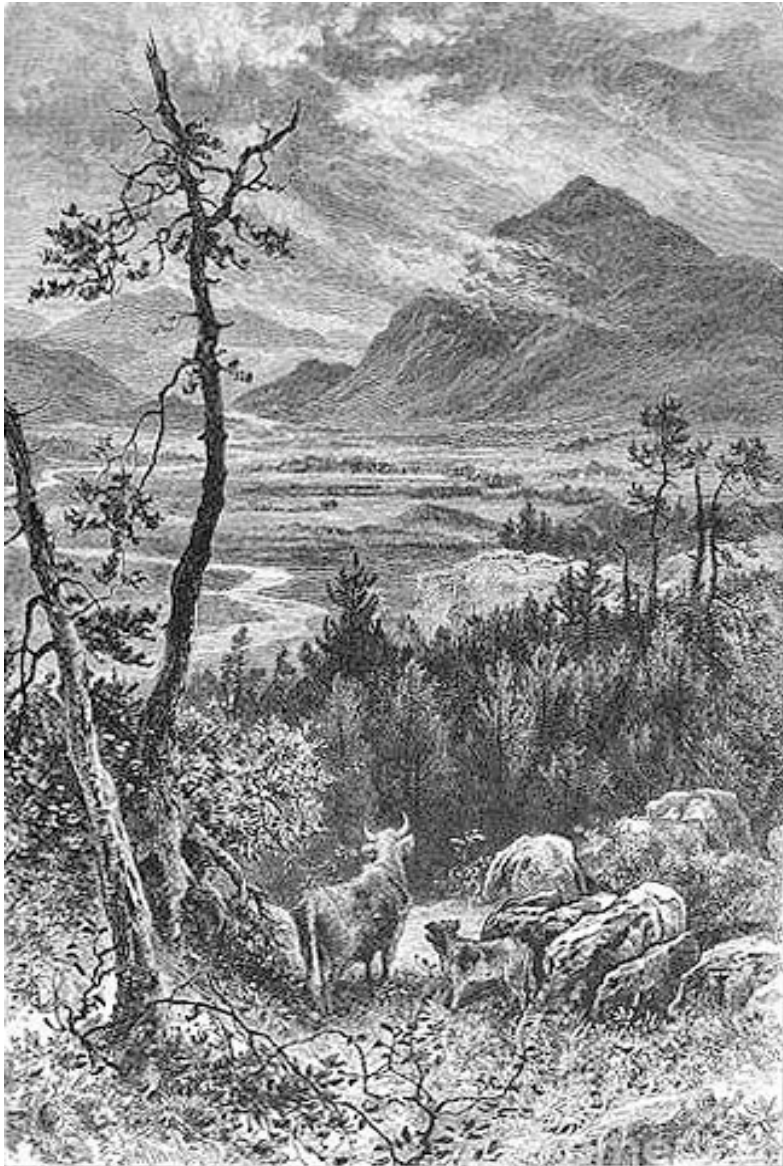


TRANSATLANTIC IDENTITIES



2. NATURE AND NATURE'S GOD

September 27, 2023

NATURE AND NATURE'S GOD

FOR CENTURIES, WESTERN POETS AND PAINTERS have seen the natural world as proof of God's bounty. This was especially true in early 19th-century America, where immigrant artists, newly arrived from Europe, saw the land as a second Eden, an unexplored terrain offering the chance to begin again. But already in the old world, artists of the Romantic movement were beginning to depict Nature as a metaphor for and mirror of their own feelings of love, loss, or wonder. And on both continents, though rather earlier in Britain than America, writers, painters, and composers were turning to distant parts of their country—the Scottish Highlands, the Rocky Mountains, and Niagara—whose sheer scale raised existential questions that could not so easily be answered. *rb.*

A. GETTING OUR BEARINGS

A close study of two almost-contemporary artworks to discover the kinds of meanings that landscape paintings can contain.

COMPARISON: Constable and Cole

Constable: *Salisbury Cathedral from the Meadows* (1831, Tate)

Cole: *The Oxbow* (1836, NY Met)

B. GOD IN NATURE

While some artists, especially in America, are explicit in linking their experience of Nature to the Judaeo-Christian God, most Romantics spoke in terms of a less specifically sectarian Creator, although there were exceptions in both directions.

♪ **Alexander:** *All Things Bright and Beautiful* (hymn from Ipswich)

Palmer: *After the Service* and *A Hilly Scene* (both 1830, Tate)

Palmer: illustration to *Psalm 65*

Cole: *The Garden of Eden* (1828, Fort Worth)

COMPARISON: Wordsworth Sonnets

♪ **Wordsworth:** *It is a beauteous evening* (Benedict Cumberbatch)

♪ **Wordsworth:** *The world is too much with us* (John Reads Poetry)

Turner: *Mer de Glace in the Valley of Chamouni* (1803, Yale)

COMPARISON: Coleridge and Shelley

Coleridge: *Hymn Before Sunrise* (1803), excerpt

Shelley: *Mont Blanc* (1816), final stanza

Durand: *Kindred Spirits* (1849, NYPL)

Bryant: *To a Waterfowl* (1815), first and last stanzas

♪ **Emerson:** *The Rhodora* (read by T. Schaberg)

C. MAN IN NATURE

We shall attempt to disentangle two separate threads: Nature as the mirror of Man in an aesthetic or psychological sense, and Nature as the literal environment in which people live and work.

COMPARISON: Constable and Durand

Constable: *The Cornfield* (1826, London NG)

Durand: *The Beeches* (1845, NY Met)

Constable: *The Hay Wain* (1821, London NG)

♪ **Bennett:** *Symphony #5* (excerpt, with **Constable** *Clouds*)

Stubbs: *Horse Frightened by a Lion* (1770, Liverpool)

Fuseli: *The Nightmare* (1781, Detroit)

Friedrich: *Wanderer Above a Sea of Mist* (1817, Hamburg)

Lewis: *Harvest in Herefordshire* (1816, Tate)

♪ **Clare:** *The Wren* (Simon Loekle)

♪ **Clare:** *I Am* (Tom O'Bedlam)

♪ **Canning:** *Fantasy on a Hymn Tune by Justin Morgan*

D. NATURE IN THE WILD

We look at how the poetry and music of Scotland has been shaped by its landscape, beginning with the work of a remarkable forger in the mid-18th century. And moving to America as contrast, we look at depictions of the Niagara Falls and (previewing Class 7) the Rocky Mountains.

COMPARISON: McCulloch and Bierstadt

McCulloch: *Glencoe* (1864, Glasgow Kelvingrove)

Bierstadt: *Valley of the Yosemite* (1864, Boston MFA)

♪ **Macpherson:** *Ossian* (declaimed over Mendelssohn music)

♪ **Mendelssohn:** *Fingal's Cave* (opening)

Turner: *Staffa, Fingal's Cave* (1832, Yale)

♪ **Mendelssohn:** *Scottish Symphony* (opening of the scherzo)

♪ **Scott:** *The Lay of the Last Minstrel: Rosabelle* (Tom O'Bedlam)

♪ **Burns:** *Banks o'Doon* (Kenneth McKellar)

♪ **Burns:** "She's faire and fause," first stanza

♪ **Mackenzie:** *Scottish Rhapsody #2* (slow mvmt; pictures by **Doré**)

Cole: *Distant View of Niagara Falls* (1830, Chicago)

Church: *Niagara Falls* (1857, Washington NGA)

COMPARISON: poems about Niagara

♪ **Heinrich:** *War of the Elements / Thundering of Niagara* (1845)

♪ **Fry:** *Niagara Symphony* (opening)

Cecil Frances **Alexander** (1818–95, *English poet*), William Sterndale **Bennett** (1816–75, *English composer*), Albert **Bierstadt** (1830–1902, *American painter*), William Cullen **Bryant** (1794–1878, *American poet*), Robert **Burns** (1759–96, *Scottish poet*), Thomas **Canning** (1911–81, *American composer*), Frederic Edwin **Church** (1826–1900, *American painter*), John **Clare** (1793–1864, *English poet*), Samuel Taylor **Coleridge** (1772–1834, *English poet*), Thomas **Cole** (1801–48, *American painter*), John **Constable** (1776–1837, *English painter*), Gustave **Doré** (1832–83, *French painter*), Asher **Durand** (1796–1886, *American painter*), Waldo Ralph **Emerson** (1803–82, *American poet*), Caspar David **Friedrich** (1774–1840, *German painter*), William Henry **Fry** (1813–64, *American composer*), Henry **Fuseli** (1741–1825, *Swiss-English painter*), Anthony Philip **Heinrich** (1781–1861, *American composer*), George **Inness** (1825–94, *American painter*), George Robert **Lewis** (1782–1871, *English painter*), Alexander **Mackenzie** (1847–1935, *Scottish composer*), James **Macpherson** (1736–96, *Scottish poet*), Horatio **McCulloch** (1805–67, *Scottish painter*), Felix **Mendelssohn** (1809–47, *German composer*), Alexander **Nasmyth** (1758–1840, *Scottish painter*), Samuel **Palmer** (1805–81, *English painter*), Sir Walter **Scott** (1771–1832, *Scottish poet and novelist*), Percy Bysshe **Shelley** (1792–1822, *English poet*), George **Stubbs** (1724–1806, *English painter*), JMW **Turner** (1775–1851, *English painter*), William **Wordsworth** (1770–1850, *English poet*)