The True World

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Human cultures have employed myths as sacred stories concerned with the origins of the world or to explain how the world and its creatures came to have their present form. Greek and Roman myth is perhaps most familiar to Western society, but all human societies from Norse to Native Americans, from Australian Aborigines to Amazonians, have used myths as sacred narratives with moral lessons. Myths have provided human cultures with connections to the past and guidance for future decisions through their moral significance, but myth seems to be disappearing in Western society and much of the world today. Joseph Bruchac in *The Circle is the Way to See* retells the Native American myth of Gluskabe to emphasize the responsibility humans have to “their children’s children” (812), while providing insight to the profound evolutionary understanding of their myth which came long before Charles Darwin published his scientific treatise *The Origin of Species* in 1859.

This loss of myth has had devastating effects on the natural world and much of the blame has been attributed to the theory of evolution popularized by Darwin. Economist Kenneth E. Boulding warns of evolution:

An ideology which states that the world is essentially meaningless but that we ought to strive, suffer, and fight for it is unlikely to be powerful because of the essential contradiction among its components. If an interpretation of history says the world is meaningless, then our value system is likely to be pure hedonism—“Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die”—or else one of apathy or stoic resignation. (163)

In *The Future of Man*, Pierre Tielhard de Chardin echoes Boulding’s warning by writing, “The possibility has to be faced of Mankind falling suddenly out of love with its own destiny. This disenchantment would be conceivable, and indeed inevitable, if as a result of growing reflection we came to believe that our end could only be collective death in a hermetically sealed world” (296). It appears that Darwin had set an evolutionary time bomb for humankind, one that indirectly freed humans from environmental responsibility, but evolution has recently emerged as the vehicle for humanity’s salvation from ecological Armageddon. David Rains Wallace champions a conscious cultural evolution among humans in *The Human Element*, advocating an eco-responsibility akin to Bruchac. In an excerpt from *The End of Nature*, Bill McKibben addresses humanity’s ability to exercise this eco-responsibility and willfully choose survival over extinction. Indeed, humans can now drive their own evolutions by interacting with, adapting to, and changing their environments positively. By being aware of our own evolutionary and ecological potential, humankind has the ability to consciously choose what is in its best interest for survival. Ironically, the emergence of evolution in nature myth may be what saves humankind from hastening its exit from the evolutionary center-stage, while reviving myth that is disappearing in Western culture.

Bruchac tackles the issue of the disappearance of myth in American culture in *The Circle is the Way to See*. He tells the Native American myth of Gluskabe, the Trickster, who “contains both the Good Mind, which can benefit the people and help the Earth, and that other Twisted Mind, a mind governed by selfish thoughts that can destroy the natural balance and bring disaster” (812). Grandmother Woodchuck reprimands Gluskabe for capturing all the game animals in a magical game bag because “In the future, our small ones, our children’s children, will die of hunger” (812) and forces him to return the animals to the forest. Bruchac uses the myth to clarify the ecological responsibility of humans for the perpetuation of the land and all its beings, but also to represent the practical, common-sense relationship myth has with nature. He writes, “We have been given ceremonies and lesson stories (which in many ways are ceremonies in and of themselves) to remind us of our proper place” (816). Sociologist Leslie A. White in *The Science of Culture* considers culture a form of social heredity whose significant attribute is its transmissibility by non-biological means (363). Echoing Bruchac and Darwin, White insists, “It becomes the primary function of culture, therefore, to harness and control energy so that it may be put to the work in man’s service” (387).

In *The Circle is the Way to See* Bruchac also demonstrates the profound evolutionary understanding of Native Americans who realize that humans are a part of the circle of Creation and that the Earth is “the web of life that sustains us” (815). European colonists have weakened nature’s web in North America because of their anthropocentrism and made the Earth sick (815), but Bruchac presents an evolutionary perspective shared by Native Americans, elucidating:
Wallace captures the complexity of evolution emerging in modern myth in his work _The Human Element_. He believes, “We are fortunate to have the self-consciousness that allows us the possibility of free will” (934) and supports a cultural evolution amongst humans because “we must change to survive” (934). Going beyond the projection of human consciousness onto non-human nature found in many myths, Wallace suggests that evolutionary science has created the possibility of nature having its own consciousness (935). He introduces science into myth because it “has allowed us to begin to imagine states of consciousness quite different from our own. We can see to begin trees, birds, and spiders not as masks concealing humanlike spirits but as being in their own right, beings that are infinitely more mysterious and wonderful than the nymphs and sprites of old myths” (935).

Using ‘giants’ of the Klamath region on the California-Oregon border to exemplify how humans can adapt traditional myths to the humanity’s present predicament, Wallace builds a bridge between science and myth. ‘Giants seem to have originated as a way of giving human form to all that is titanic and inhuman in nature’ (936), he writes, and they have “understood the world more deeply than we have, and that thus inhabits it more comfortably and freely, while eluding our self-involved attempts to capture it” (936). According to Wallace, giants continue to humble humankind with their apparent omniscience and immortality (936), while also providing “a new function in evolutionary myth” (936) by linking us to “lakes, rivers, forests, and meadows that are our home as well as theirs. They lure us into the wilderness, as they lead us, not to devour us but to remind us where we are, on a living planet” (936). From the pre-adapted perspective, new human myths can evolve (936), but these future myths will still have the fundamental purpose of sustaining life (935). In _The Meaning of Evolution_ professor George Gaylord Simpson concurs with Wallace, proposing, “The new evolution continues to interact with and in considerable measure to depend on the old” (330). Simpson also sponsors the ideology that “it is each individual’s responsibility to choose what he considers right directions for social and for biological evolution” (331). By confronting their evolutionary choices consciously, it seems humans can willingly choose survival over extinction. Through a future evolutionary myth adapted from traditional myths and living giants, humankind can participate in its own cultural evolution and prevent its own destruction.

In an excerpt from _The End of Nature_, McKibben addresses the evolutionary responsibility of humans to embrace “a brave new ethos” (1129). He fears, “The loss of memory will be the eternal loss of meaning” (1127), reiterating the threat of disappearing myth apparent in the works of Bruchac and Wallace. McKibben proposes the discouraging idea that humans are ending nature in their myopic pursuit of a good life (1121). He warns that the idea of nature autonomous from humankind can go extinct and cautions, “The meaning of the wind, the sun, the rain—of nature—has already changed. Yes, the wind still blows—but no longer from some other sphere, some inhuman place” (1121). The end of nature also signifies an ecological catch-22 for the preservation of nature myth. Humankind’s growing disconnection from nature and pervasive effects on global systems have made fewer people attach themselves to vanishing nature because they are afraid of committing themselves to a relationship doomed for evolutionary, if not self-imposed, death (1126).

However, for McKibben evolution gives the human species the free will to voluntarily choose to remain on this earth because it allows us “to recognize the danger that our growth poses to it, and to feel something for the other species we threaten” (1128). By living up to their evolutionary potential, humankind could enter “ten thousand years of humble civilization when we choose to pay more for the benefits of nature, when we rebuild the sense of wonder and sanctity that could protect the world” (1129), and perhaps restore nature from the insidious affect of an indifferent and short-sighted humanity. He hopes that “If we now, limited our numbers and our desires and our ambitions, perhaps nature could someday resume its independent working” (1129), alluding to the rekindling of nature myth and evolutionary awareness as the keys to humanity’s self-preservation ethos.

Literature and philosophy professor Peter Marshall states of evolution in _Nature's Web_, “And if man is taught that he is a brute, or at least descended from one, then there is nothing to stop him from becoming one. The thin veneer of civilization, carefully built up over centuries, would be torn down and humanity fall back into a savage state of nature where all would prey on all” (330). Marshall focuses on how the Darwinian legacy has transformed humankind’s view of itself and of its place in nature (329), but only reveals one side of the dual nature of evolution. Darwin offers more hope than Marshall in his _The Origin of Species_, positing, “Whilst this planet has gone cycling according to the fixed laws of gravity, how is it possible for one simple beginning endless forms most beautiful and most wonderful have been, and are being, evolved” (460). Darwin’s evolutionary optimism is evident in _The Human Element_ by Wallace and in the excerpt from _The End of Nature_ by McKibben, but both authors also utilize myth as a vector for dispersing evolutionary awareness. Evolutionary myth itself has evolved from unscientific, pre-Columbian myth and the dismal portrayal of humans as just another act in the drama of evolution, to a nature narrative that gives humankind hope of preservation by consciously participating in its own cultural evolution. Bruchac emphasizes the importance of listening and learning from myth for all people of the Earth in _The Circle is the Way to See_, while advocating a cultural awareness and evolution that foreshadowed Darwin by millennia. Perhaps the ecological success of pre-Columbian cultures rests in its use of myth, with its ethical insights, as opposed to the purely scientific theory of evolution that exposed humankind to the dishonoring reality of extinction without clarifying any of the moral obligations. Botanist William H. Murdy summarizes the dual nature of evolution in _Anthropocentrism: A Modern Vision_, seeing it as ultimately beneficial for humanity, writing:

The ecological crisis is viewed as an inevitable crisis in human evolution. Through cultures knowledge becomes cumulative. A crisis occurs when our knowledge of nature, which determines our power to exploit nature, exceeds our knowledge of how to use knowledge for our own survival and for improvement in the quality of our lives. An anthropocentric belief in the value, meaningfulness, and creative potential of the human phenomenon is considered a necessary motivating to participatory evolution which, in turn, may be requisite to the future survival of the human species and its cultural values. (287)
The idea of the Green Man refers to the archetype of human oneness with nature and for a wide variety of the archetype's cultural manifestations (Olshen 96). In The Tree John Fowles criticizes scientists, academics, and, to a lesser degree, artists, who insist on explaining nature by ordering its “green chaos” (603). They “wish to make what is unconscious or partly conscious fully conscious, to use the sacred places for profane ends” (Olshen 105). To Fowles, “the idea that the real, the truly significant, is private and hidden” (Olshen 105), and the Green Man represents in his writing the basic human need for internal and external disorder. He writes, “achieving a relationship with nature is both a science and an art, beyond mere knowledge or mere feeling alone” (599). This theme of a union between science and art is present in a chapter from Aldo Leopold’s A Sand County Almanac entitled “Marshland Elegy.” Leopold laments the loss of cranes from the drainage of peat bogs in Wisconsin and expresses, “Our ability to perceive quality in nature begins, as in art, with the pretty. It expands through successive stages of beautiful to values as yet uncaptured by language. The quality of cranes lies, I think, in this higher gamut, as yet beyond the reach of words” (102). In contrast to Fowles, Leopold employs his scientific knowledge in a style that is not only artistic, but wise; uniting science and art in a sacred ecology that fosters a healthy relationship between humans and nature. Although Fowles and Leopold disagree on the roles of science and art in enhancing the human-nature relationship, both authors impart that nature is beyond the ability of words to capture. While Fowles condemns those who attempt to “defoliate the wicked green man, hunt him out of his trees” (Olshen 105), Leopold calls out to the Green Man to be an ecological diplomat between science and art, through successive stages of beautiful to values as yet uncaptured by language. The quality of cranes lies, I think, in this higher gamut, as yet beyond the reach of words” (102). In contrast to Fowles, Leopold employs his scientific knowledge in a style that is not only artistic, but wise; uniting science and art in a sacred ecology that fosters a healthy relationship between humans and nature. Although Fowles and Leopold disagree on the roles of science and art in enhancing the human-nature relationship, both authors impart that nature is beyond the ability of words to capture. 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Flash forward one class period. Surviving Delores, relieved to hear the bell, I reach for my choker. My-friend, Delores Parker.

nobody happy with their middle school body – my world. And, fear – fear of big, different, scary, not-

lockers, the embarrassed turning of bodies to corners, avoiding stares at flat chests or big busts, father's artist friends. Sighing deeply, I untie the knot and stuff it into my gym bag. Sweat, slamming piece of knotted leather, separated by washers and bolts, warmed by my skin, a gift from one of my father's artist friends. The coolest hippie choker ever lies against my neck, yellow and green wooden beads strung on a metal piece of Presses, 1999. 96-113.

Nature: Fourteen Perspectives on Landscape
Olshen, Barry N.

Meine, Curt.

Leopold, Aldo.


Aldo Leopold presents a more optimistic perspective on the positions of science and art in helping humans develop a strong relationship to nature in A Sand County Almanac. In the prosaic chapter entitled “Marshland Elegy,” Leopold couples his scientific background as a forester and wildlife biologist with an artful eloquence in describing a Wisconsin marsh. His scientific knowledge of geology, evolution, paleontology, ornithology, dendrology, and ecology contribute to the detailed description of the great marsh. Leopold notes the morning fog which resembles “the white ghost of a glacier” (101), the annual return of the cranes “is the ticking of the geologic clock” (103), the cranes “stand…upon the sodden pages of their own history” (102), in peat bogs “laid down in the basin of an ancient lake” (102). The tone seems to congratulate Darwin for enlightening humans to the geologic time scale of evolution, a contrast to Fowles’ assertion that Darwin’s legacy has isolated and detached humans from the natural world (593).

Curt Meine writes in Correction Lines: Essays on Land, Leopold, and Conservation, “Leopold rarely failed to highlight the aesthetic dimension of his work” (99), and later adds, “[his] aesthetic sensibility, as enhanced by the new science [of ecology], was useful” (102). Leopold’s endorsement of both art and science to develop a healthy human-nature relationship opposes Fowles’ discouraging perspective on the subject. Fowles stresses, “We shall never fully understand nature (or ourselves), and certainly never respect it, until we dissociate the wild from the notion of usability” (599), but Leopold transcends this dualism in formulating a land aesthetic “that celebrated not the superficial appearance of natural objects and places, but their evolutionary history and ecological relationships; he extended traditional criteria of natural beauty to the point where they essentially merged with his sense of long-term utility based on land health” (Meine 114).

Fowles and Leopold would agree that words cannot capture the true essence of nature, but the authors diverge on the issue of science and art fostering a healthy human-nature relationship. In the Tree, Fowles feels the Green Man is “lost by science in man’s attitude to nature” (598). Conversely, science and art enhance Leopold’s historical description of the Wisconsin marshland. Indeed, Leopold writes with an informed tone, eloquent speech, and refined style that imparts a land wisdom steeped in scientific knowledge and artistic awareness. Leopold laid the groundwork for the contemporary science of ecology, but simultaneously fostered “the hope that the Green Man in our time will unite what have hitherto been considered antipathetic modes of consciousness, early animism and modern science, and that the union will result in a science and art that are in harmony with wild Nature” (Olshen 96). Unlike Fowles, Leopold seems to call out to the Green Man, maybe even ask to shake his hand, and unite science and art in a sacred ecology that bridges the chasm widening between humans and nature.
Gone! Frustration sears behind my eyelids. I scabber in the bottom of my bag, desperate to find it, certain my prized possession has been stolen.

Flash forward – a day later. Delores Parker, the hallway and my green and yellow hippie gear gleaming in the folds of her puffy neck. I walk past her and stare, but she doesn't meet my eyes. She knows that she is flaunting her ill-gotten gains in my face. I am too weak to confront her but I am no snitch. She sails down the hall, not a care in the world, confident that her theft will go unpunished.

Flash forward – a year later – a new school, a new town and news from home...Delores Parker dead from some dread disease, her life cut short, her future done and I feel...vindicated? That is too strong a word – confused I ponder, in my secret, silent heart. Did she deserve this karma? Immediately guilty, I rewind and revise my thinking.

Flash forward – the yearbook dedication and her photo. I summon tears. I had no part in her demise. Vengeance is always the Lord's.

There weren't enough boxes before, so they made new ones. Welcome the new boxes: fabulously primped queens, dreamy turtleneck-donned Wills, die hard politico dikes, and lipstick lesbians. Say hello to the career climbing bitches, bike riding veggies, diaper bag daddies, and enigmatic indie dreamers. In the search to expand an archaic paradigm, one in which many found themselves outside and looking in, they created more boxes. New boxes so that everyone will have a place, so that everyone will be included. Everyone will love himself or herself, and everyone will be loved in return.

Its all inclusive, so they say. So why is that with each new box, some of us, like me, feel even more alienated? I am still on the outside looking in. There is a polarity between the old paradigm and new, so, if you didn't fit into the Stepford fences of the old, and yet you're not quite crunchy enough, gay enough, or whatever orthodox enough to fit into the new, well, then there is still no box for you, my friend. Moderate liberal? Not good enough! Bisexual? That doesn't even exist! Motherhood? That's pathetic. Don't know that band? Laughable.

They said they hated the boxes, but, given the chance to enter one, they rush in, unpack, and squat there like they never knew anything before it. I can't blame them. I imagine that its ever so warm and fuzzy inside those walls- large patriarchal walls, boundaries, of validation, a big blanket wrapped around you saying, “Hello. You're a correct human being.” At some point there is a hardening of the boundaries, once so permeable. Horror of horrors for the inhabitants to find some sad loner encroaching upon the Holy territory. They feverishly turn into pack wolves, protecting the box from outside intrusion. To let others into the box is to permit evolution, and to do that is to risk the status quo that accepts them each. The wolves throw former idealisms to the wind.

Its human nature. Revolutionaries turn into conservatives, and, yet, still parade around like the newest bike in town. Clinging to old grievances, “We are the underdog,” they proudly say. Well, somehow, as I watch them in their comfortable boxes, with their smug pride. I just can't help seeing it all as a reflection of everything they hate. I don't blame them though; I just envy their shelter.

There weren't enough boxes before, so they made new ones. Welcome the new boxes: fabulously primped queens, dreamy turtleneck-donned Wills, die hard politico dikes, and lipstick lesbians. Say hello to the career climbing bitches, bike riding veggies, diaper bag daddies, and enigmatic indie dreamers. In the search to expand an archaic paradigm, one in which many found themselves outside and looking in, they created more boxes. New boxes so that everyone will have a place, so that everyone will be included. Everyone will love himself or herself, and everyone will be loved in return.

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Comments Off on Boxed Out

Categories:

Karin Curtis

There isn't enough space in the world for everyone to feel included, much less loved. The world is a box, and even the new boxes I mentioned before, are not enough. Some try to comfort and ease the confines by creating a brand new box, one all inclusive, but completely fake. The new boxes are all perfunctory, and tend to be shallow, petty and self-righteous. They are inadequate and are not enough. People are still looking in, and want in.

Comments Off on James Fenimore Cooper's Hudson Valley

Categories:

Nina

The story is a familiar one: one evening in 1819 James Fenimore Cooper, rather unimpressed with a novel he had been reading, boasted to his wife, “I can write you a better novel than that myself.” Calling her husband’s bluff she replied, “Well, do it then.” And so the writing career of the first truly American author was born. Cooper was the first to use and celebrate American themes, settings, characters, and history in his works. The writing career of James Fenimore Cooper was long and storied. During his thirty-one-year career he wrote thirty-two novels, a history of the US Navy, a play, and other various pamphlets, fliers, etc. Cooper's novels have received various critiques over the years. Some critics lauded his social commentary, while others dismissed his works as “boys’ books.” What cannot be denied was the popularity of his more famous works as noted by James Grossman: “His popularity soared so high that Americans, clamoring for a literature of their own, as a compliment, dubbed him the “American Scott” (698). Now, with the emergence of ecological criticism, we have another reason to once again examine and interpret Cooper's works. And once we begin this new examination, we find an entirely new emphasis in many of his novels—an emphasis on the landscape and the influence the landscape can have on a character and an entire work, as Donald Ringe notes, “We must always take into account, therefore, the interrelation of man and nature in Cooper's work. To do otherwise is to court the serious danger of misunderstanding completely the fundamental meaning that Cooper is trying to express” (5-6). We have for sometime been aware of the environmental consciousness Cooper displayed (most notably by Natty Bumppo and Cooper's commentary in the Leatherstocking Tales), but now we see that he also had a substantial interest in the landscape in a work, especially as milieu. Throughout his novels, Cooper used five distinct types of landscape: the...
wretchedness, the island, the sea, the old country, and most importantly, the garden. While all of these
tales such as the sea and Old Country landscapes, the potential gentleman
conditions and surroundings which make the gentleman’s evolution impossible.
Another of Cooper’s landscapes which is not very beneficial to the potential gentleman is the
island. The island, however, is rather uncertain; for one character it can be a Tartarus, for another a
milieu for his right of passage or even a potential garden (an Eden). The novels in which Cooper
employs the island landscape include The Headsman, or The Hutted Knooll, and The Oak Openings. In all of these tales, the harsh
corruption of the city, yet proximity to the city to take advantage of the good traits of the city—the arts
and refinement of higher society, as I have stated elsewhere:

To show how beneficial this landscape was to his potential gentleman, Cooper use a variety of other
landscapes, some of which could be a malevolent influence on his characters.

This first of these landscapes to discuss is the wilderness, a landscape for which Cooper is
perhaps most famous. The wilderness was a proper location, or milieu, for a gentleman’s right of
passage, a good area for the gentleman to help it evolve into a garden, but not a good location to live.
Notable tales which fall under this category include all the Leatherstocking tales, The West of Wish-
Ten-Weth, Wyantidottle, or The Huted Knooll, and The Oak Openings. In all of these tales, the harsh
conditions of living in wilderness conditions and surroundings are brought to the fore, conditions and
surroundings which make the gentleman’s evolution impossible.

Another of Cooper’s landscapes which is not very beneficial to the potential gentleman is the island.
The island, however, is rather uncertain; for one character it can be a Tartarus, for another a
milieu for his right of passage or even a potential garden (an Eden). The novels in which Cooper
employs the island landscape include The Headsman, the Sea Lions, and The Crater, the Sea Lions
being prime example of the island’s enigmatic influence on the characters. The island is indeed an
ambiguous landscape in Cooper’s works. One of the prime reasons for this ambiguity is the island’s
location—it is surrounded by the ocean, always “the unstable element” in Cooper’s words. The image of
the sea is so pervasive in Cooper’s works that even when he discusses the American prairie—hundreds
of miles from any saltwater—he uses maritime images (Cooper, Praising 13). The parallels between
the ocean and sea are evident in Cooper’s works, but his sea tales did more than to extend landscape
similes and metaphors from the sea to the land and visa versa; in fact; his sea tales, as Thomas
Philbrick notes, although overshadowed by his frontier tales, comprise more than a third of his works
and were “regarded as a major achievement by many of his contemporaries, here and in England” (ix);
One of his sea tales which vividly illustrates the ambiguity of the island landscape is The Sea
Lions. In this tale Cooper uses the island as a wilderness, a milieu in which his potential gentleman.
Roswell, can undergo his right of passage. Throughout the tale, the island brings out the dominant
traits of one’s moral composition; hence, Roswell becomes one of Cooper’s gentlemen because of his
faith and kindness; Daggett, another character who also has a chance to complete a rite of passage,
dies because of his duplicity and greed, as I have posited before:

Thus, The Sea Lions is more than a tale of greed and conversion- it is a test. . . . The result of this
test illustrates that one of Cooper’s gentlemen can overcome the negative influence of the island on
his psyche and morals, while another man, without the proper traits, will succumb to his depravity
and perish. (Newman 69)

The island, therefore, is a rather ambiguous landscape. While the wilderness is not a proper place for a
gentleman to reside but is the proper milieu for his right of passage, the island may be a proper place for
a character to undergo a right of passage, depending on the character’s morals. While this
ambiguity exists in the island landscape, there is no such ambiguity in the landscapes of the Old
Country and of the sea.

The tales of the Old Country include The Bravo, The Heidenmauriner, and The Headsman. In each of these
tales the main character and potential gentleman is defeated in his quest to become a
gentleman by Old World customs and mores. And the reason is quite simple: these characters are on
unacceptable landscapes. The Heidenmauriner and The Heidenmauriner are set in the treacherous Alps of
Switzerland and in the mountains of Bavaria; The Bravo is set in canals of Venice. Neither of these
landscapes even remotely resemble the rolling hills of the American garden (such as the Hudson
Valley), the seat of democracy and free of Old World restraints, such as history, tradition, and heritage.

In the tales that deal with the sea and Old Country landscapes, the potential gentleman never
attains gentleman status. There are just too many negative influences on these characters. In tales such as
Ned Myers and Wing and Wing, the cause for these characters’ inability to reach
gentleman status is rather obvious—they spend too much time on the sea, the unstable element. Ned
Myers is indeed a sad tale, for Ned seals his fate early in his life by deciding on a life at sea; as I have
said before, “his life becomes one long, tragic, existence at sea, spiraling downward until his final days
spent in an old salt’s haven”; during this tragic life, Ned sailed on approximately 72 ships, watched 10
men die, was a prisoner of war, and was finally wounded bad enough to be crippled. His 33 years at
sea have left him a cripple with a wound in his side, creating a somewhat warped maritime Jesus
Christ figure (Newman 79). This is what a life at sea on the “unstable element” results in for Cooper’s
potential gentlemen.

Another unhappy ending is in store for Raoul Yvard of Wing and Wing. He too has spent too
much time at sea, albeit fighting for his country. And while Ned Myers’ life is indeed a sad tale, the
tale of Raoul is perhaps even more of a tragedy. Ned’s life does not affect the happiness or quality
of another persons life; Raoul’s does. With his death, his true love, Ghita, is resigned to a tragic life of
Much like Jefferson, Cooper saw the great potential for those who lived in this “middle state,” this put in to his gentlemen—this is the new world leader of a democratic state. With his education, bravery, honesty, integrity, land, wealth—all the characteristics Cooper possessed a good mind for thinking quickly in critical situations,” and most importantly, love for the land and cultivating the garden, and it will take care of you by providing physical and financial security. While this theme is evident in the Littlepage manuscripts, it is much more important in the Miles Wallingford tales. Miles’ adventures start when he and his boyhood friend, Rupert, run away from home to go to sea. They ship aboard the John, and because Miles’ father was a captain, Miles is known to the captain and some of the crew of the John. Because of this familiarity, Miles could receive special attention, but he will not have it. He wants to prove himself, and with the help of Clabonny, he excels. It seems that every time Miles is about face an adventure, his thoughts of Clabonny give him the strength he needs to succeed. When pirates attack the John, during Miles’ watch late one night, he is awake on deck thinking of Clabonny; hence, he is able to sound the alarm and help his shipmates fight off the pirates. When he isadrift at sea in a jolly boat with other crew members after the John sinks, he found himself once more thinking of Clabonny one night. The next morning he is the one who “caught a glimpse of something that seemed like a hummock of land” (Cooper, Afloat 273). A third time Miles thinks of Clabonny and gets the courage to fight off a French privateer and is the one who notices that the other ship’s crew is hiding behind the bulwarks and warns his shipmates. Finally, on another voyage, it is Miles, after thinking of Clabonny, who saves the ship. After the ship is taken by pirates, he brings it back to where it started. Miles has further developed the mutualistic relationship with the land his father started, making more improvements to the land and building an even larger home. With Miles, the transition from wilderness to garden is complete.

In The Redskinsthe fifth and sixth generations of Littlepages, Hugh Roger Littlepage (Uncle Ro) and Hugh Roger Littlepage (Hugh), this tale does not have the adventure or excitement of the earlier works because Cooper used this as social commentary against the Anti-Rent wars of the 1830s and 1840s. While Corny and Mordy had to go out and create the garden and fight for it, Hugh has but to maintain what his forefathers created. This he does by defeating the anti-renters, a.k.a. the Redskins, not with arms and warfare but by using legal homeowners rights. The garden his ancestors created is preserved, and Hugh can now pass on to his heirs the benefits and security of having this land. Once again, the mututalistic relationship with the land is promoted: take care of the land by cultivating the garden, and it will take care of you by providing physical and financial security. While this theme is evident in the Littlepage manuscripts, it is much more important in the Miles Wallingford tales.

The Littlepage manuscripts follow the title family through several generations and displays how a family and its gentlemen rise in status to become social leaders in a democracy. In Satinasto the die is cast with life and accomplishments of Cornelius Littlepage, a.k.a. Corny. It is Corny who first ventures to the patent his family owns up in New York near Albany. He goes through many trials in his right of passage: leading the expedition to the patent in the wilderness; saving the life of his future wife, Anneke Mordaunt; fighting in the battle of Fort Ticonderoga; laying the foundations of Ravensnest and Moosenede estates on the patent; and, most importantly, developing a mutualistic relationship with the land, as it is this close relationship with the land that sets Cooper’s gentlemen apart. Cooper shows us there is a symmetry between the two evolutions—Corny into a man (gentleman) and the wilderness into a garden.

In The Chainbearer Mordaunt Littlepage (Mordy) completes his right of passage and makes more improvements to the land. For Mordy’s right of passage he must fight to keep what is his land. The threat to his land comes in the form of a squatter named Aaron Timberman, a.k.a. Thousandacres, who depleats all the resources from one parcel and then moves on to ruin another piece of land. In the end, Timberman dies as a result of the fighting between his clan and Mordy’s tenants, and Mordy is established as the true leader of the village that has arisen around his estate on his patent. Finally, Mordy has further developed the mutualistic relationship with the land his father started, making more improvements to the land and building an even larger home. With Mordy, the transition from wilderness to garden is complete.

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Miles also illustrates Cooper’s theme of a new American gentleman being an improved gentleman, better than the gentlemen of the Old World. While on the Crisis, he saves a prize captured by the Crisis by pulling a “bait and switch” with a West Indianm that so the French lugger that had been chasing them, takes the West Indian instead. Later, after Miles loses his ship to a French captain, he and his crew build another ship, chase down his ship, and recapture it. Finally, during the hostilities between the French and the English at the turn of the nineteenth century, Miles in just a few days and no less than four separate times bests the officers of the French and British ships, leaving them to fight each other while he sails away. And since these officers were gentleman (one had to be a gentleman in many Old World countries to get an officer’s commission), we can say the American gentleman bests the Old World gentleman. This was one of Cooper’s themes in his formation of a New American gentleman—a meliorist, he took the best qualities of Old Word gentlemen and combined them with the best qualities of American gentleman to create a new, improved gentleman. This new American gentleman came from the American garden, which was most precisely presented in Cooper’s works in the Hudson Valley of New York.

More than an author of “boys’ books,” Cooper was a social critic, a meliorist, a teacher, and so popular he was dubbed “The American Scott.” In his vast portfolio he used a myriad of settings, from Antarctic islands, to the Alps of Switzerland, to the American wilderness, to the canals of Venice, to South Pacific islands, to the mountains of Bavaria, to the open ocean (both Atlantic and Pacific), to the American plains, and finally to the American garden. In all of these works, the setting, the landscape, had a major influence not only on the action but also on the characters, especially the character who represented Cooper’s new American gentleman. Of all of these landscapes, however, none were so influential or beneficial as the American garden, most notably illustrated by Cooper’s beloved Hudson Valley. From this land came Cooper’s prime example of a new American gentleman in Miles Wallingford. With his education, bravery, honesty, integrity, land, wealth—all the characteristics Cooper put in his gentleman—this is the new world leader of a democratic state.

Much like Jefferson, Cooper saw the great potential for those who lived in this “middle state,” this...
area between the city and the wilderness. Here they could enjoy the freedom of the wilderness as well as the refinements of the city; they did not have to live among "the savages," but neither were they influenced by the corruption of the city. This area truly offered these people the best of both worlds. And lying between the greatest city of the new world (New York) and the vast, great American wilderness was perhaps the greatest middle state this new land had to offer. Hence, only from these rolling hills, winding rivers and streams, beautiful farms with rich, fecund soil could a new world leader arise from Cooper's beloved Hudson Valley.

Works Cited


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