The desire of ethnographic artists to situate their images on the cusp of this transition—at the last possible moment when one could still record aboriginal cultures in what artists wanted to believe was their 'traditional' form—drives such paintings away from history and into timelessness" (*Telling Tales* 58). As a result, Catlin's concerns translate across time through his paintings, making it possible for viewers today to experience the critical moment in history for Native cultures and kindle an ethical responsibility to remember that past and right those wrongs.



George Catlin, *Wi-jún-jon, Pigeon's Egg Head (The Light) Going To and Returning From Washington*, 1837-1839

Government ethnographers who had contributed to the negative image of the Native American often based their findings on pseudo “scientific” study rather than the “field data” of personal experience (Mielke 123). Catlin critiqued this method of science because of its lack of considering “human expression . . . neglecting ‘their actual existence, their customs’” (123). In other words, Catlin’s preferred practice sought a face-to-face interaction to establish a human-to-human understanding, very much like the Levinasian ethical experience in the face of the Other, especially with its emphasis on “human expression.” Once again because of the degraded image put forth by the government, white society had begun to keep a “distrustful distance” (*LN* 1:8), and

Catlin, through his paintings and writings, hoped to “overcome the ‘distrustful distance’ at which Euro-Americans psychologically and emotionally [kept] American Indians by bridging the physical distance between them” (Mielke 121). Catlin would “recreate for them the experience of direct encounter” (Mielke 122), acting as an intermediary to translate for society that ethical experience, revealing Native Americans as “human beings with features, thoughts, reason, and sympathies like our own” (*LN* 1:5):

There is no difficulty in approaching the Indian and getting acquainted with him in his wild and unsophisticated state, and finding him an honest and honorable man; *with feelings to meet feelings*, if the above prejudice and dread can be laid aside, and any one will take the pains, as I have done, to go and see him in the simplicity of his native state, smoking his pipe under his own humble roof, with his wife and children around him, and his faithful dogs and horses hanging about his hospitable tenement.—So the world may see him and smoke his friendly pipe, which will be invariably extended to them; and share, with a hearty welcome, the best that his wigwam affords for the appetite, which is always set out to a stranger the next moment after he enters.” (*LN* 1:8-9, emphasis added)

Catlin seeks to reveal here the value of encountering first-hand the Native American in his natural surroundings as a fellow human being. While there is a divide in language and culture, it is the experience of “feelings to meet feelings” that transcends differences and translates the Levinasian ethical responsibility beyond the physical space of the encounter.

One of his paintings that best represents this experience on a number of levels is his self-portrait among the Mandan Indians, pictured below. Here, Catlin depicts himself in a buckskin outfit, surrounded by a crowd of Indian admirers while he stands before his easel with a brush and palette painting a portrait of the Mandan chief Máh-to-tóh-pa. Chief Máh-to-tóh-pa is undoubtedly the focal point of the painting, his gaze directed in a face-to-face encounter with Catlin's as he translates the visage of the chief onto canvas. Stepping outside of the image completely, viewers of this self-portrait will not only witness the human interaction between the representation of Catlin and his subject, but also experience vicariously the very encounter that Catlin depicts himself experiencing in the self-portrait. In fact, he almost represents himself as the Other, as Albert Boime points out, "deliberately satiriz[ing] himself and his outfit as out of place in this environment, and subordinat[ing] his position as recorder to the dignity and commanding stature of his subject" (210). This representation, which serves as the frontispiece to Catlin's *Letters and Notes*, undermines the viewer's perception of the otherness of Native Americans and evokes a reconsideration of his or her own identity as an Other. As Levinas explains, "A calling into question of the same [in this case, the viewer] . . . is brought about by the other" (43). Catlin's paintings evoke a muddling of otherness, whereby Natives and Euro-Americans become both "other" and "same" on the plane of ethical responsibility, creating a reciprocal experience of human understanding.



George Catlin, *Catlin painting Plate 64, a portrait of Mah-to-toh-pa,* frontispiece in Catlin's *Letters and Notes* vol. 1, 1841

Like Cooper, Catlin was also caught between the damage that white progress inflicted upon Natives and wilderness and the promise that attended the advancement of white civilization. As Boime explains in his essay “George Catlin’s Wilderness Utopia,” Catlin’s “resolution of this contradiction between his vision of a grand American civilization in the West and the looming loss of a great Indian civilization in its wake was a plan to set aside and preserve certain western prairie sites and allow the remnant of the Indian tribes and buffalo to occupy them as a permanent sanctuary” (225). By the time Catlin had started writing and painting, Indian Removal that pushed tribes further west had already occurred. His idea for this “permanent sanctuary” became something not unlike the vision for a national park:

And what a splendid contemplation too, when one (who has travelled these realms, and can duly appreciate them) imagines them as they might in future be seen, (by some great protecting *policy of government*) *preserved* in their pristine beauty and wildness, in a magnificent park, where the *world could see* for ages to come, the native Indian in his classic attire, galloping his wild horse, with sinewy bow, and shield and lance, amid the fleeting herds of elks and buffaloes. That a beautiful and thrilling specimen for America to preserve and hold up to the view of her refined citizens and the world, in future ages! *A nation's Park*, containing man and beast, in all the wild and freshness of their nature's beauty! (*LN 1:261*, emphasis added)

Catlin's hopes for a "nation's Park" "preserved" under the "protecting policy of government" for the "world" to see is somewhat like the description of America's national parks as we know them today. What was excluded in their actual creation, however, was the presence of Native Americans who were tragically displaced even further with the establishment of national parks. While associating American Indians so closely with wilderness risked their dehumanization, in addition, their eviction from national park territory suggests that the government viewed them as something separate from nature after all. In translating his personal encounters with Native Americans, Catlin, on some level, helped to rehumanize Natives from any dehumanization that may have been caused from their associations with wilderness as well as racism. As Boime concludes, Catlin "confirmed the important role of wilderness in America's collective



imagination and in shaping the national identity” as well as “humankind’s responsibility toward the earth and its inhabitants” (226).

Like James and Susan Fenimore Cooper, Catlin recognized a connection between American Indians and the natural world while also stressing their humanity. In fact, according to Joseph B. Herring, Catlin embarked on his travels West to document his experiences with local tribes “[i]nspired by Cooper’s novels” (230). His emphasis on Natives as fellow human beings, just like Cooper’s depictions of the good-natured noble savage, paints a historic picture of Native Americans from a humanistic standpoint which led, in part, to their later displacement from national parks as a faction of civilization distinct from America’s wilderness. While the Native-nature bond that white society observed may have helped to carry the Levinasian ethical responsibility to the preservation of the American landscape, the boundaries described in the previous section for maintaining that distance between society and wilderness categorized Native Americans as a group within civilization independent of the land. The national parks, thus, called for another relocation, separating the remaining Indians of the west from the wilderness that the nation sought to preserve. While representations of Native Americans alongside wilderness translated an ethical responsibility to protect the landscape, the human-to-human responsibility for their race fell to the wayside until later years when history and figures of the past rekindled feelings that lament their hardships and commemorate their once-thriving cultures.

### **Revisiting the Aesthetics, Boundaries, Cultures of Cooper**

Through his representations of wilderness and society, James Fenimore Cooper became one of the first of a group of writers and artists who sought a way of representing America textually, visually, and symbolically. In Burke's terms, Cooper's depictions of wilderness become synonymous with the sublime, though popular conceptions of wilderness and a concern for its preservation often led Cooper to show wilderness in conflict with white society and its progress. These tensions, as consequences of a mythic wilderness separate from humans, would have to be addressed in a representation that could relay a more authentic experience of wilderness by establishing the delicate bounds necessary for redefining society and wilderness as an interactive environment. Cooper's struggle to find this middle ground set the stage for the national park as a representation of an ideal place for experiencing a more authentic and aesthetic wilderness.<sup>26</sup> The key to success would be its borders.

Through the boundaries of the parks, with which Cooper experiments in his political philosophies that parallel those of Rousseau and Burke, an American symbol that could both preserve wilderness and also allow the people to experience it might be achieved. In this way, the national park—established under legislation foreseen by Cooper—becomes an intermediary due to its flexible boundaries governed by both

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<sup>26</sup> While Cooper envisioned the pastoral as the middle ground where humans and nature could successfully coexist, and the national parks may have initially been geared toward that vision, the next chapter will demonstrate how that vision has since evolved to a state where the pastoral is actually destructive to the natural world. Instead the national parks, with the help of John Muir, would come to embody a middle ground for a different, more spiritually-based, interaction between humans and nature. Cooper, however, can still be credited with highlighting the need for a middle ground. How the national parks function as that middle ground continues to evolve with changes in American culture.

natural and human agency that regulate an interactive environment between society and wilderness. In order to rally the feelings necessary for preservation on such a grand scale to make something like the national parks possible, Cooper and others communicated a human-nature connection through their representations of Native Americans as a people of the natural world. By applying a Levinasian lens to this bond, we see how a feeling of ethical responsibility not only becomes inscribed on the landscape, but also translates across time as those sentiments can still be evoked for audiences today through art and literature. It is my hope that these audiences take these lessons to their experiences in the national parks in a way that memorializes and celebrates these places as the ancestral homes of Native peoples that were initially taken from them. Today, many instances of environmental preservation have aligned with Native American activism, some of which include Standing Rock Sioux Tribe's opposition to the Dakota Access Pipeline in 2016-2017 as well as the 2018 litigation of five tribal nations (Hopi, Navajo, Ute, Ute Mountain Ute, and Zuni) against President Donald Trump's proposal to reduce the area of Bears Ears National Monument.<sup>27</sup> These recent moments in history demonstrate just how deeply-rooted in the environment many Native cultures still are, and how they continue to have an influence on environmental awareness and activism in the United States today.

The Coopers, Thomas Cole, and George Catlin all created works that sought to capture the landscape of America. Through these works and because of a popular

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<sup>27</sup> The Standing Rock Sioux Tribe's protest "drew thousands to what was arguably the largest demonstration of tribal sovereignty and call for environmental justice in history" (McKenna). See Epilogue for further detail on the controversy surrounding Bears Ears National Monument.

conception of wilderness that separated humans and nature, each writer and each artist came to realize the tensions that accompanied the intersection of wilderness and civilization, and each sought to preserve lasting impressions of these encounters. These representations demonstrated an early desire for preservation, and a need for an interactive environment to exemplify the human-nature relationship. They set the stage for an American symbol that could represent this exchange between wilderness and society, with the two coexisting in a place kept in balance by boundaries: a place like the national park.

## CHAPTER 2

### **John Muir and an Evolving Conception of Wilderness: Shaping the National Parks during their Formative Years**

Often referred to as the father of America's national parks, Scottish-born American John Muir contributed to the growth of a conservation ethic in the United States that roused the nation, especially at the start of the twentieth century. His many essays on the natural world, mostly published in *The Century* magazine, inspired the American public to get out and explore nature in the national parks and beyond. He founded the Sierra Club environmental organization, and played a large role in establishing Yosemite as a national park, becoming a renowned national figure in the process. Muir's status as a respected man of nature led him to receive visits from other national figures such as Ralph Waldo Emerson and even President Theodore Roosevelt who shared his passions as an outdoorsman. In an essay published in *The Outlook* magazine after Muir's death, Roosevelt writes that Muir was:

what few nature lovers are—a man able to influence contemporary thought and action on the subjects to which he had devoted his life. He was a great factor in influencing the thought of California and the thought of the entire country so as to secure the preservation of those great natural phenomena—wonderful canyons, giant trees, slopes of flower-spangled hillsides—which make California a veritable Garden of the Lord.

Muir's fervor for the natural world was felt throughout the nation. Whereas Cooper's novels had instilled in the nation a sense of excitement for the wilds of nature and planted the seed of concern for their gradual disappearance, Muir's writing bolstered the

importance of these sentiments during a critical time in environmental history that led to the shaping of the first U.S. National Parks to preserve that wilderness.

Over the course of this chapter, in order to show how Muir contributes to and helps define our experiences with wilderness, I will trace Muir and his writings through the same lenses of aesthetics, boundaries, and cultures that I used in my first chapter on Cooper, although with a greater historical emphasis due to Muir's more direct influence in the narrative of the national parks. The aesthetics section will examine Muir's unique experience of the sublime that incorporates both science and spirituality, and explore how his writing on that experience contributed to individuals' own aesthetic experience as the sublime wilderness became more iconic of America. His science was informed by a combination of reading (from Alexander Von Humboldt to Charles Darwin) and his own observational learning, while his spirituality transformed from one of strict Calvinist roots to a faith based in the natural world similar to that of Romantic figures like Emerson and Thoreau, whom Muir had read and admired. Their shared spirituality was anchored in Transcendentalism, though Muir's was inspired by direct physical immersion in nature like Thoreau's, whereas Emerson's experience resided in the abstract metaphysical realm of the mind. As a whole, Muir's spiritual-scientific aesthetic, which also bore certain influences from art critic John Ruskin, led Muir to an all-encompassing belief in the cosmos that deemed humans and nature to be integrated parts of a united whole.

Despite this all-inclusive vision of humans and nature, however, Muir came to accept boundaries between the two as something necessary—boundaries that would be

established with the enactment of national parks—not only for the protection of wilderness against the destructive tendencies of humankind, but also in order to maintain the cosmic balance between humans and nature. As I will address in the boundaries section, however, the reality of human-nature coexistence would resist this divide. Sadly, the mindset of human beings and nature as separate entities would have consequences for Native Americans and other small local communities within the proximity of the national parks. In the cultures section, I address Muir’s relationship with these Native peoples and why the father of America’s national parks could not prevent the discrimination that was to occur. After all, his own views that incorporate humans alongside nature were often reflected in the practices held by the American Indians with whom he interacted. Muir’s harmonic view of the cosmos, I argue, can aid in our consideration of issues today concerning class and race, considerations that we can in turn bring back to our experiences at the national parks. If adopted, his views of integrated oneness between humans and nature can offer a gateway to fostering a greater sense of unity between human beings. This unity is built from our shared environments in the United States as a nation built from many different peoples, *e pluribus unum*, and what better place to nurture that feeling than in the shared public space of the national parks? The understanding that we gain from the history that surrounds the parks additionally adds to their status as a symbolic landscape for America as a place that has seen many narratives. While the national parks cannot escape criticism that comes with this history, they nonetheless provide a powerful experience for visitors not only in the beauty of the landscape itself but because it is defined by the people of the nation—past, present, and

future.<sup>28</sup> Like Muir's unifying cosmos, the national parks can thus become a place of integrated experiences that define America.



**Muir's Spiritual-Scientific Aesthetic:  
An Alternative Twofold Experience of Sublime Wilderness**

In my close readings of Cooper's aesthetics and my comparison of his descriptions to the philosophies of Plato, Edmund Burke, and Immanuel Kant, I theorized that when society and wilderness meet, it becomes almost impossible to maintain the sublime as a culmination of the aesthetic experience. The moment in question either becomes enveloped by the terrors of the wild, or dissolves to the comforts of civilization. Both outcomes are the results of an alteration of the safe aesthetic distance required in order to experience the sublime. That distance required between humans and nature either becomes too close to wilderness with the confrontation of danger, or too far from it with the complete safety of civilization. Thus, Cooper's dilemma requires a mediator to keep the balance between wilderness and society in order to maintain the aesthetic experience. The need for this mediator, I argued, could be a source of inspiration for the national park—a place where humans and nature mingle to maintain the elevating sensations of

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<sup>28</sup> Though the definition of the parks has been historically dominated by the majority Anglo-American culture, one of my goals with this thesis is to highlight the historical experience of Native Americans in relation to the development of the national parks. Extrapolating from that formative history, I hope to bring to light a deeper understanding of what it means for the national parks to be a symbol for America.



the sublime. The park with its boundaries would still be a representation, like the landscapes of Cooper's novels; however, it would also be envisioned as able to invoke a physical experience closest to the ideal form of wilderness.

By introducing John Muir to the aesthetic discourse thus far established, I aim to reveal additional intricacies involved in maintaining this sublime experience. Like the characters of Cooper's *Leatherstocking Tales*, Muir encounters the natural world with exalted feelings of the sublime. However, unlike those of Cooper's characters, Muir's interactions with nature are devoid of fear and instead filled with a spirituality inspired by the natural world in conjunction with a scientific fascination for the same. His writings almost refuse to acknowledge the dangerous side of wilderness, even when he finds himself in life-threatening storms or on the narrow ice precipice of a glacier. In these moments when safe aesthetic distance is physically compromised, I argue that Muir maintains another kind of distance through an unconventional mix of faith and science. In addition to the tools that Cooper introduces with laws and property ownership, I suggest that Muir's methods of faith and science provide another means of safely experiencing the sublime. Whereas Cooper's mediation of boundaries offers a physical means of employing aesthetic distance for the general public as a whole, Muir offers an application of internal boundaries that can be implemented by particular individuals on a more personal level.

Central to this study will be a consideration of Muir's writing alongside the theories of John Ruskin, a leading art critic of the nineteenth century whose preferences in landscape aesthetics focused on communicating truth through nature via human

expression. Though Muir was not well-read in aesthetic theory in general, he did know Ruskin's work, and his aesthetic taste was partly developed by his friendships with landscape artists of the time whose paintings were often informed by Ruskinian theory. This section of the chapter will go into great detail with one of Muir's closest artistic acquaintances, the landscape painter William Keith. In studying the paintings of Keith alongside some of Muir's own writings and Ruskin's *Modern Painters* (1843), I will demonstrate how Muir's spiritual-scientific aesthetic is central to his ideas about how humans might safely experience the wilderness of the national parks. Together, Muir's knowledge and practice of natural science along with his spiritual appreciation for nature help him to experience an aesthetic of his own—informed by, though not equivalent to, Ruskin's.

As I established in Chapter One, Cooper's aesthetic indicates an Anglo-American cultural desire for something like a national park to serve as a mediator between humans and nature. His introduction of laws and property ownership provide not only a vehicle for the parks' establishment but also the mediating framework to keep an exterior sense of safety amid vistas of danger. Muir's aesthetics deliver an intertwining method of faith and natural science as an alternative perpetuating force that maintains the necessary distance for the sublime experience on an interior level. As a prominent figure during the formative years of the national parks, Muir was widely read and respected as the popularity of the parks grew. Visitors carried his values about the treatment of landscape with them as they sought their own experiences within the parks, as do later park administrators who now aim to provide an experience that is enlightening and

educational—mirroring Muir’s methods. The application of such human constructions to nature, however, also reveals how fabricated our conceptions of wilderness actually are, especially as the national parks have become more iconic of the American aesthetic experience as constructed by the dominant Anglo-American culture. Muir’s methods of understanding nature remind us that the parks are at once partly a representation of our own creation and partly a ground for nature itself to have agency. These two sides speak to the way in which we try to establish a clear divide between humans and nature where none biologically exists. His aesthetic, informed by faith and science, invokes an experience in which the anxiety and terror of the sublime disappear as humans seek out wilderness as something to be enjoyed and understood.

This section of my chapter traces Muir’s aesthetic development, through which he ultimately arrives at a new understanding of the American sublime in the national parks that is twofold in an innovative way. Rather than only encompassing the traditional fear and awe of the sublime, his employment of the aesthetic experience would additionally communicate an elevated feeling of human connectivity to nature. Both methods serve to connect humans to nature, but in different ways, distinguished by collective versus personal experiences. On one hand, the experience is maintained for the public behind the exterior safety of guard-railed vistas and paths (arising from Cooper’s tools of laws and property ownership), and on another, it is upheld for the individual by the interior safety of one’s knowledge of science and sense of faith (as exemplified by Muir).

As Jeffrey Wattles explains, Muir’s perception of the natural world was shaped “partly thanks to his friendship with artists” (62). One of these artists was William Keith,

whom Muir met in 1872 when Keith visited his Yosemite cabin, and encountered again in 1874 due to a newspaper job that required Muir to review Keith's work. According to Donald Worster in *A Passion for Nature: The Life of John Muir*,

Keith, who arrived in San Francisco a decade before Muir, in 1859 from Aberdeen, Scotland, was a man whom Muir inevitably was bound to love. They were the same age, spoke with a common Scottish burr, and shared a love for nature in the Sierra. Where Muir was embarking on a career of writing about that landscape, Keith was learning to paint it, with warm, romantic colors suggested by German and French influences and John Ruskin's writings. (223)

What Muir most admired about Keith's paintings was his "devout truthfulness to nature" (224)—in other words his ability to depict a landscape through observation not only of the subject, but also with attention to lighting, color, and movement, as well as the general sensation that the scene communicated. In short, Keith's paintings were characterized by a cross between realism and idealism, a tendency that had strong affinities with, what Robert Chianese calls, "Ruskin's theories about combining accuracy with emotional vision" (557). One of Keith's paintings, for example, entitled *Yosemite Valley*, depicts a small gathering of humans in the foreground set against a dark line of trees and the stark outline of the El Capitan monolith as a backdrop. The lighting and shadows that Keith implements work to convey the curves and crevices of the mountains in what Ruskin terms in *Modern Painters* as the "faithful conception of any natural objects" (I, 110)—in other words, an accurate representation grounded in a kind of scientific fact-seeking method of painting.

In order to fulfill Ruskinian criteria, however, Keith's painting would also have to express the human feeling of the scene. In Chapter One, I addressed Thomas Cole and his minimization of human presence in his painting *Landscape Scene from "The Last of the Mohicans."* By contrast, Keith's human figures in the foreground of *Yosemite Valley* are important to communicate for the viewer "thoughts and feelings" (*MP I*, 110) that Ruskin claims are the "only important end of all art" (*MP I*, 113). Viewers, in seeing these human figures amidst the natural world, could then begin to read and interpret what the landscape had to say about deeper truths and human emotion. As Wolfgang Kemp explains, "[T]o read what nature had to say about man, to keep open the bridges between the human world and the world of inanimate objects, and between art and sciences: that was Ruskin's life's work" (31). Whereas Cole places primary emphasis on the landscape, perhaps in recognition of Cooper's tensions between society and wilderness, Keith—similarly informed by Ruskin—instead places importance on the human engagement with nature in hopes of better understanding moral truths.



William Keith, *Yosemite Valley*, 1875

Muir admired the dual factual and emotional aspects of Keith's work; however, his own views were less anthropocentric, in that they emphasized a relationship between humans and all other creatures in nature rather than seeking to understand human truth and morals alone. Muir's interpretation of Keith likely corresponds to what Chianese suggests—that in depicting human figures, “Keith may have intuited that the interdependent biological model of ‘nature’ needs to include us, not as spectators but as actors and participants, since we share a mutual fate with physical processes and entities” (457). In this case, Keith, like Muir, would have recognized humans as playing a small part in the grander cycles of the natural world, what Muir would have called our existence as being “part and parcel of nature” (*A Thousand-Mile Walk* 107).<sup>29</sup> In an 1875 edition of *Overland Monthly*, Muir even commends Keith's role as a painter, actively participating in the environment as follows:

Keith is patiently following the leadings of his own genius, painting better than he knows, observing a devout truthfulness to nature, yet removing veils of detail, and laying bare the very hearts and souls of the landscapes; and the truth of this is attested more and more fully by every picture that he paints. (482)

John Ruskin, whose theories informed much of Keith's work and who was a contemporary of Muir, was like Muir in many ways, which may have contributed to their

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<sup>29</sup> Muir probably took this phrase directly from Thoreau's “Walking” (1861), in which Thoreau wishes to “regard man as an inhabitant, or a part and parcel of Nature, rather than a member of society” (4). Emerson also speaks to the concept in *Nature*, though with his own transcendental interpretation: “I become a transparent eyeball; I am nothing; I see all; the currents of the Universal Being circulate through me; I am part of God” (29).

likeminded thoughts on aesthetics.<sup>30</sup> Just as Muir came from strict Scottish evangelical roots, learned to appreciate the world aesthetically from his experiences and painter friends, and held a lifelong fascination for the natural sciences of botany and geology, so, too, did Ruskin. According to Sara Atwood in her lecture “Ruskin and the Language of Nature,”

[Ruskin’s] evangelical upbringing taught him to see the Divine in nature. . . . His early exposure to Romantic art and literature informed his aesthetic response to the natural world; his study and practice of drawing taught him a different way of seeing it; while his interest in natural science, geology and mineralogy in particular, resulted in practical knowledge of scientific processes and developments.

As a result, Atwood explains, “Ruskin’s ideas about nature reflect the ‘interwoven temper’ of his mind, refusing to slot neatly into established categories.” Due to this range of influences, much of Ruskin’s theory, as I mentioned, thus rests somewhere between realism and idealism, while Muir’s aesthetic appreciation is similarly shaped by science and a spiritual connection with the natural world. Just, as Atwood describes, Ruskin “walked the countryside—and up and down his beloved Alps . . . sketch[ing], collect[ing] rocks, and stud[y]ng the plants and flowers, looking closely at all he saw,” John Muir embarked on his thousand-mile walk to the Gulf of Mexico, doing all the same. On

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<sup>30</sup> To clarify ideologies, Keith and Ruskin were of the same school of thought, with emphasis on expressing the overall human emotion in the face of nature. Muir took this idea beyond the exclusively human interest and instead sought out a more reciprocal relationship between humans and non-human nature. Cole focused primarily on landscape, glorifying nature and minimizing the human gaze, while Cooper grappled with the tensions between humans and nature but also saw potential for their coexistence.

Ruskin's journeys, according to Atwood, he "botanized, geologized and studied the weather, making careful records of his observations. He was not merely *in* the landscape, but *of* it." So, too, was Muir.

Both Ruskin and Muir explored an interconnectedness between humans and the plants and animals of the natural world. However, as mentioned earlier, Muir's outlook emphasized an all-encompassing reciprocal value of humans and nature, whereas Ruskin's was based on seeking truth on human terms. Terry Gifford, in "Muir's Mode of Reading Ruskin," best summarizes their similarities and differences: "Ruskin, essentially anthropocentrically, and Muir, essentially biocentrically, each confronted the dilemmas presented by human presence, influence, and responsibility on the earth" (83). In comparing Muir to Ruskin, it is also important to acknowledge Muir's outward dislike for Ruskin's theories, a sentiment that he expresses in a number of letters to his acquaintances. Gifford, however, argues that Muir was misreading Ruskin deliberately. Finding evidence in Muir's own copies of Ruskin, Gifford claims that "Muir was misreading Ruskin in 1873, for his own purposes, which were closer to Ruskin's than he cared to admit" (79). According to Gifford, Muir's notations in Ruskin's works, most indicatively his markings of "(Yo)" for Yosemite, are evidence that Muir was using "his reading of Ruskin at this time to inform his own thinking about Yosemite. . . . clearly relating Ruskin's images to his own field of study and producing new ways of thinking about his own mountains" (82). As I have pointed out, there *are* differences between the two figures; however, a study of Ruskin alongside Muir offers a lens through which we



might better understand Muir's aesthetic development and his uses of science and spirituality to maintain an aesthetic experience amidst wilderness.

Muir's sense of spirituality stemmed not only from his evangelical roots and inspiration from figures like Emerson and Thoreau, but also from a modification of these beliefs through his own experiences with the natural world. These experiences were informed by the deep connections that Muir sensed between all things in nature (humans included), and these deep connections were forged by a scientific understanding of all he saw in attendance with what he felt in nature's presence. The foundational moments of Muir's spiritual-scientific aesthetic occurred during his trek by foot from the Midwest down to Florida in 1867—his nature travel log entitled *A Thousand-Mile Walk to the Gulf*. One of the entries that provides evidence of his scientific inclinations in conjunction with his passion for the natural world follows:

I found splendid growths of shining-leaved *Ericaceae* (heathworts) for which the Alleghany Mountains are noted. Also ferns of which *Osmunda cinnamomea* (Cinnamon Fern) is the largest and perhaps the most abundant. *Osmunda regalis* (Flowering Fern) is also common here, but not large. In Wood's and Gray's Botany *Osmunda cinnamomea* is said to be a much larger fern than *Osmunda claytoniana*. This I found to be true in Tennessee and southward, but in Indiana, part of Illinois, and Wisconsin the opposite is true. Found here the beautiful, sensitive *Schrankia*, or sensitive brier. It is a long, prickly, leguminous vine, with dense heads of small, yellow, fragrant flowers. . . . How little we know as yet of the life of plants – their hopes and fears, pains and enjoyments! (18)

In this entry, Muir documents his knowledge of scientific and common names for plants, referencing scientific authors Wood and Gray, whose books he had acquired during his short time at university. As Donald Worster explains, Muir's traveling library during his journey to the Gulf included "a collection of Robert Burns poems, John Milton's *Paradise Lost* . . . the new Testament . . . [and, finally] Alphonso Wood's *A Class Book of Botany, being Outlines of the Structure, Physiology, and Classifications of Plants; with a Flora of the United States and Canada*" (120-121). This last book would be central to his learning alongside his own experiences in the natural world with each place he visited. As we see in the passage above, Muir relies on Wood's findings ("*Osmunda cinnamomea* is said to be a much larger fern than *Osmunda claytoniana*"), but he also contributes his own observations from his work on the ground ("This I found to be true in Tennessee and southward, but in Indiana, part of Illinois, and Wisconsin the opposite is true"). These notes are evident of an experiential learning, a search for scientific veracity that goes beyond fact and extends to one's own pursuit for truth. Like Keith's painting, this aspect of Muir's writing reflects Ruskin's qualification for the "faithful conception of any natural objects" (*MP* I, 110). As for Ruskin's ultimate criteria of expressing "thoughts and feelings" (*MP* I, 110), Muir's final note in this entry occurs as his scientific inclination gives way to passion. When he exclaims, "How little we know as yet of the life of plants—their hopes and fears, pains and enjoyments!"<sup>31</sup> we can discern his desire

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<sup>31</sup> This exclamation is also reminiscent of Susan Fenimore Cooper, who took great care to engage in a deeper understanding of the natural world around her. As a result, her descriptions of nature are often personified, much like Muir's. For example in her Spring section of *Rural Hours*, Susan Fenimore writes: "How rapid is the advance of spring at this moment of her joyous approach! And how beautiful are all the plants in their graceful growth, the humblest herb unfolding its every leaf in beauty, full of purpose and power!" (37). Other moments of Susan Fenimore's use of personification include her description of "a

to know the plants on a more personal level, to understand them on the human terms designated by Ruskin.

Muir attempts to establish the human-nature connection, however, by attributing human qualities—“hopes and fears, pains and enjoyments”—to the plants. While this method fulfills a means of expressing human emotions, it also contradicts Ruskin’s beliefs by invoking the “pathetic fallacy,” which Ruskin condemns in *Modern Painters*. With this theory, Ruskin seeks to highlight “the difference between the ordinary, proper, and true appearances of things to us; and the extraordinary, or false appearances, when we are under the influence of emotion, or contemplative fancy” (*MP IV*, 175). The latter is what Ruskin calls the pathetic fallacy—in short, a moment when one is overwhelmed with his/her own emotions and assigns human traits to nonhuman objects. In wondering about the “hopes and fears, pains and enjoyments” of the plants he studies, Muir becomes guilty of what Ruskin warns against. A deeper look into this theory, however, reveals that Ruskin’s main trepidation regarding the pathetic fallacy is that it interferes with truth—with that first necessity to recognize an object as itself. Ruskin explains, “the spirit of truth must guide us” (*MP IV*, 178). As Muir’s digression into his passion for plants here is preceded by a detailed scientific analysis of the same, his use of pathetic fallacy is of an acceptable sort—if not to Ruskin, then to Muir. In this case, he falls somewhere just outside of Ruskin’s category of “the man who perceives rightly in spite of his feelings, and to whom the primrose is for ever [*sic*] nothing else than itself—a little flower

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mingled society of plants” (49), her observation of “native plants, gathering, as if out of affection, about the roots of the fallen forest trees” (64), and her note on how certain “plants seem to have an aversion to the soil or climate of Europe” (172), amongst many more.

apprehended in the very plain and leafy fact of it, whatever and how many soever the associations and passions may be, that crowd around it” (*MP IV*, 179). Muir’s passions might even prepare his thinking for closer scientific analysis of the plants as they are, for Richard Grusin notes, “Such epiphanic experiences are not dissipating but rather make one’s mind more suited for such purposeful activities as natural history or scientific observation” (49). Muir recognizes the plants in themselves via his scientific notations; however, his use of the pathetic fallacy in assigning emotions to the plants is Muir’s way of seeking a connection to nature that informs his spirituality. He sees truth, but he also feels a kinship with the world whereas Ruskin would instead emphasize human understanding separate from nature. Muir’s use of pathetic fallacy thus expands upon Ruskin’s in order to explore a deeper understanding between humans and the natural world. In Muir’s own words, “From the dust of the earth, from the common elementary fund, the creator has made *Homo sapiens*. From the same material he has made every other creature, however noxious and insignificant to us. They are earth-born companions and our fellow mortals” (*A Thousand-Mile Walk* 72-3). Thus, Muir seeks out a communal relationship with the world, in which humans and nature and all of its creatures are but agents in a single interactive natural environment.

It is important here to counteract criticisms that Muir’s personification of nature is necessarily anthropocentric because that is quite the opposite of what he intends. Rather than placing humans at the center of everything, he continually emphasizes a reciprocal relationship between humans and nature, placing equal value on each. While he applies personification by giving human traits to nonhuman aspects of the natural world, he

correspondingly reverses the descriptive device. In *A Thousand-Mile Walk to the Gulf*, for example, Muir reflects:

As I gazed from one to another of the palm-crowned keys, enclosed by the sunset-coloured dome, my eyes chanced to rest upon the *fluttering sails* of a Yankee schooner that was threading the tortuous channel in the coral reef leading to the harbour of Cedar Keys. ‘There,’ thought I, ‘perhaps I may sail in that *pretty white moth*.’ She proved to be the schooner *Island Belle*. (75, emphasis added)

Just as Muir attributes human qualities to nonhuman objects, so too does he relate features of a human-made object to that of a nonhuman species. In this particular moment, he compares the “fluttering sails of a Yankee schooner” to a “pretty white moth”—turning the scales of Ruskin’s pathetic fallacy. This instance takes to another level Muir’s inclination to discern the natural in the human just as easily as seeing the human in the natural. He places himself, creatures of nature, and everything of the world around him within a reciprocal relationship. His efforts to attain this connectivity, once again, all harken back to his spiritual aesthetic, in which he might “blend with the landscape, and become part and parcel of nature” (107).

For Ruskin, the landscape painter must aim to meet two ends:

the first, to induce in the spectator’s mind the faithful conception of any natural objects whatsoever; the second, to guide the spectator’s mind to those objects most worthy of its contemplation, and to inform him of the thoughts and feelings with which these were regarded by the artist himself. (*MP I*, 110)

In short, the first end seeks to capture the visual and material truth of the scene represented, while the second end communicates a human emotion or feeling attached to the same. According to Ruskin, the first end could be reached without achieving the second end; however it would be “altogether impossible to reach the second without having previously met the first.” Thus, for Ruskin, while the representation of human thoughts would be the “only important end of all art,” the physical representation of facts would be the “foundation of all art” (*MP I*, 113)—or, for Muir, a scientific understanding of nature would be necessary for attaining a human spiritual-aesthetic appreciation for it.

However, an additional point of conflict between the ideologies of Muir and Ruskin involves Ruskin’s concept of “Mountain Gloom.” In contrast with “Mountain Glory,” Ruskin claims that “no good or lovely thing exists in this world without its correspondent darkness; . . . the universe presents itself continually to mankind under the stern aspect of warning, or of choice, the good and the evil set on the right hand and left” (*MP IV*, 366). Beyond doubt, Ruskin’s thoughts here of “gloom” versus “glory” echo the fear and awe of Burke’s sublime so present in the works of Cooper and Cole. His sentiment takes on a harmony in nature that balances light and dark, good and evil—but it is very different from Muir’s sense of harmony that involves a greater oneness with the world as a whole. According to Worster, Muir “challenged Ruskin’s admission that nature could be foul or in any way hostile or threatening to humans” (187). Even in life-threatening circumstances, Muir refused to acknowledge the harmful side of nature. His resolve was, in part, likely due to his revelation during a night spent in Bonaventure

Cemetery in Savannah, Georgia in 1867. In *A Thousand-Mile Walk to the Gulf*, he ponders:

On no subject are our ideas more warped and pitiable than on death. Instead of the sympathy, the friendly union, of life and death so apparent in Nature, we are taught that death is an accident, a deplorable punishment for the oldest sin, the arch-enemy of life. . . . But let children walk with Nature, let them see the beautiful blendings and communions of death and life, their joyous inseparable unity, as taught in woods and meadows, plains and mountains and streams of our blessed star, and they will learn that death is stingless indeed, and as beautiful as life, and that the grave has no victory, for it never fights. All is divine harmony.

(42)

For Muir, life and death were not of the Ruskinian “glory” and “gloom,” but rather were evidence of a harmony of continuous cycles. Not only does Muir invoke his spirituality in recognizing a “divine” harmony, but he also recognizes, via his knowledge of natural science and experiential learning, that when life meets death, things decompose and start life anew in a union that fuses everything in



Alana Jajko, *Pencil Sketch of Oak Grove in Savannah, Georgia*, 2014

and of the world in complete accord.<sup>32</sup> As Wattles explains, “coming across the sight of a decaying tree or a rotting carcass, Muir embraced a long-term perspective of death as nourishing the soil for the next growth of life” (68).

In other situations, Muir is able to see past the “gloom” of life-threatening circumstances in nature by further implementing his knowledge as a naturalist. As Worster explains, “Muir went to extreme lengths to assure himself and his readers that the violence nature seemed to threaten was in truth rather harmless” (226). One such occurrence was his experience in a tumultuous storm, documented in “A Wind Storm in the Forests”—a chapter in his book *The Mountains of California* (1875). Venturing out into the storm, Muir exalts the force of the wind and admires the sway of the branches above. “[T]hen it occurred to me,” he writes, “that it would be a fine thing to climb one of the trees to obtain a wider outlook and get my ear close to the Æolian music of its topmost needles.” Muir acknowledges that “under the circumstances the choice of a tree was a serious matter,” and he proceeds to use his scientific and experiential knowledge of the species to choose the tree that would safely hold him in the storm. He proceeds to deliberate:

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<sup>32</sup> Thoreau also considered the cycles of life and death, particularly in his “Spring” chapter of *Walden*. For example, in the following passage, he writes:

There was a dead horse in the hollow by the path to my house, which compelled me sometimes to go out of my way, especially in the night when the air was heavy, but the assurance it gave me of the strong appetite and inviolable health of Nature was my compensation for this. I love to see that Nature is so rife with life that myriads can be afforded to be sacrificed and suffered to prey on one another; that tender organizations can be so serenely squashed out of existence like pulp—tadpoles which herons gobble up, and tortoises and toads run over in the road; and that sometimes it has rained flesh and blood! (316)



One whose instep was not very strong seemed in danger of being blown down, or of being struck by others in case they should fall; another was branchless to a considerable height above the ground, and at the same time too large to be grasped with arms and legs in climbing; while others were not favorably situated for clear views. After cautiously casting about, I made choice of the tallest of a group of Douglas Spruces that were growing close together like a tuft of grass, no one of which seemed likely to fall unless all the rest fell with it. (251)

Writing that he was “[a]ccustomed to climb[ing] trees in making botanical studies,” Muir uses his knowledge as a naturalist to choose his tree, climb it, and sway in its topmost branches without experiencing the fear or danger so indicative of Ruskin’s “gloom” and Burke’s sublime:

In its widest sweeps my tree-top described an arc of from twenty to thirty degrees, but I felt sure of its elastic temper, having seen others of the same species still more severely tried—bent almost to the ground indeed, in heavy snows—without breaking a fiber. I was therefore safe, and free to take the wind into my pulses and enjoy the excited forest from my superb outlook.

Clinging to the topmost branches, “like a bobo-link on a reed” (252), Muir is able to experience the storm without fear, defying Ruskin’s concept of “Mountain Gloom” and the twofold nature of the sublime. His aesthetic is one that maintains distance in another form. Rather than being physically distant from the source of sublimity, Muir ventures as close as possible to that source, becoming, once again, “part and parcel” of nature, allowing wild landscapes to envelop him completely. For Muir, the “safety” of the

aesthetic experience is attained, as demonstrated by the wind storm, through a combination of knowledge and faith. He implements scientific knowledge gained from observational learning and spirituality acquired from his religious background as tools that can be used by any individual to encounter wilderness from a perspective that advocates well-being and fellow-feeling, ultimately achieving a oneness with the world at large where society and wilderness might coexist.

Since Muir was able to attain an experience that overcame fear by applying science and faith, one might argue that his sublime is not sublime at all—for the Burkean sublime, as explained in the previous chapter, requires a twofold sensation of fear and awe. William Cronon, however, in “The Trouble with Wilderness,” suggests that Muir exemplified a “domesticated sublime” that entailed “giving way to a much more comfortable, almost sentimental demeanor.” While many, like Cooper and Cole, saw wilderness as embodying the power of the sublime, Cronon advocates that “wilderness was also being tamed.” This domesticated wilderness is in part what the national parks came to represent. By the second half of the nineteenth century, more tourists had begun to seek out wilderness “as a spectacle to be looked at and enjoyed for its great beauty” (75), and this trend only grew. As a result, the wilderness within the national parks became all the more constructed, all the more tame, and all the more safe from the fear instilled by the sublime. At the same time that the national parks were meant to preserve wilderness, they were also intended to provide for the enjoyment of society—something that entailed maintaining the idea of “wilderness” as a picturesque, pristine landscape. As explained in Chapter One, landscape architects like Frederick Law Olmsted designed

roads, vistas, and scenic promenades to showcase the best features of the parks from safe distances. I addressed a relinquishing of human agency to the growth of nature in order to mask the constructedness of these viewpoints (so that nature could grow back and cover certain boundaries); however, to some extent park officials are required to continuously trim branches and shape landscapes so that the overlooks can provide the same spectacular scene for years to come. Inevitably, the national parks come to embody a construction of wilderness inescapable from the human hand, a fact that reconciles Cooper's concerns for the coexistence of civilization and wilderness. This domesticated sublime wilderness is what most tourists would come to experience. To qualify Cronon's categorization of Muir within a "tamed" domesticated sublime, however, I must emphasize that Muir advocates another side to the sublime aesthetic of the parks, assigning more credit to the creative agency of nature itself to shape the landscapes we so admire. In *Our National Parks* (1901), Muir explains,

The old *rivers*, too, are growing longer, like healthy trees, gaining new branches and lakes as the residual *glaciers* at their highest sources on the mountains recede, while the rootlike branches in the flat *deltas* are at same time spreading farther and wider into the seas and *making new lands*. (3-4, emphasis added)

As Grusin suggests, "Muir's interest is not, as with Olmsted, in the artistic creation of the landscape by the relinquishment of human agency to nature but in the geological or ecological creation of the landscape by means of the aesthetic agency of glaciation" (51). Muir's acknowledgement of nature's more active role in aesthetics harkens back to his beliefs that humans share in a communal existence with all other parts of the natural

world. In recognizing and appreciating nature's power to shape itself, he places wilderness on a level equal to humankind. His conceptions go beyond relinquishing human agency to nature and rather celebrate nature's own act of creating without human interference. While human and natural agencies often intermingle in those scenic viewpoints at national parks, Muir acknowledges how the two act independently alongside one another as well. Thus, Muir also offers a consideration of wilderness that, in some ways, escapes the "tamed" element of Cronon's domesticated sublime, which suggests a direct human agency that throws the coexistence out of balance.

Cronon, however, does acknowledge the taming of wilderness not just by human agency "but also by those who most celebrated its inhuman beauty" (75) —in other words, not just by direct human influence on the physical environment, but also by how humans express their feelings about nature's beauty. This celebration, which Muir invokes through his passions arising from science and faith, is another factor that aided in diminishing fear and elevating awe in the face of the sublime wilderness. One major criterion for the domesticated sublime, according to Cronon, is "none of the fear or terror one finds in earlier writers" (75) like Cooper. As I have established, most tourists experience this form of the sublime at vistas and viewpoints. Muir's absence of fear, however, extends to areas beyond such human-made boundaries and into the wilder places of nature. In *Our National Parks*, he repeatedly addresses the issues of fear and danger:

When an excursion in the woods is proposed, all sorts of dangers are imagined,—snakes, bears, Indians. Yet it is far safer to wander in God’s woods than to travel on black highways or stay at home (28)

Fears vanish as soon as one is fairly free in the wilderness. . . .

Most of the dangers that haunt the unseasoned citizen are imaginary; the real ones are perhaps too few rather than too many for his good. (57)

Fear nothing. No town park you have been accustomed to saunter in is so free from danger as the Yellowstone. (58)

According to these selections, fear truly vanishes when one is “free in the wilderness,” free to “saunter.” Muir rather suggests leaving the paved pathways and getting lost in the deeper recesses of the national parks where wilderness truly reigns. He advocates exploring the depths of nature on foot instead of acting as the usual tourists, “content with what they can see from car windows or the verandas of hotels, and in going from place to place cling to their precious trains and stages like wrecked sailors to rafts.”<sup>33</sup> Fear is relinquished for Muir not only by faith because he is “in God’s woods” (28), but by his own knowledge as a naturalist. He even mentions a bear hunter who echoes Muir’s own sentiments of knowledge and fear, claiming that “the more he knew about bears, the more he respected them and the less he feared them” (180). Knowledge and spirituality guide

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<sup>33</sup> This sentiment resonated with future national park writer Edward Abbey who writes about “motorized tourists” in *Desert Solitaire* (1968): “They are being robbed and robbing themselves. So long as they are unwilling to crawl out of their cars they will not discover the treasures of the national parks and will never escape the stress and turmoil of the urban-suburban complexes which they had hoped, presumably, to leave behind for a while.” He poses the question that was also beginning to concern Muir: “How to pry the tourists out of their automobiles, out of their back-breaking upholstered mechanized wheelchairs and onto their feet, onto the strange warmth and solidity of Mother Earth again?” (51).

Muir through a wilderness that cooperates with the presence of humankind in a mutual relationship that renounces fear.

The examples above, in addition to earlier ones in Muir's ruminations on death in *A Thousand-Mile Walk to the Gulf* or his venture up a tree in a violent storm in "A Wind Storm in the Forests of Yuba," demonstrate Muir's use of knowledge and spirituality when in the wilderness—methods that can be applied by individuals appreciating the aesthetics of wilderness in the national parks today. While the vistas and viewpoints of the parks resolve the need externally for boundaries between society and wilderness that Cooper's work suggests, Muir illustrates another means by which we might experience the parks through his treatment of wilderness. His method challenges those physical boundaries and creates new internal ways of mediating human fear in the face of a sublime wilderness. Thus a new twofold experience in the national parks becomes that which we experience by two methods: (1) within the public/external safety of paved paths and vistas with wilderness at a distance, and (2) out in the deeper recesses of wilderness shielded behind our individual/internal knowledge of nature and feelings of faith. Both methods relinquish fear and instead promote an aesthetic that rather encourages a sustainable relationship between society and wilderness—realizing the parks as the mediator that Cooper requires as well as a basis for the fellow-feeling endorsed by Muir.

I would like to conclude this section by taking a moment for deeper reflection on the removal of fear and elevation of awe that characterize the aesthetic experience of the national parks. As I have established, both Cooper and Muir provide methods for

relinquishing fears, externally and internally respectively, in order to make way for a greater sense of admiration and wonder in the presence of nature. What I would like to emphasize is that these two methods also provide alternative experiences to serve the widest range of people visiting the national parks—those who would adhere to paths and overlooks, and those who would rather explore the uncharted portions of the parks. This wide range of experience, in addition to the removal of terror and emphasis of pure enjoyment, make the national parks all the more accessible to the public.<sup>34</sup> Whereas Cronon advocates a domesticated sublime to explain the loss of fear, I would rather suggest a shift from fear to awe in a kind of transfigured sublimity. Muir’s ability to recognize nature’s agency alongside his deeper endeavors off the beaten path of nature without fear suggests an immersion of humans in nature rather than a human domestication of nature. Thus, a transfigured sublime might better encapsulate the shift from fear to awe that functions within the national parks. Not only does this transfiguration from fright to veneration reflect a positive reciprocal relationship between humans and nature, but it also overlaps with the national parks as a symbol for evoking a sense of unity throughout the nation, providing the safest experience possible for the greatest number of people.<sup>35</sup> A culminating historical moment in this process was

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<sup>34</sup> In addition to the internal accessibility to wilderness attained through scientific knowledge described in this section, the next section on boundaries discusses Muir’s hand in supporting physical accessibility to the national parks themselves. His role was especially prevalent during the Hetch Hetchy Controversy, which I will discuss in more detail in the next section. As Worster explains, “Muir was compelled, if he wanted to defend Hetch Hetchy, to put forth a program of better roads and trails to bring people into its hidden recesses and make its beauty accessible” (438-9).

<sup>35</sup> I recognize that there are socio-economic problems that arise in my suggestion that the national parks are accessible to the “greatest number of people.” Costs of travel and entrance fees place certain limitations on who is able to access the parks. Instead, I more specifically refer to the “greatest number of people” in regards to their ability to engage in a safe aesthetic experience within the national parks. The multiple

Theodore Roosevelt's overnight camping trip with Muir in Yosemite in 1903, which I will discuss in the following section on boundaries in Muir's work.



### **Muir's Acceptance of Boundaries and a Resistance from the Human-Nature Coexistence**

Through a lens of boundaries, I discussed in Chapter One how Cooper introduces tools for mediating the sublime experience between humans and nature that would later be used to establish the bounds of the national parks. More importantly, I detailed how these tools function to reconcile the divide between humans and nature and reinvent boundaries as a network necessary to the benefit of both society and wilderness. Cooper prescribes laws in *The Pioneers* to correct the “wasty ways” of humankind by placing hunting regulations on local species that are similar to legislation that created the national parks and regulations to follow. I also addressed Cooper's consideration of property ownership, not only of American Indian rights to the land, but also of private-public ownership where privately-owned land is used freely by the public in a way that creates the illusion of public ownership. This example, too, reflects concerns regarding Native rights to national park territory as well as park status as government-owned property to be enjoyed by the public with an aura of national ownership. On a material level, the bounds

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possibilities for experiencing wilderness in the parks make them accessible to a wider range of people physically and mentally.



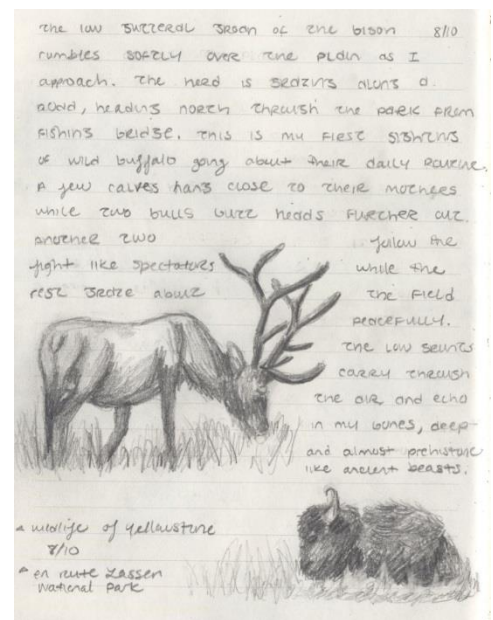
created by this legislation collectively serve as a mediator between humans and nature for their successful coexistence, while on a more symbolic level the parks represent Cooper's Rousseauian and Burkean-influenced social and political ideologies. As a result, the parks have come to embody, in form and function, an America of both civilization and nature.

In bringing John Muir into the discussion of boundaries, I intend to further destabilize the early American myth that humans and nature are separate entities by tracing both humans' and nature's ultimate resistance to boundaries and how Muir comes to accept a divide for the sake of preservation. While Muir recognized the relationship between humans and nature, he did eventually realize that wilderness needed to be protected from the damaging actions of humankind. By protecting our environment, we would be guarding ourselves against our own wasteful and destructive practices. The only way to safeguard nature would be to place boundaries upon it, creating what would become the national parks and other protected wilderness areas. While Muir's approach of experiencing the natural world through science and faith would offer certain boundaries that allowed for a closer, personal relationship to nature, the need for boundaries on a grander scale was a pressing matter for the sake of conservation.

I begin this section by tracing Muir in his position between society and wilderness as the embodiment of Cooper's character Natty Bumppo. On the cusp between two worlds, Muir came to realize the necessity for boundaries between the growing progress of civilization and the natural world. I will address his part in the establishment of Yosemite National Park by referring to his essays "The Treasures of the Yosemite" and

“Features of the Proposed Yosemite National Park” (1890), as well as the frustration to follow as he realized the inclination for such boundaries to be changeable and evasive because humans and nature cannot be divided. Muir’s last fight for conservation during the Hetch Hetchy Controversy brings to light most effectively why boundaries between humans and nature would be so hard to establish permanently. The debate challenged the human right to natural resources by breaking the national park bounds with a dam, and its results revealed that humans were more tied to the natural world than the preconceived divide suggests. Thus, I follow Muir’s contributions to the national park movement as a way of revealing the tendency of humans and nature to resist boundaries,<sup>36</sup> even though the divide is intended for the benefit of both—a paradox resulting from the fact that humans and nature are ultimately inextricable.

During his early years, Muir was occupied as an inventor—ironically contributing



Alana Jajko, *Journal Page on the Wildlife of Yellowstone National Park*, 2014

<sup>36</sup> Nature, though arguably not sentient, can resist boundaries in the way that plants and animals, for example, sometimes resist containment. Plants grow wild, and thus, as discussed in Chapter One, need to be trimmed by humans in order to maintain ideal scenic viewpoints at national park vistas. Likewise, animals often do not adhere to the invisible boundaries that designate national parks and will wander unknowingly in and out of bounds. As historian Karl Jacoby explains, wild animals of the national parks like elk “regularly tore down or leapt over fences designed for livestock, while antelope, because of their small size, often slipped through openings.” In spite of efforts to keep wildlife within park bounds and domesticated animals out, park officials were constantly required “to drive [wild animals] back over Yellowstone’s borders” (141-142).

to the progress of society by creating machines that performed tasks more quickly and efficiently—so that he would have more time to spend in nature. He was longing to find his life's purpose, and “the cause of promoting modernity and progress,” for the time being, “had become his personal cause” (Worster 106). At this point, Muir was a being of civilization. Everything changed, however, when in March of 1867, he was nearly blinded in a factory incident. When his sight was restored, Muir made a decision to leave the industrial world for good, and was, as Worster explains, “determined to see as much of wild nature as he could before it passed before him” (114). Muir's decision to walk to the Gulf of Mexico in 1867 was a reflection of this resolve and his desire to escape the pressures of civilization, not unlike Cooper's hero Natty Bumppo. While Muir disliked what Worster calls the “constraints [of society] that had been pressing him down into a mold of conformity” (119), Natty leaves the town of Templeton “weary of living in clearings, and where the hammer is sounding in my ears from sunrise to sundown” (*Pioneers* 453). Both believe that they are “form'd for the wilderness” (454), and long to leave the troubles of the civilized world behind. As I addressed in Chapter One, however, Natty is a character of ambiguity, existing somewhere between wilderness and civilization. Just as he intends to escape society by heading West at the end of *The Pioneers*, Natty Bumppo is paradoxically “the foremost in that band of pioneers who are opening the way for the march of the nation across the continent” (456). He evades civilization temporarily by venturing into a western wilderness, yet inevitably signals the beginning of Western expansion as he encounters the society for which he has paved the way in the next book of the chronology, *The Prairie*. Like Natty, Muir, in his walk down

to the Gulf, not only became what Worster calls, “[a] runaway from civilization,” but also “learned that freedom from human affairs could never be absolute” (122). As Worster goes on to explain, “Muir began his journey out of a desire to escape the snares of society, but his overland route, which followed established arteries of travel and commerce, would necessarily take him through a human community” (121). Unlike Natty, who refuses the gift of “new-fashioned money” (*Pioneers* 455) for his journey west, Muir had to rely on American dollars for food and board along his route. In an America much more developed than Natty’s, Muir’s inability to completely escape society also provided a comfort, because he was, Worster explains, “unwilling to abandon his books, science, or hairbrush” (121). Thus, Muir comes to embody a kind of Natty Bumppo of his day, longing to live a life of wilderness but not wholly able to break away from the tangle of civilization.

While living on the cusp of society and wilderness, Muir also came to adopt a sense of the need for conservation of animal species similar to Natty’s concerns as Cooper’s hero sees citizens of Templeton killing for sport. In *The Pioneers*, Natty continually laments the “wasty ways” (248, 265, 336, 356) of humankind, be it the mass shooting of passenger pigeons, which are now an extinct species, or the immense capture of fish from Otsego Lake. Natty laments that it is “sinful and wasteful to catch more than can be eat” (266). Similarly, in *A Thousand-Mile Walk to the Gulf*, Muir finds himself repulsed by the sport of hunting. While in Florida, Muir is invited to join a deer hunt with a Captain Simmons and an ex-judge who is also boarding with the captain. He records the events of the day and reflects:

The captain, the judge, and myself stood at different stations where the deer was expected to pass, while a brother of the captain entered the woods to arouse the game from cover. The one deer that he started took a different direction from any which this particular old buck had ever been known to take in times past, and in so doing was cordially cursed as being the ‘d\*\*\*\*dest deer that ever ran unshot’. To me it appeared as ‘d\*\*\*\*dest’ work to slaughter God’s cattle for sport. ‘They were made for us,’ say these self-approving preachers; ‘for our food, our recreation, or other uses not yet discovered.’ As truthfully we might say on behalf of a bear, when he deals successfully with an unfortunate hunter, ‘Men and other bipeds were made for bears, and thanks be to God for claws and teeth so long.’ . . . . Well, I have precious little sympathy for the selfish propriety of civilised man, and if a war of races should occur between the wild beasts and Lord Man, I would be tempted to sympathise with the bears. (65)

Like Natty, Muir cannot see the sense in hunting for the sake of enjoyment, and he detests the assumption that everything on earth was put there for the use of humankind. It is important to acknowledge, however, that Muir, unlike Natty, was not a hunter. Rather than live off the land, Muir more often than not found sustenance on bread alone when in the wilderness. His dislike for the sport of hunting was likely due to his recognition of equality among all of God’s creations, seeing little difference in value between humans and animals. He seems to have felt that things were made for the use of animals and plants just as well as humans. Regardless, just as Natty Bumpo’s concerns indicate Cooper’s own early environmental thinking, Muir’s reflection here is significant of his

growing conservation ethic. It is also indicative of Muir's emergent realization that although humans and nature are of one and the same, certain boundaries would be necessary for preserving the beauty of wilderness against the predominant mode of thinking that all natural resources "were made for us . . . for our food, our recreation, or other uses not yet discovered" (*Thousand-Mile Walk* 65).

During his journey south, Muir initially intended to continue to South America in the footsteps of his scientific hero Alexander Von Humboldt.<sup>37</sup> By the time he reached Florida, however, Muir had contracted malaria and was forced to take an alternative route for his health. The culmination of Muir's thousand-mile walk to the Gulf thus unexpectedly brought him (like Natty) West, but to the mountains of California, a place he would fall in love with and call home for the rest of his life. During his first few years in the Yosemite Valley, Muir took up employment under James Hutchings, who had set up a hotel and begun to promote tourism of the area (Worster 167-8). Hutchings and other entrepreneurs, however, soon began to press claims for private ownership of their portions of the valley. While Muir never outwardly expressed his opinion on the matter, his correspondent Jeanne Carr was "in favor of giving the center of the valley to Hutchings if it meant keeping roads and tourist masses out." Not unlike how Cooper enforced his private ownership of the Three-Mile Point for its protection, Carr believed that private ownership of this national treasure would better serve its preservation.

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<sup>37</sup> As an explorer, writer, scientist, and humanist, Humboldt was a well-known intellectual of the nineteenth century. His book *Cosmos: A Sketch of the Physical Description of the Universe* (1845) would have been especially influential to Muir as it suggests a vision of humans and nature as integrated halves of a single whole. As Laura Dassow Walls explains, one of Muir's dreams was "to be a Humboldt" and one way to do this would be to embark on "a long walking tour from Wisconsin through the southern United States to South America" (291).

However, in 1872, the U.S. Supreme Court turned down Hutchings' land claim and the "valley forever remained the property of the American people" (169). Years before Hutchings' claims, in 1864, Abraham Lincoln had signed a bill "giving Yosemite Valley . . . and the Mariposa Grove of sequoias, together an area of 40,000 acres, to the state of California to preserve for public use and recreation" (170). Muir, however, believed that the best way to preserve the valley would be its transference to federal ownership like Yellowstone, which was established as a national park in 1872. In Muir's view, this federal ownership would be another kind of private ownership that would protect the valley while still leaving it accessible to the enjoyment of the public—again, not unlike the private-public function of Cooper's Three-Mile Point. For Muir, like Cooper, this kind of ownership might provide a necessary boundary for regulating the damage that he was beginning to see as human activity disrupted the sanctity of the valley. State ownership was proving to make the valley more susceptible to corruption and for-profit development. With federal ownership, there would instead be a kind of transcendental or ultimate authority to oversee and protect the area. Thus, Muir's fight for a Yosemite National Park began.



Alana Jajko, *Photograph of Yosemite Valley*, 2014

The question remains: Why would Muir agree to boundaries in a world where he saw humans and nature united? According to Worster, Muir saw that the valley floor of Yosemite was “marred by a repulsive saloon, the repugnant odor of a pig sty, fields plowed up for crops or fenced for cattle, acres upon acres of tree stumps, overall a tacky commercialization” (312). Even beyond the domain frequented by tourists, Muir recognized a “damaged landscape, the vegetation devastated by too many seasons of too many sheep” with a result of “diminished tree and wildflower richness, trampled meadows, and muddied waters” (312). Thus, the tourist population and the free range of domesticated animals within the valley were, in the eyes of Muir, contributing to an imbalance in the harmonic order of humans and nature. As a result, he began to write, sharing the beauty of the Yosemite Valley with the world and spreading awareness of the



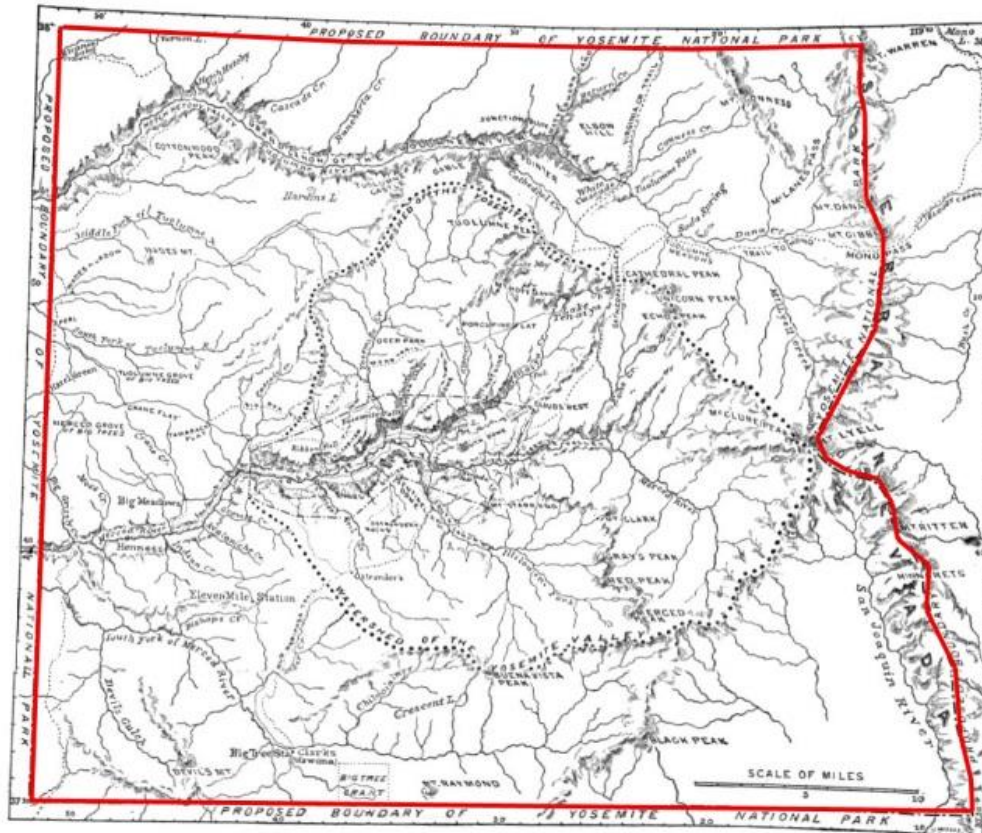
necessity to preserve it from damaging human activities. Two of Muir's most important essays on the topic became "The Treasures of the Yosemite" and "Features of the Proposed Yosemite National Park," both of which he wrote for the New York magazine *The Century* in 1890. In the first article, published in August of that year, Muir details some of his own experiences in the valley while also emphasizing that the area is "surely worth saving, whether for beauty, science, or bald use." He goes on to explain:

But as yet only the isolated Mariposa Grove has been reserved as a park for public use and pleasure. Were the importance of our forests at all understood by the people in general, even from an economic standpoint their preservation would call forth the most watchful attention of the Government. At present, however, every kind of destruction is moving on with accelerated speed. ("Treasures")

Echoing Natty Bumppo's mantra against "wasty ways," Muir goes on to stress the destruction of lumbering, highlighting that "waste far exceeds use" in mill operations. Likewise, he emphasizes the "comprehensive destruction caused by 'sheepmen' whose herds "are driven to the mountain pastures every summer, and desolation follows them." According to Muir, "[e]very garden within reach is trampled, the shrubs are stripped of leaves as if devoured by locusts, and the woods are burned to improve the pasturage." These operations are exactly what Muir deems should call forth "the most watchful attention of the Government" (591) to protect the valley as a national park.

Muir's second article, published in September of 1890, serves as more of a travel guide to emphasize Yosemite's "use as a pleasure ground" should it be designated as a national park. In "Features of the Proposed Yosemite National Park," Muir describes

some of the park's best and most accessible attributes while also stressing its protection “for the use and recreation of the people” (614). Along with the original version of this second article published by *The Century*, Muir even included a map of the Yosemite region showing present reservation land, the watershed of the valley, and approximate limits of the proposed national park.



“The above map represents the limits of the park as proposed by Mr. Muir and as advocated before the Committee on Public Lands of the House of Representatives. As we go to press, the Committee seems disposed to extend the north and south limits eastward to the Nevada line, thus adding an equal amount to the area here indicated. The honor of introducing the National Park bill belongs to General William Vandever of California. -EDITOR” (written by Robert Underwood Johnson to accompany Muir’s map in “Features of the Proposed Yosemite National Park,” red outline added to emphasize boundaries)

His inclusion of this map in the second article coincides visually with Muir’s rumination on boundaries in the first article, where he states:

the branching cañons and valleys of the basins of the streams that pour into Yosemite are as *closely related to it as are the fingers to the palm of the hand*—as the branches, foliage, and flowers of a tree to the trunk. Therefore, very naturally, all the fountain region above Yosemite, with its peaks, cañons, snow fields, glaciers, forests, and streams, should be included in the park to make it an *harmonious unit instead of a fragment*, great though the fragment be; while to the westward, below the valley, the boundary might be extended with great advantage far enough to comprehend the Fresno, Mariposa, Merced, and Tuolumne groves of big trees, three of which are on roads leading to the valley, while all of them are in the midst of conifers scarcely less interesting than the colossal brown giants themselves. (591-592, emphasis added)

While Muir concedes to the need for boundaries in order to preserve the beauty of the Yosemite Valley, the boundaries that he proposes in this selection and in the map above respect boundaries already naturally formed. He acknowledges a necessity for a divide between humans and nature, but he is able to retain some sense of harmony in the world by recognizing a smaller example of unity within the Yosemite ecosystem. Thus, Muir argues, the features that make up Yosemite are essential to its whole, just “as are the fingers to the palm of the hand” (591). His consideration of park bounds emphasizes a “harmonious unit instead of a fragment” (591-92).

In October 1890, Muir’s efforts were, to some extent, met with success. “An act to set apart certain tracts of land in the State of California as forest reservations” was passed on the first of the month. The act laid out particular boundaries, many of those

suggested by Muir, and set aside lands within these bounds to be “reserved and withdrawn from settlement, occupancy, or sale under the laws of the United States, and set apart as reserved forest lands.” Additionally, “That said reservation shall be under the exclusive control of the Secretary of the Interior, whose duty it shall be, as soon as practicable, to make and publish such rules and regulations as he may deem necessary or proper for the care and management of the same” (U.S Congress, *An Act to set* 650-1). Finally, Yosemite National Park had been placed under the protection of the federal government. The only stipulation, however, was that the Yosemite Valley itself and the Mariposa Big Tree Grove would remain, for the time being, under state control, as designated by the act passed under Lincoln in 1864 that had previously set aside this land for preservation. Muir’s battle for federal control over the entirety of the valley was far from over.

By 1903, Muir had spent nearly a decade, according to Ken Burns’ documentary *America’s Best Idea*, “struggling to have the Yosemite Valley given back to the federal government and made part of the larger Yosemite National Park, but nothing he seemed to say or do had proven successful” (Episode Two, 1:17:11-1:17:26). It wasn’t until he received a letter from “an influential man from Washington” (*Life and Letters* 374) that Muir regained hope for this ultimate goal. This man was President Theodore Roosevelt, and during his visit the two men would bond over a common passion for the natural world. Their guide, Charlie Leidig, writes:

Around the campfire Roosevelt and Muir talked far into the night regarding Muir’s glacial theory of the formation of Yosemite Valley. They also talked a

great deal about the protection of forests in general and Yosemite in particular. I heard them discussing the setting aside of other areas in the United States for park purposes. (*ABI*, Episode Two, 1:22:55-1:23:19)

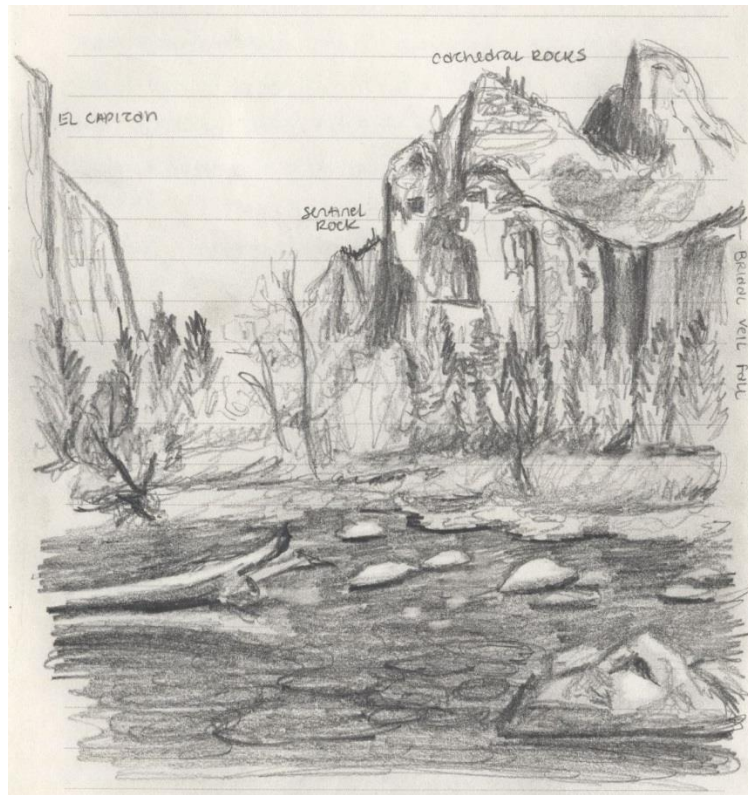
As a result, Muir had gained an influential friend, and as the proposed boundaries for Muir's Yosemite National Park came to a decision by Congress, Theodore Roosevelt threw in his support. By 1905, an act "Regranting to the United States of America the Yosemite Valley and the land embracing the 'Mariposa Big Tree Grove'" had been passed (Statutes of California). To his editor at *The Century*, Robert Underwood Johnson, who had also pursued this goal, Muir wrote "Yes, my dear Johnson, sound the loud timbrel and let every Yosemite tree and stream rejoice!" (*LL* 350). All of Yosemite was finally under federal protection, and the boundaries that Muir saw as necessary for preserving the balance for a human-nature unit were established. Up until this point, he had temporarily been forced to become a person of civilization once again. He reflects:

I am now an experienced lobbyist; my political education is complete. Have attended Legislature, made speeches, explained, exhorted, persuaded every mother's son of the legislators, newspaper reporters, and everybody else who would listen to me. And now that the fight is finished and my education as a politician and lobbyist is finished, I am almost finished myself. (*LL* 350)

But Muir's fight was far from finished. While the boundaries around Yosemite had been officially designated under the federal government, this fact did not mean they were permanent. The American "Manifest Destiny" belief that humans had a God-given right to natural resources would come to destabilize those bounds. On April 18, 1906, an

earthquake devastated San Francisco and instigated an already-growing concern about finding a water source for a city rapidly increasing in population (Nash 161).

Immediately, city officials applied for a plan to dam the Tuolumne River to flood the Hetch Hetchy Valley. The action met resistance from what Nash calls, “the flourishing cult of wilderness,” especially because the dam would affect an area residing within Yosemite National Park—within the bounds that Muir had fought so hard to institute. While opponents of the dam, like Muir, defended the human need for nature’s beauty as a place of spiritual healing, proponents argued for the more urgent human necessity for inexpensive water. As a result, Nash explains, “For the first time in the American experience the competing claims of wilderness and civilization to a specific area received a thorough hearing before a national audience” (162). Muir came to the forefront of the debate, revising a portion of “Features of the Proposed Yosemite National Park” to emphasize the beauty and importance of the Hetch Hetchy Valley area of the park. His revision became a chapter entitled “Hetch Hetchy Valley” within a book called *The Yosemite*, published in 1912 by *The Century*. As a whole, it would serve as a guide book, but the individual chapter on Hetch Hetchy, Worster points out, “quickly became a weapon in the interminable struggle to prevent San Francisco’s dam from taking over that undeveloped valley” (449).



Alana Jajko, *Pencil Sketch of the Yosemite Valley*, 2014

In the Hetch Hetchy chapter, Muir emphasizes that “water as pure and abundant can be got from outside of the people’s park, in a dozen different places” (500), but those in favor of the dam in Hetch Hetchy argued that it would be a comparatively cheaper source. In addition to this “not here” stance that was rebutted by proponents of the dam for the sake of frugality, Muir also draws upon his spiritual and scientific aesthetics for the case against the dam. He invokes the scientific aesthetic, for example, when he recalls a trip to Hetch Hetchy in 1907 with painter William Keith. He records how the artist “wandered day after day along the river and through the groves and gardens, studying the wonderful scenery; and, after making about forty sketches, declared with enthusiasm that although its walls were less sublime in height, in picturesque beauty and charm Hetch Hetchy surpassed even Yosemite” (502). Thus, Muir relays how Keith was

able to assign merit to the Hetch Hetchy Valley by an aesthetic informed by scientific observation. Likewise, Muir invokes his spiritual aesthetic, claiming “[t]hese temple destroyers, devotees of ravaging commercialism, seem to have a perfect contempt for Nature, and, instead of lifting their eyes to the God of the mountains, lift them to the Almighty Dollar” (503). By applying religious diction to his argument, Muir sought to reveal how an immoral idolization of money fed the greed that drove those in favor of a dam. While science and spirituality inform most of Muir’s thinking, he also implemented these methods in order to appeal to a larger national audience, secular and religious alike.

The most significant point of debate, however, became a consideration of the park’s use value. Muir rebuffs his opponents, claiming that “[t]heir arguments are curiously like those of the devil, devised for the destruction of the first garden—so much of the very best Eden fruit *going to waste*; so much of the best Tuolumne water and Tuolumne scenery *going to waste*” (502, emphasis added). The waste stressed here, however, is not Natty Bumppo’s environmental awareness of the “wasty ways” of humankind taking more than it needs, but rather refers to the natural resources that go to waste because they are not used to the benefit of human civilization—in other words, waste from the overuse of natural resources versus waste of not using those resources at all. As discussed earlier, Muir detested the assumption that everything in nature was meant for the commodified use of humankind. He insists, “Everybody needs beauty as well as bread, places to play in and pray in, where Nature may heal and cheer and give strength to body and soul alike” (500). For Muir, the use provided by Yosemite National Park was of an intangible sort, as a spiritually rejuvenating source rather than a cost-



effective trove of resources to be tapped. These two opposing definitions of “use” forced people to rethink conservation. The distinction became a front that divided Muir from Gifford Pinchot,<sup>38</sup> for example, who believed, “The fundamental principle of the whole conservation policy is that of use, to take every part of the land and its resources and put it to that use in which it will best serve the most people” (U.S. Congress, *Hetch Hetchy* 25). One commonality between the two definitions of use, however, was the inextricable element of humans alongside nature. Muir’s definition recognized a spiritual union between humans and nature, whereas Pinchot’s underlined the benefits of natural resources to human material survival. Muir advocated a need for boundaries in order to mediate Pinchot’s utilitarianism and to elevate the importance of spiritual and recreational value.

Despite Muir’s efforts against the dam, the use of nature for basic human survival needs prevailed, and by 1913, the debate culminated in government approval for its construction. Ultimately, as Nash explains, “mere preservation of a beautiful, romantic, and picturesque spot . . . for esthetic [*sic*] purposes” could not conceivably take precedence over “the urgent needs of great masses of human beings for the necessities of life” (178). Thus, the Hetch Hetchy Controversy became the first major battle between wilderness preservation and traditional notions of human rights to use natural resources.

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<sup>38</sup> According to Worster, Muir and Pinchot began as friends when they became acquainted in 1896 during a tour of the western forests. Muir joined the group of “distinguished commissioners to inspect the public lands and recommend new conservation measures” (349), but Pinchot often led him away on side excursions or “small boyish rebellions” (351). These moments of bonding, however, would not result in a life-long friendship. Eventually, Muir and Pinchot would realize “differences in values and ambitions, differences that would split conservationists into separate, sometimes contending, camps” (352-3)—as was the case with Hetch Hetchy.

Muir's fight to establish Yosemite as a national park, as a wild place in bounds, led him to accept boundaries between humans and nature as necessary for preserving a communal balance between the two. The Hetch Hetchy Controversy forced him to defend these boundaries, but the results of the debate revealed an instability within them, forcing those borders to change under the pressure of a human resistance to them. Because humans had become accustomed to living without restrictions alongside the natural world, the boundaries of the national park interfered with a method of coexistence already in place. While Muir's fight for boundaries was in the best interest of preserving wilderness, the ultimate state of flux regarding these borders illustrates the difficulties of maintaining a divide between humans and nature where none naturally exists. A natural ecosystem is an intricate web of cycles and relationships between organisms and their environment, humans included. What concerned Muir, and Cooper earlier on, was an imbalance in the ecosystems with which humans were interacting. Paradoxically, Muir believed that creating a divide between humans and nature with the national parks could aid in correcting that imbalance and secure the human-nature harmony that had previously existed before the American drive for progress tipped the scales. As Hetch Hetchy, demonstrates, however, this divide would need to be flexible. In fact, as the Yosemite National Park online database indicates, legislation following Hetch Hetchy continued to alter park boundaries up until the most recent in a 2013 act, entitled "Minor Boundary Revision at Yosemite National Park."

While the results of the debate did not mean total success for Muir's idea of wilderness preservation, the outcome helped shape American environmental values

because it aroused national interest in preserving wilderness. According to Nash, “For three centuries [Americans] had chosen civilization without any hesitation. By 1913 they were no longer so sure” (181). In the years following the controversy, support for wilderness preservation would increase significantly, resulting in later successes such as the enactment of the National Park Service in 1916, which would aim to place stricter boundaries between society and wilderness (180), as well as the Wilderness Act of 1964 (200). The results of the debate would also provide a precedent for arguments against the establishment of later dams, including the proposal for a dam on the Green River at Echo Park, which resides within Dinosaur National Monument. Due to the environmental values instilled by Hetch Hetchy’s loss, many later movements for preservation were met with success—though the debate also put into question the preconceived divide of humans and nature as separate entities. While Muir began to realize the damage that humans could impose on nature, the boundaries that he came to accept and promote proved to be unstable, ironically because the harmony between humans and nature that he truly believed in resisted them.

As Cronon explains, a wilderness separate from humans is “quite profoundly a human creation,” in fact, “a product of that civilization” (*The Trouble* 69). Even if Muir’s national park borders were intended to preserve nature from the ravages of humankind, the placement of a border itself indicates the act of a human hand within nature. Thus, even the enactment of national park boundaries ironically resists a divide between humans and the natural world. While a wilderness contained within the national parks might seem to represent a pristine sanctuary, the borders that make them appear so are a

human construction. These borders are intended for wilderness preservation, yet they also demonstrate the inescapable touch of humankind. During the early years of the national parks, the drive to protect their wild features from human presence paradoxically led to an alteration in natural ecosystems that had coexisted with humankind for centuries. The enforcement of boundaries where none had previously existed was significant not only to natural species but also to American Indians, who had for generations been living in these environments.

As the next section will explain in more detail, the creation of the national parks forced many Native tribes, like the Ahwahneechee of Yosemite, to adapt to the influx of tourists and the establishment of boundaries. What resulted was a change in cultural traditions that had been practiced for generations, and the eventual removal of Native peoples from their ancestral homes. The absence of these people, in turn, had effects on the environments that Native Americans had been interacting with for centuries. A drive to perpetuate a wilderness separate from humans, thus made changes to otherwise already balanced ecosystems, drawing attention to the constructedness of a natural world separate from humans. The next section will address these early years and the consequences of perpetuating that wilderness myth.



### **The Culture that Could Have Shaped the National Parks: Muir's Wavering Boundaries of Prejudice**

In the Cooper section on culture, I explored representations of American Indians alongside those of wilderness in James Fenimore Cooper's writings, as well as in the works of his daughter Susan Fenimore and artist George Catlin. Through a lens of Levinasian theory, I traced a blending of Native peoples and wilderness where the face of wilderness might be experienced through the face of the Native American Other. I came to the conclusion that this experience heightened ethical feelings for the natural world, prompting preservation. Rather than communicating an ethical responsibility for *both* wilderness and Native cultures, however, these representations did not do enough to contest the nineteenth-century subjugation of Native peoples. Through works of art and literature, we can revisit how this experience in the face of the Other functioned, and how it still does today where the face-to-face interaction now carries a history of guilt that bolsters our ethical responsibility for American Indians, as well as for the wild landscape. Throughout the section, I addressed Cooper's representation of Chingachgook in *The Pioneers*, Andrew Jackson's Indian Removal Act of 1830, Susan Fenimore Cooper's encounters with Indians recorded in her published nature journal *Rural Hours*, and the portraits and writings of American painter, author, and traveler of the nineteenth century,

George Catlin—all part of a pre-national park period, but all suggestive of what was to come for American Indians when the parks were finally created.

My purpose for invoking Muir in this discussion is to consider his relationships with Natives during a time when wilderness areas had gained national park status. In doing so, I draw upon the plight of Native cultures to reveal the impossibility of creating a divide between humans and nature in parklands where none naturally or historically ever existed. As a person of his time, Muir did hold racial prejudices, but his interactions with the Natives of California and Alaska<sup>39</sup> brought him to realize that they practiced a reverence for the natural world not unlike his own. In this section, I provide a general overview of Muir's interactions with various Native tribes and examine specific selections from *Travels in Alaska*, *My First Summer in the Sierra*, and *The Mountains of California* that highlight his growing sense of respect for Natives through their common appreciation for nature. This veneration stemmed from the Natives' recognizing a oneness with the world and practicing a sense of the spiritual and scientific in nature that coincided with Muir's own methodology. However, it also involved a use of nature for survival needs—something that went beyond Muir and actually combined his values with those of his rival Gifford Pinchot. Accordingly, I intend to demonstrate how the American Indian values that Muir discerns encompassed a more holistic view of

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<sup>39</sup> Based on Muir's writings, we can glean that he interacted with the Mono and Digger tribes of California (though he also mentions the Pah Ute, Carson, Walker River, King's River, Yosemite, and Modoc Indians), and the Tlinkit tribes of Alaska (more specifically the Stickeen, Chinook, Chilcat, Kake, Hootsenoo, Hoonah, Taku, and likely many others). However, he does occasionally use the umbrella term "Indians," making it difficult to discern which particular group of people to whom he refers. Throughout this section I use the specific tribe name whenever possible.

conservation<sup>40</sup> that could have shaped the national parks. Additionally, in this section I address the history of American Indian treatment in Yosemite and Yellowstone National Parks,<sup>41</sup> revisiting the image of Natives created by Cooper and Catlin, and indicating how the eventual exclusion of Natives from the parks reveals all the more the constructedness of a wilderness separate from human beings. At the same time, I suggest that Muir's writings ultimately advise an integration of humans and nature that can serve as a model for infiltrating boundaries of class and race, resulting in a deeper sense of humanity acquired through our experiences in nature. By recognizing a transcendent oneness of the world when we visit the national parks today, we might foster the kind of fellow-feeling that Muir sensed in nature, but also celebrate and value the cultures that make each one of us unique.

In terms of Muir's environmental awareness, he was a radical thinker; however, as a product of his time, he was not free from the prejudices so often held by Euro-Americans toward American Indians. His writings reflect conflicting ruminations on Natives—he remains caught between contempt for their savageness and admiration for their connection to nature. Richard F. Fleck in *Henry Thoreau and John Muir: Among the Indians* ultimately attributes Muir's earlier hesitations about American Indians to a

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<sup>40</sup> By holistic, I mean a view that encapsulated both sides of conservation—that for the purpose of preserving nature's beauty and that of using nature's resources for survival. While Muir is generally associated with use for beauty and Gifford Pinchot with use for resources, it is important to note that the Native American use for resources that Muir observes is a qualified version of Pinchot's use that actually seems acceptable to Muir. It is a use for the basic needs for survival with little ecological footprint, rather than Pinchot's belief of tapping into natural resources for the sake of survival with progress and economic development also in mind.

<sup>41</sup> I limit my scope to Yellowstone and Yosemite, two major parks of the western United States, because Muir's writings on the national parks are mainly concerned with these areas.

combination of his boyhood experiences in Wisconsin with the Winnebago tribe, “prevailing [racist] attitudes towards Indians” (34) during his time period, his disapproval of their general uncleanliness, “especially since they lived in a pure and fresh wilderness” (39), and an overall feeling of “culture shock” (36). Because of these circumstances and biases, Muir’s earlier writings, particularly from *My First Summer in the Sierra* (1911) and *The Mountains of California* (1875),<sup>42</sup> often refer to American Indians with mixed feelings. When encountering the Mono tribe of California, for example, he sees them as inferior beings because of what he considered to be their primitive ways and overall uncleanliness, yet he cannot help but bear witness to their ability to blend with the landscape. For example, in *The Mountains of California*, he reflects:

Occasionally a good countenance may be seen among the Mono Indians, but these, the first specimens I had seen, were mostly ugly, and some of them altogether hideous. The dirt on their faces was fairly stratified, and seemed so ancient and so undisturbed it might almost possess a geological significance. The older faces were, moreover, strangely blurred and divided into sections by furrows that looked like the cleavage-joints of rocks, suggesting exposure on the mountains in a cast-away condition for ages. Somehow they seemed to have no right place in the landscape, and I was glad to see them fading out of sight down the pass. (92-93)

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<sup>42</sup> I refer to these as earlier works, not in reflection of their publication dates, but because their content refers to experiences that occupied Muir’s time in California, which began in 1868. A number of his “books” were in fact compiled after his death from essays and journals that he had previously written, and so the publication dates are not necessarily relevant to the time in which Muir was writing.



While Muir depicts his encounter with these Natives in a negative light, calling them “altogether hideous” and believing that they “have no right place in the landscape,” he contradicts himself by describing their features in a way that directly associates them with that very landscape of the mountain pass. According to Muir, some of their faces are “stratified” with dirt as if reflecting “geological significance,” while others “looked like the cleavage-joints of rocks”—not unlike the weathered faces of cliffs.

What might seem like an insult only comes to reflect Muir’s frustrated and impossible effort to disassociate these Natives with nature. In a later revision of the same passage, rephrased in *My First Summer in the Sierra*, Muir adds, “Yet it seems sad to feel such desperate repulsion from one's fellow beings, however degraded. To prefer the society of squirrels and woodchucks to that of our own species must surely be unnatural” (219). Muir was continually editing and re-publishing revised works of previous essays throughout his life. This later addition reflects his growing guilt and realization that these Native cultures had more in common with his own than first perceived. Not only did it seem “unnatural” for Muir to be repulsed by these Mono Indians because they were his “own species,” but because they were fellow creatures made from one and the same.

In a way, Muir seems to categorize American Indians as liminal beings on the threshold between human and inhuman—sometimes recognizing their fellow humanity as he does in the admission above, and sometimes describing them as inferior nonhuman entities of nature as he does in the mountain-pass selection earlier. He reveals their ability to live closely with the landscape, yet while he reveres this talent he also struggles with a racist tendency to exclude Natives from a common humanity and a place in the

landscape. This liminality reflects Muir's conflicted feelings toward the Native Americans whom he meets. In *My First Summer*, he describes his hesitations: "most Indians I have seen are not a whit more natural in their lives than we civilized whites. Perhaps if I knew them better I should like them better. The worst thing about them is their uncleanliness. Nothing truly wild is unclean" (226). While his words here are problematically prejudiced, Muir does show a willingness to break those racial boundaries and try to better understand the Natives whom he encounters, probably driven by a duty to the idea of the unifying cosmos that he so believed in.

Muir's belief in a oneness of the world and its beings, of a unity between humans and nature, would be a prominent thought for him as he encountered the Natives of California. Continually, he admires the ability of American Indians to leave a minimal footprint on nature. "All Indians<sup>43</sup> seem to have learned this wonderful way of walking unseen," he says, "this experience transmitted through many generations seems at length to have become what is vaguely called instinct" (*My First* 53-54). Muir sees this ability of this Brown's Flat Indian to merge with nature as something that has become "instinct," or in other words, natural. He continues in the next paragraph of *My First Summer* to describe in more detail their lack of ecological impact:

Indians walk softly and hurt the landscape hardly more than the birds and squirrels, and their brush and bark huts last hardly longer than those of wood rats,

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<sup>43</sup> Though Muir uses an umbrella term here, his comment is in reaction to an encounter with a Native from Brown's Flat, California. It follows: "One of the Indians from Brown's Flat got right into the middle of the camp this morning, unobserved. I was seated on a stone, looking over my notes and sketches, and happening to look up, was startled to see him standing grim and silent within a few steps of me, as motionless and weather-stained as an old tree-stump that had stood there for centuries" (*My First* 53).

while their more *enduring monuments*, excepting those wrought on the forests by the fires they made to improve their hunting grounds, *vanish in a few centuries*.

(54-55, emphasis added)

Again, Muir's words here capture the capability of some indigenous people to blend with the landscape and live sustainably with little trace of their presence. The selections that I emphasize, however, are also interestingly reminiscent of Thomas Cole's series of paintings *The Course of Empire*, which I discussed in Chapter One. Muir reminds us that while American Indians have an admirable way of blending with the landscape, they, too, are composed of civilizations. They, too, have "enduring monuments" that "vanish in a few centuries." Whereas Cole's paintings communicate a violent downfall of civilization resulting in ruin and the eventual restoration of wilderness, Muir describes a peaceful interaction in which the "monuments" of Natives are rather intended to disappear gradually back into the landscape. The basic technology used by the American Indians whom Muir meets in California is representative of a more balanced form of civilization, one that lives in harmony with nature and thus welcomes "Destruction" and "Desolation"<sup>44</sup> as stages of a natural cycle.

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<sup>44</sup> These terms are in reference to titles of the Cole paintings, but also to the tendency of nature to reclaim humanmade structures in any landscape, whether they "vanish in a few centuries" like the Native-made structures observed by Muir or are eventually overrun with nature like in Cole's painting entitled "Desolation."



Thomas Cole, *The Course of Empire*, “Destruction” (1836, pictured left) and “Desolation” (1836, pictured right)

Thus, this sentiment reflects Muir’s acceptance of death and decay as a natural part of life, as a moment in the greater workings of the cosmos. Revisiting *A Thousand-Mile Walk to the Gulf*, we find Muir ruminating about “the friendly union . . . of life and death. . . . All is divine harmony” (42). The Native way of life that Muir observes—of leaving a minimal footprint upon nature—reflects Muir’s ideal for society, wherein we might escape the violent resistance to our downfall as depicted in Cole’s *Course of Empire* paintings. Instead, a harmony with the natural world and an acceptance of the natural cycles of life might provide humans with a more concordant life in recognition of our oneness with the world.

There were still certain aspects of Native life, however, for which Muir exhibited mixed feelings. He revered, for example, their ability to live off of the land. “Like the Indians,”<sup>45</sup> he said, “we ought to know how to get the starch out of fern and saxifrage stalks, lily bulbs, pine bark, etc. Our education has been sadly neglected for many generations” (*My First* 79). Yet, in some ways, he also warned against this kind of

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<sup>45</sup> Again, Muir does not refer to a specific tribe, though earlier in this entry he does mention the ability of the “Eskimo” to get “a living far north of the wheat line, from oily seals and whales” (78).

lifestyle. In “The Water-Ouzel” chapter of *Mountains*, Muir discusses the beauty of bird song and flowers and praises the ability of the Digger Indians to appreciate this beauty “whether available as food or otherwise.” He continues on to warn that “[m]ost men, however, whether savage or civilized, become apathetic toward all plants that have no other apparent use than the use of beauty” (*Mountains* 295). Thus, in the eyes of Muir, assigning a “use value” to plants and animals as something necessary to our survival endangers the harmony of humans with the natural world—infusing that inherent fellow-feeling with a sense of apathy as these things become fetishized as objects to be consumed rather than appreciated for their intrinsic beauty. As a result, those things of pure beauty become useless in comparison to those that provide a more utilitarian purpose. The real danger posed from living off the land would thus be the dominance of practical use over use for beauty. As I discussed in the previous section on boundaries, these conflicting definitions of “use” are often what brought Muir into disagreement with Gifford Pinchot. Because the Natives that Muir encountered, however, were so integrated into the environments they inhabited, they were able to maintain a balance that allowed for simultaneous uses of the natural world—for beauty as well as for sustenance. Additionally, Pinchot’s utilitarian drive for conservation went beyond satisfying basic human needs and also considered economic growth and settlement for the sake of human progress. Since this teleology was not a concern of the Natives that Muir interacted with, they were able to uphold a less extreme form of land use that blended with the appreciation of nature’s beauty that Muir deemed important for the human psyche. As Fleck points out, “Muir gradually realized that early day primal cultures possessed an

intuitive understanding of natural harmonies, and for this reason his Indian education in California and more importantly in Alaska was of profound significance” (34). He learned that for many Native cultures, the natural world was inherently integrated into all aspects of life—from religion, mythology, and survival to social customs, philosophies, and language. These practices, so grounded in nature, thus allowed Natives to live sustainably, practicing a lifestyle that incorporated both Muir’s and Pinchot’s “uses” that came to divide the environmental movement.<sup>46</sup>

Muir’s multiple voyages to Alaska, the first occurring in 1879, possibly did the most to shift his views of American Indians from prejudice to companionship. His intention was, as Worster explains, primarily to “observe the power of nature to remake the world through glaciation” (247); however, as *Travels in Alaska* details, Muir also learned much about the Native Tlinkit cultures there and came to appreciate their lifestyle, which integrated the natural world in many ways. During a particular canoe voyage in 1879 from Fort Wrangell, Alaska, northwards to study glaciers, Muir was guided by a crew of Indians, one of whom was the son of a Chilcat<sup>47</sup> chief called Kadachan. Muir records one conversation with this group of Natives in *Travels in Alaska*:

I greatly enjoyed the Indian's [*sic*] camp-fire talk this evening on their ancient customs, how they were taught by their parents ere the whites came among them, their religion, ideas connected with the next world, the stars, plants, the behavior and language of animals under different circumstances, manner of getting a

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<sup>46</sup> Pinchot’s school of conservation sought to conserve natural resources for the sake of their eventual use, while Muir’s school of preservation sought to protect nature from conventional use altogether.

<sup>47</sup> The Chilcat Indians are a tribe of the Tlinkit people.

living, etc. When our talk was interrupted by the howling of a wolf on the opposite side of the strait, Kadachan puzzled the minister with the question, “Have wolves souls?” The Indians believe that they have, giving as foundation for their belief that they are wise creatures who know how to catch seals and salmon by swimming slyly upon them with their heads hidden in a mouthful of grass, hunt deer in company, and always bring forth their young at the same and most favorable time of the year. I inquired how it was that with enemies so wise and powerful the deer were not all killed. Kadachan replied that wolves knew better than to kill them all and thus cut off their most important food-supply. (67)

This passage not only demonstrates Muir’s genuine interest in Native culture and customs, but is also indicative of thinking that aligns with Muir’s own method of interacting with the environment. As Fleck explains, this passage “is strong evidence for the Tlinkit’s ecological understanding of his environment acquired through long years of observation” (52)—in other words, a kind of scientific learning from nature not unlike Muir’s own methods. I would also add that the Native belief that the wolves do indeed have souls coincides with Muir’s all-encompassing spirituality that includes every being of the world as a creation of God. Here we see Muir’s interest piqued as the Native Tlinkit tribe seems to hold values for the natural world that very much coincide with Muir’s own spiritual-scientific principles. Unfortunately, according to historian Julie Cruikshank, Muir’s editor Robert Underwood Johnson “apparently deemed such ideas too radical for readers of *The Century Magazine* and expurgated such passages from Muir’s submissions” (174). As a result, “both the specificity of Tlingit local ecological

knowledge and Muir's attention to Tlingit perspectives slid from the published record of those encounters" (175). The exclusion of writings like these from the public eye was tied to a prevailing exclusionary ideology that, in part, contributed to the later failure of the national parks in regards to their American Indian policy.

Also important to address in this account is the Indian guide's response that "wolves knew better than to kill" all of the deer so that they would not "cut off their most important food-supply." This statement further suggests observational learning—that the Natives, alongside the wolves, have learned to conserve resources so as not to diminish their food supply—while also reflecting a preservation ethic that Muir would have admired. However, in part, Kadachan's reply also reflects a use value in nature that functions for survival rather than for Muir's aesthetic appreciation. Thus, this sentiment offers another example that combines Muir's and Pinchot's beliefs, exemplifying Muir's advocacy for a sustainable coexistence between humans and nature alongside a qualified version of Pinchot's view of nature as something to provide vital resources for human survival.

Muir had his prejudices, some which he could probably never be free of; however, as he spent more time amidst the Natives of California and Alaska, he admired how they, for the most part, lived in harmony with nature. The natural world figured in all parts of Native life, from beliefs that echoed Muir's own spiritual-scientific understanding to their practical use of the land that left minimal ecological impact. They had found a sustainable way to live that reflected the oneness of the world that Muir



advocated, humans and nature as a working unit. As Park Superintendent Gerard Baker explains in *America's Best Idea*,

John Muir would have made a great medicine man in his day because he would feel the same things an American Indian would, because he was listening—he was truly listening. He wasn't exploring; he was living; he was learning; he was living with the elements out there. And John Muir would have been part of it, just like the [Tlinkit] elders that I knew were part of the environment. (Episode One, 1:34:19-1:34:43)

As I discussed in the previous section on boundaries, Muir spent a good portion of his life advocating the establishment of the national parks. Perhaps he had hoped that the similarities he shared with American Indians would carry over into protecting the land that the parks encompassed. Yet, tragically and ironically, the eventual removal of Indian settlement from park territory was not long to come after national park establishment. Considering the sustainable lifestyles of Native tribes that Muir observed, why would such a removal be necessary or desirable? Issues of race, popularization of conservation, and the widespread conception of wilderness as something separate from human presence all contributed to the “Indian question” within the national parks. By revisiting circumstances of the parks in their earliest years, I intend to highlight initial attempts to include American Indians within park bounds and to demonstrate why these attempts ultimately failed, leading to the removal of Native peoples from park territory.

As Mark Spence explains in *Dispossessing the Wilderness*, before Yosemite had become a national park, the Ahwahneechee people had already inhabited the area “for at

least six hundred years.” Their way of life was rooted in the landscape: “they described Yosemite as a special place the Creator had filled with all they would need, including trout, sweet clover, potent medicinal plants, roots, acorns, pine nuts, fruits, and berries in abundance, as well as deer and other animals, ‘which gave meat for food and skins for clothing and beds’ ” (103). Not only does this lifestyle reflect a positive interaction between humans and nature, but it also is related to the two kinds of conservation “uses” referred to earlier—Muir’s “use” of nature for spiritual needs and Pinchot’s “use” of nature for its resources. The two often opposing conceptions are blended into a single sentiment in the Ahwahneechee belief that “the Creator” had filled the landscape “with all [the resources] they would need” to live. However, their use of the land’s resources placed them into the side of conservation that the national parks sought to ward off—for their mission would be to preserve a pristine wilderness protected from the ravages of civilization, without taking into account this gentler coexistence with wilderness. Though they left relatively no footprint, the greater Native population of Yosemite would come to be seen as a civilization incompatible with the prevailing public visions of wilderness.

As Yosemite gained popularity as a state park, the Natives of the area (including, but not limited to the Ahwahneechee) interacted with tourists and local white communities in peaceful commerce. Under state control, these relations continued, and, as Spence explains, “native people had become an important part of the tourist experience, whether as laborers in the valley’s growing service industry or as an authenticating aspect of the encounter with wilderness” (107). When Yosemite became a national park, however, park officials began to change their policy towards American

Indians, beginning with enforced hunting regulations that had an effect on Native life. Since the Yosemite Natives were a mostly peaceful people and posed no real danger to white visitors, the larger concern for their existence in the park rather arose from the idea that their presence was “incongruous with [popular] notions of ‘pristine’ nature.” According to Spence, “they did not match the ‘handsome and noble’ Indians of popular fiction and art” (109). Even Muir could not get past their uncleanliness, feeling that they had “no right place in the landscape” (*Mountains* 93). As I explained in Chapter One, Cooper had contributed to this Romanticized image of the Indian as a “Noble Savage,”<sup>48</sup> and as tourists interacted with the Natives of Yosemite, the stereotypical vision that they anticipated did not concur with the visage of Natives that they actually met.

Rather than remove the Ahwahneechee because they did not match what was expected of “wild” Indians by the general public, Yosemite officials and concessionaires enacted what were called Indian Field Days in 1916, the same year that the National Park Service was established. While the Field Days might have appeared as, Spence writes, an “effort to represent or honor Native culture,” in reality, they only served as a means of satisfying “popular white conceptions of how Indians were supposed to look and behave.” Native Yosemite Indians became the center of basket weaving contests, parades, rodeo events, and bareback horseraces in all of which they were often paid to dress in full Indian costume “wholly foreign” to their own culture and pose in front of

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<sup>48</sup> Cooper’s portrayal of the “Noble Savage” is, however, balanced by the characterization of hostile Natives, like the Huran chief, Magua. His noble savage Chingachgook is intended to evoke pity as Cooper attempts to communicate the inability of American Indians to retain their culture alongside white culture, which was becoming more dominant in the New World. His fate was also entwined with the white hero of the books Natty Bumppo who ultimately chooses the Native way of life over that of Euro-Americans.

“crudely constructed canvas tepees” (117). The notion of including American Indians as a feature of the national park seems to take its origins from George Catlin’s idea of a “nation’s Park,” also addressed in Chapter One. Catlin imagines the park as a place “where the world could see for ages to come, the Native Indian in his classic attire, galloping his wild horse, with sinewy bow, and shield and lance, amid the fleeting herds of elks and buffaloes” (*LN* 1:261). While Catlin, like Cooper, would have been trying to preserve a positive and lasting memory of American Indian culture,<sup>49</sup> both men inadvertently contributed to another kind of myth that unfortunately turned Native people into an idealized attraction by the time the national parks were established.

Fortunately, the Yosemite Indians benefited from the Field Days, making a profit from selling Native crafts and finding pleasure in competing with neighbors in events like the basket weaving contests and rodeo. In short, Spence explains, “they participated in the Field Days because they enjoyed the events and derived certain benefits,” while at the same time they were able to preserve their true culture behind the scenes (120). Their habitation within park bounds, however, still posed a problem to the Euro-American conception of wilderness as something isolated from human beings. When visiting the parks, tourists expected to see what Spence calls “an empty, uninhabited, primordial landscape. . . .preserved in the state that God first intended it to be” (131). As white voyeurs only visiting the landscape, tourists forgot that they themselves would interfere

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<sup>49</sup> Another problem of these popular representations was the public oversight that the Indians depicted by Catlin and Cooper were of particular civilizations. Catlin painted and described Indians of the Great Plains like the Assiniboine, Crow, and Sioux (among many others), while Cooper wrote about Indians of the Northeast, which included the Delaware and Iroquois people. Thus their descriptions are not applicable to the Native tribes of the far western United States.

with that vision. Despite this oversight, regulations on Native habitation gradually became stricter and “any village residents who acted in a socially unacceptable manner would be banished from their homes in the valley” (120). Park officials even enacted “criteria for Indian residency” by 1928 that became so difficult to meet that they “implied the possibility of outright eviction for the entire Native population” (122).<sup>50</sup> As Spence points out, however, the removal of indigenous peoples from the parks demonstrated that “uninhabited landscapes had to be created” (131). Cronon concurs: “The removal of Indians to create an ‘uninhabited wilderness’—uninhabited as never before in the human history of the place—reminds us just how invented, just how constructed, the American wilderness really is” (*The Trouble* 79). Thus, the issue of Indian removal from the national parks in the twentieth century indicates the incompatibility of the ideas of pristine wilderness with the reality of Native habitation in North America. This reality is evidence that the preconceived notion of a pristine, uninhabited wilderness never existed in America and never would unless contradictorily created by humankind. Mark Spence cites one tourist who, after the creation of Yosemite as a state park in 1864, admires the simple lifestyle of American Indians in the park, rejoicing that “the time will never come when Art is sent here to improve Nature” (105). Ironically, in setting aside Yosemite as a national park, “Art” did indeed come to “improve Nature,” as Native populations were eventually forced to leave in order to maintain an ideal form of wilderness.

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<sup>50</sup> Two park officials involved in these decisions were Superintendent Washington Lewis, and his successor Superintendent Charles Thomson (Spence 120-122).

Yosemite's Indians faced a long and gradual removal from their homeland. As Spence explains, it wasn't until late December of 1996 that the "last Yosemite Indian to reside in the national park left his birthplace" (131).<sup>51</sup> Removal from Yellowstone National Park, on the other hand, took a swift and forceful course. In the early years of the park, Indian wars had broken out, and so removal here was largely enacted to ensure the safety of park visitors. Yet the danger posed by American Indian presence in some ways became a part of the adventure experience. In August 1877, a group of tourists entered the park, among them Emma and George Cowen, who planned on celebrating their second wedding anniversary in Yellowstone (*ABI*, Episode One, 1:17:40-1:17:59). During their visit, they were caught in the crosshairs of a conflict between members of the Nez Perce tribe and park cavalry that resulted in George Cowen taking a bullet to the head:

Army surgeons probed his head by candlelight and removed the bullet, flattened by his skull. By the time he was reunited with his wife, the Nez Perce War was ending hundreds of miles away with Chief Joseph's surrender in Northern Montana. Yellowstone's superintendent soon arranged for the Native Sheep Eaters<sup>52</sup> who had not taken part in the troubles to be evicted from their homeland so he could assure the public that Yellowstone National Park was now free of all Indians. Years later, when the Cowens returned to visit the park, Emma would say

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<sup>51</sup> Spence details the circumstances of Yosemite's last Native inhabitant: "Jay Johnson, the eldest son of Harry Johnson and the grandson of Bridgeport Tom, had retired the previous July from his position as a forester with the National Park Service. In accordance with the Yosemite Indian Village Housing Policy of 1953, he and his family had to leave their home by the end of the year" (131).

<sup>52</sup> A group of Shoshone Indians, also known as the Tukudika ("Historic Tribes").

she was surprised any of her group had been spared given the horrible treatment the Indians had suffered. George, meanwhile, happily recounted the tale of their second anniversary and then capped his story by showing off his proudest Yellowstone souvenir—the bullet that had been removed from his skull, which he had made into a watch fob. (*ABI*, Episode One, 1:19:58-1:21:08)

For George Cowen, the bullet became a souvenir, memorabilia of his experience at the national park in the midst of an Indian war. The event encapsulated the kind of adventure, the kind of sublime danger, depicted in Cooper’s *Leatherstocking Tales*, and—as this example demonstrates—the nation had come to envision Cooper’s novels and the Indian conflict within them as the true experience of America’s wilderness.



Alana Jajko, *Photographs from Yellowstone National Park: Yellowstone River* (left) and *Upper Yellowstone Falls* (right), 2014

However, as the parks began to remove Indians and enforce boundaries between humans and the natural world, a vision of wilderness as something separate and distinct from humans prevailed—no more wild Indians like Cooper’s Huron or Delaware, no more adventurous trappers like Natty Bumppo. Muir reflects in the Yellowstone chapter of *Our National Parks*, “No scalping Indians will you see. The Blackfeet and Bannocks

that once roamed here are gone; so are the old beaver-catchers, the Coulters and Bridgers, with all their attractive buckskin and romance” (51). Eventually, American Indians as well as local white trappers and hunters were evicted from the national park in an effort to preserve that ideal form of untouched wilderness. Again, however, the presence of tourists in the park, like the Cowens, demonstrates another relationship that defies the human-nature divide that the wilderness myth perpetuates. While the eviction of Natives and other local communities was meant to satisfy the vision that tourists expected, the visitation of tourists to these natural areas for the purpose of recreation undermined those efforts by introducing another kind of human presence. Tourists might have believed that they were only visitors, observing the wonders of the national parks from a distance, but they ultimately came to the parks to have an experience, see the great outdoors, and bask in nature for the use of its beauty—not to mention the changes to the environment made by the need for amenities to service tourists. Despite efforts to eliminate human presence, the purpose of the removal of Natives and other locals to satisfy tourists ironically contributed to another kind of human interaction with nature—making the divisions between humans and nature that they so desired impossible to accomplish.

This eviction not only of American Indians like the Nez Perce<sup>53</sup> but also small white communities around the park ironically caused major changes to Yellowstone’s ecology. During these early years in Yellowstone, the United States cavalry had been

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<sup>53</sup> The greater Yellowstone area was also home to ancestors of the Blackfeet, Cayuse, Coeur d’Alene, Bannock, Shoshone, and Umatilla, among others. According to the National Park Service, “The Crow occupied the area generally east of the park, and the Blackfeet occupied the area to the north. The Shoshone, Bannock, and other tribes of the plateaus to the west traversed the park annually to hunt on the plains to the east. Other Shoshonean groups hunted in open areas west and south of Yellowstone” (“Historic Tribes”).



called upon to enforce park boundaries and regulations. Muir esteemed these “Uncle Sam's soldiers” as “the most effective forest police” (*Our* 188), admiring how they “efficiently managed and guarded” the natural sanctity of Yellowstone (40). The problem with these soldiers, however, became their antagonistic approach, which, as historian Karl Jacoby explains, “reduced natural resource management to a battle, one in which forest fires, predators, and human intruders alike became little more than enemies to be attacked and vanquished” (120). The consequences of their actions not only resulted in conflict with local Indian tribes, like the Nez Perce, but also with “many of the region’s inhabitants [who] perceived conservation as interfering with their preexisting rights to the natural world” (101). This mentality once again harkens back to the use of natural resources that divided Muir and Pinchot in the Hetch Hetchy Controversy and other environmental debates to come. Since Muir supported the cavalry’s efforts, his role in all of this becomes difficult to address. At the same time that Muir had nature’s best interests in mind, his new fixation on boundaries blinded him to the subjugation of peoples that resulted and the benefits that a human presence could have on an environment. In effect, his drive for preservation led him to forget that a reciprocal relationship between humans and nature could be successful and representative of the nation.

One of these white cultural blind spots that Muir was able to see beyond involved the effort to evict Natives because of their use of forest fires. As Jacoby points out in *Crimes Against Nature*, “Not understanding the role that it played in increasing plant diversity or forest reproduction, nineteenth-century conservationists considered fire a uniquely dangerous and unpredictable force” (86). On the contrary, these fires helped to

clear dead underbrush to make room for new life and perpetuate the cycle of certain plant species. As a result, the move of national park officials to eliminate the fires started by Natives caused “dramatic alterations in the park’s ecosystem” (118). These American Indians had already negotiated a sustainable way of life within that ecosystem, leaving footprints that were only beneficial to the environments they inhabited. Even Muir, despite his support of the cavalry, recognized the American Indian role alongside nature observing, “the fires of the Indians<sup>54</sup> and the fierce shattering lightning seemed to work together only for good in clearing spots here and there for smooth garden prairies, and openings for sunflowers seeking the light” (*Our* 335). He also reflects in “The Forests” chapter of *Mountains*: “Indians burn off the underbrush in certain localities to facilitate deer-hunting, mountaineers and lumbermen carelessly allow their camp-fires to run; but the fires of the sheepmen, or *muttoneers*, form more than ninety per cent. [*sic*] of all destructive fires that range the Sierra forests (199). Thus Muir attributes most of the harmful destruction caused by fire not to Native practices but to the white pastoral communities of the parks, recognizing the benefits that resulted from Indian-facilitated fires.

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<sup>54</sup> Muir does not specify here which particular tribe practiced burning fires, though Jacoby discusses the use of fire by the Natives of Yellowstone, which included tribes like the Crows, Bannocks, and Shoshones (118).



Alana Jajko, *Photograph of a Forest Fire in Yosemite National Park*, 2014

Despite the prevention of these fires in order to extract human influence from nature, the national parks, in these early years, could not be more representative of the human-nature coexistence. The absence of human interaction ironically became just as impactful on the environmental as its presence—whereas the indigenous people of the parks were more demonstrative of a symbiotic relationship with nature, the park officials who enforced fire regulations exerted another kind of influence. Muir, and others like Muir, valued military action within the parks because they thought it was in the best interest of the environment. However, not only did the cavalry's actions negatively impact local communities, but they also damaged natural ecosystems that had grown accustomed to the presence and practices of the local Indians. As Jacoby explains, the prevention of fires in the national parks even exacerbated the danger they posed, allowing

“dead plant matter to accumulate, so that when fires did erupt they proved uncommonly fierce and difficult to control” (119). With policies enforced by park officials alongside the growing population of tourists, the formative years of the national parks thus saw more than ever an interaction between humans and wilderness—for better or for worse, ironically through actions intended to decrease the human-nature exchange.

The boundaries enforced by park officials not only affected American Indian communities, but also local white communities who likewise depended on the surrounding landscape and its resources for survival. The result of strict no-hunting regulation within park bounds caused the elk population to rise to an extent that the park had to export some of the animals to zoos and conservation centers (144). Rather than modifying boundary laws to accommodate the local communities who “would almost starve but for the game” (122) and solve the problem of elk overpopulation, the park opted to maintain strict regulations and send the excess elk elsewhere, often to undesirable confinement. A better solution would have been to allow locals to retain certain hunting rights in order to control the elk population. Exclusionary practices like this example created a point of contention between national park officials and the small-town rural populations around its borders.

In Chapter One, I speculated that the kind of wilderness showcased within the parks maintains the inspiration needed for upholding a democratic pastoral community that cooperates with nature in a sustainable way, echoing Cooper’s vision for a human-nature relationship. In this vision, the national parks in part stand as a symbol for that first Euro-American vision of America as a nation made up of small democratic pastoral

communities (as envisioned by Thomas Jefferson, and perpetuated by the works of James Fenimore Cooper). The relationship exhibited during Muir's time, however, suggests something different. While the parks might have certainly come to be an inspiration for the democratic pastoral life, considering Muir's hatred of the destruction that domestication caused to wild nature<sup>55</sup> and the exclusion of these same communities from the parks, we must recognize that the parks did not begin that way. As we consider their early years, I would qualify that the national parks speak to a more complicated past in terms of delineating human-nature relations. They stand as representations of wilderness and as a symbol for America as a nation, embodying a history of changing definitions and relationships that continue to evolve even as we experience them today.

The subjugation of American Indians and these small local communities suggests a culturally-based exclusion as a consequence of perpetuating the wilderness myth. Yet the national parks today have become an all-encompassing symbol that inescapably integrates humans and nature. Muir preached a oneness with the cosmos, what he described as a harmony between humans and nature, that was reflected in his observations of various American Indian tribes.<sup>56</sup> He had prejudices resulting from his

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<sup>55</sup> Though, ironically, as a liminal being drawn to nature but attached to society (like Natty Bumppo), Muir himself did participate in the domestication of nature when he and his wife, Louisa Strentzel, took over the management of his father-in-law's ranch and estate in the Alhambra Valley, California. Believing artificial selection to be inferior to natural selection, Muir did suggest a "radical approach to agriculture based on Darwinian biology," in which farmers and breeders should "turn to nature for inspiration and use the wild species of plants and animals as a standard to be emulated rather than a blunder to be corrected" (Worster 288-9). In practice, though, Muir himself turned out to be a "cautious businessman rather than an agronomic revolutionary" (290), not wanting to jeopardize his family's livelihood.

<sup>56</sup> To clarify, the harmony that I refer to was not one that Muir himself physically practiced, but rather one that he believed in. It was reflected in the ability of many Native Americans to (a) combine the two uses that divided conservation (for beauty as well as practical use), (b) their tendency to live sustainably with little ecological footprint, and also (c) the integration of the nonhuman into different aspects of Native life (including language, religion, social customs, etc.).

beliefs and upbringing, but he was able to bend the boundaries posed by these biases to a certain extent as he spent more time with Native communities, complicating his prejudice with instances of respect. Muir admired the American Indians' ability to live sustainably with the landscape, which brings us to wonder why the father of the national parks could not succeed in preventing Indian removal from their ancestral homes. Cooper had romanticized American Indians in order to preserve a positive and lasting memory of their culture, while Muir came to appreciate their methods of existing within the natural world. Combined, these depictions turned the American Indian, the "Noble Savage," into a symbol for American adventure. The prevailing wilderness myth, however, categorized humans and nature as separate entities. And while the works of Cooper and Muir maintain a conception of Natives alongside the natural world, the reality of their existence initially was left out of vision for the national parks. Additionally, because they used the resources of the land for survival, reflecting Gifford Pinchot's utilitarianism, American Indians faced removal from their ancestral homes because of the other side of the environmental movement that sought to protect the parks from such practical uses. The parks would instead promote beauty and recreation, something that American Indians not only violated because of their use of nature, but because of they did not match the image of the "Noble Savage" that the public had come to expect.

Muir succeeded in his fight for the national parks. While Yellowstone became the first national park in 1872, it wasn't until 1890, under Muir's persistence, that Yosemite became the second. Muir thus began a trend in environmental legislation that ensured the continued establishment of national parks and an eventual National Park Service.

However, his core ideology that recognized a greater harmony between humans and nature, similar to what he saw reflected in American Indian cultures, seems to have eluded park establishment. Perhaps if he and others had promoted this ideology strongly enough to defeat the wilderness myth and shape the national parks as a place of human-nature coexistence, many communities—Native and white alike—would have been spared the hardship of their removal. Muir's writing, though laced with admiration for American Indians, was also fraught with deprecating remarks driven by bias against Indians and white herdspeople that limited his vision. Race and class became boundaries that not even Muir could totally break free from. Yet his belief in the shared place of all beings in the cosmos helped him to better understand the Native people with whom he interacted, permeating racial bounds through the realization of a shared place in nature.

Despite a paradoxical tendency to separate humans and nature, the national parks would never truly achieve that divide. The presence of American Indians, local white communities, and tourists in the national parks—not to mention the human act of placing borders to preserve wilderness in the very creation of a national park—counteracted separation from the start. An earlier failure to recognize this relationship between humans and nature resulted in discrimination for many, prompting efforts today to learn from and reverse previous mistakes. These lessons that history has to offer allow certain flexibility to human understanding that infiltrates boundaries like class and race. Considering Muir in the context of his time, we can see how his own boundaries wavered due to a deep-seeded belief in earthly unity—one that could have shaped the national parks, and one that can redefine the culture we bring to our experiences in the parks today.

### **Revisiting the Aesthetics, Boundaries, & Cultures of Muir**

Whereas Chapter One considered James Fenimore Cooper and his contemporaries as precursory to the national parks, this second chapter invokes John Muir as a central literary figure to the parks' formative years. Aesthetically, Muir is able to maintain a transfigured sublime during his experience in nature by implementing a combination of science and faith—a mix not unlike that recommended by the art critic John Ruskin. This pairing allows Muir to achieve the safe distance necessary for experiencing the sublime internally, whereas Cooper's sublime requires external physical boundaries to mediate the experience. Through this aesthetic, Muir also realizes a oneness with the world, in which humans and nature are but integrated units of a single cosmos. The national parks have come to encompass both varieties of boundaries: (1) the public/external safety of paved paths and vistas foreseen by Cooper, and (2) our individual/internal knowledge of science and feelings of faith as demonstrated by Muir. Both methods relinquish fear and instead promote an aesthetic that rather encourages a sustainable relationship between society and wilderness—realizing the parks as the mediator that Cooper's vision of vanishing wilderness requires as well as a basis for the integrated cosmos endorsed by Muir.

Yet Muir eventually recognized that certain physical boundaries between humans and nature would be required in order to maintain the greater harmony of the world. Thus his conservation ethic led him on his mission for the establishment of the national parks, which would provide those very bounds. Caught between his passion for wilderness and his position in civilization, Muir was situated for most of his life in a place of ambiguity



not unlike Cooper's hero Natty Bumppo who also exists somewhere between society and wilderness. In order to maintain the harmonious human-nature unit that he saw in the world, Muir began writing to promote preservation for the purpose of keeping that balance in order. Preservation, however, entailed a divide between humans and nature, and that divide would be met with resistance from the human-nature coexistence. Soon after Yosemite gained the national park status that Muir so desired, its boundaries were threatened by a human need to reclaim part of the valley for water. The Hetch Hetchy Controversy thus revealed the fragility of any borders placed between humans and nature. While these borders are intended to divide, they are also ironically contrary to that effect because the placement of a border in itself indicates the act of a human hand within nature. Thus the two are inextricable, and efforts for separation reveal the constructedness of a wilderness isolated from humankind.

The impossible drive to maintain a separation between humans and nature, however, persisted, and many cultures faced the consequences. Muir himself, due to a variety of circumstances, had his prejudices, but as he interacted with a number of American Indian cultures in California and Alaska he came to forge a sense of respect for Natives based on a common devotion to nature. Muir's core belief in a oneness of the earth was demonstrated by many of the Natives with whom he interacted. They exhibited the very harmony with the natural world that Muir recognized—their lifestyles, language, and other customs infused with and inspired by nature. Yet they were victims of the boundaries that the national parks posed, evicted from their homelands over the years due to their failure to live up to the Romantic expectations unintentionally advanced by

Cooper and Catlin and the effort by the parks to achieve the Euro-American ideal of an uninhabited wilderness. Thus the American Indians whom Muir met, in addition to other local communities, faced discrimination in part because of an effort to realize a number of myths by instating borders.

Julie Cruikshank, in her book *Do Glaciers Listen?*, points out that “competing ideas about borders—some flexible and others straining toward certainty—demonstrate how physical landscapes came to furnish clues for thinking about social order” (214). Boundaries between humans and nature create boundaries between people, but as I have demonstrated with examples like the Hetch Hetchy Controversy, these boundaries are flexible, always changing, always resisting permanence. While Cruikshank does recognize that a competing idea of borders is one “straining towards certainty,” I indicate that the “strain” of maintaining that certainty reveals all the more the true tendency of boundaries, including race and class, to be flexible. Additionally, if, as Cruikshank argues, the physical landscape can lend clues to understanding social order, perhaps prejudices against race and class within a shared country are in fact permeable boundaries—susceptible to change and resistance.

As we come to realize how constructed the borders between humans and nature actually are, the consequent human-human boundaries like race and ethnicity are revealed as things just as invented. Rather than erase these bounds completely though, we should celebrate those aspects that make each culture unique while recognizing a deeper common humanity through our shared place in nature. We need to recognize this flexible nature of boundaries and use that knowledge to mitigate issues like class and race, within

the national parks and beyond, by reconciling the parks' complicated past of discrimination, and realizing what it truly means for the parks to exist as a symbol of the nation, for better or for worse. We must learn that boundaries should not function as divides, but rather as intricacies of the cosmos. We must educate ourselves and each other on the history of the national parks, and we must take comfort in the fact that we can add to this history with a new understanding of how flexible boundaries between humans and nature offer a model for how we must come to appreciate both the differences and likenesses that define our own human-human bounds. In recognizing the oneness of the earthly world that Muir believed in, we can reshape the national parks as an ever-evolving artwork, representative of a complex history of relationships and potential as a symbol of unity between humans and the natural world in its entirety. Once understood through the lenses of aesthetics, boundaries, and cultures, the national parks thus serve as an all-encompassing symbol—both tainted and blessed with the history of the nation, representative of an imperfect but inevitable human-nature coexistence, and evocative of a myriad of experiences that shape and define America as a nation.

## EPILOGUE

### **Moving Forward: Aesthetics, Boundaries, & Cultures As we Experience them in the National Parks Today**

Much has changed since the early National Park days of James Fenimore Cooper and John Muir. While the parks themselves might be considered means for representing our ideas of wilderness, other technologies for representation that aid these ideas have advanced from paintings and monochrome photographs to macro-quality photography and high-definition videography that allow us to view the world beyond human capacity. Each of these outlets informs our aesthetic, and our aesthetic becomes important, as I have demonstrated with Cooper and Muir, in regards to how we experience the national parks. Have these technologies evolved too much? Have they dampened the real physical experience of the parks by overstimulating our senses with hyperreal content? Or have they expanded our minds to think beyond what we see? To take what we encounter in the National Parks and to ask questions, research further, and learn from the endless outlets of information within our grasp?

These technologies can be both a boon and a burden if not balanced with experiential engagement. We must get out and physically explore the world with technology by our sides as a source of guidance and learning. With these new technologies, we must weave new boundaries—between ourselves and nature and technology—in order to get past the modern myths about wilderness and foster successful shared environments that celebrate the natural world alongside humanity. The human ability to create tools that teach us more about the environment in which we live reflects our desire to learn more about ourselves and to do so through the natural world—drawing

attention to the reality of the human-nature bond, and highlighting humans and nature as integrated parts of a united whole. Flexible boundaries between humans and nature serve to facilitate a more efficient exchange of this bond; however, they are not seamless.

Advancements in technology have changed the way we see and interact with the world. In some ways, we are fearless. We have the means to predict disasters, the knowledge to fight disease, the power to influence what species live or die in the environments around us—yet, we often forget those aspects of nature that are beyond our control.

Just as human activity sometimes poses threats to natural ecosystems, our environment will never cease to embody certain risks to our own existence. Even in the national parks, rock falls and fires have taken human lives and devastated homes. In September 2017, portions of rock from El Capitan in Yosemite collapsed several times resulting in death and injuries to several park visitors (“Climber from Wales”). Also in September of that year, wildfires raged through Glacier National Park destroying important historic structures in a 20-square-mile blaze (Wamsley). Past fires have posed an even greater threat to human lives, such as the Yosemite fire in September 2014, which forced the helicopter evacuation of about 100 park visitors from the top of Half Dome in Yosemite National Park (“Fire in Yosemite”). In November 2016, another damaging fire roared through Great Smoky Mountains National Park, more severely resulting in several fatalities and the destruction of much of the nearby resort town of Gatlinburg, Tennessee (NPT Staff). These are just a few of the many catastrophes that occur in the parks each year. Boundaries can serve to provide safety for both humans and

nature in most instances; however, there are moments that wreak havoc on these boundaries.

Occurrences like the ones listed above—events of entropic destruction—can yet, in a way, remind us of the shared bond between humans and nature, of the tendency for all matter and energy in the universe to evolve toward a state of uniformity. It's as if the constructed boundaries between humans and nature can no longer be sustained and the tension results in these disasters to remind us of that material oneness of the world, to remind us of the shared environments that both we and nature reside in. At the same time, we use our advanced technologies to record these moments and more. We document our experiences in the parks to remember and revisit them—catastrophic or benign—to share them with others, contributing to the tradition of shared representations, like Cooper's and Muir's, that shape our experiences in the parks. Social media platforms like Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook allow us to share these encounters like never before, bringing the natural world into a virtual one of our own creation. These photos and videos, more often than not, depict humans interacting with those landscapes, all at once verifying that human-nature bond while also instilling the desire in countless others to visit those places and do the same.

With the advancement and popularity of technology, however, there come certain risks. We engage in framing our experiences, altering or reducing the reality of the landscapes we inhabit, to claim them as our own. This use of technology draws attention to the possessive tendency of humanity to contain nature, something that has potential to result in a greater abuse of power. In a personal interview with award-winning filmmaker

Ken Burns, Burns shared with me a sentiment of concern in regards to technology, highlighting the “asocial” side of media that has “impeded human connectivity,” and offering the caveat to “use technology as your weapon, so that it does not become a weapon that uses you.” His thinking is in line with philosopher Martin Heidegger, who explores how human beings stand in relation to technology in *The Question Concerning Technology* (1977). For Heidegger, the problem is not technology itself but rather our orientation to technology, more specifically an orientation called “enframing,” in which humankind is at risk of becoming a “standing-reserve” for technology, existing for the sake of technology rather than for itself (19-20). He explains, “The rule of Enframing threatens man with the possibility that it could be denied to him to enter into a more original revealing and hence to experience the call of a more primal truth” (28). That is, the essence of technology threatens the potential for humans to have a “free relationship” with the world, in that technology seeks out precise scientific knowledge, or a “means to an end” (3-4). As a result, humanity also becomes in danger of acquiring a sense of power over the natural world that leads us to a belief that we have control over all existence. In order to balance this orientation of humans to technology, Heidegger offers art, in the Greek sense *techne*, which is the source for the English word for technology and implements the fine arts in addition to instrumental use. Heidegger places particular emphasis on the artistic process of *techne*, which he terms *poiesis*, as a balancing factor (34). It is precisely this intersection of art, technology, humans, and nature that occurs at the national parks. We must be aware of how we orient ourselves in these relationships, both out in the natural world and as we implement technology, so that we can avoid the

risk of being defined by our relationship to technology alone, and thwart any abuse of the power that it grants us.

Online sharing has increased the popularity of the parks to over 300 million visitors each year, with nearly 331 million last recorded in 2016 (“Annual Visitation”). Most come for recreation, to bask in the beauty of a mountain landscape or the sublime vastness of canyons and deserts, but how many realize the historical significance tied to these places? How many look at the iconic National Park Service logo and are struck by the reminder that the arrowhead instills? Intended to represent historical and archaeological values (“History of the NPS”), the shape of that arrowhead doubly evokes the injustices that were faced by Native Americans for the sake of the national parks. While this history certainly does not bolster the parks morally, it is an important history from which to learn, one that we must acknowledge and contemplate for the sake of bettering future cultural engagement within the parks and beyond. When we visit the national parks, we visit places not only of complex human-nature relations but of historic human-human conflict among tourists, settlers, park officials, and American Indians that saturated the early years of the parks.

Since then, the parks have grown and evolved—not totally free from conflict—but towards acknowledgment of past wrongs and emphasis on the importance of early Native cultures across the United States. As historians Robert H. Keller and Michael F. Turek point out in *American Indians & National Parks*, “Finally, in 1987, the [National Park Service] made an official commitment, in its Native American Relationships Management Policy, that, more than merely tolerating native presence in or around parks,



it would respect and actively promote tribal cultures as a component of the parks themselves” (234). Another important act that followed was the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act in 1990, which “provides a process for museums and Federal agencies to return certain Native American cultural items—human remains, funerary objects, sacred objects, and objects of cultural patrimony—to lineal descendants, culturally affiliated Indian tribes, and Native Hawaiian organizations” (“National NAGPRA”). Over the years, moves like these have begun to mend relations between the National Parks and American Indian nations. A more recent endeavor has been the ongoing partnership between the National Park Service and the Haudenosaunee Confederacy to establish a connector trail that will expand the reaches of the John Smith Chesapeake Trail network to encompass the greater Susquehanna corridor. Taking its source from Cooper’s very own Otsego Lake in Cooperstown, New York, the Susquehanna River has historically been the livelihood of many Native American tribes who engaged in direct exchange with John Smith and Anglo culture in the sixteenth century (“Feasibility Report”). Designating the main Susquehanna corridor as a part of this trail network would pay tribute to these important cultures and the natural environments in which they thrived.<sup>57</sup> The culmination of this project will also mean the collaboration of probably the largest organization of historic Native American

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<sup>57</sup> The essence of community and nature reflected in the historical elements of this expanded corridor would also echo the writings of Susan Fenimore Cooper. As a nineteenth-century naturalist, she very much valued the sustainable ways in which she saw her own community living beside the natural world in the waterways of Otsego Lake and the greater environment around her. I am currently involved in a digital book project entitled “Digital Rural Hours,” under the leadership of Rochelle Johnson, Alfred Siewers, and Roger Hecht that seeks to digitally annotate Susan Fenimore’s published nature journal from 1850, making connections to her place via academic research as well as field work on the ground where she lived in Cooperstown, New York.

governments in the northeastern U.S. with the National Park Service finally to create a site of national park status that honors both the environment and its Native cultures.

More currently, however, there has been some troubling legislation attending the presidency under Donald Trump. Native Americans and environmentalists alike have voiced opposition to Trump's proposal to shrink protected land in Bears Ears and Grand-Staircase Escalante—two national monuments that cover millions of acres of federal land in Utah. According to U.S. News, “The two monuments were among 27 declared by former presidents Barack Obama and Bill Clinton that Trump had U.S. Secretary of the Interior Ryan Zinke review.”<sup>58</sup> Bears Ears in particular, created in December 2016 by President Obama, is of concern to five Native American tribes (Hopi, Navajo, Ute, Ute Mountain Ute, and Zuni) who spent years lobbying to make the place and its estimated 100,000 archaeological sites a national monument in the first place. Despite the historical conflict between the National Parks and American Indians, this site marks an instance of proactive relations. Obama's Presidential Proclamation of the Monument ensured that Tribal Nations would have a say in how the land is managed:

In recognition of the importance of tribal participation to the care and management of the objects identified above, and to ensure that management

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<sup>58</sup> United States Presidents have been able to designate national monuments by executive decree since Theodore Roosevelt passed The Antiquities Act of 1906 (Brinkley 642). This abuse of that power—the power to de-designate monuments just as easily—draws attention to a need to revise that original system. George Bucknam Dorr, known as the father of Acadia National Park, lobbied for three years until he was able to convince President Woodrow Wilson to sign a proclamation on July 8, 1916 to designate the area now known as Acadia National Park as Sieur de Monts National Monument. Upon his success, however, Dorr was wary: “If a president could unilaterally create a national monument, he could just as easily take it away” (*ABI*, Episode 3, 00:48:17-00:48:50). The problem that Dorr saw in the system as early as 1916 still remains an issue today.

decisions affecting the monument reflect tribal expertise and traditional and historical knowledge, a Bears Ears Commission (Commission) is hereby established to provide guidance and recommendations on the development and implementation of management plans and on management of the monument. The Commission shall consist of one elected officer each from the Hopi Nation, Navajo Nation, Ute Mountain Ute Tribe, Ute Indian Tribe of the Uintah Ouray, and Zuni Tribe, designated by the officers' respective tribes.

These Tribal Nations have been just as proactive in preserving these protections granted to them for the lands they consider sacred. In a video released by the Protect Bears Ears campaign, Regina Lopez-Whiteskunk, of the Ute Mountain Ute Tribe explains, “To diminish the Bears Ears National Monument is a dishonor to our Tribal sovereignty, to the government, to government relationships, and to the many relationships forged to advocate for the designation to begin with, but it’s a bigger heartbreak for the generations to come” (Protect Bears Ears). Since the Trump administration proposed the reduction of this monument, representatives of the five tribes have prepared and been involved with ongoing litigation, updates to which can be found at [bearscoalition.org](http://bearscoalition.org).

Another unfortunate possible change to the national parks has been the Trump administration’s consideration of increased entrance fees to 17 of the most popular national parks during peak season. The change would increase fees from \$25-30 to the steep sum of \$70 per vehicle entering the park.<sup>59</sup> While the increase is said to be put

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<sup>59</sup> The fee for an annual pass, however, which admits the vehicles of pass-owners to all National Park locations within the span of one year, would remain \$80. The charge of all passes “per vehicle” also draws attention to the main way of entry into the parks: personal vehicles. Auto-traffic (and earlier, carriage-traffic) has been an increasing concern of some, John Muir and Edward Abbey, amongst them. Not only do

towards funding for park maintenance to repair deteriorating buildings, restrooms, and roads (Fears), it makes the selected parks less accessible to much of the public economically. The act of Congress that made Yellowstone the world's first National Park in 1872 stated a purpose: "for the benefit and enjoyment of the people"—all people, regardless of class or race. President Theodore Roosevelt, on a visit to Yellowstone quoted this legislation in 1903 when he laid the cornerstone for a railroad<sup>60</sup> archway in Gardiner, Montana just outside the park (Brinkley 516). According to American humanities scholar, author, and educator Clay Jenkinson, by quoting the Yellowstone Act,

Roosevelt argued that the parks are a democratic experience. That was his essential argument about the National Parks. That the rich people always have their playgrounds, they know how to amuse themselves, and that America as a classless society, or at least a society that would like to be classless, needs to have places where regular human beings can go and stand side-by-side with the rich and privileged and enjoy the same experience and not be made to feel that they are somehow less. And so his primary argument was that the national parks are a democratic experiment in nature (*ABI*, Episode Two, 1:10:00-1:10:39)

It is true that, in regard to socio-economic class, the national parks have historically had a limited reach, originally especially with an audience in the "leisure class," but it does not

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they pollute the parks with toxic fumes and noise, but they are also not always an affordable means of transportation for all people. Perhaps the integration of a national parks public transportation system could reduce the traffic concern, simultaneously making the parks accessible to more people.

<sup>60</sup> This railway gestures towards a public transportation plan that could have been implemented and advanced into something like the system mention in the previous footnote.

diminish their role in symbolizing the nation. We must understand that the parks are representative of a country trying to move towards ideals of community and equality, though that goal might never be fully achieved. In more recent years, however, the national parks have come to represent an experience of the natural world and country that can even extend into more economically accessible urban ecosystems seen in park corridors in more developed areas. The “Urban Agenda,” for example, was launched by the National Park Service in 2015 with a goal “towards building relevancy for all Americans, to connect with their lives where they live, rather than only where some may spend their vacation” (Jarvis). This initiative encourages Americans to experience the wilderness in their own backyards, expanding the accessibility of parks while also pushing even further the human construction of wilderness. If we consider one standard definition of wilderness as including “A mingled. . . vast assemblage or collection of persons or things” (*OED*, s.v. *wilderness*), we see how an urban landscape might be considered just as wild as a natural one. While the major parks like Yellowstone or Yosemite have come to embody a traditional wilderness experience, they are also spaces for learning, spaces for those who have the socio-economic means to bring what they encounter there to other wilderness spaces closer to home. In this sense, the parks are also symbolic in the way that they offer an aesthetic experience that can be applied to other landscapes across the nation, including urban ecosystems and other developed areas as demonstrated with the park service’s “Urban Agenda.”

The idea of wilderness is something we have created, but something deeply tied to the identity of the United States. The national parks both as sites for this human-

wilderness interaction as well as sites for historical contemplation have gathered potential to evoke exploration of both self and national identity. Our individual and shared identities come to a crossroads at the parks. More than a century of writers, artists, explorers, and everyday people have found a sense of belonging in these American landscapes. While the works of James Fenimore Cooper and John Muir may have served as the precursor and foundation respectively for America's National Parks, countless others have carried on the tradition as the parks have grown and evolved. Writers and artists including but not limited to Albert Bierstadt, Ansel Adams, Edward Abbey, Chiura Obata, and Terry Tempest Williams have all participated in experiencing and interpreting the parks as the years have passed. They create new perspectives for understanding America's national parks and shape our experiences in the parks themselves as we carry those perspectives with us.

Park Ranger Shelton Johnson recalls a moment in Yosemite National Park that encapsulates the kind of experience that the parks can induce:

I remember one day I was walking in the Cooks meadow, which is a meadow in the central part of Yosemite Valley, and there was a woman there. And she was just looking up and around her and she just kept saying, "Oh! Oh my, oh my..." I went up to her and said "Ma'am are you alright?" and she said, "Yes, I'm just fine. I just...ohh." I didn't have to talk to her about the transcendent experience. She was having one. And it wasn't a transcendent experience because it was a national park, it was transcendent because it was Yosemite Valley. But because it *had* become a national park, she could have that transcendent experience, and

that's commonplace in Yosemite and where else can you get an experience like that? (*ABI*, Episode Two, 1:26:09-1:26:54)

In the moment above, Shelton Johnson and this woman forge an unspoken bond in their shared experience of the Yosemite Valley. This is what it means for the national parks to be a unifying symbol for the people of the nation. As Johnson points out, because Yosemite has become a national park—because it has become accessible to the public—this woman, like so many others, was able to have that transcendent experience. The landscapes of the parks have evoked these transcendent encounters for countless Americans. Regardless of class, race, gender, or age, the same experience that the parks induce can be extended to more accessible ecosystems outside the parks as well, and the park system itself has embraced such extended experience through its expansion into urban areas. Yet, these aesthetic moments have also been perpetually informed by our exposure to art and literature centered on wilderness and our relationship to it.

The stories behind these representations, the deeper history and knowledge to be gained from exploring beneath the surface of an ideal natural wilderness, are something that we too often overlook. We have these aesthetic experiences in the national parks and forget the boundaries that we have artificially placed between ourselves and nature. We admire the sheer beauty of dramatic park landscapes and neglect the consequences of the constructed divide that historically has caused so much hardship for Native cultures and natural environments. If the national parks are to be symbolic of America, then we must consider exactly what that means. They carry a history of relationships—both human-human and human-nature—yet, in a continually evolving world, we must now

contemplate a threefold human-nature-technology relationship. While I have demonstrated that a stark divide between humans and nature is both false and impossible, the parks offer sites of flexible boundaries where humans, nature, and technology meet. In other words, I am not suggesting that we eradicate the divide, but rather that we reconsider how the divide can function permeably to accommodate sustainable relationships between humans and nature, and, by extension, technology.

To invoke ecological terminology, the boundaries of the national parks are an ecotone of sorts: “A transitional area between two or more distinct ecological communities” (*OED*, s.v. *ecotone*). Just as an ecotone is ecologically rich and diverse due to its place on the border between ecosystems, so too do the parks offer sites for rich, integrated experiences between humans, nature, and technology. Before we reach this productive implementation of boundaries, however, we must understand the national parks not as all-inclusive utopias where human-nature-technology relations coincide flawlessly, but as textual landscapes laced with history, conflict, and a future yet to be written. As we move forward, we must contemplate this past, using it to reconsider relationships amongst ourselves and between ourselves and nature. In the words of Terry Tempest Williams, “Wildness reminds us what it means to be human, what we are connected to rather than what we are separate from.”

It is my hope for this thesis to not only shed light on historical and ecocritical scholarship surrounding Cooper, Muir, and the national parks, but also to add in some way to future park experiences for all those who visit. The transcendent experience in the national parks can be more than pure aesthetic or recreational fun. There is a human and



natural history surrounding these places that are attended by emotions just as powerful. In bringing our emotions, knowledge, and aesthetic judgment into our experiences at the national parks, we bring potential to redefine the parks and what it means for them to symbolize America as a nation. We must realize that the parks themselves are representations, reflecting a wilderness ideal that can yet be shaped and molded. In visiting the national parks and infusing our experiences with a consideration of the aesthetics, boundaries, and cultures discussed in this thesis, we bring to light a past of human-human and human-nature relationships, establish a present moment of shared experiences, and pave the way for a future that continues to seek meaning and fellowship in the environments we call home.

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