The nature background of American fiction

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

Boston University
BOSTON UNIVERSITY
GRADUATE SCHOOL

THESIS

THE NATURE BACKGROUND OF AMERICAN FICTION

Submitted by

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(A. B., Cornell College, 1913)

In partial fulfillment of requirements for
the degree of Master of Arts.
Bibliography.

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Helen Hunt Jackson - - - - - - Ramona.
The Nature Background of American Fiction

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The Nature Background of American Fiction.

Instead of seeing the sunset, sit on a wall along the hard-paved, hard-walled streets, and look at the cobblestones. We forget that Nature, like all things of deep abiding importance, has herself spoken. "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, and a heart of life all depend on her. We appreciate Nature as we appreciate our parents and God—all things that are ours or part of us, bone of our bone, flesh of our flesh, and without which life would be impossible. Still we forget Nature because she is the beauty and the soul of things. She is present, and we subconsciously feel that first we created; but to be known we must be sought to and learned of. But since we are weary and worried, we look at the cobblestones forgetting where we sit and find rest.

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

American letters have had a normal growth, and the development in the handling of Nature is interestingly typical. In the early
days, the first impression that America ever produced on an English settler was recorded by Governor Bradford in his straightforward Puritan style: "And in the beginning... affirmed... wilderness... wild and savage view". In those days "Nature was not a background. She was an inseparable, terrifying companion.

But the settlers did not see the pushing side of Nature. On mean, cut trees and distrustful mists and chilly streams, a mean, illsounding streets and builded cell. Nature is help towards existence. This is our way to build and to live. We cannot go up a little in a sudden, but we rise with an emphasis... and. Prof. that. To the Nature we become a tool... The influence, nature has been felt in all our literature since.

One of the earliest interpretations of Nature in America is in the poem "Adventures of a Life in the Wilderness" by Cooper: "And in the beginning... affirmed... wilderness... wild and savage view". Besides, what could they see but a mineous and desolate wilderness, land of unfathomable depths. Neither could they go up to je top of fiesta... as if it were, to view such a wild scene... so good his desire to feel their way... for such an, considering... their legs (save up ward to je be vino) they could find little solace or content in respects of any outward objects."
Ahuman, is it so? Do we not re-feel the life of a winter day, the barren landscape, and feel the cold, empty,
poetic loneliness? Have we not felt the oppression of the hills
and fought for passion when we stood in the woods? Is Nature
secure? Is it sure we Bradford has been put in the place of the
true one yet... and feel its depth in him, to the truly
capable 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, not investigated. As yet, she is too
omnipotent to escape observation and too unattractive to win research.
Descriptions are too ample superficial, giving the evident and
incredible facts rather than the details. Their aim is merely
re-created spirit delineated in literature, or scientific detailed
accuracy, but first, a translation of what they saw, told for the
profit of interested friends at home in England. If occasionally
we find a chance page or line which has enough of beauty of form and
humanity of touch to be called literature, it is only 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 make our bread, our homes, and our clothing from an unnamed nature
without tools but our hands; had all the work of a spring and summer,
then, been suddenly beaten down by a storm, or snatched by an early
frost, we, 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 alibits 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 Josselyn were among them. They did not find it quite as easily as they had imagined to their readers. Occasionally, we find more announcements like the following on their yellow old pages: "The trochulus, a small bird, black and white, which nests like the Swallow's nest, cometh. Let four or five young ones; and when they go away, they now fail to throw down (on 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 fought and conquered.

By the early part of the sixteenth century, settlers were more numerous. Nature was greatly subdued, and much less feared. Men lived in cities and villages and on farms that 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 approached, in her beauty, she becomes 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 of, investigation. This development is shown first in the writings of that learned 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 base 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 with great part of the night. They are very clamorous in their Banquets, which we know in 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, de
evelops, 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, in-
cidentally, 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 templed 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 Brockden 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 background 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 strained situations, and then added the nature background, not as a. 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 as 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 unpruned, lovely 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 stores of the street and store. And through the whole story the clear mountain sunshine warms Irving's kind 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. Herol's
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 unbrok en 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 waterfalls 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 few
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, two wood-brown 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 wild, strange, and alluringly horrible. The dank tarn of the house of Usher is something so lostly, the room with unseen crawling things that it is unforgettable. But is it 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 in southern New England by Charles Brockden Brown. These then are the contributions made in the treatment of nature by American story-writers.

The corner-stone 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 unprecedented 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 in 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 and clothing from the life of the wild, fighting the wary and treacherous red-men who menaced every step of the way. It was a perilous, 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 shacks-holes in the wilderness. Separated absolutely from luxuries, conveniences, or help, they built their stockades for defense and beguiled over again the old story of settlement. Once more the forests were red, as the sea is still 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 part 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 "Winning of the West", which will live for its accuracy as well as for its vivid 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-current of utter loneliness and separation from all human-kind. The reader knows how a time Boone or Roberton, or Sevier, fighting and struggling with them, feeling the brush of the branches and the spongy leaf-sodded path, 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 like 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 in shadow, o'er,
Fair Freedom's star points to the sunset regions, boys,
Ho-ho, ha-ha!"

The literature of this age was left to be written by the grand children, no 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 thus changed by the shrinking power of their natural surroundings. It is a striking fact that environment actually influences man's physical form. 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...
ters born in Europe. In the same way, the settlers became a new people, 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 refilling 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 for 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 to one's own river-bank and forest glade, and as close as one's own hedge or 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 Lyman":

"But thou art here, thou fill'st
The solitude. Thou art in the soft wings
That run along the summit of these trees
In music; thou art in the cooler breath
That from the inmost darkness of the place
Comes, scarcely felt; the barksy trunks, the ground,
The fresh moist ground, 'we all instinct with thee.' Thoreau found in Nature the glory of the primitive; Emerson the germ 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, sentimental, and cheap, even when it is otherwise wholesome. Most of it is a discouraging prospect, but is so weak as to be forgotten, 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 making 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, stone 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 hides its sweet-smelling blossoms under the snow-encrusted leaves and in the rock crevices. Tiny red checker-berrics shine from under their moist green leaves, before the snow has melted from the shade side of the rocks and trees. So a wet leaf-old that sinks deep into the soft earth blizcs 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 i 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 o 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 sale 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 women are rough and uncouth—fighting the waves with the unopining, silent persistence of fate. But in the South, where the sand dunes shift, there is wisdom, sort of sable—rugged and hardy to be sure—but a little more 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 villages where shrill-voiced old maids make life miserable for a normally vindictive little boys. 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 lonesome, 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 laborer's conflict with Nature to save a calf. The milkman is the hero, and Nature in the foreground is as often is in lives of these coastmen is the offensive force. There is the taste of the salt sea spray, the dizz, descent from the crest to the trough of a breaking wave, the shudder of the dory when the next wave strikes
A human soul is Nothing if it is raging tumult of wind and water; and the reader feels with Eliot's Wren all the stupendous power of nature in tumult.

Back from the coast, New England is different; but still distinctively 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 knows 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 Farmer, as Hamlin Garland pictures the Middle Westerner, without loss or more romance than 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 sympathy 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 Sunday School picnic. Her nature background is usually given for relief or contrast. Occasionally, we find a swift picture of the far away hills, the wind-swept sky, and the rare distances. Her background is one "renovated" by war, and it is consequently un-beautiful 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 wildness. She gives a picture of the pointed lire, 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 for et 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 he is often strange and unfamiliar.

Another of the leading New England fiction writers is Margaret Deland. Here again we find such 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 Gilpin": 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 roadsides 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-
erature is the South.

The mountains are the background; the broad plantations another; and thebayous and swamps of the Gulf region a third. Here again the inseparable oneness 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 Martinville. Uncle Remus, too, is unthinkable in any other place in the world than Harrie Murfree's sunny backyard. It is almost impossible to separate plot action from character, or character from setting which is the foundation of All Helen.

The interpreter of mountain life is "Charles Tom Craddock" or Mary Murfree. Her art is restrained and at times almost cold. Most writers of mountain life seem tempted to become either sentimentally romantic or brutally realistic. Miss Murfree is a realist but she has a true enough insight to see beneath the brutal surface into the great core which is her romance. Her characters are inherently like their own wild, rugged mountain home. There is a sense of utter desolation and oppressive mystery which makes the white and maroon furnished homes seem strangely otherworldly. The people are isolated and at their tea--unswerved by any moment, cruel or kind, and to the spectacle of nature's violent, elemental planet. This is Mary Murfree's picture of the mountain hero. But her contribution is not a great character or a great plot. She has given us no deeper, keener understanding of the human heart, she did
Sara Orne Jewett and Margaret Deland. Their Maryiant works are to
imagine the Tennessee mountains to reality. They are a picture,
for their color, sound, movement, and forest fragrance. There
is the close, rushing and rushing water, the animal of primulas and
its own creeping thistles, the present odor of pine new order.

The South can be seen a sort of a soul of illustration, with its
ideal historic mission. On the road, in the ideal no
addition beyond. The former with its cast and setting, room and
no soul, is seen toward by Thomas Nelson Page; the latter in
its original joys and redolent memories by Joel Chandler Harris,
icreator of Uncle Remus and the immortal Old Man.

Page created an atmosphere of tender, half-
reminiscence. We look back the days after the war with their beauty and tragedy
from to the "good old days" when the great was a lovely one,
likely, where the negro anthologies were full, the picture was plentiful
and happy, where there was life and pleasure and love on the
"good plantation." Page's main concern is in harmony with the
atmosphere. He shows the "wild waste of saeculum" where the fields
once were, and "once-gleaming" the new found song to beauty
set back far from the road in proud seclusion, among "robes of our
and victory, now scarlet and gold with the early frost." It is occa-
sational nature touches like these - accurate, artistically came,
an impressionistic - that make Page's are marks. He describes
mighty, so rings in, impressionistic incidentally. He devotes
a few paragraphs to pure setting, and men on the land, see a
picture that we do not easily, "once... The songs of the soul..."
the lure of ease, the wood-swept hut in a clearing, and still,
secreted houses surrounded by untrimmed trees - all that is charac-
teristic of the work-worn South is as if we had known it in art.

Joel Chandler Harris' purpose in telling tales of the rough
side of Negro life, the joy of mere living in Southern want and
delicious idleness. He gives us the true face of Uncle Ransan of
the other side of the war and his story of the walls, politics and
practicalities as both a happy, and philosophy. The nature
background is the plantation back-ground where Uncle Ransan sits on
high and tells stories, and brushwood and canebrake where Brother
Ransan tells his significant and interrupted tale. It is a sea
that lies a long intermission of work, writing and those, when there
is the need of breaking off the degree medium to the we are
over all the world. These are still the love of living and growing.

In some ways 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 life, i.e., the hide poetic nature of
the mountaineer and his aversion to work or progress is like the
Creole of New Orleans. But otherwise the contrast is its great
mountains and the mountain-side, the wide and unending river-
valley. The Far South is like another country - a luxuriant, tropic-
ial land of sensual warmth and alluring romantic beauty. The stiff
palmettos and graceful magnolias are perfect to the point of an-
ime, artificial it. Even in her abandon, nature seems to us of the
North, to be non-country. In the forests, the giant trees majestic and
gnarled, are made weird and uncanny by shadow hangings of climatis.

matter: southern. etc. It is quiet in the southern forest. There are
few singing lilies, and no break in the cool breathe, over many rocks and clear streams. The streams are slow and sluggish, stagnant and hidden in the mystery of a forest dark and silent,—"the region where springs perpetual summer," "...here through the Golden Coast, and proves of green and splendor, "Sweeps the gigantic curve and rolls on to the Everything, "Over their heads the towering and tenacious boughs of the cypress "Yet in a dark and gloomy forest like this..." This one is the realm of George Cable, wherein lies an unforgettable, the romantic charm that surrounds and protects 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 a poetic, tender vision of romance. They are passionate, emotionally crowded people—part of the tropical warmth and sunshine, as vivid as they are in fles. George Cable is more than a landscape painter. In fact, he is more like the writer of the novel "Tales of the South," in his ability to suggest a nature atmosphere rather than give a picture. He does not see any more of the palmettos and magnolias that is necessary, to the story, development, as we know that it is tropical and exotical. These modern 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 read or heard accounts, detailed Description of its scenery, George Cable's background would be
vague. However, most of us do have a picture of the South that we do acquire 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 his South, he does not disdain to give Nature an active place in his stories; as, for instance, the isle Demobil, the realm of white beauty, the home of terror, the house of dancing, all in a treacherous way, all are suddenly sunk, with one effort, and call of terror—sink, sink, down, down, down, into the merciless, unthomb-like flood of the Mississippi. His descriptions are full of action, as in the following: "Great circles or waves of surface would roll up from numera of feet below, and glaze over, as seem to float away—sink, and sink again under water, and with only a soft disturbance again, and again drift off, and vanish."

From the sunny, romance-loving South, we come again to the coo-er, one racing North. The Middle States east of the Mississippi have missed being interpreted in literature. For some reason or other of romance has seldom been sweetened the prose of Michigan, Illinois, and Ohio life. The potential writers here never wrote, and if they were required to farm and do chores to make money. Indiana, however, is typical of all this section; and Indiana has produced at least one fiction-writer of some value, and one of exceeding popularity, if not of lasting greatness. In his early days, Edward E. Hoey made immortal the pioneer life with its hardships and far-between joys, in "The Hoosier Schoolboy", "The Circuit Rider", and "The
Koosier Schoolmaster. Both Marking, a true epigrammatist, is giving us how the — or the comedy of the present day in the small-town life of the middle west. The men from home of Logan County, or William to was seventeen, are his typical characters — self-made men without culture or education but with plent of American idealized virtues of honesty and cheerfulness and kindness; self-conscious boys who are a puzzle to psychologists with their vivacity and activity and endless other paradoxes.

Edward Eggleston is a writer of an earlier age, but he has the characteristics of his time. "Local color" and the impressionistic aim relate former terms to him. Like Cooper, he describes in long passages, tells in all the scenes. When the circuit-rider is going to one camp meeting to another, Eggleston keeps the point of view clear by constantly describing the ever-changing landscape. The style seems old-fashioned only to us now who are not familiar, but there is a good story here, with worth while human people to know, in a wilderness background that makes the joy and love the 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由此风 blow to make and horses to feed, chill the reader as if those 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 waters, with.
the clear clean smell of pine, and leaves, the cold snow, the all this outside the cabin; and inside, the crackling flames in the fireplace, the glow on the white walls, 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 area 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 "suits of coat 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 to state has quite such a history - a history of dramatic situations and passionate 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 parching 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 more than passing worth
in his "Certain Rich Man". It is distinctively, a Kansas book in its
background and characters, but is universal in its appeal to our
love of clear bracing winds and sun and a vivid vision. He treats his
future 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

date. It begins then it is a new country — a great stretch of
open unsettled land in the throes of a life and death struggle be-
tween two types of settlers. The richness of view is what White aims
for, and he achieves it with remarkable success. No history or other
story gives one quite the sense of vast lonely, struggling Kansas —
with her far-reaching plains, her open sun-scorched skies, and the hoar, of
air that urges men to action. Then the boy grows up, and the town
changes from a few shacks to a few more 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 will pond are
forgotten, the boy bides ever in certain rich men. He grows old.
The little town is a city with parks and pleasures, but the rich ma-
riers of it all. He had lost his God, as he goes to the grove, which
was God's first temple, and to the hills whence come help. It is
the same grove and the same God in the land 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. White 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 entirc, due to the fact that the river determined every activity of the people, and in turn moulded 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 automatic chugging of a neat little tug, the river smells of fish and tarpaulin and grease - this is one 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 just as the

quest way of describing his background, for the main interest is
for all the rest thing and only of 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
density and over-whelming agents; expressed in snow-tipped moun-
tains felt way into clouds and mist, in masses and piles of snow-
sunset-colored rock, and waves in the earth on two down endlessly
into a dim and unknown chasm below. There is the miner's camp
with rude huts and bare grassless ground, surrounded by the still
straight mountain trees with their dark silhouetted forms a guard-
ing sentry between the miner and all that connects him to home. It
is such conceptions as these with all their atmosphere of strength
and light and power is the gift of literature. The writer who
has done the best in widening our experience to include the far
mountain west - California, is Bret Harte. Nature serves him as a
great emotional background, strengthening the story impression and
linked inseparably with it. To bring out the harmony and peace of
the Luck brought to Roaring Camp, he shows the harmony and peace
of Nature, who is almost given a place equal to the characters in
the story.
"Howbeit, whether creeping over the pine boughs or lying lazily on
his back, blinking at the leaves about him, to him the tree tops,
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 salt of sea and resinous
air; to him the tall redwoods nodded familiarly and deeply, the
humble bees buzzed, and the rocks cawed a slumberous accompaniment."

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

There was a rude attempt to decorate his bower with flowers and
sweet-scented shrubs, and generally someone would bring him a cluster
of wild rosebuds, honeysuckles, or the painted blossoms of Las
Vernitas. The men had suddenly awakened to the fact that there were
beauty and significance in these trifles they had long trodden
senselessly 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 foot of which
illuminated by the rising moon. The suffering one might have seen
it from the rude bunk whereon she lay - seen it winding like a silver
thread until it was lost in the stars above."

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

There is another West that Bret Harte interprets. It is the West of wild plains and desert wastes where in the dry dust through the crackling sage brush, where prairie dogs and swift-creeping lizards are the only evidence that life still exists. Where would seem to be no literary material here, yet 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 Bret Harte Hunt Jackson has located her stirring drama of the South-west. Here and in the paradise of southern California, we follow Ramona and Alejandro Azuaje, soldiers and dreamer, from her sunny pleasant home to the canons and the desert places. There is very little description, but much is suggested. We see the immense rapides of the canyon looking into the heads of the fleeing husband and wife. We see the side of a wall of desert flowers that are gold as a snow-storm shining 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 piercing, wearying, discouraging search for the nuggets that were
so seldom there; the coarse humor; the wild, reveling, leisures
of the bar-room; and on the background "the great peace and
calm" of the California climate that cooled their spirits". It is
this sense of the abiding strength of nature that makes its firm
foundation in the struggle between men and the earth for her re-
sources. He uses nature, not consciously for dramatic or impres-"i-
static reasons, but as he says, "I've simply tried to present the
west as it is, not in accordonce with the artificial ideas of
"dramatic plot", or "love interest", or "artistic balance", or
anything that would interfere with a true picture". Yet in pictur-
ing normally, all these things are used. The spirit of the west in-
trines with the spirit of the characters, with the individual
flower and leaf. When the gold-seekers are satisfied; the
reader feels too their very content and engages looking with them.
"For the first time with seeing eyes" that, "the little up-sloping
meadow was blue and dully-green with flowers; while below the stream
browled foam-flashed among black rocks", the high hills rose up to
meet the sky, and out across the plain the pines stood thick
and serried". He goes on, always describing through the eyes of his
characters; "We entered a cool green place, peopled with shadows
and the rare considered notes of soft-voiced birds---the golden
sunlight flooded the mountains opposite, flashed from the sheen,
the langorous on the meadow. Long bars of it elated through
the gap in the hills leading us to touch with magic the very tops of the
trees with our heads. The sheen of the precious metal over the land.

His descriptions are not elegant, but when read aloud, they come alive - concise, simple, active - a vivid, a personified spirit of the time and place. The titles of West's importance are attached to the nature background, "The Silent Places", "The Blazed Trail", "Gold". His contribution is the true life of California people and is what some have called the "living consciousness of genuine artistry".

One great literary field in the United States is not yet considered - the Middle West. For a long time this section seemed devoid of all poetry or romance. It was thought to lack natural beauty, to attract only the poor and failing, to produce men of coarse and cloven-like instincts. It took one who had grown up with the music of the wind in cereals, whose spirit had been quickened by the mystery of the rolling, cloud-breathing, infinite hills - to tell the story of the West. And one who has made that story, is Hamlin Garland - of the Iowa cornfields and the Dakota wheatfields, of the blood and soil of the land. The earthy heart, the singing sun, the singing wind of insects - this is the realization of Garland's West. The waving of the wheat through the rustling corn, the laughter of the water over clean little stones, the cloud shadows moving on the smooth surface of the river, the blue
spaces, cool and sweet and restful, - this is the romance. Theirs
may be the spirit in this burned earth, the ardor; eyes
blinded by the dazzling light, or the eternal monotony of grass;
corn leaves, hopes made stagnant by the dry, sun-burned
or endless, ebbing blood. There may be, in the one mind, the
spirit of the eye-glasses - free and reaching the far-reaching. This
latter is the spirit of Hamlin Garland, but we see also something
enough to underestimate the other. We must see with vision, we are
rebellied against this soul in the drudgery 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
knowing his close relation to the nature about him. To one who is
likewise intensely spirit of the West, Hamlin Garland seems to be
the West itself incarnate. He is the inevitable voice of its burdens,
its injustices, and its great purpose.

His art is unworldly. His descriptions are the finest thing we
have so far in the portrayal of nature background. They are accurate;
for instance, "A kingfisher crossed and re-crossed the stream with
ripples sweeping; it was . . . They are vivid in painting, not in
vagueness of view; "A corn-field in July is a lovely place. The soil
is hot and dry; the rays bounce from the blazing sun, burning leaves
with a warm sickening smell drawn from the rapidly growing, broad-
flaring tassels of the corn. The sun nearly vertical, drops a flood
of dazzling light upon the field, a part of the roof shaded a little,"
only to make the heat seem more intense. They are occasionally
long, but they so interweave with the rush of Nature, as
hold one with the lure of color and smell and sound that the reader
does not stag with. They are active, not passive, descriptive,
and are intensely impressionistic. He keeps Nature near in the back
and interprets life truly, but, unlike the writers who omit
tall nature depiction, he makes us see more than we have seen before.
He tries to make us see with a new eye the miracle in things
ascaped us. He shows the close, inextricable connection between
and their light. He cannot tell his story without one of the
mil in it. For instance, Grant, in "Up the Coolly", is the inheri-
table result of his grinding toil on the scorched little line,
while his brother Howard is the other result - the elemen-
tic cheer-loving, but unclean and univeral - another lim-
. There are two doors to the immense vast real life. Some are
made by it, while others are broken. Garland's characters represent
both kinds, and he shows that they are the direct outcome of
nature's two roads from which the spring. Garland calls himself a
"son of the middle border"; there will be "greater sons to win" and
those will well spring from the further border, for settling westward
seems to be a kind of humanly reality! His work in the greatest
est achievement in nature interpretation in American literature.
Cooper did almost as well, but in descriptive art of the
...accurac, impressionistic, lively, spirited and words or int
verse feeling. Most of our writers have attained some distinctive
work in interpreting the unique life of America, but none have gone
does not go toward the ideal of incarnating Nature as both
fundamental protagonist in all life stories as has W. B. Yeats.

So do they all also write for times to come. They make nature
the strong background, as not like Garlana, an actual working in-
fluence. Because our nature background is different from any other
nation's, we have different literature from any other anywhere.
Both literatures which Nature as her agent leads to Scotland
both literature has the meditative, poetic, and reverent attitude
toward its nature that American has. 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 re-
result. It has succeeded in keeping our senses and interests alive to
Nature. School children who would grow up never seeing the woods to
know their spirit, are taught to desire for knowing by "The Water-
fowl", "The Luck of Roaring Camp", "The Last of the Mohicans", and
many 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 consciously inter-
preted, until he learns the signs and symbols in order to read for
himself. Our literature is for most of us the initial stimulus. From
knowing "The Waterfowl", we catch a new beauty in the spirit of A
gray autumn night. From an hour with Bret Harte, scanning the explor-
ing take on finer possibilities. Thoreau and Burroughs make us long to work out for ourselves a newer knowing of forest and wilds.

Literature has to do with people and what is ofuniversal meaning to them—human ideas, instincts, emotions are most of such meaning, and they are the themes of our writing. However, those spiritual abstractions ust express with concrete life; and life is Nature. People are the result of an age-on-age progress—they are the composite of all that is primitive and divine in Nature.

Nature then is truly our great back-ground. We are infinitely more closely related to her than occasional tramps in the woods, occasional dreams at sunset—we are one of her. We are flesh of her bones. All of life is a great unity, as 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 that which they themselves beg 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 Omniscence and Omnipotence, in Emerson, the seer, calls the "garment of the Invisible Spirit."