1920

The nature background of American fiction

https://hdl.handle.net/2144/7246

Boston University
THE NATURE BACKGROUND OF AMERICAN FICTION

Submitted by

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(A.B., Cornell College, 1918)

In partial fulfillment of requirements for
the degree of Master of Arts.
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The Nature Background of American Fiction.

Instead of seeing the sunset, go out of us walking along the hard-paved, hard-walled streets, and look at the cobblestones. We forget that Nature, like all things of deep abiding importance, his himself say, "See and I shall find—but you must knock. "Knock, and it shall be opened unto you"—but you must knock.

We cannot imagine life without Nature because we are inextricably bound up with her. Our food, clothing, shelter, our being of life all depend upon her. We appreciate Nature as we appreciate our parents and God—all things that are ours or a part of us, bone of our bone, flesh of our flesh, and without which life would be barren. Still we forget Nature because we are in the hurry and the fret and futility. She is present, she is subconscious, but is first form created; but to be known we must be sought to and learned of. But while we are weary and worried, we look at the cobblestones, forgetting where we have been thus far.

Just as Nature is seen as an essential part of us, and all that accepted and wrought upon by man living, so is she of our literature. All great writers have understood this to some extent, but in direct proportion to their greatness they have made Nature the pervading spirit of the background. This, that is, is the purpose of our study; to discover the important, extensive, and effective use of nature background, especially, in American fiction.

American letters have had a near all growth, and the development in the handling of Nature is interestingly typical. In the early
days, the first impression that America ever professed on an English settler was recorded by Governor Bradford in his straightforward Puritan style: "For so it came to pass, as they came into the land with considerable fear; and the whole country, full of . . . wilderness, represented a wild and strange view. In those days Nature was not a background. She was an inseparable, threatening, face-to-face.

But the coming of settlements upset the face of Nature. The first cuts, trees and cleared patches of cleared ticket. The rape, with its streets and crowded cell. Nature is now a background. This is one to the very sky. All men are in the battle. It is the age of reason. We are no longer to be a little in a world, we are to be this world's emperor. The cold, freezing wind, Nature has been felt in all her native force since.

One of the earliest interpretations of Nature in America is in Edward Johnson's "An History of New England.": "And so the sea, as it was wont, did carry, not only fish but all sorts of inhabitants, but all not to cruel and fierce storms. Besides, what could they see but a hundred wilder seas, land of the heath and the fen. Neither could they go up to the top of Pisgah, as it were, to view and they will therefore greedily desire to feel their organs; for, with an. . . .

"to the face (save up ward to the head itself) they would find little solace or content in respect of any outward objects."
A human, is it not? Do we not re-feel the life of a winter day, the bristles standing on the toes and the hair on the head, pointed, which have we once felt? Is the impression of the hills and woods for Tioga which fronts the wooded banks of Nature secure? Is nature's Bradford not also here in the wilderness? Take one and see, and feel its deeply felt aim, as the family created a passage of literary value.

Further than having qualities of literature, these lines of Bradford are representative of certain general characteristics in nature handling at that time—the period from 1600 up to 1700. Nature is yet observed, yet investigated. As yet, she is too omnipresent to escape observation and too inattractive to win research. Descriptions are therefore superficial, loving the evident and inconspicuous facts rather than the detail. Their aim is better the re-created spirit delight in literature, or scientific detailed accuracy, but the, a translation of what they saw, told for the benefit of interested friends at home in England. If occasionally we find a chance page or line which has enough of beauty of form and humanness of touch to be called literature, it is happy accident. Nature was feared, sought, and destroyed with unremitting toil. Nature's cruelties were so abundant as to make her gifts unnoticed or, more often, ascribed to another Source. Had we of 1918 been forced to live as Bradford, our food and clothing were an unquenched nature with no tools but our hands; had all the work of a spring and summer, then, been suddenly beaten down by a storm, or starved by an early frost, i.e., too, right not have been lovers of the wild and the forest.
Because the people in England were anxious to know about the new world and because the settlers had no time for scientific research, there was a natural tendency to "brighten up the dull ol' bits of fact." Men like Bradford were as true and just in their reports as they were in their dealings with men. They were the leaders, and they expressed the real heart of the people.

These others who wrote, yielded to the impulse to tell a good story, and to their readers enjoyed a few additional surprises. Captain John Smith and John Joscelin were more true. They told of it's being a land of unbelievable things. Occasionally, too, we find rare announcements like the following on their yellowed pages: "The trocolus, a small bird, black and white, which nests like a Swallow's Nest, cometh. Let there be five young ones; and when they go away, they now fail to throw down (the chimney) one of the young birds into the room by way of gratitude."

This returning to our nation's literary childhood gives us an idea of certain of its qualities. The descriptions were general impressions, neither artistic nor scientific. The attitude toward Nature was one of fear and awe. She was always to be feared and conquered.

By the early part of the eighteenth century, settlers were more numerous. Nature was greatly subdued, and much less feared. Men lived in cities and villages and on farms and their fathers had cleared before them. The great silent endless woods, and the creeping, treacherous life within them, were pushed out of the door-yard farther toward the horizon. For the first time, Nature was seen in her whole-
ness. "Whenever Nature can be seen, or even imagined, in her unity, she always alluring and beautiful. It was natural, then, that Nature's greater recession into the background meant an immediate growth of leisure for, the interest in, appreciation, and investigation. This development is shown first in the writings of that learning Virginia cavalier, William Byrd. His "History of the Dividing Line" marks the beginning of a new spirit toward Nature. He is accurate to the detail, yet never loses sight of the great unit. He is interesting because he goes further than the bare relation of fact, and touches the emotions continually; here a bit of humor, there the thrill of adventure, always a the personal appeal.

His close observation of detail may be illustrated by this description of the pines in North Carolina; "The Pines in this part of the country are of a different Species from those that grow in Virginia; their bearded leaves are much longer and their Cones much larger. Each Cell contains a Seed of the size and figure of a black eye Pea. The smallest of these Pines are full of Cones, which are 8 or 9 inches long, and each affords commonly 60 or 70 seeds".

A history containing only a list of such accurate details would be but tiresomely readable. However, we find frequently a touch like this; "This (the venison) we consigned to the Wolves, which in return serenaded us great part of the night. They are very clamorous in their Banquets, which we know is the way some other Brutes have of expressing their thanks to Providence."

A later writer brings us a new interpretation of Nature. He
sees the idyllic, the peaceful, the kindly, rather than the thrilling and adventurous. This is Rector St. John Creve-coeur, another poet-naturalist of early days. He finds in Nature the reflection of what is good in Man, and in Man the reflection of Nature. He is a scientist, but in his attention to detail, he never forgets the greater meaning or the personal significance. He writes with perfect accuracy and a sincere delight. Inspired with the same emotion of the later poet who wrote,

"Break, break, break,
On they cold gray stones, or sea,
And I would that my tongue could utter
The thoughts that arise in me,"

Creve-coeur says, less perfectly, but with a like spirit:

"My ears were stunned with the roar of its waves rolling one over the other, as if impelled by a superior force to overwhelm the spot on which I stood. My nostrils involuntarily inhaled the saline vapors which arose from the foaming billows or from the weeds scattered on the shores. My mind suggested a thousand vague reflections but now half-forgot and all indistinct. And who can be old so singular an element which by its impetuosity seems to be the destroyer of this poor planet, yet at particular times accumulates the scattered fragments and produces islands and continents fit for men to dwell on!"

When men come to see into the heart of Nature thus accurately and understandingly, literature must soon be brought forth. What we
find in embryo in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in a Byrd and Creve-coeur is born later into a Cooper, a Bryant, and on to Emerson, Thoreau, and Burroughs. For literature, like a child, develops, is born, and grows to the stature of manhood. Our American literature is growing. It is young now and daring. Some are not sure that it is literature yet, but when we look into the normality of its making, the steadiness of its progress, we become prophetic with the fore-knowledge of faith.

In this development, how has Nature taken her place? From fear of her as an enemy, men achieved by conquest means of using the enemy. From the utilitarian came accuracy of observation. Out of accuracy grew science and literature.

In the early days American nature was so unfamiliar as to need description. Self-evident facts were described minutely, and compared with English scenery. Naturalists like Creve-coeur were poets in spirit. Explorers like Byrd were naturalists at heart. Unfortunately, however, we cannot say that the poets were often naturalists. Nature was not considered "good literary stuff" in those days, especially American nature. When one assayed to write, he wrote a "Prince of Parthia", "Day of Doom", or a "Columbiad". Nature was only beginning to find her place in writing. The increasing number of naturalists gave evidence that the start was made, but it was a long time before a "Forest Hymn" could be written.

In these days, only the naturalists wrote about Nature, and, incidentally, quite from the purpose, attained some bits of literature.
They made Nature the purpose and the foreground. If Nature was touched by the pen at all, she was the centre of attention. The value of background and the psychology of suggestion were not recognized until Cooper and Irving.

Later, in the struggle and hope of the Revolution a new nation and a new literature were born. With the strong consciousness of ownership that freedom prompted, came a keener sensitiveness to the quality of this unique and unbounded land. "Try rocks and rills, they woods and templred hills, of thee we sing." There was pride in this country that belonged to them--pride in its fruitfulness, its unlimited possibilities, and its mysterious, alluring beauty. At the same time, there were men of letters who dreamed of making America rank high by means of her literary offerings. The pride and the dream had been growing for years. Now, at last, they came together in one man. Charles Brockdale Brown, the first novelist in America. To be sure, his is not a name that will live for any other than a historical interest. But for his own day, he achieved his end. His wild and grotesque tales were read eagerly at home and in England. He was welcomed as a great writer, and he developed with a free and unguided hand the nature material that made his setting. American nature, he interpreted after his own heart. The forests were bleak and eerie, but they were still, indisputably, American forests. Stronge voices came sounding ominously from the depths of gashed cliffs--America rocks with ragged fir-trees hanging over the edge. He used the background that he knew, and pictured it so vividly and impressively that the descriptions are still compellingly interesting. However, his plot and characters were not so accurately taken
from the life; and instead of making both grow out of the nature backdrop in spirit and circumstance as they do in all living, he made the fatal mistake of reversing the order. He imagined, or rather fancied, a strange set of characters in various strange situations, and then added the nature background, not as an essential part of it all, but a means to enhance the particular atmosphere and tone that he especially desired. Nature was used as an ornament, not an inherent necessity.

Charles Brockden Brown was a pioneer, but not a great writer. The line of great writers began soon after him, though, with the work of Irving and Cooper. With them, plot and character are bound up naturally and inextricably with the setting. Rip Van Winkle goes to the mountains, because he finds in them much that is like himself—trees mossy and cool and unpromised, low-shade paths that lead to deep, alluring shades; and all that is free, untended and wild. Dame Van Winkle belongs in the town with the gossip and scurries of the street and store. And through the whole story, the clear mountain sunshine warms Irving's kindly humor as it warms the hills and valleys of his Hudson river home.

However, the story-teller Cooper is one of the few American masters. Irving is picturesque, appealing, and contagiously cheerful, but not rugged or strong. Cooper, on the other hand, gives to his novels the strength that human nature admires above all else. In Cooper the plot, the characters, and the background are balanced and harmonized. There is romance and realism, just as in normal life. The treatment is straightforward, sincere, and vigorous. It is hard to separate one part from another, but the nature background is noteworthy. He pols
as breathless with the daring of Hawkeye and Chingachgook, but never
is the silent, mysterious endlessness of the forest for a moment for-
gotten. His best stories take place in the unbroken woods of New York
along Otsego Lake and in the Lake George region. The trees may now
have been cut, and sun-burned little villages taken their place, but
Cooper's trees and caves and water falls are immortal. We can still
read "The Deerslayer"; hear the rush of the waters, the stir of the wind
in the uncounted trees, and feel as he felt, the "breathing, stillness
of the woods". Cooper has succeeded above any other American writer
in making the forest live. It is not a painted woodland scene, where
a play might be staged, but it is active. The leaves rustle against
each other, the squirrels chatter, there is the crackling of the low
bushes when the deer tears through with his antlers, the pine needles
and leaves are fragrant and fresh. There is always sound or movement.
Besides this use of accurate details, he creates an impression that
is in harmony with the spirit of the story. When Hawkeye is protect-
ing Cora and her sister from the Indians in the cave, there is a sense
of foreboding in the slow dripping of the water from the rocks. Just
as we naturally notice the details that accord or contrast with our
mind, so Cooper chooses that which expresses the keynote of his
situation. After him, we find many who accomplish some part of what
he did, but none who approach him in all. It is only in recent years
that anyone of his literary calibre has appeared. His realm is the
central west, and Hamlin Garland's "Son of the Middle Border" is coming
to rank with the "Last of the Mohicans", and others of our best
American fiction.
It is a long step in time from Cooper to Garland, and many came in between. Hawthorne and Poe are among America's few greatest artists, but their handling of nature was not original or unusually strong. Neither of them knew nature, so they could not use picturesque details. They did not love it so they could not interpret its real spirit. Both used it impressionistically. Details were seldom given, and mood-born pictures were suggested rather than described. The lonely, treeless plot where the woman of the scarlet letter lived is a dim picture suggested once and never changing throughout the story, as nature herself changes in reality. Poe describes his nature background in detail, but it is wil, strange, and alluringly horrible. The dank tarn of the house of Usher is something so lostsome, the room with unseen, crawling things that it is unforgettable. But is is not nature that is pictured any more than Poe's characters are real people. It is an impression so vivid and strikingly terrible that it clings in one's memory with fascinating horror. Hawthorne was unsurpassed as a symbolic revealer of spiritual meanings, but his characters are no more fleshly warm than his setting is vivid. Poe was great as no other writer has been, as an impressionist. He was a romancer, depicting life not as it is normally, but as it appears to be in rare intervals of terror and loneliness. For that reason, Poe appeals only occasionally, when we are in a mood to escape from normality to horror for horror's sake. As romancers, Hawthorne and Poe made nature as they made their characters and plot,—what they wanted them to be for some purpose or effect. Neither is typically American; neither could have placed his story in England or elsewhere as easily as in America.
So far the nation and its literature have been forming. The old idea that nature is to be feared and hated has long worn away. The later conception that she is only for man's use is still strong, but Cooper's interpretation of the spirit of the woods shows that a deeper appreciation is developing. In letters, America has attained a measure of self-confidence. She has found in herself literary resources peculiar and distinctive—a natural environment that cannot be duplicated in kind or variety, and the new type of life and character that arise from it.

Nature has been given her rightful place in our fiction. Her spirit has been interpreted accurately and effectively by Cooper, our first great storyteller. The characters and plot grow out of, and belong to, their natural surroundings. There is a tendency to locate a story in a definite section of the country—in central New York by Cooper, the Hudson river valley by Irving, and southern New England by Charles Brockden Brown. These were the contributions made in the treatment of nature by American story-writers.

The cornerstone was laid by Cooper for the building of a genuinely great American literature. It remained for the expanding nation to produce new writers who would follow his plan, but add to and develop it.

It happened then that the nation did expand and produce, in a phenomenal and unheeded way. For the first hundred years, America had stayed at home in New England, the South, and the Middle states. But the lure of the unknown was a magnet to the hardy, adventurous sons of pilgrim and cavalier fathers. They longed to go beyond the mountains, to see the forests and streams on the other
side, to discover the Indian fastnesses; and they dreamed of greater
America.

So they went—Boone, Sevier, Robertson, Lewis and Clark—blazing
paths through the unknown forest and waste, killing and taking their
food en. clothing from the life of the wild, fighting the wary and
treachereous red-men who menaced every step of the way. It was a per-
ilses, unequal warfare that these explorers waged, but the price was
even then not too great. After the period of exploration and conquest,
the conquerors came home to their families, who went out with the
.. to build shack-homes in the wilderness. Separated absolutely from
luxuries, conveniences, or help, they built their stockades for defence
and beguiled over again the old story of settlement. Once more the forests
were fe red, as the sea is still so red and hated by the fishermen's
wives. But as the Indians gradually yielded and vanished, farms
produced abundant grain, the rear diminished and they looked to a
fart of conquering and using of the immense resources at their doors.

The story of transformation has been most vividly recorded, not
by a novelist, but by a historian, Theodore Roosevelt, in his "Win-
n Ing of the West", which will live for its accuracy as well as for its
flamed quality of vitality and human appeal. Like Cooper, Roosevelt's
forest is animate with sound and movement. The turbid swirling Ohio
sweeps on with slow powerful strength. There is the deep under-curr-
rent of utter loneliness and separation from all human-kind. The
reader knows for a time Boone or Robertson, or Sevier, fighting and
struggling with them, feeling the brush of the branches and the spongy
leaf-coated paths, watching and constantly dreading that the Indian
death-yell will break the hushed stillness. This period of western
expansion lacks literary expression just as all periods before it do. The people are too busy fighting and building, or planting and harvesting, to rest or write. Their evening recreation is gathering about the fireside, talking of their crops and their families, or singing the rollicking old pioneer song:

"Cheer up, brothers, as we o'er the mountains, westward go,
Where herds of deer and buffalo furnish the fare.
Then o'er the hills is glowing, o'er,
Fair Freedom's star
Points to the sunset regions, boys,
Ha-ha, ha-ha!"

The literature of this way was left to be written by the grandchildren, few of whom can interpret what they have never seen. In fiction, it has been tried, but never successfully accomplished.

Nature was thus changed by the incoming of explorers and settlers. Forests were cleared away, sections and squares plotted out, and cities and towns came to take the place of the limitless wilderness. The people and their lives were changed by the reducing power of their natural surroundings. It is a striking fact that environment actually influences man's physical development. It has even been shown that the heads of babies born in America of foreign parents will differ in shape from the heads of their older brothers and sis-

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ters born in Europe. In the same way, the settlers became a new people, as the new west became a new nation. They were no longer New Englanders, or Southerners, but partook of the nature of their surroundings.

While the West enacted the great drama of expansion, the Home states were refining and growing into a productive maturity. There was more leisure here than in the fields and forests of the West, more colleges and universities, and more interest in the things of the spirit. It was natural then that New England, with Boston as its literary center, took the lead in the literary movement which was soon to spread over the whole new country.

After Cooper and Irving, there developed the idea, first among essayists like Emerson and Thoreau, and finally among story-tellers, that the best source of literary subject-matter was at home—close one's own river-bank and forest glade, and as close as one's own hedge of apple-tree. Irving was the first to create "local color"—the making of the setting stand out as distinctive and locally characteristic. It was a long time before he had many followers. The period of poets and essayists occupied the next fifty years. Nature was interpreted as a revelation of God—Bryant said in his "Forest Lament":

"But thou art here, thou fill'st
The solitude. Thou art in the soft winds
That run along the summit of these trees
In music; thou art in the cooler breath
That from the frosty darkness of the place
Comes, scarcely felt; the barking trunks, the ground,
The fresh moist ground, 'tis all instinct with thee.'

Thoreau found in Nature the glory of the primitive; Emerson the garment of the Invisible Spirit. These men, along with other thinkers of their time, were interested in Nature from a religious and philosophic as well as aesthetic point of view. Nature was foreground material for them. They have interpreted her spirit so spontaneously and so humanly that even those who know Nature and the Infinite least are stirred by this revelation.

Since 1870 the interest in fiction has again revived. Much of it is imitative, sensational, and cheap, even when it is otherwise wholesome. Most of it is a discouraging prospect, but is so weak as to be fortuitously forgettable. However, there are occasional discoveries that are nearly as good as all the rest is bad. The most striking tendency is the location of the story in a definite locality, and having the characters and plot grow naturally out of it.

In New England, which is geographically the place to begin, in a review of sectional literature, some of the best of the late fiction has been written. The nature background has been emphasized not unduly but normally. Irving's contribution of "local color" has been seized upon, and the treatment, in many cases, improved. As the Catskill Mountains had been given to all who read, so it remained for someone to give New England - her rocks and pine forests, stormy hills and steep slopes, the clear clean streams that wind between the hills to the ocean, the "pointed firs" and the shifting sand dunes, the rocky cliffs and sleepy tide-washed beaches. For New England is distinctive. It is a stern and yet kindly country - like its people.
The hills are rock-ridden and untilled, but the streams in the valley are swift and powerful, with strength for tasks beyond men's muscles. Because the hills cannot be farmed, they are left to Nature. The result is unending forests, with the needles of pine and fir making the ground a soft spongy carpet to the feet. Great rounded rocks overgrown with moss and dripping with cool damp dew rest silently on as they did when the Indians crept over these same forest paths to spy upon our fathers. In the spring, trailing arbutus rides its sweet-smelling blossoms under the snow-covered leaves and in the rock crevices. Tiny red checker-berry berries shine from under their moist green leaves, before the snow has melted from the shady side of the rocks and trees. So, wet leaf-ol that sink deeply into the soft earth blazes the way often to a hidden spring of clear earth-chilled water. Then there are cleared meadows where hay and corn struggle for growth against the rocks that hold and crowd them. But they are picturesque meadows with overgrown stone fences and morning glories and daisies scattered where the grain should be. In the end, the up-country streams go through towns and factories, finally pouring into yellow turbid tumult through rocky gateways to the sea. Here the great rocks, gaunt and bare, act as an invincible fortress for the land against the age-old onslaught of the waves. Piled high by some immense force in a geologic age gone by they still stand firm and unyielding, strong for us and generations to come. These are the coasts in the north country. In the south below Boston and down to Cape Cod, there is a new world. There the beaches stretch out lazily in the sun,
and the jolly little crabs race back and forth for unaccountable crab-like purposes. The sand which has been made by the ocean from great invincible rocks on some rugged coast is stored here for safe keeping. On Cape Cod, huge shifting sand dunes with dry tenacious shrubbery - bleached and parched of all color - are a bit of the Sahara repeated in rugged rock-bound New England.

The people again are like their country. Stern and uncompromising is the true New Englander, but tender and kindly in the hidden places. Along the northern coast, the sea men are rough and uncouth - fighting the waves with the unyielding, silent persistence of fate. But in the South, where the sand dunes shift, there is a sort of saucy - rugged and hardy; to be sure - but a little are tender and human. He sells his dory when his pile is made, and goes home. Then he and his old friends sit on the sands, or lounge on the grocery store counters smoking and re-telling old yarns with a quaint and altogether irresistible sense of humor.

This then is the life and nature background that looks for interpretation by its writers. Too many have caricatured New England in an attempt, not to picture her, but to create best sellers. The result is that New England is frequently imagined as a land of drive-up villagess where shrill-voiced old maids make life miserable for a normally vindictive little boy. But there are a few who have the real spirit of New England - who have discovered the romance and realism of its people, and have pictured the romance and realism of its sunny farms and fog-drenched harbors. There are many writers of the coast, because there they find a fit background for dramatic
situations. Wilbur Daniel Steele has made us see the lonely, dismal marshes and swamps where nothing is heard but the sliding of occasional water-snakes between the reeds and rushes. The cry of gulls, and the sweep of their wings as they scud over the black still waters make an eerie background for his stories with their strange and haunting analysis of the black, still places in the human heart. The characters and events are born of their mysterious setting, but what they are and what they do sinks out of memory. The limitless marsh with the still dark sea beyond, the screaming gulls, the wind-swept reeds, and the heavy, oppressive darkness remain vivid and distinct, haunting those of us who have never known the secrets of the swamp at night.

Still another writer gives us the spirit of the coast. His field is among the rocky Maine harbors and islands, where Nature is overwhelming in her irresistible power and cold, repressed beauty, where the people are silent and hard, with all the human weakness hidden within. It takes an artist to re-create in words a Nature and a people like these. One man, not a writer by profession, has succeeded in telling his story simply and faithfully. It is a true story and he writes it with understanding sympathy. It is ex-President Eliot's story of a man's conflict with Nature to save a calf. The milkman is the hero, and Nature in the foreground is the often is offensive force. There is the taste of the salt sea spray, the dizziness from the crest to the trough of a breaking wave, the shudder of the dory when the next wave strikes
and lifts it high. A human soul is nothing if it is raging tumult of
wind and water; and the reader feels with Eliot's Hulka all the
stupendous power of nature in tumult.

Back from the coast, New England is different; but still distinc-
tively characteristic. Here the dramatic situations take place
in human hearts rather than on the high seas. There have been many
voices for these rural people, and the world shows their hills and
forests through many writers; Mary Wilkins Freeman, Sarah Orne Jewett
and Margaret Deland among the best. Mrs. Freeman gives us the prosy,
gossipy village, picturing the hard and querulous New England Farm-
er, as Hamlin Garland pictures the middle westerner, without gloss
or lore romance that is true. The farms are small and rocky, full of
dry hills and swampy valleys; the soil is light, and rough with stones.

The south side of the hill may produce well, but there is always a
north side where the sun strikes too seldom. It is the north side
that Mrs. Freeman would have us appreciate, and it is the north side
of these stern, repressed people that she understands with the sym-
pathy of one who springs from their stock. She shows the barn-yard
and the ditch and the kitchen, and less often the parlor or the Sun-
day School picnic. Her nature background is usually given for re-
lief or contrast. Occasionally, we find a swift picture of the far
away hills, the wind-swept sky, and the rare distances. Her back-
ground is one "renovated" by war, and it is consequently un-beaut-
iful and cramped as is the repressed and unnatural side of their
lives. When men begin to destroy Nature, they destroy the love of it from their own lives, and the poetry of life is gone. It is so with many farmers, who of all people have a God-given chance to know the secrets of the woods and the fields, and their creatures. Mrs. Freeman shows the lack and the tragedy in her unadorned, New England style.

With something more of tenderness and kindly understanding, Sarah Orne Jewett takes away the covering of hardness. Far from being sentimental, she yet makes her readers feel deeply what she expresses with quiet but intense restraint. Her treatment of nature is of its whole. She gives a picture of the joined life, but not of the brown needles underneath, or the rough, rugged bark within. Hers is the picture of black, straight trees silhouetted against the sky and singing softly of night and woodland mysteries. Nature under her pen becomes kindly and gentle like her characters. Her treatment is brief and almost casual, but always effective. The centre of attention is always the main character; for instance, the queen's twin. The reader must never forget her, during even a glance at the sunset or the meadows. The hills are described in a few forceful, impressionistic sentences, for the purpose of making clear and emphatic the bleak solitude of the little woman's home. Later the extent of her pride and happiness in her relation to the queen is shown by the fact that she is never lonely in spite of her lonely surroundings. This illustration is typical of Sarah Orne Jewett's use and treatment of nature as a background. In a sense, she is comparable to Hawthorne, but she makes her background genuinely real and earthy. They both paint it in a few words and ill-
pressionistically, but it is often strange and unfamiliar.

Another of the leading New England fiction writers is Margaret Deland. Here again we find much the same handling of nature — strict holding to the background and use only to explain and make clearer the action of the characters. Neither Miss Jewett nor Miss Deland ever allow nature to become an active part in the story, thus affecting the plot, as Eliot uses the storm in "John Gilly": Only as nature is a part of the characters, influencing their actions as environment naturally does, is it emphasize in their stories. In reading we are no more conscious of the road-sides and hedges, the forest and waste, than we are of the nature life about us every day. This method of handling contrasts strongly with the method of Irving and Cooper, who gave whole paragraphs and pages to long descriptions that the average reader skips entirely. The method of Margaret Deland and Sarah Orne Jewett is the modern way. It suggests in the background only what the average person would be vaguely conscious of, and presents it in such a way that the reader is scarcely conscious that he is reading description. The method has its advantages, but whether it is the best and final way we are inclined to doubt.

New England is the section much-written, and is therefore hard to leave. But these few are the leaders who have given us the chief phases of her life and the various languages of her unique nature. The next section which has found great expression in American lit-
The mountains are the background; the broad plantations another; and the bayous and marshes of the Gulf region a third. Here again the inseparable union of character and nature background is made strikingly manifest. A Creole could never come from the mountains, nor a mountaineer from New Orleans or Saint Mar-...
Sarah Orne Jewett and Margaret Deland. West Mary Antics. It is as to
incorporate the Tennessee mountains into one whole, more than a picture,
for hers has color, sound, movement, and forest fragrance. There
is the close, reviving and rushing water, the sounds of thunder and
its cool creeping breath, the present odor of pine and earth.

The South can be part of a whole or Elsewhere with its
restless spirit, and the land's remote profundity beyond. The former with its charm and poetry, room and
beauty, it's seen the best by Thomas Nelson Page, the latter in
its circular joys and redolent harmonies by Jocelyn Pier Morris,
creator of Uncle Remus and the immortal Mr. Bobby.

Page created an atmosphere of tender, half-
rememberance. We look back to the days in their decay and tragedy
from the "good old days" when the plantation was litigate and
happy, when the negro anthologies were full, the pickaninnies plenti-
ful and happy, when there was life in pleasure and love on the
Border Plantation. Page's a great admirer and his fervor is a
true sphere. He knows the "wild waste of sand hill" where the fields
and once bee, and "once splendid" mission was built, still
merry set back far from the road in proud seclusion, being "rooms of our
ancient, now scarlet and gold with the early frost." It is oc-
casional nature touches like these - accurate, artistically composed
impressionistic - that lift Page's the most. He describes
mystery, as closely in his description incidentally. He devotes
a few paragraphs to pure setting, and he on the land, creates
a picture that we do not easily forget. The songs of swallows,
the rule of bees, the wood-smoke that is so pleasant, and still,
received houses surrounded by untrimmed trees — all that is charac-
neristic of the way-worn South is as if we had known it in jest.

Joel Chandler Harris' purpose in writing to give the same
price of Negro life, the joy of mere living is another sort of
harcious idleness. He gives us the true spirit of Uncle Remus
of the same like and the air that breaths out the line symp-
pathy and homesickness in South's happy, free philosophy. The nature
background is the plantation; says Jo the Uncle Remus sits of
South and tells stories, and bushwood and canebrake where Br'er
Roots weeps in significant but interrupted grace. It is a set
to leave a long impression of work, going on; now, when there
is the sound of thawing, and the sense aroma tingling things, rise over
all the world, and in all the love of living and growing.

In so far as the life of the Creoles in New Orleans and along
the bayous of the lower Mississippi is similar to the mountain and
the negro side of the plantation, i.e. the side poetic nature of
the mountaineer and his aversion to work or progress is like the
Creoles' and negro. But otherwise the contrast is great, the
mountains and the plantation — the two as the cereals and the river-
valley. The Far South is like another country — a luxuriant, tropic-
al land of sensuous warmth and alluring romantic beauty. The stiff
palmettos and picturesque magnolias are perfect to the point of artifi-
ciality. Even in her abandon, Nature seems to us of the
North to be meaner. In the forests, the great trees massive and
gnarled, are made weird and uncanny by shadowy hangings of climber,
lighter southern souls. It is quiet in the southern forest. There are
fewer living things, and no brooks that could breathe, over many rocks and cleared stones. The streams are slow and sluggish, stagnant and hidden in the mysteries of a low-lying region, "the region where grows perpetual summer,"

"where through the Golden Coast, and proves of sunshine and leisure,
Sweeps the majestic curve of the meander, over their beds the towering and tenacious boughs of the cypress, through the golden arch of the brilliant lilies."

This is the realm of George Cable, whose life is unforgettable, the romantic care that surrounds and projects even the tragedies of the Creoles. He describes the life and nature background of the South as it is in reality, but he envelops it all as the Creole himself does, in theastic, tender hues of romance. They are passionate, emotionally luminous people—part of the tropical warmth and sunshine, in splendor as they are in fires. George Cable is more than a landscape painter. In fact, he is more like the writer of New England; it is his ability to suggest a nature atmosphere rather than give a picture. We do not see any more of the palmettos and magnolias that is necessary, to the story development, as we know that it is tropical and enigmatic. These romantic writers, who create a background by a few impressionistic words, are depending on some previous knowledge on the part of their readers. If we had never traveled in the South, never heard or read accounts, detailed descriptive of its scenery, George Cable's background would be
vague. However, not all of us do have a picture of the South; we are acquainted in some way, and Cable's impression is so artistic that it serves to recall vividly all that we have ever known or imagined. Taking for granted that we know the South, he does not decline to give Nature an active place in his stories, as, for instance, Belle's Demise, the realm of white beauty, the roar of oriental music, the house of dance, all in a terror of terror are suddenly sunk, with one moan, and wall of terror -- sink, sink, down, down, down, into the merciless, unfathomable flood of the Mississippi. His descriptions are full of action, as in the following: "Great circles of muddy surface would roll up from columns of feet below, and pour over, as seem to float away -- sink, sink, again under water, and with only a soft murmur of strain, the again drift off, ad infinitum."

From the sunny, romance-loving South, we come again to the cooer, the gracing North. The Middle States east of the Mississippi have missed being interpreted in literature. For some reason or other, of romance has seldom sweetened the prose of Michigan, Illinois, and Ohio life. The potential writers here never wrote, so the they were required to farm and do chores to make money. Indiana, however, is typical of all this section: Indiana has produced at least one fiction-writer of some value, and one of exceeding popularity, if not of lasting greatness. In one of his books, Edward E. Hoxtor made immortal the pioneer life with its hardships and far-between joys, in "The Hoosier Schoolboy", "The Circuit Rider", and "The
Koosier Schoolester. Both Marking, a pure epicurean overlit, is giving us now the color and comedy of the present day in the small-town life of the middle west. The man from home of Box Lake County, or William no was seventeen, is his typical characters self-made men without culture or education but with plenty of American idealized virtues of honesty, cheerfulness and kindness; self-conscious boys who are a puzzle to psychologists with their timidity and curiosity and endless other paradoxes.

Edward Egglestone is a writer of an earlier day, and he has the characteristics of his time. "Local color" and the impressionistic aim re interior terms to him. Like Cooper, he describes it long par- agraphs, telling it all you can see. When the circuit-rider is going from one camp meeting to another, Egglestone keeps the point of view clear of constantly describing the ever-changing landscape. The style seems old-fashioned, but to us, who can't study, but there is a good story here, with worthy while human people to know.

A wilderness background that makes the joy and love and struggle of these days all the more fine and heroic. The bitter cold makes our fingers numb with those of the women who hold of the frosty pump. The cutting winds of a winter morning, the chore of a cow to milk and horses to feed, chill the reader as if these chores were actually for him to do. The clearing where the log cabin stands, the forest all encircling, with its immense mystery and danger, the calls of woods creatures and the murmur of water, with
the clear clean smell of pine, and leaves, a cold was that — all this outside the cabin; and inside, the crackling flames in the fireplace, the glow on the white walls, and the contagious cheerfulness of work and laughter — this is the history that Eggleston keeps warm and vital.

Eggleston's novels interpret the life of the early days in true early-day style and spirit. Booth Tarkington's are as different as is the life of the pioneer from the life of the small-town citizen to-day; and just as the small town has pushed away and forgotten nature, so has its interpreter left her out of his calculations. There remains only an impression of a few stores, a few streets, and beyond, flat fields and straight roads. In most ways Booth Tarkington is fair, at least, to the superficial — self-evident, but he is not fair to the nature background of Indiana. She has her "haunts of cost and, her" — her "rocks and rills" — and even a few "templed hills." But the reader who does not know Indiana would never suspect it, Tarkington sees the straight-ahead, self-evident highway — in human hearts as well as in Nature — and passes by the little hidden paths that lead to the real and elemental. His work cannot rank as literature with that of Eggleston, but it records with interest the life of a passing age.

Another state has attained especial literary expression, and that is the state of Kansas. Here is surely a land of peculiar romance. No state has quite such a history — a history of dramatic situations and adventurous leaders. Its nature background is the kind to create men of stern purpose and driving actions. The prairie rolls away
to the horizon in a great level plain, over which the wind sweeps in old bitter blasts, and upon which the scorching sun of summer beats and burns. It is a country to produce men of far vision, great plans, and the stern fibre that achieves high purpose. Many writers have been thrilled with the reserve strength of Kansas. William Allen White is one, who has contributed a book of rare and passing worth in his "Certain Rich Man". It is distinctive, a Kansas book in its background and characters, but is universal in its appeal to our love of clear bracing winds and the et in my view. He treats his nature background as a fundamental element in his story. He suggests much, but he also devotes much space to simple description. He does one thing that is new in his setting, development. His story covers about seven years, from the childhood of the hero to is birth. In the beginning then it is a new country - a great stretch of open unsettled land in the throes of a life and death struggle between two types of settlers. The wholeness of view is what White aims for, and he achieves it with remarkable success. No historian or other stor , gives one quite the sense of vast lonely, struggling Kansas - with her far-reaching plains, her open sun-baked skies, so the quality of air that urges men to action. Then the boy grows up, and the town changes from a few shacks to a few score houses and a department store. The open places beyond are squares of wheat, separated by a checker-board system of long, white roads. The grove and the mill pond are forgotten, and the boy becomes a "certain rich man". He grows old. The little town is a city, with parks and pleasures, but the rich no longer. It is all. He has lost is God, as he goes to the grove, which was God's first temple, and to the hills whence cometh help. It is
the same grove and the same God in the had lost; and we come away believing with him that God and Nature are the "same yesterday, to-day, and forever".

It seems a long step from William Allen White to Samuel Clemens, but in reality they are connected in their common effort to interpret the various types of middle western life. While gave us the Kansas of history while Clemens gave the Mississippi valley. The life on the great river has been essentially different from any other in the nation, which is entire, due to the fact that the river determined every activity of the people, and in turn molded their characters. Mark Twain seized upon the immense literary resources of Mississippi life, and re-created it for readers of nearly every civilized nation. The principal interest is as it should be — in his characters and plot, but there is added pleasure in seeing and feeling a life we ourselves have not know. For he makes us feel life with him. The strain and creak of the river boat as it wriggles itself away from the dock, the monotonous chugging of a little little tug, the river smells of fish and tarpaulin and grease — this is the side of the picture. There are others — the island where Tom Sawyer goes with his band of robbers. There is the deep forest where Huck Finn hides from his father. The landscape is constantly changing, and always we are conscious of the background which is a part of Huck and Tom and which makes them immortal because they are eternally natural. Mark Twain's favorite method of describing his nature background is an actual contribution. Every writer has used it to some extent, but none more successfully than he. Instead of using too many long descriptions, or over-doing the impressionistic method, he develops the ef-
fect of the setting upon the characters - which is how the
quest way of describing the background, for the most interest is
for all the main thing and only if the rest relates to it is it
important.

From the Mississippi river valley to the heights of the Far
West, is the next step. Most people do not realize how much their
conception of the West they owe to literature. For those of us who
have never seen it, there is a distinct and vivid impression of its
extent and over-powering agents expressed in snow-tipped peaks in
that old way into clouds and mist, in masses and piles of pine
semit-colored rock, innesses in the earth on two down endlessly
1 to a dim and unknown chasm below. There is the mining camp
with rude shacks and bare grassless ground, surrounded by the still
straight mountain trees with their dark silhouetted forms guarding
sentry between the miner and all that connects him to home. It
is these conceptions these with all their atmosphere of strength
and little power that I owe the gift of literature. The writer who
has done the most in widening our experience to include the far
mountain west - California is Bret Harte. Nature serves him as
great emotional background, strengthening the story impression and
linked inseparably with it. To bring out the harmony and peace
of Nature, who is almost given a place equal to the characters in
the story.
"Hov/ber/t, whether creeping over the pine boughs or lying lazily on his back blinking at the leaves about his head, the squirrels chattered, and the flowers bloomed. Nature was his nurse and playfellow. For him she would let slip between the leaves golden shafts of sunlight that fell just within his grasp; she would send wandering breezes to visit him with the nectar of bay and resinous gum; to the tall redwoods nodded familiarly and deeply, the humble bees buzzed, and the rocks cawed a slumberous accompaniment."

And again he uses this nature background for contrast and for the purpose of showing the extent of the baby's influence on the brutal coarseness of the men:

"There was a rude attempt to decorate his bower with flowers and sweet-scenting shrubs, and generally someone would bring him a cluster of wild honeysuckles, azaleas or the painted blossoms of Las Vegas. The men had suddenly awakened to the fact that there were beauty and significance in these trifles they had long trodden carelessly beneath their feet. And again he uses it to bring out the emotional impression of utter isolation: "The camp lay in a triangular valley, between two hills and a river. The only outlet was a steep trail over the summit of a hill at the rear of the cabin, now illuminated by the rising moon. The suffering man might have seen it from the rude bunk wherewith he lay - seen it winding like a silver thread until it was lost in the stars above."

Later when the woman dies, he refers back to this description continues: "Within an hour she had climbed, as it were, that rugged road that led to the stars, and so passed out of Roaring Camp,
its sin the shame forever".

There is another West that Bret Harte interprets. It is the West of sun, plains and desert where the winds blow dry dust through the crackling sage brush, where prairie dogs and swift-creeping lizards are the only evidence that life still exists. There would seem to be no literary material here, but wherever human life can be found, there the great dramas are sure to be re-enacted. The Mexicans and Indians still cling to their desert border homes, and here is the Helen Hunt Jackson's "A Century of Dishonor" of the South-west. Here and in the "Paradise of Southern California," we follow Ramona and Alejandro Ezquez, soldiers and deserters, from her sturdy pleasant home to the canons and the desert places. There is very little description, but much is suggested. We see the immenserajides of the canyon looking down on the heads of the fleeing husband and wife. We see the alloverwork of mustard flowers that are gold snowflakes in the California sun. It is a few such touches that create a nature background.

Stewart Edward White is another voice of the Far West. He speaks as one having authority, because he lived the life and knew all its romance and realism. He gives us a much different picture of California than Bret Harte. His story deals with the gold rush of '49, from the point of view of four men who are dreamers and tenderfoots, before they have become brutalized by isolation from refinement and home life. It is nevertheless a story of stern realism — a rigid, unwearying, discouraging search for the nuggets that were
so seldom there, the coarse humor; the wild, reveling, leisures of the bar-room; as on the background "the great peace and mystery of the California mountains that cooled their spirits". It is this sense of the abiding street of nature that makes his firm foundation in the struggle between men and the earth for her resources. He uses nature, not consciously for dramatic or impressionistic reasons, but as he says, I've simply tried to present the West as it is, not in accordance with the artificial "isms" of the literary plot', or 'love interest', or 'artistic manner', or anything that would interfere with a true picture'. Yet in picturing the reality, all these things were used. The spirit of the setting merges with the spirit of the characters, a rare instance of "true" life. When the gold-seekers are united, the reader feels too their very content and enjoy looking with them. "For the first time with clearer eyes' I t.t, "the little up-sloping meadow was blue and duffed with flowers; while below the creek brawled its--flashed among black rocks", the high hills rose up to meet the sky, "and at our backs across the way the pines stood thick and serried". He goes on, always describing through the eyes of his characters; "We entered a cool green place, peopleed with shadows and the rare considered notes of soft-voiced birds... the golden sunlight flooded the mountains opposite, flashed from the stream, its langorous over the meadow. Layers of it climbed through the gap in the hills behind us to touch with magic the very tops of the
trees over our heads. The sheen of the precious metal over the land.

His descriptions are not frequent, but when they come, they come like this - conceived, made active - a vivid, a permeated, a spirit of the time, a place. His titles of West importance are attached to the nature background, The Silent Places, The Blazed Trail, Gold. His contribution is the true life of California posed in it without conceit called the singing and leanness of genuine artistry.

One great literary field in the United States is yet not considered - the Middle West. For a long time this section seemed devoid of all poetry or romance, thought to lack natural beauty to attract only the poor and failing, to produce only men of course and clod-like instincts. It took a soul itself to look inside into the elemental heart of the real westerner. It took one who had grown up with the music of the wind in cornrows, whose spirit had been quickened by the mystery of the rolling, stormy, infinite hills - to tell the story of the West. And the one who has made that story, is Hamlin Garland - of the Iowa cornfields and the Dakota wheatfields, of the blood and snow of the land. The sultry heat, the shimmering, the gold and green stretches of wheat and corn, the singing walls of insects - this is the realism of Garland's West. The waving of the wind through the rustling corn, the laughter of the water over clean little stones, the cloud shadows quelling the smooth surface of the river, the blue
spaces, cool, sweet and restful,—this is the romance. Theirs may be the spirit of this tempered joy; the not in color; eyes blinded by the dazzling light of the sun; the monotony of drab corn leaves, hopelessly spent at the falling of the old girt burden or endless, drab labor. There are, in the center coast, the spirit of the open spaces—tree and reaching wind-swept. This latter is the spirit of Hamlin Garland, but in the same inspiring essence to understand the other. We have seen with vision, we have realized and lost his soul in the burden under the blazing sun. He has also looked into the far distances and has been renewed in heart. Garland is an inseparable in personal character from the soil he reared him. It is impossible to estimate him without seeing his close relation to the nature about him. To one who is likewise close to the spirit of a land, Hamlin Garland seems to be the West most incarnate. He is the inevitable voice of its burden, its in wakings, and its great purpose.

His art is unstudied. His descriptions are the finest thing we have so far in the oratorical of nature background. They are accurate; for instance, "A kingfisher crossed and e-crossed the stream with dippy sweep of its wing... They are vivid in their, no in splendors of view; "A corn-field in July is a color place. The soil is hot and dry; the sun burns a row the lusty, sunburned legs laden with a warm sickening smell drawn from the rapidly growing, 'road-ling banners of the corn. The sun-yearly vertical drops flood of dazzling light upon the fields of gold, the cool shade's flood,
only to make the heat seem more intense. They are occasionally
do, but they do it with the most exquisite of nature, as
hold one with the lure of color and smell and sound that the reader
does not write. They are active, not passive, descriptive,
and the intensely impressionistic. He keeps nature near in the back
ground, and interprets like truly, but, unlike the writers who omit
all nature depiction, he makes us see more than we have seen before.
He tries to open the same with a new to the miracle that has
escaped us. He shows the whole, in every visible connection between
Earth and their soil. No color is truly without one of the
soil in it. For instance, Grant, in "Up the Coolly", is the inevitable
result of the grinding toil on the scorched ground, while his brother
Howard is the other result - the pick-motion cheer-leading, but with unquenched emotions and a heart
still loving. There are two kinds to the intense west real-life. Some are the
made by it, while others are broken. Garland's characters represent
both kinds, and he shows that they are the direct outcome of
nature restored from stuck-down spring. Garland calls himself a
"son of the middle border"; there will be greater sons to come, and
there may well spring from the farther border, for determining westward
seems to be a kind of humanly reality. His work is one of the
greatest achievement in nature interpretation in American literature.
Cooper did almost as much, but in descriptions, one of the
impressionistic, lively, with glee, words or intense feeling. Most of our writers have attained some distinctive work in interpreting the unique life of America, but none have gone so far on the road toward the ideal in incarnating Nature as the fundamental protagonist in all life stories as was Franklin G. Garlana.

So do they all also write for times to come. They make nature the strong background, if not like Garlana, an actual working influence. Because our nature background is different from any other nation's, we have different literature from any other anywhere. Such literature this nature as the woods and the soil in Scotland.

Such literature, with a madness, pride, and reverence attitude toward its nature that Americans. While we lack in quantity, and in some kinds of quality, we come near to making up in our alliance with nature.

While we may say that our nature background has contributed an element of distinction to our literature, there is yet another result. It has succeeded in energizing senses and interests alive to nature. School members who would grow up never seeing the woods to know their spirit, are taught to desire for knowing by "The Waterfowl", "The Luck of Roaring Camp", "The Last of the Mohicans", and countless others. The love of nature is potential in everyone. But it is dormant unless stimulated. One is indifferent until he has something to look for, until the meaning is somewhat interpreted, until he learns the signs and symbols in order to read for himself. Our literature is for most of us the initial stimulus. From "The Waterfowl", we catch a new beauty in the spirit of
gray autumn night. From an hour with Bret Harte, counting the explor-
ing take on finer possibilities. Thoreau and Burroughs make us
long to work out for ourselves a better knowing of forest and fields.

Literature has to do with people and what is of universal mean-
ing to them: human ideas, instincts, emotions are a part of that
meaning, and they are the themes of our writing. However, those
spiritual instructions are essential unto concrete life; and
life is Nature. People are the result of an age-on-age process—
they are the composite of all that is primitive and divine in Nature.

Nature then is truly our great background. We are infinitely more
closely related to her than occasional tramps in the woods, occa-
isonal dreams at sunset—we are one of her. We are flesh of her
flesh. All of life is a great unity, and nature works as a basis
before our birth and as the constant shaping influence throughout
our lives. She is stern mother, sacrificing her children for just
ends which may themselves fail to see. Literature must then take
account of this silent, powerful influence, and interpret, according
to the varying philosophies of its writers, the meaning of the
Omnipresence and Omnipotence, which Emerson, the seer, calls the
"garment of the Invisible Spirit."

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