THOMAS COLE ON ARCHITECTURE:

PICTURING THE GOTHIC

by

Rebecca Ayres Schwartz

A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the University of Delaware in
partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Art
History

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I dedicate this manuscript to my son Zachary Michael Schwartz.
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ABSTRACT

This dissertation studies Thomas Cole and the Gothic Revival. Through an examination of Cole’s paintings of landscapes and architecture, as well as his writings, this dissertation demonstrates Cole’s preference for the Gothic Revival as an architectural style, and how he visually associated the Gothic with the American wilderness and American Indians. Furthermore, by considering Cole’s beliefs in the cyclical theory of history, and the Gothic’s place within that history, it shows that Cole drew a connection between the Gothic and specific Christian spiritual implications.

An in-depth analysis of the painting The Architect’s Dream, Cole’s essay “Letter to the Publick on the Subject of Architecture,” his paintings based on James Fenimore Cooper’s gothic novel The Last of the Mohicans, and his numerous landscapes with both classical and Gothic ruins reveal how Cole defined the Gothic. For Cole, the Gothic symbolized all that was wild and free as opposed to classicism’s order and control. He made the Gothic manifest through his paintings of Gothic buildings within the landscape and by drawing from the tools of gothic novelists. This dissertation establishes how Cole developed the Gothic as a pictorial trope in order to contextualize more fully our understanding of the nineteenth-century Gothic Revival.
A very few generations have passed away since this vast tract of the American continent, now the United States, rested in the shadow of primaeval forests, whose gloom was peopled by savage beasts, and scarcely less savage men; or lay in those wide grassy plains called prairies...

And, although an enlightened and increasing people have broken in upon the solitude, and with activity and power wrought changes that seem magical, yet the most distinctive, and perhaps the most impressive, characteristic of American scenery is its wildness.

It is the most distinctive, because in civilized Europe the primitive features of scenery have long since been destroyed or modified – the extensive forests that once overshadowed a great part of it have been felled – rugged mountains have been smoothed, and impetuous rivers turned from their courses to accommodate the tastes and necessities of a dense population – the once tangled wood is now a grassy lawn; the turbulent brook a navigable stream – crags that could not be removed have been crowned with towers, and the rudest valleys tamed by the plough.¹

Thomas Cole wrote his “Essay on American Scenery,” 1835, and expounded the American landscape’s difference and superiority to that of Europe. Cole’s explanation, based on America’s wild and primitive sublimity as opposed to Europe’s cultivated, civilized, and ordered landscape, paralleled the juxtaposition of the Gothic Revival with classicism. For Cole, one represented all that was wild, free, and innocent, while the

other embodied civilization, decline, and immorality. In his paintings and writings, Cole explored these differences between the Gothic and the classical, contributing to a broader understanding of the Gothic as more than just an architectural style; rather, it not only encompassed architecture, but also literature, historical interpretation, and the American landscape itself. This dissertation examines Cole’s paintings of the American wilderness, his unpublished essays on architecture, his paintings of James Fenimore Cooper’s gothic novel *The Last of the Mohicans*, and his paintings of architectural ruins in order to contextualize the Gothic more fully and comprehend how Cole developed the Gothic as a pictorial trope or recurring theme.

Thomas Cole was born on February 1, 1801, in Lancashire, England, and immigrated to America with his family in 1818. Today, the state of scholarship written about the artist includes the biographic documentation of Cole’s life and body of work, detailed case studies on specific paintings and their socio-historical contexts, as well as examinations of Cole’s work in relation to general landscape and aesthetic theory. Scholarship on Cole began even before his death in February of 1848 with William Dunlap’s chapter on Cole in his *A History of the Rise and Progress of the Arts of Design in the United States* in 1834.² Louis Legrand Noble wrote the first full biography of Cole five years after his death.³ More recently, Ellwood C. Parry’s *The Art of Thomas Cole*:

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Ambition and Imagination serves as the most thorough biographical work and critical analysis of the largest number of Cole’s works in one volume. Many essays exist on Cole’s individual paintings, but two works especially, View from Mount Holyoke, Northampton, Massachusetts, after a Thunderstorm (The Oxbow), 1836, and the series The Course of Empire, 1834 – 1836, receive the most attention. Landscape and aesthetic


theory comprise the bulk of the remaining scholarship on Cole. Best known both during his career and today as a painter primarily of landscapes, most of Cole scholarship focuses on these landscapes. However, architectural subjects within a landscape account for roughly one quarter of his overall work. Gothic subjects make up approximately one tenth of his total paintings. While a few scholars have studied some aspects of Cole’s architectural subjects, or some of his Gothic themes, no one has studied extensively Cole’s stated preference for the Gothic as an architectural style, or how he worked the Gothic into so many different kinds of images, such as architectural fantasies, painted ruins, and subjects including American Indians. In addition to his paintings of Gothic and architectural subjects, Cole actually designed two buildings: the Ohio State Capitol.

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and the Gothic Revival St. Luke’s Episcopal Church in Catskill, NY. However, most Cole scholars have ignored his architectural interests and projects, a void this dissertation fills.

The upcoming chapters examine Cole’s built projects, his architectural paintings, and landscape paintings. In addition to addressing the relationship between architecture and landscape, the following chapters also consider the relationship between landscape and literature. Broader studies of Cole or antebellum landscapes may focus on the political, economic, and theological contexts of Cole’s contemporaries including the conflicts of Jacksonian America, New York City’s social and economic rise, and religious revivals. However, this dissertation’s multi-disciplinary approach allows for a focused study of Cole’s different representations of the Gothic as well as a broader understanding of the relationship between landscape and architecture, and especially between landscape and the Gothic.

Today, several archive collections hold crucial primary source material. The New York State Public Library’s Thomas Cole Papers contain the majority of Cole’s writings, including letters, journals, and essays. Much of the best scholarship on Cole takes advantage of this abundance of material written in Cole’s own hand. Four published

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9 Other important collections containing Cole letters, documents, and journals, include the Albany Institute of History and Art, Albany, NY, and The Detroit Institute of Art, Detroit, MI.
works reproduce in length many of Cole’s important correspondence, poems, and a number of his essays.\textsuperscript{10} However, the majority of these primary sources remain unpublished in archive collections alone. This dissertation addresses several of those untapped primary sources, specifically Cole’s essays on architecture, and a narrative about the legend of the American Indian Chocorua.\textsuperscript{11}


Scholars who mention Cole’s “Death of Chocorua” include: Burns, Painting the Dark Side: Art and the Gothic Imagination in Nineteenth-Century America; and Vernon Scott Dimond, “‘Eloquent Representatives:’ A Study of the Native American Figure in the Early Landscapes of Thomas Cole, 1825 – 1830” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 1998). Appendix C contains a transcript of “Death of Chocorua.”
The term Gothic originated in the seventeenth century in English political discourse, and then as a reference to the medieval style of architecture dating roughly from the twelfth through fifteenth centuries. Architectural critics initially used it as a derogatory term for the architecture created by the so-called barbaric Goths who destroyed classical civilization. These critics ignored the style’s origins in twelfth-century Île de France when architects and builders used pointed arches instead of rounded arches in order to build walls taller and lighter, allowing soaring vaulted ceilings as well as more light to enter the interior space. With the Renaissance’s return to a more classical-mode of architecture, critics saw the medieval styles as outdated. For the

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12 Samuel Kliger explains that Parliamentarians first used the term Gothic to refer to the Goths, the Germanic people who invaded ancient Rome, as the modern English people’s original forebears, consolidating many groups, such as Jutes, Angles, Saxons, etc., into the one term of Goths. The English proponents of the Gothic hailed these Goths for destroying tyrannical institutions. In addition to political tyranny of an absolute ruler from ancient time, Rome personified contemporary Catholicism for eighteenth-century English Protestants. They saw the ancient Goths’ invasion of Rome, therefore, as anti-absolutist in both a political and religious aspect. The term Goth or Gothic took on even more political associations as antiquarians and politicians connected their Saxon heritage with the Goths. They hailed these Gothic Saxons for overcoming absolutist Roman Britain in the fourth and fifth centuries, and for their formation of the witenagemot, a more participatory form of government, on which they based the English parliament. See Kliger, *The Goths in England: A Study in Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century Thought* (New York: Octagon Books, 1972).


14 Medieval contemporaries simply referred to it as the French Style when it started to become popular throughout Europe during the following centuries.
eighteenth-century critic, classicism referred to ancient Greek and Roman architecture.\textsuperscript{15} Compared to the Gothic, it emphasized order and harmony over dramatic heights, and it aimed to apply the classical orders of architecture, such as the Doric, Ionic, and Corinthian, in the same manner as the ancient Greeks and Romans.\textsuperscript{16} This dissertation shows how Cole contextualized examples of the Gothic and classicism in very different ways in order to emphasize their differences.

With the dawn of romanticism in the eighteenth century, many artists and architects started to look to non-classical styles for inspiration. Romanticism emerged during a time of conflicts as an ideological longing for freedom.\textsuperscript{17} Rebelling against the

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{15}The classical Greek style of architecture corresponded with the period from c. 500 – 323 BCE. The term classicism is more comprehensive and includes classical Greek, Hellenistic, Republican Roman, and Imperial Roman periods.

\textsuperscript{16}Lovejoy explains how eighteenth-century classical theorists specifically criticized the Gothic’s lack of simplicity, lack of symmetry, irregularity, and inability to maintain universal acceptance. Classicists maintained that these traits did not conform with nature. Lovejoy, “The First Gothic Revival and the Return to Nature,” 428 – 430.

\textsuperscript{17}Anne Mellor defines romanticism as “a cultural dialogue between competing public discourses – some committed to a visionary ideology of radical social change and personal transcendence, others committed to the liberation and triumph of working-class consciousness, still others sustaining an aristocratic and French-inflected libertinism, the majority committed to the growth and political control of a bourgeois domestic ideology and Christian morality.” See Mellor, “Romanticism, Difference and Aesthetic,” Pacific Coast Philology 34, no. 2 (1999), 138.


Horace Walpole juxtaposed the freedom of the Gothic against the rationality of classicism: “it is difficult for the noblest Grecian temple to convey half so many impressions to the mind, as a cathedral does of the best Gothic taste… the latter
rigid order and reason of the Enlightenment, the Gothic provided romantics with a new set of associations.\footnote{18} Romanticists viewed traits such as irregularity or asymmetry as now conforming with, rather than being at odds against nature.\footnote{19} Rather than just a style, the Gothic Revival represented a mode, or a manner of understanding.\footnote{20} It looked to a

exhausted the knowledge of the passions in composing edifices whose pomp, mechanism, vaults, tombs, painted windows, gloom and perspectives infused such sensations of romantic devotion. One must have taste to be sensible of the beauties of Grecian architecture; one only wants passion to feel Gothic.” Walpole, \textit{Anecdotes of Painting in England with Some Account of the Principal Artists; and Incidental Notes on Other Arts; Collected by the Late Mr. George Vertue; and Now Digested and Published from His Original MSS, By Mr. Horace Walpole}, vol. 1 (Strawberry Hill, 1762 – 1771; repr. London: J. Dodsley, 1782), 182 – 183, and quoted in Matthew M. Reeve, “Gothic Architecture, Sexuality, and License at Horace Walpole’s Strawberry Hill,” \textit{Art Bulletin} 95, no. 3 (September 2013), 418.


\footnote{19} Classicists based their association of regularity and symmetry with nature on mathematical rules of proportion. Later enthusiasts of the Gothic Revival, however, connected the Gothic to nature in a visual manner, likening columns to tree trunks and ribbed vaulted arches to tree branches overhead. Lovejoy, “The First Gothic Revival and the Return to Nature,” 426 – 437.

James F. White connects romanticism with the development of the Cambridge Camden Society (the precursor to the Ecclesiological movement), and its influence on the Gothic Revival. “It was characteristic of Romanticism to emphasize that the natural, the intuitive, and the unaffected came closer to purity than the rational and sophisticated. A return to the past, an intense nationalism, a stress on the natural and the picturesque, the cult of the supernatural, and an emphasis on the importance of feeling, all these were characteristic features of Romanticism which were frequently evident in the activities of the Cambridge Camden Society.” White, \textit{The Cambridge Movement: The Ecclesiologists and the Gothic Revival} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1962), 29.

\footnote{20} Dell Upton distinguishes three forms of understanding artifacts: style, mode, and fashion. Style “provides a context, or system of common understanding, for the members
particular medieval architectural style to distinguish itself from classicism and that style’s associated sense of rigidity and control.

The asymmetry and irregularity of many medieval Gothic buildings appealed to the romantic sense of freedom, just as seventeenth-century English politicians associated the so-called Gothic origins of their parliament with freedom from tyrannical absolute monarchy.\textsuperscript{21} The association between the Gothic and freedom continued in the eighteenth century when architects and viewers began to see it also as a reference to indigenous Saxon modes of architecture. Ignoring the Île de France origins of original of society.” Modes “serve not to unify but to distinguish. They refer to the divisions within society, emphasizing and perpetuating old differences.” Fashion emerged after the mid-eighteenth-century availability of consumer goods. It plays on the premise of élite modes which “depend for their appeal in large part on their inaccessibility.” Fashion draws “tensions between sentimental allegiance to archaic social hierarchies and the values of competitive consumption.” Upton, “Form and User: Style, Mode, Fashion, and the Artifact,” \textit{Living in a Material World: Canadian and American Approaches to Material Culture}, ed. Gerald L. Pocius (St. John’s, Newfoundland: ISER, 1991), 160 – 165. See also Upton, “Toward a Performance Theory of Vernacular Architecture: Early Tidewater Virginia as a Case Study,” \textit{Folklore Forum} 12, no. 2 – 3 (1979), 173 – 196.


Note that many English writers during the eighteenth century, for example Milner, the Roman Catholic Vicar Apostolic of Western England and Bishop of Castabala, declared in his \textit{History of Winchester} (1798) that Gothic architecture originated in England. For a discussion of these works see Simon Bradley, “The Englishness of Gothic: Theories and Interpretations from William Gilpin to J. H. Parker,” \textit{Architectural History} 45 (2002), 325 – 246.
Gothic architecture, English antiquarians and proponents of a more nationally-rooted architecture advocated for the Gothic because of its historical connection with the time of the Magna Carta. Thus eighteenth-century British architects not only associated the Gothic with Protestant values, but they also connected it with the idea of modern English liberties in general.

As the style developed in the eighteenth century, builders and viewers invested the Gothic Revival with additional layers of meanings that at times appear at odds with each other. English Whigs from the first half of the eighteenth century associated medieval Gothic structures with Britain’s pre-Reformation past. Specifically, they associated it with the typologies of Catholic ecclesiastical architecture. However, under the reign of Henry VIII, the crown dissolved many Catholic monasteries and abbeys. While the crown transferred some entirely to private, Protestant owners, they demolished

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David Watkin explains how the Gothic temple at Stowe, originally called the Liberty Temple, designed by James Gibbs in 1741, manifested these connections between liberty and the German Goths. Antiquarians argued that when the Germanic Goths invaded Rome, they brought with them democratic procedures described by Tacitus as typical of German assemblies. See Watkin, *The English Vision: The Picturesque in Architecture, Landscape and Garden Design* (New York: Harper and Row, 1982), 20 – 21.

Laura Doyle also explains the belief that the English descended from the freeborn Gothic Saxons who brought to Great Britain the traditions of participatory government. See Doyle, “At World’s Edge: Post/Coloniality, Charles Maturin and the Gothic Wanderer,” *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 65, no. 4 (March 2011), 523.

others for their scrap parts. Furthermore, because so many had their valuable parts removed, such as their roofs, the remaining structures quickly fell into ruin. After its establishment, the Church of England converted ecclesiastical structures previously affiliated with Catholicism into Anglican churches. The visual iconography of the Gothic therefore held both a connection to earlier expressions of Catholicism as well as modern Protestant triumphs.

23 Under the rubric of church reform and for financial reasons, Henry VIII dissolved, consolidated, and reorganized many of the country’s monasteries. Most of the smaller monastic houses at the time were purgatorial institutions, offering prayers for the souls of their benefactors. However, a fixed period for the recital of prayers replaced the practice of perpetual prayers for the departed making these monastic houses out of fashion. The tenets of reform dictated that these monasteries had to pass three tests, based on religious utility, morality, and size (whether they were large enough to sustain themselves). For a fuller discussion of the reasons for the dissolution of the monasteries, see R. W. Hoyle, “The Origin of the Dissolution of the Monasteries,” The Historical Journal 38, no. 2 (June 1995), 275 – 305. For a discussion of how the dissolution happened and some of its effects, see David Knowles, Bare Ruined Choirs: The Dissolution of the English Monasteries (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1976); and Joyce Youings, The Dissolution of the Monasteries (New York: Barnes and Noble, Inc., 1971).

The crown reused much of the physical properties of the religious orders in different ways. For example, they reforged abbey bells into canons and sold valuable lead from roofs along with interior furnishings and other sundry goods. See G. W. O. Woodward, The Dissolution of the Monasteries (New York: Blanford Press Ltd., 1966), 122 – 138.


25 That associated triumph increased even more after the failed Jacobite Rebellion of 1745, when Charles Stuart, also called the Young Pretender, tried to restore the Catholic Stuart line to the British throne. English Protestants believed Catholic Jacobites were primarily subjects of the pope. If the Stuart cause prevailed, Protestants feared a return to both a tyrannical absolute monarchy and ultimate submission to the power of the pope in Rome. These fears were therefore both political and religious. During and after the uprising, anti-Stuarts destroyed many Catholic buildings and properties in order to demonstrate their power over the Catholic Jacobites, and to discourage them from further rebellion. For a discussion of anti-Catholicism fears and acts of mob violence, see Colin Haydon, Anti-Catholicism in Eighteenth-Century England: A Political and Social Study
In the mid-eighteenth century, several Whigs commissioned Gothic-style follies, built intentionally to mimic ruins. They include the follies built by Sanderson Miller at Radway Grange (1749) and Hagley Park (1749) (Figure 1.1); James Essex at Wimpole (1768); and William Shenstone’s ruin at Leasowes (1757). Their designers and commissioners consciously designed these sham ruins to look like older buildings that had started to decay and crumble from war. Horace Walpole, who started to build his own Gothic castle at Strawberry Hill in 1750, even remarked that the tower at Hagley had “the true rust of the Barons’ Wars.” Lord Hardwicke, the commissioner of Wimpole, played a part in punishing Jacobites. He specifically requested that Miller design a folly in the baronial style to show the destruction of baronial Jacobite power. While Radway Grange, Hagley Park, and Wimpole all represented ruinous baronial, that is Scottish, Catholic, Jacobite, castles, Shenstone’s sham at Leasowes resembled a ruined priory.


26 David Stewart explains how these shams were “monuments of ridicule and images of just destruction” which commemorated the fall of the Jacobite and Catholic threats in his “Political Ruins: Gothic Sham Ruins and the ’45,” *The Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 55, no. 4 (December 1996), 400 – 411. For more discussion of the follies, see David Adshead, “The Design and Building of the Gothic Folly at Wimpole, Cambridgeshire,” *The Burlington Magazine* 140, no. 1139 (February 1998), 76 – 84.


28 David Stewart, 403. Erich Eych also explains how Lord Hardwicke initiated legislation abolishing the Scottish clan system after the Stewart cause collapsed after the Battle of Culloden in *Pitt Versus Fox: Father and Son, 1735 – 1806* (London: G. Bell, 1950), 47.
Rather than exemplifying hostility towards political tyranny, Leasowes expressed enmity towards the medieval religion of Catholicism by presenting a destroyed priory. These were the first consciously revived Gothic structures.

As a revived style or mode, the Gothic Revival and neoclassicism engaged attributes from the past with contemporary purpose. No matter how richly informed or carefully copied, these revivals appear in new contexts as adaptions. Historical distance always affects our understanding of the past. Revivals therefore, whether they reuse classical or Gothic elements, deal with imagined constructions of the past. A revival’s contemporary viewers draw associated values between the original and revived works, such as ecclesiastical references in the case of Gothic architecture, but these same


30 These revivals often have nothing to do with the original structural material or functional purpose related to a revived visual image or form. For example, Ryan K. Smith examines the irony of Protestants using Gothic Revival “Catholic” features in church design during a time of anti-Catholic sentiment and fear in Gothic Arches, Latin Crosses: Anti-Catholicism and American Church Designs in the Nineteenth Century (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006).

31 I base my definition of revival styles in part on Virginia Chieffo Raguin’s explanation of how revival styles “reveal what a society values in its past,” in her “Revivals, Revivalists, and Architectural Stained Glass,” Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians 49, no. 3 (September 1990), 310.

Matthew J. Reeve also explains how the Gothic Revival creates a fantasy image of the past, rather than an imitation. It decontextualizes, recreates, and reconstructs. See Matthew Reeve, 423 – 426.
viewers also apply new agency to old meanings. This dissertation investigates how Cole gave new agency to the Gothic by associating it with the American wilderness, American Indians, and contemporary notions of Christian spiritualism.

American Gothic Revival as an architectural style began in the eighteenth century, with such buildings as Bard and Robinson’s Trinity Church (1788), New York, New York and Benjamin Henry Latrobe’s Sedgeley, or the William Crammond home (1799), Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Unfortunately for students of American architecture, many works that address Gothic Revival architecture in general focus mostly on English and later Continental-European examples of the style. The study of English Gothic Revival relies much more on both the context of the Anglican Church and the relationship between new and older, preexisting Gothic buildings. A common theme in much of the mid-twentieth century scholarship on American Gothic Revival architecture deals with the identification of specific medieval sources for more recent Gothic Revival buildings and the questioning of the nature of Gothic architecture as a revival in general or the

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34 For example, Chris Brooks, The Gothic Revival (New York: Phaidon Press, Ltd., 2001) focuses almost exclusively on European examples. He includes only one chapter that addresses American examples. Michael J. Lewis’s The Gothic Revival (London: Thames and Hudson, 2002), also mainly focuses on Europe. He only briefly mentions Trinity Church in New York, and the works of the American architect Henry Hobson Richardson.
survival of medieval building practices. The antiquarian practice of identifying historic sources or references says little about attitudes towards Gothic uses or the reasons for an architect’s choice. The rhetorical purpose of attempting to prove that American buildings merely copy older European examples led many architectural historians to single out America’s earliest Gothic structures as examples of what they called Gothic Survival, as opposed to a conscious revival.35


Similar to the debate of Gothic Survival versus Gothic Revival is the differentiation between two spellings: Gothic and Gothick. In the nineteenth century, critics sometimes spelled Gothick with a “k” as a mark of contempt, but then later referred to appreciation for the style’s frivolity and wit. Mid-twentieth-century architectural historians also used the term Gothick to differentiate the revival style (Gothick Revival) from Gothic Survival. Michael Hall explains the etymology of the term “Gothick” in Gothic Architecture and its Meanings, 1550 – 1830, ed. Michael Hall (Reading: Spire Books, 2002), 11 – 12. The term is problematic because even eighteenth-century writers used “Gothick” to refer to both their own contemporary practices as well as medieval references. Therefore, scholars such as Colvin in his article “Gothic Survival and Gothick Revival” complicate the term by associating it with eighteenth-century practices of revival as opposed to examples of continuing or surviving methods and practices of Gothic masonry construction. The term “Gothick” represents a way of thinking about eighteenth-century applications and attitudes of Gothic Revival. Cole used both the terms “Gothic” and “Gothick” even within the same essays, such as “Letter to the Publick on the Subject of Architecture.” Therefore, readers should interpret them as interchangeable for Cole.
Another strand of American Gothic Revival scholarship concerns the Ecclesiological movement, which influenced many nineteenth-century American churches built in the Gothic Revival mode. The American Ecclesiological movement derived from the English Cambridge Camden Society, founded in 1839, and gained traction in the American Episcopalian church. It looked to the Middle Ages as the most appropriate sources for the Christian liturgy and Christian cultural values. The Protestant Episcopal Church strongly appreciated its medieval English heritage, while maintaining freedom from British governance. This connection to religion frequently appears in literature on the American Gothic Revival, but it tends to overlook American Gothic churches of other denominations as well as non-ecclesiastical examples.


chose to be baptized in the Episcopal Church of St. Luke’s in 1844 in Catskill, New York, after the arrival of the Rev. Louis Legrand Noble, a high churchman. After his baptism, Cole attended the annual convention of the Episcopal Diocese of New York three times, and he was elected to St. Luke’s vestry. During his later career, Cole demonstrated his strong religious, especially High-Church, convictions in his series of paintings *The Voyage of Life* and *The Cross and the World*. His love of the Gothic stemmed in part from the religious and spiritual associations it held for him.

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According to St. Luke’s vestry minutes, Cole was an active member of the committee that called Rev. Noble to St. Luke’s as the successor to Rev. Joseph F. Phillips in 1844. See Wright, 296.

Cole was baptized on November 2, 1844. See Robert Weeks’s pamphlet, ‘Old St. Luke’s’: a Reminiscent Address by the Rev. Robert Weeks of Riverhead, L.I., Sunday Morning, June 4, 1899.


40 Cole painted two versions of the four-painting series *The Voyage of Life: Childhood, Youth, Manhood, and Old Age*. He painted the first version of the series in 1840 and it is located in the Munson-Williams-Proctor Institute, Utica, New York. A second version of series dates to 1842 and is now at the National Gallery, Washington, D.C. While unfinished at the time of his death, Cole intended five paintings for *The Cross and the World: Two Youths Enter Upon a Pilgrimage – One to the Cross, the Other to the World* (1847), unlocated; *The Pilgrim of the Cross on his Journey* (1847), unlocated; *The Pilgrim of the World on his Journey* (1846 – 1847, study only), Albany Institute of History and Art, Albany, NY; *The Pilgrim of the Cross at the End of his Journey* (1847, studies only), Brooklyn Museum, New York, NY, and Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, D.C.; and *The Pilgrim of the World at the End of his Journey* (1847, oil study only), Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, D.C.
The Gothic was not the only style popular during the time of Cole’s career in the first half of the nineteenth century. In architecture, Cole himself designed one building in the Gothic Revival style: St. Luke’s Church, 1840, Catskill, NY; and one in the neoclassical: The Ohio State Capitol, 1838. Indeed several architects worked in both styles. For example, Ithiel Town, who commissioned Cole’s *The Architect’s Dream*, designed the neoclassical New York Bowery Theater, 1828, and with Alexander Jackson Davis, the Park Hotel (Astor House), 1830, and the United States Custom House, 1833 – 1842, all in New York City. The same architects worked together on the Gothic Revival Glen Ellen in Baltimore, 1832, and Davis on his own planned Millbrook (Henry Sheldon House), 1838, and The Knoll (Gen. William Paulding House), 1838, both in Tarrytown, New York. These two styles looked to different period sources with very different associations: one to the medieval, Christian past, and the other to pagan antiquity. Even though many architects worked in both styles, examples of classicism dominated. Cole’s Gothic works, therefore, emerge as one alternative to the dominant discourse of classicism.

Chapter Two, “The Gothic Wilderness in *The Architect’s Dream,*” explores

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41 Dominant discourse is a methodological construct often used in race and feminist studies and critiques. Whereas it frequently explains how a minority or feminist alternative exists as opposed and in relation to a dominant white, masculine discourse, I use it in this dissertation to explain the use of the gothic as an alternative to classicism, the wilderness as the alternative to civilization, and finally American Indians as the alternative to Euro-Americans. Dominant discourse and its implication of dualism begs the question as to what the alternative is to a standard norm, and what is that alternative’s relationship to the established sense of norm. Michel Foucault explained how a dominant discourse relates to discourses and knowledge in general: “It is in discourse that power and knowledge are joined together. And for this very reason, we must conceive discourse as a series of discontinuous segments whose tactical function is neither uniform nor stable. To be more precise, we must not imagine a world of discourse divided between accepted discourse and excluded discourse, or between the dominant discourse and dominated one; but as a multiplicity of discursive elements that can come into play in various strategies… Discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also
the dialogue Cole presented in *The Architect’s Dream*, 1840, between classicism and the Gothic and between European civilization and the American wilderness. This chapter presents a formal analysis of *The Architect’s Dream* as well as a discussion of the aesthetic and associationist theories that influenced Cole to show how he used the juxtaposition between the Gothic and classicism as well sublime and beautiful aesthetics to associate the Gothic with the wilderness and the American landscape itself. Scholars often describe the painting as epitomizing the popularity of multiple revival styles in the nineteenth century, but this dissertation considers how Cole intended an American viewing audience to see and understand the Gothic mode in relation to the landscape.

Chapter Two examines a painted representation of a Gothic church juxtaposed against classicism; Chapter Three, “Cole’s Essays on Architecture,” looks at Cole’s written thoughts about these two styles. It examines Cole’s use of the Gothic by contextualizing his preference for the Gothic Revival over classicism through a reading of his essay: “Letter to the Publick on the Subject of Architecture.”

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Matthew J. Reeve discusses how Horace Walpole conceived the Gothic as the Other to classicism in his design and construction of the Gothic Revival Strawberry Hill. See Reeve, 421.


I discuss in Chapter 5 some of Cole’s contemporaries’ views of the excessive use of classicism in American architecture.

42 Cole’s “Letter to the Publick on the Subject of Architecture” is in the Cole Papers, New York State Public Library, Albany, NY, hereafter referred to as Cole Papers.
likely written between 1836 and 1848 and probably intended for *The Knickerbocker, or New-York Monthly Magazine*, Cole discussed his theory about three epochs of architectural history as well as how he associated Gothic architecture with Christian values. The chapter presents a detailed analysis of Cole’s writing in order to explain how he envisioned classical and Gothic architecture’s place in history, and how they related to his built and painted projects. Cole’s essay crucially aids our understanding of the artist’s thoughts on the Gothic and requires a close analysis.

While the Gothic Revival began in the 1740s with contrived ruins, it quickly spread to the field of literature with the gothic novel, an important category of romantic literature, beginning in 1764 and continuing well into the nineteenth century. Three general characteristics define European gothic fiction: distancing effects, elements of nostalgia, and a frightening villain. By placing narratives in a medieval setting as a kind of distancing effect, the gothic novel removes the action from the reader’s sense of normalcy and reason to create a sense of the sublime. American gothic novelists substituted the American wilderness for medieval abbeys and castles to heighten a sense of terror far removed from the world of the modern urban reader. These American versions replace nostalgia for the medieval period and traditional hierarchies with nostalgia for the lost American wilderness, or frontier living. Furthermore, the American

43 1764 marks the year Horace Walpole first published *The Castle of Otranto*.

44 I draw my definition for the gothic novel from several sources, especially from Leven M. Dawson’s lists of seven paradoxical essential elements that make of the gothic novel: “the enjoyment of fear, erotic terror or horror, beauty in terror or the sublime, the Gothic hero, savage women and nuns, incest, and certain recurrent attitudes toward religion.” Dawson, “*Melmoth the Wanderer*: Paradox and the Gothic Novel,” *Studies in English Literature, 1500 – 1900* 8, no. 4 (1968), 621 – 632. Also, Robert D. Hume’s explanation of the distancing effect as a psychological atmospheric effect especially influenced by definition. See Robert D. Hume, 282 – 290.
gotic novel often substitutes American Indians for the evil monks and aristocrats of their European predecessors. All these themes present themselves in Cooper’s *The Last of the Mohicans: A Narrative of 1757.* While not architectural, the landscape subjects of Cole’s *The Last of the Mohicans* paintings bare similarities to the wilderness in *The Architect’s Dream.* Chapter Four examines how both Cooper’s novel and the paintings Cole based on it portray the American wilderness and the American Indians who inhabit that space. Through a multi-disciplinary focus on the narrative, the landscape, and its peoples, the chapter demonstrates how Cole used the literary devices of gothic novels in his paintings to portray American Indians, depicting them as the distanced Other, at home in the Gothic American landscape.

Chapter Five, “History and Ruin,” returns to Cole’s architectural subjects with a study of his paintings of ruins. Like the contrast between the Gothic and classical in *the Architect’s Dream,* Cole treated his classical and Gothic ruins very differently in order to emphasize their pagan or Christian associations. He painted dozens of landscapes with both classical and medieval ruins, however they represent an understudied aspect of his

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This chapter examines how Cole’s classical and medieval ruins paintings communicate his belief in the cyclical theory of history, which asserts that civilizations inevitably rise and fall. Just as specific styles of architecture become fashionable, and then drop out of favor, so too, civilizations and cultures rise to prominence, and then descend into obscurity. Cole used these images of ruin, to remind viewers that all societies eventually collapse. For Cole, they served as a warning that even the young America would follow the example of these once grand monuments of Europe’s architectural past. While this dissertation studies Cole’s treatment of the Gothic, it is necessary to examine his paintings of classical ruins to help contextualize the images of medieval ruins and connect them to a greater dialogue about history in general. By examining Cole’s understanding of the cyclical theory of history and associationist theory, Chapter Five explores how Cole presented classical and medieval ruins differently in his landscapes. Even as Cole used both classical and Gothic ruins to communicate his ideas about history, the Gothic specifically reminded the viewer that even Christian, not just pagan monuments could fall.


Continuing an examination of Cole’s portrayal of the Gothic especially for its demonstration of Christian ideals, the concluding chapter, “Picturing the Gothic,” examines Cole’s 1837 pendent paintings *The Departure* and *The Return*. The study of these two paintings further demonstrates Cole’s application of associationist theory, and how he connected the Gothic with Christian spiritualism. The pair illustrates his thoughts about the Gothic’s place in history in general and like his paintings of ruins, it emphasizes his belief in cyclical history. Together, the paintings also offer a nostalgic view of the past similar to Cole’s paintings of *The Last of the Mohicans*. In addition, this chapter further examines Cole’s use of fictional and fantastical settings for the Gothic, showing how he romanticized the Gothic.

Considerations of the Gothic went through many phases from the late-seventeenth through nineteenth centuries. From being disparaged as anti-natural, to lauded as epitomizing nature; from feudalistic to anti-absolutist associations; and from Catholic to Protestant references, these associations contribute to many layers of interpretative meaning. By the time of Thomas Cole’s career, the meaning was less in flux, but still not entirely fixed. In representations of the American landscape, Cole helped further define the Gothic. Often referred to as the father of the Hudson River School of painters, Cole’s landscapes inspired future artists to focus similarly on the American landscape for its wilderness qualities as well as its relationship to change, settlement, and development. Cole not only juxtaposed the Gothic against classicism, but he also used the Gothic as a symbol for the American landscape and its native peoples, wild and untamed, as opposed to the civilized Old World. His representations of the Gothic include built structures and paintings of Gothic Revival architecture, Gothic ruins, the American wilderness, and
American Indians. Cole’s images of the Gothic exist within a dialogue with classicism, represented by neoclassical architecture, and the history of European civilization.
Chapter 2

THE GOTHIC WILDERNESS IN THE ARCHITECT'S DREAM

“Nature has spread for us a rich and delightful banquet. Shall we turn from it? We are still in Eden; the wall that shuts us out of the garden is our own ignorance and folly.”

In 1839, the American architect Ithiel Town commissioned Thomas Cole to paint a landscape scene. After Cole finished the painting *The Architect’s Dream* in 1840 (Figure 2.1), complete with inscription to Town in the foreground, Town rejected the painting because the architecture dominated the landscape:

> Your picture is a fine Architectural painting – you are aware however, that my friend Cole is very celebrated for painting rich Landscapes, with Architecture, History intermixed, I was therefore very desirous of such a Landscape from your brush… I like the mixture of different ages and styles in the same imaginary picture, but I wish the landscape to predominate – the Architecture, History, etc., to be various and subservient – or, mainly to enrich a very bold & richly various Landscape…

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3 Town to Cole, 20 May 1840, Cole Papers.
Cole and Town argued about the painting and its commission in letters back and forth over the course of four months. Town neither wanted to take possession of the picture nor pay the remaining $341.75 owed to Cole; instead, he wanted Cole to paint an entirely new painting. Conversely, Cole felt that the picture fulfilled their initial agreement. They finally compromised that Cole might paint a new, smaller picture for Town that included architecture, but mostly consisted of landscape. Unfortunately, Cole never completed any such painting.

Town considered the painting *The Architect’s Dream* to be uncharacteristic of Cole’s work because of the small proportional content of natural landscape. However, even while dominated by architecture rather than the landscape itself, the painting demonstrates an important characteristic found in many of Cole’s works: the relationship between the wilderness and civilization. Reduced to less than one quarter of the entire composition, the wilderness still plays an important role in the painting’s overall narrative of the history of architecture. Humankind only created a built environment after conquering the natural environment. This chapter analyzes *The Architect’s Dream* in order to understand Cole’s view of the wilderness and how he thought it related to the Gothic. After formally examining Cole’s representations of the wilderness, this chapter explores how Cole associated the Gothic and the wilderness in the painting with an American landscape while he firmly rooted the classical landscape on the right half of the

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4 It is interesting to note that after stating several times how Town desired the landscape in the original painting to dominate the scene rather than architecture, in his final letter, Town wrote that he did “not so much admire Landscapes generally, as to feel able to have a large one, which would be rich enough to please me.” Town to Cole, 1 August 1840, Cole Papers.
composition in a European context. This chapter further studies how these juxtapositions of Gothic and classicism, wilderness and civilization, and New World and Old World relate closely to the aesthetic theories of the sublime and beautiful, the influences of Salvator Rosa and Claude Lorrain, as well as associationist theory. In *The Architect’s Dream*, Cole painted a fantastical scene representing the history of architectural styles, the advance of civilization, and the relationship between built and natural environments. The painting demonstrates Cole’s understanding of the Gothic within the landscape.

Ithiel Town, probably best known today for his patented lattice-pattern truss, built in both the Greek and Gothic Revival styles.\(^5\) That an architect rejected a painting, which included his own working styles, because it was overly architectural, illustrates how Cole’s contemporaries viewed him as a painter. The critics primarily praised Cole for his picturesque and sublime compositions that focused on the natural landscape itself. Some of the best praise he received in the press commented specifically on his ability to capture real landscapes. Referring to *View of Sleepy Hollow*, exhibited at the National Academy of Design in 1835, *The Knickerbocker’s* fine arts editor wrote, “His conception, – his feeling of nature, – is beautiful: and nature on his canvass is not represented, but actually exists.”\(^6\) He received less admiration for his allegorical, historical, and poetical

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\(^5\) In 1820, Town received a patent for the Town Lattice Truss for constructing wooden bridges that allowed for greater flexibility and could therefore span greater distances over rivers that previously required ferries. See Roger Hale Newton, *Town and Davis, Architects: Pioneers in American Revivalist Architecture, 1812 – 1870* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1942), 19.

\(^6\) “Editor’s Table,” *The Knickerbocker, or New-York Monthly Magazine* 5, no. 6 (June 1835), 552. Unfortunately, *View of Sleepy Hollow* is unlocated.
paintings. The Architect’s Dream, an overall image of fantasy, does not represent any real landscape. Rather it draws from the artist’s imagination. Critics disliked the imaginary subject matter when Cole first exhibited it at the National Academy of Design in 1840. One critic wrote: “Mr. Cole has shown great knowledge of architecture in this work and has preserved the perspective, both aerial and architectural with more than ordinary success. It is a beautiful picture, but the subject is not over felicitous.”

Another critic drew attention to how it might be a wonderful painting but would not receive general praise from the public because of its subject matter. “The ‘Architect’s Dream’ is the last of Mr. Cole’s imaginative works, and in our judgment displays as much genius as many of his best. It will not be a popular picture, because it is too

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7 The biggest exception was the series The Voyage of Life of which Cole executed two versions: one in 1840, and the other in 1842. Joy Kasson writes that few patrons were willing to buy Cole’s allegorical paintings and favored landscape views instead. See Kasson, “The Voyage of Life: Thomas Cole and Romantic Disillusionment,” American Quarterly 27, no. 1 (1975), 42. William Truettner also discusses these different subjects in Cole’s oeuvre and draws attention to the discrepancies between how modern viewers perceive his landscapes and how Cole’s contemporaries would have understood them. See Truettner, “Nature and the Native Tradition: The Problem of the Two Coles,” in Thomas Cole: Landscape into History, eds. William Truettner and Alan Wallach (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 137 – 158. Ringe also mentions these different approaches in “Painting as Poem in the Hudson River Aesthetic,” American Quarterly 12, no. 1 (Spring 1960), 71 – 83. Wallach writes about some of the reasons why The Voyage of Life was popular both during Cole’s life and after his death at which point it was reproduced in prints. See Wallach, “The Voyage of Life as Popular Art.”

8 Note that while some of the individual buildings in the composition resemble historic buildings, Cole combined them together into one grand composition that can only exist in paint or the mind.

9 “Editor’s Table,” The Knickerbocker, or New-York Monthly Magazine 16, no. 1 (July 1840), 81.
delicate, too full of poetry, for the majority to appreciate." In the end, Cole never sold the painting.  

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11 Cole kept several receipts or references to the payment agreed upon when Town commissioned the painting. The first receipt dated March 6, 1839 states “Received from Ithiel Town in Books & Engravings the amount of $222.50/100 towards paying for a picture which I am to paint of the value of $500. Two Hundred dollars to be paid by him in Cash six months after the painting is finished, the remainder of the five hundred dollars to be paid in Books & Engravings. The picture to be painted in the course of the next Summer – copy of the note give to Town.” A penciled note at the bottom of the receipt then reads: “Town books to the amount of $86.00.” Cole Papers. Town’s letter of June 12, 1840 specifically refers to one of those books as “Durand, Parallel of Architecture.” That book is Jean Nicolas Louis Durand’s Recueil et Parallèle des Édifices de tout Genre Anciens et Modernes, Remarquables par leur Beauté, par leur Grandeur ou par leur Singularité, et Dessinés sur une Même Échelle (Paris: École Polytechnique, 1800). Cole also mentioned possession of “Durand’s Parallele” in an undated booklist now in the Detroit Institute of Arts. My thanks to Alan Wallach for providing me with a copy of this list.

The second reference to payment in Cole’s notes states: “In consequence of an arrangement made between Mr. Town & myself last March (1840) I agreed in consideration of $150 added to the $500, which had been agreed upon before, to paint a larger Picture for him & I have painted the ‘Architect’s Dream’ for him so that he now stands indebted to be $341.75.” Cole Papers. Then Cole marked in his account book that he received the remaining money so that in total he received the $650.00 from Town on April 24, 1840 “for a picture called the Architect’s Dream.” Thomas Cole Collection, Albany Institute of History and Art. Cole and Town finally agreed that Cole would keep The Architect’s Dream and instead paint a picture of the same size as one made for William P. Van Rensselaer with either a view of the Temples of Paestum, a view of Aqueducts in the Campaigna de Roma, or a view of Tivoli. Cole to Town, 24 July 1840, Cole Papers. However, it is unclear whether Cole ever completed any such painting.

Cole’s inventory at the time of his death in 1848 lists “1 painting Architect’s Dream (now in New York) estimated at $400.” Thomas Cole Collection. The Architect’s Dream passed to Cole’s estate and then on to his grandchildren: Mrs. Florence H. Cole Vincent, Mrs. Mary Cole Van Loan, and Thomas Cole, III. It resides currently in the collection of the Toledo Museum of Art, which purchased the painting from Mrs. Florence H. Cole Vincent in 1949 with funds from the Florence Scott Libbey Bequest in
While the critical responses show that the general public failed to admire Cole’s allegorical subjects as much as his pure landscapes, Cole believed in the superiority of symbolic themes. He considered landscapes that merely copied a compositional scene entirely from nature to be unimaginative. True art should not simply copy nature, but rather should rise above the natural world and portray something of the artist’s imagination in the manner of poetry. Cole lamented that not everyone agreed with his belief that direct copies from nature lacked higher taste or sentiment:

I do feel that I am not a mere leaf-painter. I have higher conceptions than a mere combination of inanimate, uninformed nature. But I am out of place; every thing around, except delightful nature herself, conflicts with my feelings: there are few persons of real taste; and no opportunity for the true artist to develop his powers. The tide of utility sets against the fine arts.  

Nature, including entire landscapes as well as individual rocks and trees always appealed to Cole. He spent a good deal of time hiking through the natural landscape and made numerous studies from his observations, including quick general sketches and highly detailed studies of individual trees and other objects drawn directly from nature.  

Memory of her Father, Maurice A. Scott. Provenance information courtesy of the Toledo Museum of Art.


knew of contemporary developments in photography and optical devices, but he still
maintained that painting as an art form relied as much on imaginary invention as on
copying images and forms directly from nature. Writing to his friend William Adams in
1840 about the recent developments in daguerreotypes, Cole stated that “the art of
painting is a creative as well as an imitative art & is in no danger of being superseded by
any mechanical contrivances.”¹⁴ Devices such as the daguerreotype may not have
equaled the art of painting according to Cole, but he still appreciated their value. He even
owned a camera obscura.¹⁵ The camera obscura, an optical device that projects a real
image onto a screen, enables an artist to trace the image.¹⁶ While an artist could capture a
great deal of detail using optical devices, and communicate a very faithful portrayal of
nature, it remains a mere tool of the artist, lacking artistic creation of its own. Higher art,

¹⁴ Cole to William Adams, 26 February 1840, Cole Papers.

¹⁵ William Dunlap’s biography of Cole in A History of the Rise and Progress of the
Arts of Design in the United States, vol. 2 (New York: George P. Scott and Co., 1834),
359 describes how Cole sold a camera obscura in 1823 to pay for supplies when he began
his in career drawing in Philadelphia. At some later point, he acquired another one,
because it was included in his estate inventory from March 3, 1848. A copy of the
inventory is in the Thomas Cole Collection at the Albany Institute of History and Art,
Albany, NY. Tracie Felker notes that while Cole had a camera obscura as early as 1825,
it appears that he did not use it. She writes that drawings produced with the aid of the
optical device appear traced with lines of uniform thickness, curved distortion to lines at
the edges of the picture, and marked beginnings and ends to all lines. None of Cole’s
works, argues Felker, include these details. See Felker, 92.

¹⁶ For a discussion of the camera obscura and artists’ uses of the device, see Jonathan
Crary, Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century
(Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992); and Jenny Carson and Ann Shafer, “West, Copley,
and the Camera Obscura” American Art 22, no. 2 (Summer 2008), 24 – 41.
according to Cole, required the artist’s act of creation and imagination, which should elevate images from the natural world to the realm of symbol or allegory.

In his finished paintings, Cole drew from many of his sketches and studies, however, whenever possible, Cole adjusted details while working in his studio, drawing from his imagination and critical judgment in order to enhance compositional aesthetics of the sublime and the beautiful. He implied that many more of his paintings’ subject matters would have been very different if he did not feel the need to cater to public demands.

I am not the painter I should have been had there been a higher taste. Instead of working according to the dictates of feeling and imagination, I have painted to please others in order to exist. Had fortune favoured me a little more than she has, even in spite of the taste of the age, and the country in which I live, my imagination should not have been cramped, as it has been; and I would have followed out principles of beauty and sublimity in my works, which have been cast aside, because the result would not be marketable.

Cole meant that those paintings based more on his own imagination rather than the surrounding landscape failed to provide enough of an income for him and his family. It is therefore understandable why Town’s reaction to The Architect’s Dream, which Cole considered “one of the best I have ever painted,” disappointed him so much.

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17 Parry explains how Cole often adjusted his compositions to include an “X” pattern that helped organize orthogonal thrusts into the painted three-dimensional space in order to create a dramatic synthesis between the beautiful and the sublime. See Parry, “Overlooking the Oxbow: Thomas Cole’s View from Mount Holyoke Revisited,” 43 – 44.


19 Cole to Town, 25 May 1840, Cole Papers.
Cole most likely derived his emphasis on symbolism and allegory over what he called mere leaf painting from Sir Joshua Reynolds’ *Discourses on Art*, 1769 – 1790.\(^\text{20}\) Reynolds wrote that “Nature herself is not to be too closely copied…. A mere copier of nature can never produce any thing great; can never raise and enlarge the conceptions, or warm the heart of the spectator.”\(^\text{21}\) Instead of copying scenes, for a painter to be a true artist, “he must endeavour to improve them by the grandeur of his ideas.”\(^\text{22}\) *The Architect’s Dream* follows Reynolds’s prescription both in the sense that it does not mechanically copy from nature, and it represents a product of the artist’s intellect or imagination. A Gothic church sitting within a dark forest stands directly alongside a

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\(^{20}\) Reynolds delivered his *Discourses on Art* as lectures to the Royal Academy in London between the years of 1769 and 1790.


\(^{22}\) Reynolds, 42. Based on Cole’s language, we assume that he was aware of Reynolds’s writings, although we do not have direct evidence linking Cole to *Discourses on Art*. However, even if Cole were unaware of Reynolds, he most likely was aware of the teachings of his friend the painter and president of the National Academy of Design, Samuel F. B. Morse. Morse presented four lectures in 1826 on art, which demonstrated Reynolds’s influence. Lecture two in particular, delivered on March 27, 1826 discussed the benefits of using the intellect and the imagination over pure copying. Morse delivered his lectures on March 20, March 27, April 3, and April 12, 1826 at Columbia College. See Morse, *Lectures on the Affinity of Painting with the Other Fine Arts*, ed. Nicoli Cikovsky, Jr. (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1983). My thanks to Roberta Gray Katz for directing me to this connection.

Cole spent the winter of 1826 at the estate of Mr. George William Featherstonhaugh, on the Schoharie River at Duanesburg, NY, to the west of Albany from late December 1825 to March 1826. He returned to New York City sometime towards the end of March, so he probably heard Morse lecture.

wide river. Across the river stand a long line of monumental buildings plucked from antiquity. The architect himself lounges in a meditative dream-like manner on top of an architectural column inaccessible except in this realm of fantasy. Gothic arches and a green curtain frame the entire vision setting it off and separating it from the world of reality in which the viewer stands. Cole did not copy any of the scene directly from nature, and, by including the figure of the dreaming architect in the foreground, he reinforced the imaginary aspect of the landscape. Just as the reclining architect appears to dream up the entire composition, so too, Cole drew from his own imagination.

Cole painted over fifty landscapes with architectural subjects. These architectural subjects, including both classical and medieval structures, primarily represent European rather than American landscapes. Cole portrayed several examples of American vernacular buildings, including log cabins in the woods; however, his portrayals of monumental architecture were for the most part, European. This does not signify that Cole necessarily preferred European architecture to American, but simply that American examples of longstanding buildings were not as plentiful as European ones. The Architect’s Dream stands out from all of Cole’s other architectural landscapes because it portrays a fantastical vision of the history of architecture from ancient Egyptian to the

23 Cole’s few paintings of log cabins or rustic houses include: Daniel Boone at his Cabin at Great Osage Lake (1826), Mead Art Museum, Amherst, MA; A View of the Mountain Pass Called the Notch of the White Mountains (Crawford Notch) (1839), National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.; Hunter’s Return (1845), Amon Carter Museum, Fort Worth, TX; and Home in the Woods (1847), Reynolda House Museum of American Art, Winston-Salem, NC. Other American architectural exceptions include several views of the Catskill Mountain House and portraits of both the Daniel Wadsworth House and Van Rensselaer Manor House.
Gothic in one composition. By thoroughly examining its formal composition and especially its split between the classical and Gothic halves of the painting, the following discussion demonstrates how Cole visually and symbolically connected classical architecture with civilization and the Gothic with wilderness.

Instead of a strict linear progression from old to new, Cole separated the painting into two distinct spheres. A body of water divides the Gothic church on the left from the ancient classical architecture on the right, just as the Atlantic Ocean separates Europe from the Americas. On the right half, Cole depicted a progression of the historical architectural styles from the Mediterranean world. An Old Kingdom Egyptian, c. 2686 – 2258 BCE, pyramid rises in the far distance; hazy atmospheric perspective and a wisp of cloud emphasize its remoteness in both time and place. In front of the pyramid stands a hypostyle temple from New Kingdom Egypt, c. 1550 – 1070 BCE, and the setting sun envelops it in a soft haze. Two obelisks and two pylons mark its entrance; papyrus-shaped capitals top its columns. To the right of the Egyptian temple sits the comparatively small Doric Temple. Along the same plane, but farther to the right, rests a larger Ionic Temple. Between the Doric and Ionic temples, but elevated above a higher plane made by a long Doric order of pilasters, Cole placed a circular Corinthian Roman

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24 Parry notes that Cole probably used Durand’s *Recueil et Parallèle* for his inspiration for the Egyptian buildings. See Parry, “Thomas Cole’s Imagination at Work in The Architect’s Dream,” *American Art Journal* 12, no. 1 (1980), 47. Specifically, plate 1 of *Recueil et Parallèle* shows elevational views of the pylons with a pair of obelisks at Luxor and the hypostyle hall temple of Esna. However, while very similar, Cole’s versions are not exact copies. Cole’s obelisks are shorter in height proportionally to the pylons at Luxor as shown in *Recueil et Parallèle*, and he did away with the solid side walls of the temple of Esna to make the papyrus capitals of the columns more visible.
temple.\textsuperscript{25} Behind the centrally planned temple, stretching from the Egyptian structure all
the way to the view’s boundary on the right runs a long arcade.\textsuperscript{26}

The water separating the painting’s two halves creates a diagonal through the
composition, progressing from the lower right to the middle distance on the left.\textsuperscript{27} The
diagonal of the water not only reinforces the sense of linear perspective made by the
colonnade and arcade above it, but Cole carefully used the water to separate the painting
into a near and far side relative to the viewer’s space. The architect himself lies on the
near side, reclining on top of a huge, fantastical column, close to the viewer’s physical
space, gazing at the only building also placed on his side of water: the Gothic church.

Standing in the left half of the composition, on the viewer’s side of the water, a
Gothic church rises with a tall tower, pinnacles, flying buttresses, pointed arches, and
stained glass windows. The church could refer to either a medieval Gothic structure, or a

\textsuperscript{25} Parry makes the argument that Cole based these classical temples on Giovanni
Battista Piranesi’s \textit{The Three Temples} (at Paestum), plate three from \textit{Différentes Vues de
Quelques Restes de Trois Grandes Édifices qui Subsistent Encore dans le Milieu de
l’Anciène Ville de Pesto} (Rome, 1778 – 1779). Parry, “Thomas Cole’s Imagination at
Work in \textit{The Architect’s Dream},” 43 – 44. Parry further argues that the switch from a
horizontal to a vertical alignment demonstrates how Greek architecture served as a
foundation for Roman architecture in “Thomas Cole’s Imagination at Work in \textit{The
Architect’s Dream},” 49. Cole also may have referred to William Martin Leake’s
\textit{Topography of Athens} (London, 1821), which appeared in one of Cole’s undated
booklists, now at the Detroit Institute of Arts.

\textsuperscript{26} The arcade connecting the classical buildings strongly resembles the Aqueduct of
Claudius, views of which Cole studied in Durand’s \textit{Recueil et Parallèle}, plate 24.

\textsuperscript{27} Dan A. Kushel notes that diagonal compositions were standard for Cole in “Some
Observations on Thomas Cole’s \textit{Voyage of Life Using Infrared Reflectography and X-
Radiography},” in Paul D. Schweizer, with contributions by Dan A. Kushel and Ellwood
Parry, \textit{Voyage of Life by Thomas Cole} (Utica: Museum of Art, Munson-Williams-Proctor
Institute, 1985), 56.
nineteenth-century Gothic Revival building. Evidence indicates that Cole quoted the east end of Salisbury Cathedral, 1220 – 1266. But, while its general form may indeed reference the thirteenth- to fourteenth-century English medieval cathedral, it is not a complete rendering of Salisbury. The windows and pinnacles appear to match the east end of the choir, but it lacks the entire Lady Chapel at the furthest east end. In the painted version, Cole maintained the general shape of the crossing tower, but simplified it by reducing the amount of ornament, and changing the windows. Furthermore, it lacks the context of Salisbury’s urban environment. Instead, it represents an imaginary possibility set within a new landscape. It is a recreation, or a revival. The nature of a revival style consciously references and recontextualizes a past visual style. Cole relocated the Gothic into a new wilderness setting, very unlike the urban cathedral city of Salisbury.

The Gothic-styled church in the left half of The Architect’s Dream stands amidst tall evergreen trees. Most of the trees rise above the roofline of the church, but even the tallest only stands approximately two thirds the height of the highest spire of the crossing tower. The tower’s spire has an octagonal circumference, and its great height makes it appear conical. Formally, the trees mimic the shape of the tower with the tapering points standing as tall, slim, and graceful cones. The sun backlights both the trees and the tower itself casting their fronts in shadow while light silhouettes their peaks. Two pinnacles

flank the central tower, rising from flying buttresses. The left of these two pinnacles stands nearly perfectly level with one of the trees only a few inches to its left. Their close proximity enhances their strong similarity allowing the elements of the Gothic church to blend more easily with the surrounding wilderness. Cole blended these features intentionally; he even made the connection between the tall evergreen trees of the American wilderness and Gothic architecture in his journal, writing:

The effect of the sun shining in gleams through the tall dark spruce Forest on the green velvety carpet which outspread, without underwood, was extremely beautiful. It reminded me of the interior of some vast Gothick pile whose clustered columns [lift] the groined roof above & the sun breaks through narrow windows in slender streams and light whatever it strikes with a refulgence that appears almost supernatural amid the dim gloomy shadows round.²⁹

Written just two years before he painted *The Architect's Dream*, Cole’s description refers to the scenery he encountered while hiking around Kaaterskill Clove near Catskill, New York. His painted version of the Gothic building provides the visual for his written description.

While similar, Cole depicted the trees and the church with two main differences. First, the church rises significantly taller than any of the trees. Indeed, the church’s spire peaks as the tallest point of the landscape seen through Cole’s painted arched opening, soaring higher than the pyramid in the distance. Even while partially hidden by the surrounding forest, its sheer size helps denote the Gothic church’s supreme importance within the overall composition. The church’s windows draw the viewer’s attention to

another crucial difference from the surrounding trees. Whereas the trees stand
silhouetted against the setting distant sun, the church encompasses more than just a
silhouette. Light shines through the church’s windows making it appear to glow from
within. That inner light gives the church a sense of life and spirituality.\(^\text{30}\) Cole drew on a
long tradition of associating God with light, dating back to the beginning of the Gothic
style with Abbot Suger and the construction of the church of St.-Denis. Suger wrote
about the transcendent effect of light seen through stained glass or reflected off of
colorful gems. Such light:

called me away from external cares, and worthy meditation has induced
me to reflect, transferring that which is material to that which is
inmaterial, on the diversity of the sacred virtues: then it seems to me that I
see myself dwelling, as it were, in some strange region of the universe
which neither exists entirely in the slime of the earth nor entirely in the
purity of Heaven; and that, by the grace of God, I can be transported from
this inferior to that higher world in an anagogical manner.\(^\text{31}\)

The divine or celestial light shines forth from the church and also bathes the face of the
dreaming architect showing both the reclining architect’s and Cole’s heavenly
inspiration.\(^\text{32}\)

\(^{30}\) Parry notes that by showing the church lit from within Cole referred to popular
optical devices, the practice of lighting transparent prints from behind, the use of
theatrical dioramas, and his interest in stained glass. See Parry, “Thomas Cole’s

\(^{31}\) Abbot Suger, Liber de Rebus in Administratione sua Gestis XXXIII (1140 – 1141),
reprinted and translated in Erwin Panofsky, Abbot Suger: On the Abbey Church of St.-

\(^{32}\) Randall C. Griffin explains the symbolism of light striking the dreaming architect’s
forehead to emphasize his creative powers. See Griffin, “The Untrammeled Vision:
Others joined Cole in relating visual connections between the trees of the American wilderness and Gothic architecture’s towers and pinnacles. James Fenimore Cooper wrote *Deerslayer* one year after Cole completed *The Architect’s Dream*, and drew a close comparison between America’s trees and Gothic inspirations as well.

The arches of the woods, even at high noon, cast their sombre shadows on the spot, which the brilliant rays of the sun that struggled through the leaves contributed to mellow, and, if such an expression can be used, to illuminate. It was probably from a similar scene that the mind of man first got its idea of the effects of gothic tracery and churchly hues, this temple of nature producing some such effect, so far as light and shadow were concerned, as the well-known offspring of human invention.\(^\text{33}\)

Cooper drew attention to the relationship between the height and shapes of trees and the dramatic contrast of the lights and shadows of a Gothic church. Cole and Cooper first met in the spring of 1826 while both were living in New York City. They may have met later at the National Academy of Design, where Cole held a membership since its founding in 1825, and Cooper received an honorary membership in 1831.\(^\text{34}\) Cooper liked


\(^{34}\) Cooper wrote about his meeting Cole in 1826: “When he brought himself into notice by his views of the Catskill, he was living not far from me in Greenwich Street, and I visited him, and he visited me.” Cooper to Noble, Otsego Hall, Cooperstown, 6 January 1849, James Fenimore Cooper, *Letters and Journals*, ed. James Franklin Beard, vol. 5 (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1968), 396. The National Academy of Design elected Cooper an honorary member June 14, 1831, in appreciation for several casts that Cooper donated to the Academy. Therefore, Cooper and Cole may have met at the Academy or its annual exhibitions as well. See Cooper, *Letters and Journals*, vol. 1, 397 – 398; and Eliot Clark, *History of the National Academy of Design, 1825 – 1953* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1954), 59.

We cannot know for sure whether Cooper saw the painting *The Architect’s Dream* while it hung at the National Academy of Design. Cooper was in New York City on May 16, 1840 while en route home to Otsego Hall, Cooperstown, NY, from Philadelphia,
Gothic architecture so much that he rebuilt his home, Otsego Hall, in Cooperstown, NY in the Gothic Revival style in 1834.\textsuperscript{35} Cole and Cooper met again in December of that same year when Cooper visited Cole’s studio.\textsuperscript{36} The two possibly even discussed Cooper’s recent architectural endeavors. Indeed, we can imagine that Cole thought a lot about architecture during that time for only two months later, he signed apprenticeship papers for his nephew, Henry Bayless, to work with Ithiel Town as an architectural student.\textsuperscript{37} Furthermore, in 1834 and 1835, Cole listed himself as an architect in the City Directory.\textsuperscript{38}

making it possible for him to have seen it, however, he spent only one day there. Cooper referred to his brief stop in a letter to Mrs. William Heathcote de Lancey, 15 May 1840, Cooper, \textit{Letters and Journals}, vol. 4, 40.

\textsuperscript{35} Unfortunately, a fire demolished the house in 1853. Cooper described Otsego Hall: “The walls of the building were raised four feet. On these were placed battlements and heavy cornices in brick that add altogether eight feet to the elevation of the building.” Cooper, \textit{The Chronicles of Cooperstown} (Cooperstown: H. & E. Phinney, 1838), 84 – 85. For a description and history of the house, see Kerry Dean Carso, “The Old Dwelling Transmogrified: James Fenimore Cooper’s Otsego Hall,” \textit{James Fenimore Cooper Society Website}, http://external.oneonta.edu/cooper/articles/suny/2001suny-carso.html (originally published in \textit{James Fenimore Cooper: His Country and His Art}, papers from the 2001 Cooper Seminar, The State University of New York College at Oneonta, Oneonta, NY.


\textsuperscript{37} Cole Papers and described in Parry, \textit{The Art of Thomas Cole}, 162.

In the years leading up to Cole’s completion of *The Architect’s Dream*, the Gothic Revival became increasingly popular in America, especially in the countryside. The 1830s especially saw an increase in Gothic Revival attributes, such as pointed arches, in domestic architecture due to the increased circulation of agricultural journals, which included many printed examples of readers’ farmhouse plans. During the 1830s and 1840s American architects, such as Ithiel Town, Alexander Jackson Davis, and Cooper himself designed several Gothic Revival buildings outside of urban environments. While not exactly in the same kind of rough wilds that Cole portrayed surrounding his Gothic church in *The Architect’s Dream*, these architects showed the connection between the Gothic and nature. They considered the Gothic more closely associated with the romantic natural landscape in general. The Gothic’s unique traits, such as irregularity,

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39 Sally McMurry describes the increasing circulation of agricultural journals in the 1830s. By the 1840s, attributes of the Gothic Revival began appearing in areas that had still been in the pioneer stage during the 1830s. See McMurry, *Families and Farmhouses in Nineteenth-Century America: Vernacular Design and Social Change* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 4 – 5, 18.

40 Examples include: Ithiel Town and Alexander Jackson Davis, Glen Ellen or the Robert Gilmor Residence (1832), Towson, MD; James Fenimore Cooper, Otsego Hall (1834), Cooperstown, NY; Alexander Jackson Davis, Millbrook or the Henry Sheldon Residence (1838), Tarrytown, NY; Alexander Jackson Davis, The Knoll, or the General William Paulding House (1838), Tarrytown, NY; and James Fenimore Cooper, Christ Church (1839), Cooperstown, NY.

seemed to fit with the American landscape’s picturesque rugged and variable characteristics more than Europe’s more regular and ordered landscape.

Cole himself designed one Gothic Revival church in the same year that he completed *The Architect’s Dream*, and two striking similarities exist between the two. In 1839, the church of St. Luke’s in Catskill, NY burned down. Cole, a member of the church, designed the new structure in the Gothic Revival style in 1840, and the church was completed in early 1841 (Figures 2.2 and 2.3). Cole’s design includes tall lancet windows, a vaulted roof, and a large square tower at the entrance with crenellations. As built, the church differs from Cole’s initial design, which lacked the square tower and had two pitched-roof elevations. The original drawing and the finished church both include the crenellations, although in slightly different locations. In the drawing, Cole placed them over the pointed arch entrance, and atop two buttresses that flank the entrance and rise just above the top of the peaked vaulted roof. The finished church, which stood on

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*On the 11th of September 1839, the church was destroyed by fire, which was supposed to have originated in a spark thrown from the smoke-stack of a planing-mill in the vicinity…. Steps were at once taken for the building of a new edifice. Plans were drawn by the celebrated artist Thomas Cole, who was a member of this congregation and one of the building committee, and the structure was completed in the early part of 1841, and consecrated the same year.”* J. B. Beers Co., *History of Greene County, New York, with Biographical Sketches of the Prominent Men* (1884; repr. Cornwallville, NY: Hope Farm Press, 1987), 133.

S. W. Bullock describes the church as it neared completion in 1840. “We have so far finished our church that we held Services there last Sunday morning and although every other house [of worship] in the village was open ours was crowded we had an excellent sermon and everything went off well – all are well pleased with the House  I think it is complete. Do not know how it could be bettered Mr. Hopkins and many others say its equals is not in the Union unless the cost be over ten thousand dollars.” Bullock to Thomas Cole, 22 December 1840, Cole Papers.
the south side of Church Street, facing north, had crenellations along an upper, but not
topmost level of the square entrance tower (Figure 2.3).\textsuperscript{42} They topped the main block of
the entrance tower, flanking and framing the belfry itself, which rose one level higher.
The top of the bell tower similarly had crenellations at its four corners. Instead of
crenellations over the entrance, Cole included a small gabled roof, which created a
sheltered entrance porch. Ornamental curving verge-boards decorate the gable over this
porch. From the photographs, it appears that Cole kept the same window configuration
as in the drawing. However, photographs of the church show replacement brickwork
flanking the entrance where there may have been additional rectangular windows.\textsuperscript{43}

\textsuperscript{42} The congregation of St. Luke’s used Cole’s church until 1899. They sold the
building after its final service at that location on June 6, 1899 and the congregation
moved four blocks to William Street. See Frank A. Gallt, \textit{Dear Old Greene County: Embracing Facts and Figures} (Catskill, 1915), 259 – 260. Amos Post bought Cole’s building, according to the written description on the back of a photograph of St. Luke’s taken on January 12, 1896, now in the Vedder Library, Greene County Historical Society, Coxsackie, NY. It became Amos Post’s Automobile Repair Shop and Agency for Overland, Franklin and Cadillac Cars. Then The Daily Mail, the Catskill local newspaper, purchased the building in 1979. Finally, Cole’s building was torn down in 2002 for a new parking lot for the Greene County building at the corner of Main and Church Streets. See: Raymond Beecher and Harvey Durham in conjunction with the Greene County Historical Society, \textit{Around Greene County and the Catskills} (Portsmouth, NH: Arcadia Publishing, 1997), 45; and Richard Philp, \textit{Catskill Village} (Portsmouth, NH: Arcadia Publishing, 2009), 78.

\textsuperscript{43} The Vedder Library has eight photographs of Cole’s church in its collection. One of
those photographs contains a tree in bloom that obscures much of the building
(reproduced in Parry, \textit{The Art of Thomas Cole}, 242), however the other seven show the
front of the church very clearly, and all include the bricked up windows. Unfortunately, I
was unable to locate any photographs of the interior of Cole’s building. For a written
description of the interior of St. Luke’s, see Robert Weeks’s pamphlet, ‘Old St. Luke’s’: a
Reminiscient Address by the Rev. Robert Weeks of Riverhead, L.I., Sunday Morning, June 4, 1899.
Cole’s pen and ink drawing for the church, now in the Detroit Institute of Arts, also includes some important pencil additions (Figure 2.2). In pencil, Cole inserted tall pinnacles at the top of the crenellated buttresses flanking the entrance. The pinnacle, not included in the built version of the church, marks a striking similarity to the Gothic church in *The Architect’s Dream* where two pinnacles flank the peaked roof in front of the bell tower. This small pencil addition helps further demonstrate the connection between the overlapping built and painted churches.

The trees in *The Architect’s Dream* that make up the wild landscape surrounding the Gothic structure help reference an American-like context. The tall trees themselves appear to be either a variety of spruce or cedar. Cole made extensive drawings and studies while in Europe; however, the surviving studies he made of specific trees were American. Further evidence for the trees’ distinct American quality lies in their virginal and wild abundance, made apparent by standing in dramatic contrast to the more urban-appearing landscape across the water.

The contrast between the forested Gothic half of the painting and the civilized classical half reflects two aesthetic categories: the sublime and the beautiful. Whereas the characteristics of the picturesque include variety and intricacy, the sublime deployed

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44 Parry argues that the forested landscape surrounding the Gothic church in *The Architect’s Dream* may refer to a Northern European landscape setting contrasted against the Southern European, Mediterranean setting of the classical architecture in the painting’s right half. See Parry, “Thomas Cole’s Imagination at Work in *The Architect’s Dream*,” 51. However, I believe the wilderness setting of the Gothic indicates an American landscape.

awe to provoke delight from the viewer.\textsuperscript{46} The shadowy contrasts and the awe-inspiring feeling of the Gothic structure within the wilderness in \textit{The Architect’s Dream} communicate a sense of the sublime. Cole’s understanding of the sublime came from Edmund Burke, who Cole listed in a books-borrowed list in his 1839 journal.\textsuperscript{47} In \textit{A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful} from 1757, Burke defined the sublime as:

Whatever is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain, and danger, that is to say, whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror, is a source of the \textit{sublime}; that is, it is productive of the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling. I say the strongest emotion, because I am satisfied the ideas of pain are much more powerful than those which enter on the part of pleasure.\textsuperscript{48}

Burke even went so far as to explain how architecture could best achieve the sublime:

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{46} The term “sublime” first appears in English in 1698, in an English translation of Longinus’s work \textit{On the Sublime} using the term “sublime.” See Jan Cohn and Thomas H. Miles, “The Sublime: In Alchemy, Aesthetics and Psychoanalysis,” \textit{Modern Philology} 74, no. 3 (February 1977), 293. Longinus discussed the sublime in literature as it pertained to nature probably in the first century CE, although some scholars date Longinus to the third century CE. For a discussion of Longinus see D. C. Innes, “Longinus and Caecilius: Models of the Sublime,” \textit{Mnemosyne} Fourth Series 55 (2002), 259 – 284. It was not until John Baillie’s 1747 \textit{Essay on the Sublime}, that a writer used the term sublime to refer to more than just literature.

The Rev. William Gilpin later pioneered the term “picturesque” in his descriptive tours of Britain, \textit{Essay upon Prints: Remarks upon the Principles of Picturesque Beauty, the Different Kinds of Prints, and the Characters of the most noted Masters} (London, 1768).

\textsuperscript{47} Note that while Cole wrote “Burke, 1\textsuperscript{st} and 2nd vol from A.K.G.,” he crossed off the listing. See Cole Papers. The strikethrough may indicate that he did not read Burke that year, but its presence indicates that Cole at least was aware of Burke’s writing.

\textsuperscript{48} Edmund Burke, \textit{A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful} (1757; repr. London: J. Dodsley, 1767), 58 – 59.
\end{footnotesize}
All edifices calculated to produce an idea of the sublime, ought rather to be dark and gloomy, and this for two reasons: the first is, that darkness itself on other occasions is known by experience to have a greater effect on the passions than light. The second is, that to make an object very striking, we should make it as different as possible from the objects with which we have been immediately conversant; when therefore you enter a building, you cannot pass into a greater light than you had in the open air; to go into one some few degrees less luminous, can make only a trifling change; but to make the transition thoroughly striking, you ought to pass from the greatest light, to as much darkness as is consistent with the uses of architecture.  

Cole seemed to follow precisely Burke’s recipe for the architectural sublime for the Gothic church in *The Architect’s Dream*. He accentuated the dark gloom of the forest with the shade of tall trees. That shade stands out even more strikingly because it dramatically contrasts with both the brilliantly-lit classical architecture across the water, and the bright light of the sun shining behind the church and forest highlighting their profiles and allowing for dramatic shade.

By connecting the twilit and gloomy forest to the Gothic structure in *The Architect’s Dream*, Cole set up a contrast between the sublime left half of the painting and the beautiful right. If the sublime represents awe-inspiring emotions and holds potential terror in its dark shadows, then regularity, smoothness, and soft color define the beautiful. Differentiating between the beautiful and the sublime or great, Burke wrote: “beauty should not be obscure; the great ought to be dark and gloomy; beauty should be light and delicate; the great ought to be solid and even massive. They are indeed ideas of...

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49 Burke, 147 – 148.

50 Burke describes some of the characteristics of the beautiful as “soft, smooth, variegated.” Burke, 231.
a very different nature, one being founded on pain, the other on pleasure.”

Another aesthetic theorist, Sir Uvedale Price, used architecture to help illustrate the difference the beautiful and the third aesthetic category, the picturesque. In his *Essay on the Picturesque*, 1794, Price wrote that “a temple or palace of Grecian architecture in its perfect entire state, and with its surface and colour smooth and even, either in painting or reality is beautiful; in ruin it is picturesque.” Just as the Gothic half in *The Architect’s Dream* appears dark, Cole portrayed the classical half shining evenly in the light. There, a gentle haze embraces the architecture rather than striking contrasts of bright light and shadow. The light and haze soften the colors, preventing any harshness that might negate the effects of the beautiful. Cole used soft greens for the few plants, pale yellows for highlights, and a pale rose or lavender for shadows. The architecture’s stones seem smooth and even without any great variation or marked texture. Even the water at the shores of the classical half lies calm and still.

As aesthetic categories, the beautiful, the picturesque, and the sublime do not exist on their own. The human mind must give meaning to the feelings associated with unique visual effects. Cole drew his understanding of these aesthetics from the theory of association, which originated with the seventeenth-century thinker John Locke.

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51 Burke, 238.

52 Sir Uvedale Price, *An Essay on the Picturesque: as Compared with the Sublime and the Beautiful; and, on the Use of Studying Pictures, for the Purpose of Improving Real Landscape* (London, 1794; repr. London 1796), 62.

53 Several scholars examine Cole’s understanding of associationist theory and how he connected it with aesthetics. See Merritt, “A Wild Scene: Genesis of a Painting;” Ralph N. Miller, “Thomas Cole and Alison’s Essays on Taste,” *New York History* 37 (1956),
observed that the mind connected certain ideas with the experiences of the senses’ reactions to the physical world. He wrote, “some of our Ideas have a natural Correspondence and Connexion one with another: It is the Office and Excellency of our Reason to trace these, and hold them together in that Union and Correspondence which is founded in their peculiar Beings.”

If the mind associated certain ideas with specific visual subjects, then the artist could encourage certain interpretations by playing on those connections.

Following Locke’s explanation of the association of ideas, in the eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries, the aesthetic theorists Archibald Alison and Richard Payne Knight ascribed the emotions of aesthetic responses to the mind. Alison wrote:

> When any object, either of sublimity or beauty, is presented to the mind, I believe every man is conscious of a train of thought being immediately awakened in his imagination, analogous to the character or expression of the original object. The simple perception of the object, we frequently find, is insufficient to excite these emotions, unless it is accompanied with this operation of mind, —unless, according to common expression, our imagination is seized, and our fancy busied in pursuit of all those trains of thought, which are allied to this character or expression.


Similarly, Knight wrote that the perception of sensations “and consequently the pleasures and pains arising from them, as well as the ideas which they imprint, are in the brain.”\(^{56}\) Therefore, the interpretation of objects, buildings, and landscapes depends on the viewer’s thinking. The viewer draws associations depending on his or her own imagination. Cole understood that his role as an artist included presenting visual suggestions to a viewing audience.\(^{57}\) Furthermore, Cole followed the thinking of Alison and Knight along with Sir Joshua Reynolds, which elevated the arts that engaged the imagination over all others.\(^{58}\)

Using associationist theory, the viewer’s mind imaginatively equates the Gothic with the dark wilderness surrounding it in *The Architect’s Dream*. First, the viewer associates the tall pointed trees with the towers, and the shadowy darkness of the trees and church. In addition to visual aspects, the mind also draws spiritual connections between the church and God’s nature. In his writing, Cole specifically associated the Gothic with Christianity: “Partaking of the Genius of Christianity [the Gothic] opens a


\(^{57}\) Donald Ringe explains that: “The associationist school believed that the beauty of sublimity of any object lay not in the object itself but in the mind of the beholder, and was perceived by that mind only as a result of such associations as happened to be aroused by the object. If this be true, the artist strives not so much to represent his subject as to suggest elements that will release a chain of associations in the mind of the beholder. The purpose of art, therefore, is not imitative, but suggestive.” Ringe, “Painting as Poem in the Hudson River Aesthetic,” 73.

\(^{58}\) See note 21.
world beyond the visible in which we dwell.”  
 Furthermore, the Gothic represented “prayers in stone which rise in mysterious ascent toward heaven.”

The association between the Gothic and the American wilderness existed in literature as well as the visual arts. James Fenimore Cooper made the connection in Home as Found, 1838. In the novel, Cooper described his own aversion to the Greek Revival both in New York City and the Hudson River Valley. He demonstrated his preference for the Gothic Revival by describing the Effingham house in Templeton, NY.

“If you are not pleased with your own dwelling, Ned,” he answered, “you can have, at least, the consolation of looking at some of your neighbors’ houses, and of perceiving that they are a great deal worse off. Of all abortions of this sort, to my taste, a Grecian abortion is the worst--mine is only Gothic, and that too, in a style so modest, that I should think it might pass unmolested.”

He connected the Effinghams’ Gothic Revival home to its surrounding nature even more by the nickname Mr. Effingham gave the house: Wig-wam. Rather than a reference to any neighboring American Indians, for there were none at this point in Cooper’s narrative, the Wig-wam presents an association with the location of the American Indians’ abode in the wilderness.

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61 James Fenimore Cooper, Home as Found (1838; repr. New York: W. A. Townsend, 1860), 150. Note that Cooper based his descriptions of the house in the fictitious Templeton, NY on his own Gothic Revival house, Otsego Hall, in Cooperstown.
The sublime aspect of the Gothic church helps identify it as American as well, for Cole believed that the sublime aspect of the American wilderness was superior to that of Europe. Writing to fellow painter John Ludlow Morton, Cole described the American landscape as “those sublime scenes of the wilderness… scenes which peculiar grandeur has no counterparts in Europe.”

Europe, in contrast to America, represented civilization and order. According to Burke, that civilization meant regularity and assurance rather than the kind of terror or excitements that the sublime offered. However, Europe as Cole represented it in The Architect’s Dream, looked very different from contemporary 1840 Europe. Cole painted ancient Europe at its peak, while contemporary Europe’s peak already had passed.

The American landscape’s wild nature, Cole believed, best indicated the sublime. In his Essay on American Scenery, Cole wrote, “the most distinctive, and perhaps the most impressive, characteristic of American scenery is its wildness.” Even though Europe still had some forests, Cole considered America’s forests unique. In the same essay, he wrote that, “in the Forest scenery of the United States we have that which occupies the greatest space, and is not the least remarkable; being primitive, it differs widely from the European.” The primitive or savage state of America’s forests helped define it as pure wilderness. That wild aspect of the trees surrounding the church in The

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*Architect's Dream*, which the viewer imagines continuing beyond the borders of the painting, helps root it in America rather than Europe.

In addition to its exceptional wilds, America contained plenty of pastoral and cultivated settings similar to Europe’s. Cole drew attention to this duality within the broader American landscape in *View from Mount Holyoke, Northampton, Massachusetts, After a Thunderstorm (The Oxbow)*, 1836 (Figure 2.4). The right half of the composition consists of a cultivated landscape divided into farms, signs of humankind’s impact and control over the land itself. The left half of the painting portrays a wild scene. There, on the top of Mount Holyoke, a thick forest and lightning-blasted trees express the raw power of nature. *View from Mount Holyoke* shares a very similar composition with that of *The Architect’s Dream*. In both, a river or body of water bisects the painting. The water starts in the lower right corner of both and proceeds along a diagonal towards the center left. And both paintings present the contrast between the orderly right half and wild left half. But where *View from Mount Holyoke* represents an entirely American landscape, *The Architect’s Dream* separates the two halves further by including the classical, civilized half representing the Old World.

Intermixed with the conifers in *The Architect’s Dream* are a few, deciduous trees just starting to turn autumnal shades of red and gold. This inclusion of autumn colors in the forest may also be a reference to the American landscape. The colors of fall were, to

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65 *View from Mount Holyoke* is now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY.

66 The deciduous trees could be oak.
Cole, one more element of America’s superior beauty. He wrote: “there is one season when the American forest surpasses all the world in gorgeousness – that is the autumnal.” 67 Cole painted many scenes of the American wilderness that include both evergreens and deciduous trees in autumn similar to those surrounding the Gothic church in The Architect’s Dream. In particular, A View of the Mountain Pass Called the Notch of the White Mountains (Crawford Notch), 1839, combines similarly tall and pointed evergreens with deciduous trees turning gold and red in the fall (Figure 2.5). 68

Just as Cole drew a parallel in The Architect’s Dream between the Gothic and the rugged landscape surrounding it, he marked a similar relationship between the urban plantings and classicism on the right. This comparison between the greenery in the painting’s two halves further enhances the American-like forest’s primitiveness. Green plantings exist in abundance on the classical, Mediterranean, right half of the composition. However, people carefully control that foliage. Ordered, planned, and systematic, plants only grow in spaces designated by people. Kept small and neat, they appear minuscule in comparison to their architectural surroundings. They represent humanity’s power over nature. There in civilization, people control nature’s growth, and they even control the movement of water in the shape of an elaborate fountain. In contrast, the wild shadowy trees on the left half of the scene represent nature’s awesome and uncontrolled power.


68 Commissioned by Rufus L. Lord, NY in 1839, the painting is now in the collection of the National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC.
Cole emphasized the importance of nature’s relationship to civilization in another series of paintings: *The Course of Empire*. In that series, Cole represented humanity’s level of civilization as depending not only upon its ability to build, but also to control nature. In the third painting of the series, *Consummation of Empire*, Cole showed a very similar scene to that of the right half in *The Architect’s Dream* (Figure 2.6). Similar classical temples stand facing a body of water. Architectural similarities include a round Ionic temple, Doric temples, and long colonnades. Also very like the right half of *The Architect’s Dream*, the only greenery in *Consummation* appears in pots and carefully controlled gardens. The relationship between humankind’s built environment and nature stands in dramatic contrast to the previous painting in the series, *The Arcadian or Pastoral State*, where only a few buildings stand in the distance and Cole filled in the rest of the painting with woodland and meadow. The proportional differences between nature and human-built structures serve as Cole’s biggest indicator of civilization.

The difference in greenery parallels the different styles of architecture between the painting’s two halves. In his “Letter to the Publick on the Subject of Architecture,” Cole’s description of different architectural styles sounds analogous to *The Architect’s Dream*. From “the stupendous portals of Egyptian Arch to unsurpassed beauty of Grecian architecture – Symmetrical & complete the mind dwells on this monument of

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69 Luman Reed commissioned the series in 1833. It includes: *The Course of Empire: Savage State; Pastoral or Arcadian State; Consummation of Empire; Destruction; and Desolation*. Cole finished the series in 1836. Today, the New-York Historical Society, New York, NY owns the paintings.
human skills with satisfied delight.” On the right half, both nature and buildings stand as testaments to humankind’s ability to form an ordered environment. Conversely, Cole placed the Gothic in a wilderness setting where the imagination runs free of constraint. The American landscape, free from the binds of civilization, provided him with the appropriate setting for an architectural style evoking the imagination and sense of freedom.

Cole’s different treatment of the two halves of *The Architect’s Dream* demonstrates the influence of two seventeenth-century artists: Salvator Rosa and Claude Lorrain, both of whose paintings Cole saw at the British Institution’s summer exhibition in 1829. Critics traditionally consider Rosa and Claude as two ends of the spectrum

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70 Cole, “Letter to the Publick on the Subject of Architecture.”

71 Several contemporary periodicals mention paintings by Claude and Rosa exhibited at the British Institution in the summer of 1829. The three by Claude include: Catalogue #20, *Coast Scene with the Rape of Europa* (1667), The Royal Collection of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II; Catalogue #59, *Landscape with Psyche Saved from Drowning Herself* (1666), The Wallraf-Richartz Museum, Cologne, Germany; Catalogue #115, *Sea Port*, unidentified and unlocated. The two by Rosa include: Catalogue #12, *A Landscape with Figures*, unidentified and unlocated; and Catalogue #149, *A Woody Landscape with Figures*, unidentified and unlocated. The unidentified *Sea Port* by Claude was lent from the collection of Sir Richard I. Frederick, Bart. The unidentified works by Rosa were lent by G. J. Cholmondeley, Esq. and G. Wilbraham, Esq., M.P. See: “British Institution,” *Morning Post* (London), June 9, 1829; “British Institution,” *Athenaeum and Literary Chronicle* (London), June 10, 1829, 363; British Institution, *Catalogue of Ancient Pictures by Italian, Spanish, Flemish, Dutch, and English Masters, with which the Proprietors Have Favoured this Institution* (London: William Nicol, 1829); and “Monthly View of New Publications, Music, The English and Foreign Drama, The Fine Arts, Literary and Scientific Intelligence, &c,” *La Belle Assemblée, or Court and Fashionable Magazine*, July 1829, 42.
representing the sublime and the beautiful. In *The Architect’s Dream*, Rosa’s influence shows in the sublime wilderness of the left half, while Claude’s comes to light in the beautiful and harmonious architectural scene of the right half.

Rosa’s influence appears in Cole’s shadowy and sublime wilderness. Besides the original Rosa paintings Cole saw in London in 1829, he also studied the work of an imitator of Rosa at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts: *Landscape with Mercury and Argus* while in Philadelphia from 1823 – 1825. Rosa excelled at the sublime, heightening it by inserting elements such as blasted trees and rocky masses that represent nature’s awesome raw power. In *The Architect’s Dream*, Cole substituted rocky masses for the stony church, and the wilderness surrounding the church appears dark and dense. The lack of visible roads through the trees also makes it appear awesome and potentially threatening.

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72 Born Claude Gellée, he is generally referred to as either Claude, or Claude Lorrain after the province where he was born.


73 Cole’s patron, Robert Gilmor owned what he described as the first Rosa in America: *The Augures* or *The Auguries*, which he discussed with Cole in their correspondence. Robert Gilmor to Thomas Cole, Baltimore, 1 August 1826, Cole Papers. See also Parry, *The Art of Thomas Cole*, 38 – 39 for a discussion of this letter. Wallace writes that Gilmor’s painting was probably a Rosa imitation. Wallace, 117.
In 1832, Cole even began a painting entitled *Salvator Rosa Sketching Banditti*, in which the small figure of Rosa sits within an untamed landscape as wild and dangerous as the *banditti* he sketches (Figure 2.7).\(^\text{74}\) Cole left out any actual *banditti* within the composition, but the wild surroundings encourage the viewer to imagine any number of ferocious beings lurking in the shadows. In the background, the ruins of a medieval tower stand atop a rocky outcropping, combining the Gothic and the wilderness in a manner similar to the left half of *The Architect’s Dream*.

Cole drew inspiration for the beautiful, classical half of *The Architect’s Dream* from Claude’s landscapes and seaports. He particularly admired the cool tones of Claude’s *Landscape with Psyche Saved from Drowning Herself* (1666), which he saw at the British Institution in London and described it as “the best Claude I have ever seen” (Figure 2.8).\(^\text{75}\) At the same exhibition, he saw two other works by Claude: *Coast Scene with the Rape of Europa* and a *Seaport* scene.\(^\text{76}\) While the *Seaport* landscape goes unidentified, nineteenth-century descriptions call attention to its architecture, specifically, a triumphal arch.\(^\text{77}\) Claude’s seaports in general, such as *View of Carthage with Dido and* 

\(^{74}\) *Salvator Rosa Sketching Banditti* is now in the collection of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, MA.

\(^{75}\) Cole, journal entry, London, July 1829, Cole Papers.

\(^{76}\) See note 71.

\(^{77}\) The firm Christie, Manson & Woods sold the painting after the death of Sir Frederick in 1874. A newspaper announcement described the sale: “Messrs. Christie, Manson & Woods sold on the 7th inst., the under-named works of art, the property of the late Sir Richard Frederick and others… Claude, An Italian Sea-Port, with a triumphal arch and figures, boats in the foreground, 336 L.” *The Athenaeum*, no. 2416, (London, 14 February 1874), 233.
Aeneas Leaving for the Hunt, provide views across bodies of water, often seen from a diagonal perspective, framed by architectural stages. 78 Claude’s landscapes, often referred to as formulaic, typically carry the eye through distinct foreground, middle ground, and distant backgrounds, while buildings and/or nature frame the composition. 79 Landscape with Psyche Saved from Drowning Herself follows this pattern as well. Trees and foliage flank the central scene framing the composition. Psyche and the personified river who saves her stand in the foreground; the palace of Amor stands in the middle ground on the left hand side, and the remains of a classical aqueduct appear in the distant background. The Architect’s Dream utilizes a similar composition. The architect reclines in the foreground, looking out over a Gothic middle ground, while the classical architecture quickly recedes into the distant background. Furthermore, Cole framed the entire view with an architectural stage.

Cole had high praise for another artist who was also influenced by Claude: Joseph Mallord William Turner. After seeing Turner’s Dido Building Carthage, 1815, in London, Cole wrote: 80

78 View of Carthage with Dido and Aeneas Leaving for the Hunt is at the Hamburger Kunsthaller, Hamburg, Germany. I. G. Kennedy writes of Claude’s seaport scenes: “With their elaborate and in most case imaginary buildings arranged in perspective, they are a series distinct from the landscapes, coast views and topographical pictures.” Kennedy, “Claude and Architecture,” Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes 35 (1972), 268.


80 Dido Building Carthage is now in the collection of the National Gallery, London.
I have just returned from seeing Turner and his pictures…. The Building of Carthage is a splendid Composition & full of poetry. Magnificent Piles of Architecture some finished & some incomplete, filling the sides of the picture while the middle of it is seen a bay or arm of the sea that comes to the foreground glittering in the light of the sun which rises directly over it. The F[?] vessels are very appropriate. The composition very much resembles some of Claude’s. The Colour is fine & the effect of sunshine excellent but the sky round the sun appears to me to be too raw a yellow.\textsuperscript{81}

Cole recognized Claude’s influence on Turner’s painting.\textsuperscript{82} Turner looked to Claude’s Seaport with the Embarkation of the Queen of Sheba, 1648, which the National Gallery of Art, London, purchased in 1824.\textsuperscript{83} While Cole did not mention this painting in his journal, he most likely saw it while in London as well. Like The Architect’s Dream, Seaport with the Embarkation of the Queen of Sheba combines different styles of architecture: both classical and medieval, but Claude intermixed them whereas Cole divided them. Cole drew from Claude’s classical architecture. Ordered and harmonious, it provided Cole with an example of perfect mathematical linear perspective. Cole also

\textsuperscript{81} Cole, journal entry, London, 12 December 1829, Cole Papers.

\textsuperscript{82} For more on Cole’s opinion of Turner’s work see: Leo Costello, “‘Gorgeous, but altogether false:’ Turner, Cole, and Transatlantic Ideas of Decline,” in Transatlantic Romanticism: British and American Art and Literature, 1790 – 1860, eds. Andrew Hemingway and Alan Wallach (Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2015), 183 – 205.

Without providing any evidence to support his claim, Tim Barringer writes that Turner was “the single most important influence on Cole throughout his career.” Conversely, I argue that Claude and Rosa were bigger influences than Turner on Cole. See Barringer, “The Englishness of Thomas Cole,” in The Cultured Canvas: New Perspectives on American Landscape Painting, ed. Nancy Siegel (Durham, NH: University of New Hampshire Press, 2011), 3 – 4.

\textsuperscript{83} According to the National Gallery, Turner asked in his will that his Dido Building Carthage hang next to Claude’s Seaport with the Embarkation of the Queen of Sheeba at the National Gallery of Art, London, after his death. It hangs there today.
drew from Claude’s representation of the hazy distant sun. Whereas Cole criticized Turner’s sun as too yellow, Claude used a cooler color palette more similar to Cole’s final effect in *The Architect’s Dream*. Both the Claude and Turner paintings characterize ancient civilizations from literary sources, but they both display imagined recreations. Like *The Architect’s Dream*, the classical architecture in both the Claude and Turner paintings represents dreamscapes rather than any specific standing buildings.

Although Cole admired European landscapes painted by Rosa and Claude, he pointed out that their European subjects could not compare with the American landscape.

> Before us spread the virgin waters which the prow of the sketcher had never curld – green roads enfolding their whole venerable masses had never figured in trans-atlantic animals and far away the stern blue mountains whose forms were never beheld by Claude or Salvator or been subjected to the canvas by the innumerable dabblers in paint for all time past. The painter of American scenery has indeed [?] superior to any other – all nature is new to art… virgin forests lakes & waterfalls feasting his eye with new delights & filling his portfolio with their features of beauty & magnificence and hallowed to his soul because they had been preserved untouched from the time of Creation…

While Claude and Rosa had found praiseworthy subjects to paint, Cole found the American landscape superior for its wild state, untouched by human interference. The Gothic church in *The Architect’s Dream*, demonstrates Cole’s admiration. Rather than compete with the surrounding landscape, it complements the trees and seems to grow organically from the forest itself. Unlike the cleared open spaces in the classical half, the

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84 The Queen of Sheeba is an Old Testament Story from 1 Kings 10:1 – 13. The story of Dido comes from Virgil’s *Aeneid*.

85 Cole, journal entry, 6 July 1835, Cole Papers.
Gothic evokes the feeling of the sublime because of its relationship to the surrounding wilderness.

Painted for an American viewer separated from Europe by the Atlantic Ocean, the composition of *The Architect’s Dream* creates a window that allows viewers to connect their physical space with the Gothic. Cole controlled the presentation of the landscape by framing it within two columns supporting a large arch. While the arch peaks beyond the painting’s view, the angle of its spring from the columns implies a pointed, or a Gothic-styled arch. A green curtain hangs from the arch and drapes around the columns, providing a theatrical window through which the audience looks onto the scene. This framing mechanism serves as a trompe l’oeil device separating the world of reality from that of fantasy. Through this illusion, Cole firmly rooted the Gothic architectural

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87 Randall Griffin notes that the theatrical-appearing curtains may reflect Cole’s earlier experience designing sets for amateur actors. Griffin, “The Untrammeled Vision,” 68.


Framing mechanisms, according to Bernard Herman, “provide us with the means to isolate, describe, and understand elements of the material world. . . . The three
structure in the viewer’s American space. An earlier study for the painting shows a similar system of columns framing an architectural view, but with more classical-appearing column bases (Figure 2.9). 89 Cole changed the columns to present a Gothic buffer between reality and fantasy. But more than just a buffer or boundary between spaces, windows such as this frame serve as connections joining the real and imagined spaces together. The architectural framing stands at the periphery of the foreground, drawing the viewer’s gaze into the scene. As a kind of intermediary between the viewer and the architecture represented, it helps physically connect the viewer’s space and the pictorial space. In joining the two spaces, the opening reinforces to the viewer the physical proximity of the Gothic arch and the Gothic church.

Cole painted another illusionistic, window-like painting on an interior wall of St. Luke’s. 90 Standing behind a wooden screen positioned behind the pulpit, “was a beautiful window painted on the wall by Thomas Cole, the artist, a vestryman of the Church. It represented a brown stone arched window, with columns and capitals, and through the small glass panes a blue sky with clusters of magnificent cumulus clouds.” 91

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89 The drawing, Cole’s Architectural Fantasy, Study for The Architect’s Dream, c. 1839, is in the Detroit Institute of Arts, Detroit, MI.

90 Unfortunately, the painting no longer exists.

91 Weeks, 4.
Behind a reredos and the pulpit, church attendees in the nave most likely could not see it. Instead, visitors had to walk around the screen, discovering the painted window only when close to it. As a trompe l’oeil device, the painted brown-stone-arched window would have stood out on the brick building of the church itself, but still in keeping with the general Gothic Revival style.92

Cole associated the Gothic with metaphorical windows. In his “Letter to the Publick on the Subject of Architecture,” Cole connected the idea of an imaginative window and the Gothic. “Partaking of the Genius of Christianity it [the Gothic] opens a world beyond the visible in which we dwell.”93 Just like the trompe l’oeil window in the Gothic church, opening up into another world beyond that of reality, the Gothic framing arch of The Architect’s Dream opens to a dream world.

In both these trompe l’oeil windows or frames and the subjects within them, Cole created fantasy. In another example of Cole’s use of trompe l’oeil serving as both fictitious barrier and connector, The Cross in the Wilderness, 1845 (Figure 2.10), Cole rendered a circular landscape composition on a square canvas.94 In the pendentive-shaped corners, Cole painted illusionistic brown stone and mortar. The resulting image

92 Weeks’s description fails to specify whether the painted arch of the window was a rounded arch or a pointed arch. However, we can speculate that Cole probably would have painted a pointed arch to match the overall style of the Gothic church, which he himself designed.


appears to be a circular window cut through a stone wall. The stone surround thus provides a barrier between the viewer and the imaginary scene as well as providing the means of access to the painted vision.

In a fashion similar to these trompe l’oeil effects, Cole framed several of his compositions with rock formations that surround the viewer’s implied placement. In Kaaterskill Falls, 1826, and The Subsiding Waters of the Deluge, 1829, Cole framed the landscape subject with the rocky formation of a cave. In both paintings, the arched opening of the cave places the viewer within the sheltered interior space of the cave itself. The opening defines the viewer’s relationship to the subject by locating the viewer’s physical position. Just as in The Architect’s Dream, Cole clearly articulated the location of the viewer in relation to the subject and the location of the subject in relation to the viewer.

Cole’s use of illusionistic framing devices differs from another kind of trompe l’oeil technique he employed in Study for Dream of Arcadia, 1838 (Figure 2.11). Cole also painted a trompe l’oeil circular frame for Schroon Lake, c. 1846. However, instead of a trompe l’oeil stone wall, he painted a circular faux wooden frame. Schroon Lake is in the Adirondack Museum, Blue Mountain Lake, NY.

Daniel Wadsworth commissioned the 1826 painting Kaaterskill Falls as a copy of Cole’s painting of the same subject from 1825, purchased by John Trumbull and now lost; The 1826 painting is now in the collection of the Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, CT. Subsiding Waters of the Deluge is at the Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, D.C.

Painted in 1838, Cole gave the study to his fellow painter and friend Asher B. Durand. It is now in the New-York Historical Society, New York, NY. The following mention the study: Columbus Museum of Art, More Than Meets the Eye: The Art of Trompe L’Oeil (Columbus: Columbus Museum of Art, 1985), 30; Esther Seaver, ed., Thomas Cole, 1801 – 1848, One Hundred Years Later (Worcester: Wadsworth
executed this oil on wood panel to look like an oil-on-paper painting tacked onto a wooden board. The illusionistic paper curls around thumbtacks painted at its four corners. This kind of trompe l’oeil serves as a reminder to the viewer that the landscape remains just a painting. Its form as a study, unpolished with loose brush strokes, likewise draws attention to its painted, fictitious, and imaginary form. The illusionistic frames in *Cross in the Wilderness, Kaaterskill Falls*, and *The Architect’s Dream*, on the other hand, seem to imply a world beyond the two dimensions of the painted surface. Cole showed the viewer a painted world, which implies that the viewer can enter it simply by stepping through the framed window.

While Cole experimented with these trompe l’oeil techniques for the frames or media of painting, he disliked the practice of illusionistic paintings imitating architecture and statuary on the interior of churches. Writing in 1846 to *The Churchman*, Cole explained that these kinds of paintings “cannot accomplish the object for which they are intended, that is, illusion. They cannot do this, because the perspective of no architectural design can be seen from any but one point of view, without distortion, and so, no painting on a flat surface can be taken for a statue, unless at a great distance, except it is viewed directly in front.”

Cole went so far as to call these illusionistic paintings false. “In architecture as in art generally as well as in men, the simple, true and unpretending are always respectable; but the false and showy, though they dazzle for a

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time, ultimately become the objects of our disgust.” That Cole strongly disliked these kinds of architectural or sculptural illusions makes the fact that he painted illusionistic frames even more important. It demonstrates how Cole differentiated the painted framing device from the inner painted subject, the landscape itself, imbuing it with more significance. Cole never meant for the landscapes to deceive the viewer or be mistaken for reality. Instead, he meant them to be seen as products of his imagination.

As explained above, in *The Architect’s Dream*, Cole’s illusionistic Gothic frame creates both a boundary and an entrance to the landscape beyond. The audience’s high viewpoint, when looking in and over the scene, requires that separation. The viewer stands looking down on the closest elements: the tall trees and Gothic church. This height discrepancy prevents the viewer from actually entering the dreamscape, but Cole allowed a proxy within the painting. Reclining on top of a gigantic column rests the architect. Sometimes described as a stand-in for Cole himself, the figure lounges on

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100 Parry notes Cole probably used Trajan’s Column in Rome for his inspiration, of which Durand’s *Parallèle des Édifices* included an image. See Parry, “Thomas Cole’s Imagination at Work in *The Architect’s Dream*,” 53. However while Trajan’s column may have inspired Cole in terms of its sheer size and its inclusion of a figurative statue of St. Peter at its top, Cole’s painted column looks nothing like Trajan’s which has a continuous spiral relief. Cole’s column, on the other hand, has vertical fluting. Cole more likely used the Column of Phocas from the Roman forum as his inspiration. An engraving of the column appears in the book of prints, *Le Antiquita Romane* (1819 – 1823) by Luigi Rossini, and Cole included “Rossini’s Rome” on an undated booklist now in the Detroit Institute of Arts.
top of several books and architectural plans and implements. 101 His location towering above the landscape and the larger than life books surrounding him allude to his fantastical position. 102 While the title of the painting suggests this figure dreams, he does not lie asleep. Instead, while his eyes remain closed, his raised head and illuminated face suggest his awareness of the landscape he creates through his own act of dreaming. 103 His position and the title signify that he dreams of the entire history of architecture seen in the background. However, he clearly faces the left half of the painting and the Gothic church. This not only helps draw the viewer’s attention to the Gothic building, but it also implies that the inspiration for his dream may come from that direction as well. The light that strikes his face comes from the setting sun which we can only see through the windows of the church, imbuing the light with a spiritual aspect. 104

The figure of the reclining, dreaming architect is similar to the self-portrait Cole inserted into the foreground of View from Mount Holyoke. In both paintings, Cole situated the figure of the artist or architect on the wilderness side of the composition. For

101 Parry argues that the reclining figure may be Cole’s self-portrait in The Art of Thomas Cole, 246. Randall C. Griffin likewise comments that it functions as a surrogate figure for Cole in “The Untrammeled Vision,” 71.

102 Randall C. Griffin notes that the oversized architectural pattern books both allude to the intended recipient Ithiel Town’s extensive architectural library and should be viewed as a means of inspiring the architect’s vision. Griffin, “The Untrammeled Vision,” 66.

103 Randall C. Griffin compares the architect to other images of dreamers and genius types calling him emblematic of genius and introspection in “The Untrammeled Vision,” 68 – 69.

104 Randall C. Griffin explains that the light shining on the architect from above is “a traditional symbol of celestial presence.” See “The Untrammeled Vision,” 69.
both, the wilderness side stands closer to the viewer’s physical space, separated from the background by a diagonally positioned body of water. The inclusion of the figure therefore serves to draw the viewer into the wilderness as a more immediate extension of the viewer’s own world.

Cole inserted figures into many paintings of the American wilderness in the form of American Indians. At least fifteen paintings include American Indian figures within the landscape. In several of these, Cole used the figures in a similar fashion to the architect from The Architect’s Dream, or the painter in View from Mount Holyoke. In Distant View of Niagara Falls, 1830, two American Indians stand upon a ledge and look out towards the falls in the background. But whereas the architect and painter help make the wilderness feel more accessible to Cole’s contemporary viewers, the presence of the American Indians in the landscape make the landscape feel more wild and inaccessible.

105 Cole’s fifteen landscapes with just one or two American Indian figures include: Falls of the Kaaterskill (1825), unlocated; Falls of the Kaaterskill (1826), private collection; Kaaterskill Falls (1826), Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, CT; Romantic Landscape (1826), North Carolina Museum of Art, Raleigh, NC; Autumn in the Catskills (1827), Arnot Art Museum, Elmira, NY; Indians Viewing Landscape (1827), private collection; The Clove: Catskills, (1827), New Britain Museum of Art, New Britain, CT; Landscape with Dead Tree Trunks (1828), RISD Museum of Art, Providence, RI; View on Lake Winnipiseogee (1828), Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, CT; Distant View of Niagara Falls (1830), Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago, IL; American Lake Scene (1844), Detroit Institute of Art, Detroit, MI; Corway Peak (1844), Maier Museum of Art, Randolph College, Lynchburg, VA; Cross in the Wilderness (1845), Louvre Museum, Paris, France; Lake Scene (1846), Mint Museum of Art, Charlotte, NC; and Indian Pass (1847), Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, TX.

I do not include those landscapes with American Indians, which focus on narratives, such as those portraying scenes from Cooper’s The Last of the Mohicans, or Chocorua’s Curse.
More than just a visual explanation of the history of architecture, *The Architect’s Dream* communicates several popular trends in architectural revival styles from Cole’s day. These Egyptian, Greek, Roman, and Gothic Revival styles were all present in 1840 America. In *The Architect’s Dream*, Cole referred to these contemporary architectural movements as much as he referred to the past. Set up as an imagined view through an arched opening, Cole allowed the viewer immediate access to the scene. This sense of proximity further reminds viewers that the Gothic Revival building in the landscape stands closer to their space, rooting it in the New World. By dividing the two halves of the painting with a body of water and treating their surroundings so differently, Cole reinforced the Old and New Worlds’ distinctions. Order and control define the Old World, while the New World’s forest stands wild and free. The classical buildings of the Old World reflect the setting sun literally and figuratively: their time is ending. The Gothic Revival church, in contrast, glows from within. Classical and Gothic, city and wilderness, pagan and Christian: Cole juxtaposed these tropes in *The Architect’s Dream* to show that the Gothic Revival church belongs in the New World, a place of fresh beginnings.

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106 The most famous examples of Egyptian revival architecture include John Haviland, New York City Halls of Justice and House of Detention (1838), New York, NY; and Henry Austin, Gove Street Cemetery Gate (1846), New Haven, CT.
Chapter 3

THOMAS COLE’S ESSAYS ON ARCHITECTURE

In *The Architect’s Dream*, Cole separated the classical and Gothic halves of the painting in order to contrast the different kinds of associations each style held. Cole associated the classical with order, civilization, and paganism, while he related the Gothic to the wilderness and Christianity. Close in date to his painting of *The Architect’s Dream*, he also wrote an essay on the subject of architecture, in which he clearly stated the specific kinds of associations that the Gothic held for him. Sometime between 1836 and 1848, Thomas Cole wrote “Letter to the Publick on the Subject of Architecture” (Appendix A), which helps contextualize his lifelong interest in architecture.¹ Furthermore, in his essay, Cole made clear his belief in Gothic architecture’s superiority in terms of its visual aesthetics as well as its association with Christian spiritualism. This chapter presents a detailed analysis of Cole’s architectural essay’s organization, subject, and context in order to more fully understand how and why Cole so admired the Gothic, and how his understanding of the Gothic related to his built and painted subjects.

Cole divided the essay into six parts, focusing on the progress and the importance of architecture as well as specific styles of which he approved or disapproved. We can deduce an approximate date for the essay based on its subject matter, vocabulary, and by

¹ Cole Papers.
placing it within the context of Cole’s career and other works. The year 1836 marks the earliest date for the letter based on certain terminologies that Cole mentioned, which Americans generally did not use prior to that time, providing a *terminus ante quem*. This chapter explains the etymology of those terms, such as English cottage style, and Italian Villa architecture, to establish their first uses, and when Cole may have first encountered them, enabling him to use them in his turn. 1848, the year of Cole’s death, obviously marks the latest possible date. Cole probably wrote the essay closer to the year 1840, a very important period for him architecturally, and the first year that he mentioned the possibility of such an essay in another dated letter. Read in that time and context, this letter provides new insight to Cole’s other works, especially relating to his preference for the Gothic Revival.

In the letter, Cole praised other styles and periods of architecture including Egyptian and classical Greek architecture. These styles were important for Cole and had their own place in the American architectural landscape. But most importantly, Cole’s “Letter to the Publick on the Subject of Architecture” demonstrates, through his own words, his overall preference for the Gothic as an architectural style. Furthermore, it explains Cole’s admiration of the Gothic specifically for its association with Christian spiritualism.

“Letter to the Publick” contains six parts. The first part introduces the purpose of architecture as an art form in the context of aesthetic theory and its nationalistic implications. In the second part, Cole broke down the history of architecture into three

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2 Cole died on February 11, 1848.
epochs: the modest form of architecture; the utilitarian age of architecture; and the fine art stage of architecture. Cole went on to discuss taste as it applies to art and architecture, drawing heavily from associationist and aesthetic theories as well as anthropomorphic theories of the architectural orders. Cole then presented his account of the history of architectural styles, focusing especially on the Greek and Gothic styles, and then he discussed nature as it applies to architecture. Finally, Cole finished the essay by describing two contemporary trends in architecture: the English Cottage Style with which he felt dissatisfied, and Italian Villa architecture, which he preferred for the American landscape. This chapter explores each of these six parts and places them within the context of Cole’s other work, his interest in architecture, and his views on the Gothic.

Cole began by titling his essay “Letter to the Publick on the Subject of Architecture.” He published a similarly addressed essay in 1840 in *The Knickerbocker, or New-York Monthly Magazine* entitled “A Letter to Critics on the Art of Painting.”³ Cole mentioned both the published essay and the prospect of a future published essay on architecture in a letter dated August 4, 1840, addressed to William A. Adams, the commissioner from the Ohio State Capitol competition, and Cole’s old friend and Whig politician: “If you will take the trouble to look at the Knickerbocker of Sept when it comes out you will see a letter article there addressed to ‘Critics’ on the Art of Painting – you will know who is the Author – a Letter to Painters & Authors to Architects may

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possibly make their appearance in the Course of time.”⁴ The published Letter to which Cole referred, signed “Pictor,” points out what he thought should be the qualifications of a critic, namely “to teach the truth, to denounce falsehood, to enkindle lofty sentiment, and glorious aspirations; to apply the standard of the immutable laws of nature to the productions of art.”⁵ Because Cole’s letter to Adams refers to a possible future published letter on architecture, it shows that Cole was already thinking about writing an architectural essay in 1840, the same year he painted The Architect’s Dream, and designed St. Luke’s church in Catskill, New York.

Cole’s address of the essay, “to the Publick” differs from his first mention of it as a letter “to architects.” However, Cole explained in the very first paragraph of the essay that “my first thought was to address myself to Architects; but as that would have required me to address myself more technically & argue a greater degree of self-confidence than I possess & my object would only have been partially obtained I have taken this course.”⁶ Therefore, since Cole changed the address of the essay since he first mentioned it to Adams in 1840, the draft probably dates after August 4, 1840.

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⁴ Cole to William A. Adams, 4 August 1840, Cole Papers.

⁵ The Knickerbocker also published two poems by “Pictor,” which Cole most likely wrote as well: “The Winds,” The Knickerbocker, or New-York Monthly Magazine 17, no. 5 (May 1841), 399 and “Summer Days are Ended,” The Knickerbocker, or New-York Monthly Magazine 16, no. 6 (December 1840), 504 – 505.

Cole began another draft that he titled, “Letter to Architects.” In this undated, paragraph-long letter, Cole disparaged the practice of painting wood to resemble stonework.

Let wood work appear like wood work and never attempt to make it resemble stone. In chapel in University & Chimney gingerbread-work, much better to have something simple and in good style [than] have this kind of trumpery be it ever so showy. Solidity. Painting the Churches in An attempt in general [is] very bad taste. It [perspective?] looks true only from one point!8

This short draft presents a very similar topic as a letter he wrote about frescoes, which The Churchman published on October 31, 1846.9 In that essay, Cole also admonished the practice of painting architectural and sculptural illusions. Therefore, Cole most likely wrote this shorter draft sometime before the publication of the finished essay on frescoes in 1846.

Cole’s essay on frescoes holds another similarity to his “Letter to the Publick on the Subject of Architecture.” Both explained his praise for the Gothic or medieval because of its spiritual and expressive characteristics. In his letter to The Churchman, he wrote, “Let us aim at higher things – let us attain, if we can, the deep religious expression of Mediaeval art.”10 But whereas “Letter to the Publick on the Subject of Architecture” stands as a singular essay, Cole sent his letter on frescoes to The Churchman as a response to a previously published letter by another author in that publication. While

7 Cole Papers.


9 The letter, as it appeared in The Churchman, was originally untitled.

most likely written close in date, these published and unpublished works help reveal how Cole admired the Gothic.

Cole began “Letter to the Publick on the Subject of Architecture” by stating his general aim: the improvement of taste. While he hedged by reminding the reader that he was not an actual architect, he carefully expressed his deep concern for the state of architecture. He was “impressed with the conviction that a few remarks on the principles of architecture & criticism on some of the buildings lately erected or in the course of erection may conduce to the improvement of taste.”\(^1\) Cole justified his criticism by explaining that his opinions probably differ from some of his audience by writing: “some of the views & opinions I shall offer may not appear correct to suit the notions of many, but even so if by giving them I stimulate to a more general study of the principles of architecture I shall have accomplished my desire.”\(^2\) He recognized that taste depended on the individual: “Persons of Good Taste may differ but; this is no argument that there are no principles of Taste; but rather that this or that principle mode is preferred in accordance with the dispositions or temperaments of the individual.”\(^3\) By acknowledging the lack of a universal standard for good taste, Cole demonstrated the

\(^{11}\) Cole, “Letter to the Publick on the Subject of Architecture.”

\(^{12}\) Cole, “Letter to the Publick on the Subject of Architecture.”

\(^{13}\) Cole, “Letter to the Publick on the Subject of Architecture.”
influence of eighteenth-century aesthetic theorists, such as Edmund Burke, Joseph Addison, and Archibald Alison.

The definition of taste composed a large portion of eighteenth-century aesthetic theory. Edmund Burke did not believe in any single standard measure of taste, when he wrote: “I mean by the word Taste no more than the faculty, or those faculties of the mind which are affected with, or which form a judgment of the works of the imagination and the elegant arts.” Burke’s ideas on taste were partly a reaction against those of Joseph Addison who, writing earlier in the century, defined taste as a more universally established standard. According to Addison, taste is:

That faculty of the soul which discerns the beauties of an author with pleasure, and the imperfections with dislike. If a man would know whether he is possessed of this faculty, I would have him read over the celebrated works of antiquity which have stood the test of so many different ages and countries, or those works among the moderns which have the sanction of the politer part of our contemporaries. If upon the perusal of such writings he does not find himself delighted in an extraordinary manner, or if, upon reading the admired passages in such authors, he finds a coldness and indifference in his thoughts, he ought to conclude, not (as is too usual among tasteless readers) that the author wants those perfections which have been admired in him, but that he himself wants the faculty of discovering them.

14 Burke, A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful, 6.

As a point of comparison, Burke’s contemporary David Hume believed in a standard of taste. He accounted for differences of opinions on personal prejudices interfering. “Though the principles of taste be universal, and, nearly, if not entirely the same in all men; yet few are qualified to give judgment on any work of art, or establish their own sentiment as the standard of beauty.” Hume, “Of the Standard of Taste,” Four Dissertations (London: A. Miller, 1757), 228.

15 Joseph Addison, The Spectator 2, no. 409, June 19, 1712.
Cole knew of Addison for he listed Addison’s *The Spectator* in his 1839 inventory of books.\textsuperscript{16} He disagreed with Addison’s belief in a universally accepted standard of taste, and penned an essay presenting his opinion on what he thought should constitute good and bad taste in architecture.

Cole’s desire to rescue architecture from bad taste also shows the influence of Archibald Alison, who used associationist psychology to explain the diversity of tastes in his *Essays on the Nature and Principles of Taste*, 1790.\textsuperscript{17} Alison argued a viewer’s response to beauty, and the emotional associations that viewer drew from the object of beauty depended upon the object’s fitness:

> Even the objects which are most destitute of Natural Beauty, become beautiful, when they are regarded only in the light of their Fitness; and that the reason why they do not always appear beautiful to us, is, that we in general leave this quality out of our consideration. That pleasing or agreeable Forms receive Beauty from their Fitness; and that the most perfect Form of Natural Beauty may receive additional Beauty from its being wisely adapted to some End, are facts too obvious to require any illustration. It is only to be observed, that this quality, in its effect of production the Emotion of Beauty, is subject to the same limitations with every other quality of Emotion.\textsuperscript{18}

\textsuperscript{16} Cole Papers.

\textsuperscript{17} Associationist psychology dictated that objects of taste elicited a simple emotional response in the viewer, such as cheerfulness or melancholy, that then awakened a whole set of emotionally charged ideas. The difference in emotionally associated ideas could account for differences in reaction to objects of taste. For a discussion of associationist psychology and Archibald Alison, see: Steven A. Jauss, “Associationism and Taste Theory in Archibald Alison’s Essays,” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 64, no. 4 (Autumn 2006), 415 – 428; Ralph Miller, “Thomas Cole and Alison’s Essays on Taste;” and Robert E. Streeter, “Association Psychology and Literary Nationalism in the North American Review, 1815 – 1825,” *American Literature* 17, no. 3 (1945), 243 – 254.

Cole believed in the importance of this fitness, as Alison explained it. He even wrote in his essay on architecture: “one of the fundamental principles of the Art which is fitness.” Fitness became a necessary element for an object of taste. Cole described something similar when he paraphrased Alison in his journal in 1829:

I think there is in Alison’s work on taste a passage in which he attributes the decline of the fine arts to the circumstance of painters having forsaken the main object of art for the study of its technicalities. The same cause yet exists to the very great deterioration of painting. The means seem a greater object of admiration than the end, – the language of art, rather than the thoughts which are expressed. The conception, the invention, that which affects the soul, is sacrificed to that which merely pleases the eye. Painting is now more ingenious than true and beautiful. Take away from painting that which affects the imagination, and speaks to the feelings, and the remainder is merely for sensual gratification, mere food for the gross eye, which is as well satisfied with the flash and splendor of jewelry. The conception and reproduction of truth and beauty are the first object of the poet; so should it be with the painter. He who has no such conceptions, no power of creation, is no real painter. The language of art should have the subserviency of a vehicle. It is not art itself. Chiaroscuro, colour, form should always be subservient to the subject, and never be raised to the dignity of an end. The language and imagery of Paradise Lost are but the instruments by which the great poetic creation is evolved.

Cole’s attempt at rescuing his audience from bad taste appears very similar to Alison’s concept of fitness. Beauty derives from fitness, and unfortunately, the unfit leads to weirdness, as Cole wrote: “how frequently alas the eye of taste where it seeks to be delighted is not by some strange embodiment of caprice or exhibition of architectural imbecility.” He believed that good taste, and more importantly, the prevention of bad


taste, was crucial. One only acquired taste through the participation in a *sensus communis* of persons who already had taste. Through his essay, Cole attempted to engage the audience in a discussion on taste in order to heighten their sensitivities. He wanted future generations of architects to make beautiful things rather than turning away from beauty because of the influence of existing ugly buildings. He described how the future depended on beautiful architecture: “Thousands yet unborn will turn away with disgust from those piles of masonry where architects have been destitute alike of the sense of the truly beautiful and the knowledge of those principles of Art & Nature from which emanates all that is excellent in Art.” The essay on architecture serves therefore as a message to future architects and scholars as well as Cole’s contemporaries.

Taste’s non-universal status emerges as an important theme in both the unpublished “Letter to the Publick on the Subject of Architecture” and “Letter to Critics on the Art of Painting.” In the published letter, Cole wrote, “He [the critic] will perceive that art is as various in its scope and object, as the desires and tastes of men are

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22 David Shields writes that taste had to be acquired by “participating in the conversation of persons with taste until one had entered into the sensus communis of their expression. This did not mean gathering knowledge by precept. Rather, sensitivity to beauty and pleasure had to be heightened. An apperception of one’s sensitivity made taste ‘conscious.’ The consciousness that taste endowed was not self-consciousness. Taste put one into accord with a style of expression. Beauty, if it were true beauty, for instance, was not personal; it was ‘nature’ or ‘Attic’ or ‘divine.’” Shields, *Civil Tongues and Polite Letters in British America* (Chapel Hill, NC: University Press of North Carolina, 1997), 39.

diverse.” Even though Cole allowed for a person’s individual sense of taste, he wanted to improve it nevertheless.

Cole worried about rescuing the future of architecture from the pitfalls of bad taste. He then made his interest in the future of architecture even clearer by quoting in his first paragraph the first line from John Keats’s poem *Endymion*: “A poet has said that ‘A thing of beauty is a joy forever’ & as truly may it be said that an ugly thing is a curse forever & most emphatically where that thing is wrought in stone.” Cole knew Keats’s poetry and owned a book of his works. The poem communicates a desire for an ideal, a divine fellowship, or a communion with the beautiful. The search for the beautiful especially fits with Cole’s stated purpose of improving taste by recommending more beautiful architecture.

For Cole, beautiful architecture should bring pleasure to members of the public and serve as a mark of human triumph. Since the opening of the Erie Canal in 1825, many new art patrons in New York included newly wealthy members of the merchant


26 Cole includes Keats in a list of poetry that he made up as part of an inventory of his books in 1839. Cole Papers.

Popular literature of the period satirized these pseudo-connoisseurs for their lack of taste. For example, the satirical magazine *Yankee Doodle* described this problem facing the fine arts:

> It is truly gratifying to see the advancement which the FINE ARTS are making among us. The number of *connoisseurs* in Painting, Sculpture, Architecture and Music who have recently sprung spontaneously from our soil, and have attained the very highest degree of perfection without cultivation of any sort, is of itself a convincing proof of the immeasurable superiority of our national mind… the American scorns any such infringement of the freedom of the individual, and claims that he has the perfect right to think as he pleases and say what he pleases, as well about a picture as a President.  

James Fenimore Cooper also criticized the ignorance of the general public when he wrote to Cole’s biographer, Louis Legrand Noble, after Cole’s death:

> I believe he [Cole] never got an order, or patronage of any sort, from a single public body in the country. Generally, such things are reserved for pretenders, amongst ourselves. Those who are to dispense of the patronage know too little, and feel too little, to do it with judgment… A pretending but ignorant publi[c], a corrupt and vulgar press, towns composed of traders, and legislative bodies that are too ephemeral to suffer even the little that is known to become useful, are but indifferent elements out of which to create a high and intellectual civilization.

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Architecture, for Cole, became a way to help engage the public with good taste in light of these concerns about its ignorance. Antebellum New York, with its explosive growth physically and economically, as well as the need for rebuilding after the Great Fire of 1835, especially required lessons in taste. Even newly built structures were constantly in threat of demolition and reconstruction. *The New-York Mirror* described the state of New York’s building programs as a “city of modern ruins,” explaining that:

> New-York may be called a city of perpetual ruin and repair. No sooner is a fine building erected than it is torn down to put up a better. We know a noble brick warehouse at the corner of two of our business streets, which has actually been demolished, erected and re-erected three times within the last few years. We have our misgivings as to the permanency of the Merchants’ Exchange now going up in Wall-street. It is very much to be feared that it will be torn down and improved before it can be fairly finished; so restless are the tastes and habitues of the city… We raze to the ground, that we may raise to heaven. We batter down that we may build up, and we bruise that we may beautify.

Since stone architecture should endure, then extra care should go toward its beauty in order to continue the public’s instruction in taste. The rest of the first stanza of Keats’s poem continues the same point about this theme of permanence.

> A thing of beauty is a joy for ever:
> Its loveliness increases; it will never
> Pass into nothingness, but still will keep
> A bower quiet for us, and a sleep
> Full of sweet dreams, and health, and quiet breathing.

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33 Keats, *Endymion*, bk. 1, lines 1 – 5.
Cole applied this idea of longevity directly to stone architecture. Therefore, as Cole wrote, “most emphatically where that thing is wrought in stone” it becomes so much more important for stone buildings to be beautiful for the sake of future generations: “what a full & lasting source of pleasure is a fine piece of Architecture that is a benefactor to the city, a human triumph.” Cole believed that beauty and good taste were crucial requirements for the future of architecture and the public.

Later in his essay, Cole returned to the principles of taste in relation to the architectural orders in an effort to make clear that the orders were not just arbitrary inventions of their time, but rather were established examples of perfection. He hoped that because the three architectural orders, Doric, Ionic, and Corinthian, were so prevalent and recognizable, they should be accepted as canonical certainties. Cole even likened the three orders to a musical cord; any changes or deviations, and it would lose its beauty. “The distinction & characteristic beauty of each order is like a musical chord in which if any note is changed with a transition to another chord it becomes a discord.” This analogy relates similarly to Aristotle’s notion of perfection: that to which nothing can be added or taken away without blame. The Renaissance architect, Alberti, applied this theory to the concept of beauty. Cole, as an artist and aspiring architect, probably read

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34 Note that Cole’s reference predates Ruskin’s *Seven Lamps of Architecture* (1849) and *Stones of Venice* (1851).


37 See Branko Mitrović, “Aesthetic Formalism in Renaissance Architectural Theory,” *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte* 66, no. 3 (2003), 333. Leon Battista Alberti wrote,
at least some of Alberti’s treatises on architecture, possibly even from Ithiel Town’s personal library collection, from whom he borrowed books in 1839 while working on *The Architect’s Dream.*

Cole felt that the three architectural orders were the expressions of different kinds of human emotion. “In the Doric we have the expression of Grandeur & Majesty, in the Ionic of a lofty Elegance […] In the elaborate Corinthian – richness & beauty. The Doric may fully be compared to sublime Jupiter himself. The Ionic to the proud & stately Juno. The Corinthian to Venus around whose graceful brows luxuriant locks of gold are waving in the breeze.”

This anthropomorphism of the orders has a long history, dating back to Vitruvius in the first century, BCE. In the fourth book of *On Architecture,* Vitruvius described how the proportions of the Doric order relate to the body of a man, the Ionic related to the body of a woman, and the Corinthian order imitated a slender maiden.

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“Beauty is that reasoned harmony of all the parts within a body, so that nothing may be added, taken away, or altered, but for the worse.” Alberti, *On the Art of Building in Ten Books,* trans. Joseph Rykwert, Neil Leach, and Robert Tavernor (Original text published 1485; Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1988), 156.


Cole later explained how all of the styles, classical and Gothic alike, must look to the world of nature for their appropriateness. To start, just as the primitive hut developed naturally, Cole believed all architecture progressed naturally to its ultimate conclusions in the Doric, Ionic, and Corinthian orders. He wrote, “there cannot be any other order invented that will not be a combination or modification of them.”

But even more than the natural progression and ultimate perfection of the orders, Cole felt that architects and designers should take nature into account when choosing which orders to use. “If we may not invent new orders we may arrange, combine & adapt these primitive orders to our particular purposes & climate.”

Unfortunately for Cole, American architects failed to make those adaptations. Instead, they seemed to take pieces of the Greek orders and apply them haphazardly with disastrous results.

Hitherto Modern Architects & American ones in particular have in general been contented with being near copyists – they have taken the Grecian Temple for every kind of purpose Churches Banks Statehouses Warehouses and other houses have been cut to this pattern & generally to the Dorik [sic.] order. The material mattered not, whether the ponderous Granite the convenient brick or the light wood all was wrought into the same form all went to the “Dorian Measure.” The country is bespattered with Grecian absurdities – had there been complete specimens of any Order there would have been some satisfaction for the eye of Taste, but

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Note that Cole also used anthropomorphism for the rock formation in *Daniel Boone at His Cabin at Great Osage Lake* (1826), which is now at the Mead Art Museum in Amherst, MA. J. Gray Sweeney discusses this common anthropomorphic technique especially in rock formations, such as the “Old Man of the Mountain” in Franconia Notch, NH (unfortunately, it collapsed in 2003). See Sweeney, “The Nude of Landscape Painting: Emblematic Personification in the Art of the Hudson River School,” *Smithsonian Studies in American Art* 3, no. 4 (Autumn 1989), 42 – 65.


scarcely without exception the Order attempted is mutilated & distorted or denuded of its fitting ornaments that it may be accommodated to the multifarious demands of modern life.\textsuperscript{43}

Cole went on to give more specific examples of how architects misused and misapplied the orders.

[In] many buildings there is seldom more than a Grecian Portico & that is generally attached to a square structure of no order perforated with the pediment & metopes entirely destitute of sculpture with bold unmeaning spaces when there ought to be richness of effect. Villas of this mode may be called classic but they suggest anything but classical ideas. They are more apt to remind us of the Boxes we see in front of the Tallow Chandler’s Shop with a row of candles suspended in front by way of sign or sample.\textsuperscript{44}

Cole used very similar wording in another undated paper, probably an earlier draft for his “Letter to the Publick,” although incomplete (see Appendix B): “grecian porticos which afford neither shelter nor shade & yet appear to be the most important part of the building. In fact the parts square box of a house behind appears to be attached to the portico rather than the portico to it. They always remind me of a Tallow-Chandler Box with a row of candles suspended in front as a sample.”\textsuperscript{45} These similarities demonstrate that while “A Letter to the Publick” represents a very rough draft, it was not Cole’s only draft on the subject. The existence of these two drafts, regardless of the order in which he wrote them, demonstrates that Cole addressed the subject of architecture multiple times in an attempt to polish and fine-tune his ideas because of the importance he attributed to them.

\textsuperscript{43} Cole, “Letter to the Publick on the Subject of Architecture.”

\textsuperscript{44} Cole, “Letter to the Publick on the Subject of Architecture.”

\textsuperscript{45} The untitled and undated draft is in the Cole Papers.
Cole’s description of Greek revival buildings overdeveloped in the American landscape resembles the feelings expressed in James Fenimore Cooper’s *Home as Found* from 1838. In the novel, the Effingham family travels up the Hudson River from New York City to the fictitious town of Templeton, New York, and they discuss the ridiculous popularity of the Greek Revival: “the public sentiment, just now, runs almost exclusively and popularly into the Grecian school. We build little besides temples for our churches, our banks, our taverns, our court-houses, and our dwellings. A friend of mine has just built a brewery on the model of the Temple of the winds.”

Cooper mocked the overabundance of the Greek Revival in part because of the inappropriateness of many of its manifestations. Both Cooper and Cole shared the conclusion that by applying the style to inappropriate or mundane uses, builders failed to take into account the general context and locality.

Cole’s need for architecture to fit with its locality relates closely to the works written by landscape architect, Andrew Jackson Downing. He too wanted to take situation into consideration for both Greek and Gothic Revivals:

> For domestic purposes, both [the Greek temple and the Gothic cathedral], for the same reasons, are equally unfitted; as they were never so intended to be used by their original inventors, and having entirely wanting in

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46 James Fenimore Cooper, *Home as Found* (1838; repr. New York: W. A. Townsend, 1860), 24. Effingham refers to the Choragic Monument of Lysicrates in Athens, 334 BCE, also called the Tower of the Winds. Note that William Strickland quoted the same monument for a tall cylindrical lantern atop the Merchant’s Exchange in Philadelphia, 1832 – 1834, just a few years before Cooper wrote *Home as Found*. Cooper visited Philadelphia twelve times between 1834 and the publication of *Home as Found* in 1838 to meet with his publishers.
fitness for the purposes of habitation of domestic life… It would scarcely, however, be more absurd to build a miniature cathedral, for a dwelling in the Gothic style, than to make an exact copy of the Temple of Minerva 30 by 50 feet in size, for a country residence, as we often witness in this country.47

While we have no direct evidence that Cole necessarily read Downing’s work, he most likely knew of Downing’s ideas. Shortly after he returned home to New York from Europe in 1842, The Knickerbocker, or New-York Monthly Magazine, the same magazine that published at least six of Cole’s poems and essays, published a literary notice complete with an excerpt of Downing’s Cottage Residences: or, a Series of Designs for Rural Cottages and Cottage-villas, and their Gardens and Grounds, Adapted to North America in September 1842.48 The excerpt quotes a passage that would have been very important for Cole as it mimics his own purpose in writing an architectural essay: the improvement of taste. Downing wrote that his desire to “contribute something to the improvement of the domestic architecture and the rural taste of our country has been the


motive which has influenced me in preparing this little volume.”  

Similar to Cole’s preference for the Gothic in general, and particularly the need to balance architectural style with climate, Downing wrote: “The genius of pointed or Gothic architecture may be chastened or moulded into forms for domestic habitations. The steep roofs are highly suitable for a cold country liable to heavy snows.” Even if Cole did not read all or any of Downing’s works, the similarities in their subject matter reveal that both must have been participating in the same community of ideas.

Cole followed the associationist theories of Archibald Alison, and believed that different people with different experiences arrived at different standards of taste and beauty. However, the eighteenth century expanded the discussion of aesthetics to include more than just a philosophy of the beautiful. Aesthetics examine how we register experiences both mentally and sensually; aesthetics concern themselves with the form those experiences take. Cole followed the theories of Addison, Shaftesbury, Burke, Gilpin, and Price, and believed that art expressed itself through three aesthetic categories:

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49 “Literary Notices,” The Knickerbocker, or New-York Monthly Magazine 20, no. 3 (September 1842), 293.

50 Downing, Cottage Residences: or, a Series of Designs for Rural Cottages and Cottage-villas, and their Gardens and Grounds, Adapted to North America (New York: Wiley and Putnam, 1842), 53.


the beautiful; the picturesque; and the sublime. Each aesthetic category elicited a distinct type of response from the viewer, but they all served as sources of national pride for the viewer:

Art has subjected the laws of gravitation to its own ends, adapted the most obdurate materials to man’s wants & given them expression – the sublime – the beautiful – the picturesque – to the grand & beautiful & the mind by the contemplation & the humble critique as he walks beneath the shadow of some noble obstruction feels his soul expand his thoughts take a loftier flight – the patriot views it with pride & the traveler when wandering in foreign lands calls it to mind & loves his country more than ever.

Cole believed that architecture’s beauty served more than just an aesthetic preference. It could provide a source of satisfaction in a viewer’s physical environment.

Cole travelled in Europe from 1829 – 1831 and again in 1841 – 1842. After returning home from the second trip, he published two travel essays on Sicily. The theme of patriotism or pride in one’s national architecture appears in the second of the two articles: “Sicilian Scenery and Antiquities, Number Two,” published in The Knickerbocker, or New-York Monthly Magazine in 1844. Even while writing an essay about things he saw in Sicily, especially classicism, Cole noted with pleasure that

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53 These categories derive from eighteenth-century aesthetic theory associated with Joseph Addison, Lord Shaftesbury, Edmund Burke, Reverend William Gilpin, and Sir Uvedale Price. For more on these aesthetic categories, see my explanation in Chapter 2.


55 These trips refer to Cole’s two visits abroad after his initial arrival in America from England in 1818.

America had its own ample share of classical architecture as well: “there is not in the whole city of New-York a house, however lowly, but in some part of it I could point out a molding or an ornament that comes from the ancients.”\(^{57}\) In the same essay, Cole continued his discussion of ancient temples of Europe and patriotism associated with them. “These works of art were the objects of veneration and love; city vied with city in their construction; it was a noble emulation – think you not nobler than the competition for sordid gold? The citizen gazed with pride upon the marble triumphs of his native place; he loved it more than ever, and felt his patriotism kindle as he gazed.”\(^{58}\) Note, however, that Cole used the past tense when referring to Europeans’ pride in their architectural heritage, while he used the present tense in reference to America. Europeans used to marvel at their architecture, but Cole, along with other contemporary Americans, admired their architecture still.

Cole continued “Letter to the Publick” by listing three epochs in the historical progression of architecture.\(^{59}\) During the first epoch, which Cole referred to as the

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\(^{59}\) Cole’s three epochs of architecture may possibly relate to three stages of human life; however, Cole painted two series of four paintings each about the stages of life: *The Voyage of Life: Childhood, Youth, Manhood, and Old Age*. Wallach describes Cole’s use of the four stages and explains that Cole may have derived this quadripartite division from the works of Robert Pollock or Martin Farquhar Tupper. See Wallach, “The Voyage of Life as Popular Art,” 240.
modest form of architecture, humankind created built structures for the purpose of shelter from the elements: “Man in his wandering state piles up stones on logs & covers them with branches of trees so as to shelter him against the inclemency of the climate in which he lives. This is the modest form of the Art.”60 In the second epoch, or the utilitarian age, humanity organized architecture by fitness for “common wants & necessities.”61 Expression characterized the last epoch, the fine art period. “For the Third Epoch the materials are arranged not only for comfort & convenience but are carved & symmetrically arranged. In this epoch the feeling for the beautiful develops itself – Art becomes a Fine Art.”62 Here, builders designed architecture based on beauty rather than just necessity, comfort, or convenience.

Cole’s three periods of architecture, as described above, expanded on Laugier’s differentiation between the primitive hut (la petite cabane rustique) and the Art of Architecture in his 1753 Essai sur L’Architecture. Laugier explained that early people constructed huts to protect them from the elements. They built their huts from fallen branches and leaves just as Cole’s early builder likewise used stones, logs, and branches of trees.63 All architecture, according to Laugier, grows from the form of the basic rustic hut and includes columns, an entablature, and pediment. These elements comprise

60 Cole, “Letter to the Publick on the Subject of Architecture.”


beautiful architecture, but to add unnecessarily to them destroys architecture’s perfection.\textsuperscript{64} Here Cole deviated from Laugier, for he not only described three stages of architecture rather than just two, he also described how the third and last stage becomes a fine art in its different arrangement of forms from the modest or utilitarian stages. Unlike Laugier, Cole’s idea of perfection in architecture did not depend only on the simple kinds of form that developed in the first stage.

Cole read another influential source for his ideas about the three epochs of architecture during the fall of 1839 to winter of 1840: the first volume of David Hume’s \textit{History of England from the Invasion of Julius Caesar to the Revolution in 1688}, which chronicled the periods from antiquity through feudalism and the Middle Ages.\textsuperscript{65} Hume’s language contains many similarities to Cole’s description. For example, inhabitants in ancient Britain, Hume wrote, “dwelt in huts, which they reared in the forests and marshes, with which the country was covered: They shifted easily their habitation, when actuated either by the hopes of plunder or the fear of an enemy.”\textsuperscript{66} These huts appear similar to Cole’s description of covers of tree branches. Cole’s second age, depending on common wants and necessities, bears a similarity to Hume’s mention of conveniences. Hume wrote about the Roman conquest of Britain under the leadership of Julius Agricola.

\textsuperscript{64} Laugier, 14.

\textsuperscript{65} Cole read the first volume of Hume’s \textit{History of England} in 1839 – 1840, according to a list of books read during that period. Cole Papers.

who “taught them to desire and raise all the conveniencies of life.” While Hume’s discussion left out architecture per se, his general discussion of progress from barbarity to civilization fits with Cole’s line of progress.

In the United States, Benjamin Rush rhetorically linked these architectural stages to his theory about the progress of American civil society. Rush described three stages of “species of settlers” along with their various architectural abodes and land cultivation. The first stage most closely resembled the American Indians, both in terms

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Rush’s “species of settlers” recall to mind Adam Smith’s theory of progress divided into four sequential stages: “There are four distinct states which mankind pass thro: – 1st, the Age of Hunters; 2dly, the Age of Shepherds; 3dly, the Age of Agriculture; and 4thly, the Age of Commerce.” Smith, “Report of 1762 – 63,” *Lectures on Jurisprudence*, ed. Ronald L. Meeks (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 14. Note that Meeks’ edition of Smith’s work gave rise to a standard form for quoting Smith, in this case: LJ(A), i. 27. For more on Smith’s theory, see Pat Maloney, “Savages in the Scottish Enlightenment’s History of Desire,” *Journal of Sexuality* 14, no. 3 (2005), 237 – 265.

of physical proximity to the wilderness, and savage manners. “His first object is to build a small cabin of rough logs for himself and family. The floor of this cabin is of earth, the roof is of split logs – the light is received through the door, and, in some instances, through a small window made of greased paper.”\textsuperscript{70} The settler of the second stage first wanted:

\begin{quote}
\textbf{to build an addition to his cabin; this is down with hewed logs: and as saw-mills generally follow settlements, his floors are made of boards; his roof is made of what are called clapboards; which are a kind of course shingles, split out of short oak logs. This house is divided by two floors, on each of which are two rooms: under the whole is a cellar walled with stone. The cabin serves as kitchen to this house… His stable is likewise enlarged; and, in the course of a year or two, he builds a large barn, the roof of which is commonly thatched with rye straw.} \textsuperscript{71}
\end{quote}

Rush reserved the label of farmer for the final stage. His priorities focused on land cultivation and animal husbandry first in order to secure his long-term comfort. Building projects included the construction of a large stone barn, a milk house, and smoke house.

The farmer’s residential house became his last project:

\begin{quote}
The last object of his industry is to build a dwelling house. This business is sometimes effected in the course of his life, but is oftener bequeathed to his son, or the inheritor of his plantation… This dwelling house is generally built of stone – it is large, convenient, and filled with useful and
\end{quote}


substantial furniture – It sometimes adjoins the house of the second settler, but is frequently placed at a little distance from it.\textsuperscript{72}

This final stage of settlement made civilization manifest.

Cole painted images of his three epochs of architecture in the first three paintings of the series \textit{The Course of Empire: Savage State, Arcadian or Pastoral State}, and \textit{Consummation}, 1836 (Figures 3.1, 3.2, and 2.6).\textsuperscript{73} In the first painting, \textit{Savage State}, only impermanent, modest architectural structures stand in the form of tepees.\textsuperscript{74} Mobile and temporary, these structures serve the necessity of protection from the elements. \textit{Arcadian or Pastoral State} includes permanent architecture. Most prominently, a temple-like structure stands on a hill just to the left of center. It resembles Stonehenge with huge stone uprights supporting heavy stone lintels standing in a circle.\textsuperscript{75} In addition to this temple site, more buildings, probably wooden-frame houses with pitched roofs, represent permanent dwellings. These buildings mark the utilitarian age as they differ based on purpose or common wants. Finally, the period of architecture as a Fine Art finds its


\textsuperscript{73} The series, painted for Luman Reed in 1836, is in the collection of the New-York Historical Society, New York, NY.

\textsuperscript{74} Chapter 5 discusses these dwellings further.

\textsuperscript{75} Parry notes that Cole may have painted the Druidical structure in \textit{Course of Empire: The Pastoral or Arcadian State} after reading John Finch’s article, “On the Celtic Antiquities of America” in Benjamin Silliman’s \textit{American Journal of Science} 7 (1824), 149 – 161, as a reference to more northern European history rather than just that of the Mediterranean. See \textit{The Art of Thomas Cole}, 158. Parry focuses on how Cole did not paint a rectangular wooden temple as he ought to have if he were following the writings of Vitruvius. However, we know from his discussion of the architectural orders’ anthropomorphism that Cole was indeed aware of Vitruvius.
climax in *Consummation*, where civilization and culture boom and classical architecture proliferates throughout the landscape. There, classicism triumphs as a high art, completely overpowering nature itself. Buildings here express beauty and symmetry rather than just necessity or comfort.

After describing the three epochs in which architecture first developed into an art form, Cole continued his essay with a general discussion of the historical progress of specific architectural styles. While he focused mainly on the sequence of Greek, Roman, and Gothic architecture, he began by referencing the ancient Druids and the ancient Egyptians: “Ages of experience & thought must have been necessary & the human mind have travelled by slow degrees from the rude column of unheroic stone such as formed the Druidical structures through the stupendous portals of Egyptian Art to unsurpassed beauty of Grecian.”

The painting *The Architect’s Dream* includes Egyptian, Greek, Roman, and Gothic architectural references, but it leaves out any of the more humble Druidical illustrations. As such, it focuses on the Mediterranean world of classicism, or to use Cole’s words, the stupendous and beautiful. His references to Druidical monuments present a structured contrast. It illustrates the perfection of Grecian architecture, especially in comparison to the unheroic qualities of Druidical structures.

Cole called Greek architecture “Lithic Philosophy.” The architecture of stone, as it developed from the rudeness of ancient Druidical structures to the monuments of

76 Cole, “Letter to the Publick on the Subject of Architecture.”
ancient Egypt, found its height of beauty with the Greeks. The Romans borrowed the forms of Greek architecture, but not its spirit or overall beauty. Then architecture sank even deeper into despondency. “Roman Architecture is depraved Greek. The forum was borrowed but the spirit was lost & it became more & more rude until it sank in the uncouth in congruities of (7th & 8th centuries) what are called the ‘dark ages.’” But stone architecture reinvented itself with the birth of the Gothic and in a Christian context it even surpassed that of the ancient Greeks.

But from this ruin sprang a style of Architecture in which the combined elements of Ancient Art mingled together to produce effects hitherto unknown & to satisfy desires to which Christianity seemed to have given birth in the human mind – that is the Gothick. In it architecture aspires to something beyond finite perfection it leaves the philosophic completion of Grecian Art when all is finished to the eye & touch & appeals to the imagination. Partaking of the Genius of Christianity it opens a world beyond the visible in which we dwell.

Cole’s language while discussing the Gothic resembles the letter he published in The Churchman, in 1846. He wrote: “We all acknowledge that Christian architecture arrived at wonderful perfection during the Middle Ages, and we look with deep reverence at those magnificent monuments of the piety and genius of the past ages – those prayers in stone which rise with mysterious ascent toward heaven.” While Greek architecture represented perfection and beauty, Cole believed in the superiority of the Gothic because of its greater perfection and wonderful and mysterious Christian qualities. “Its towers &


pinnacles climb toward the clouds like airy fabrics. Ever hovering on the verge of the impossible on it the mind does not dwell with satisfied delight, but takes wing & soars into an imaginary world. The longings, the imaginings, the lofty aspirations of Christianity have formed expression in stone.”  

The Gothic becomes architecture’s highest achievement for it engages the mind’s imagination. It appeals to the eye through powerful emotional associations rather than just the pure aesthetics of classicism.

The fact that he preferred Gothic first and Greek architecture second, as described above, is important for those were the styles of the two buildings he actually designed: the Gothic Revival St. Luke’s church in Catskill, NY, and the Greek Revival Ohio State Capitol in 1838. Cole’s plan for the Ohio State Capitol (Figure 3.3) represented one of many submissions sent to a panel of commissioners. Cole worked on the design with his architect nephew Henry Bayless, who started his career as an apprentice to Ithiel Town. 

A recessed portico, supported by six Doric columns, shelters the central entrance of the design, and a large central dome rises behind it. Two wings stretch out to either side with Doric pilasters uniting the entire façade into one continuous order. While Cole’s and

82 Cole, “Letter to the Publick on the Subject of Architecture.”

83 Cole referred to Bayless’s involvement in the project in his correspondence with one of the commissioners, and a friend, William Adams, 26 May 1838. He wrote, “Do you know I am something of an architect? My nephew, I believe you were informed when here, was studying under Mr. Town, he is now with Mr. Rogers [Isaiah Rogers] who is erecting our great exchange. He is the first American Architect who has had an education expressly for the profession & my hopes are great – I state this that you may not be surprised if we send you a Design. If we do & it should happen to be worthy it perhaps will not be the less prized for having been made by one who almost considers Ohio his own State [Cole] & by one [Bayless] who is actually a native of Steubenville, Ohio.”  

Bayless’s plan only won third place in the competition, it most closely resembles the plan that the commissioners adopted in the final completed building (Figure 3.4). Even though Cole preferred the Gothic to classicism, he worked with a classical Doric order because of the commissioners’ suggestions for utilizing the Doric order. Bayless’s involvement encouraged a classical vocabulary as well for he had worked on the new Merchant Exchange building in New York City with Isaiah Rogers in 1836, with an Ionic order. However, without such a commissioning restriction, and while working entirely...

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While Cole’s plan most closely resembles the finished Capitol, the commissioners hired a series of architects to oversee the project. First, they employed Henry Walter as supervising architect. Work commenced in 1839, but stopped because of lack of funds. Then in 1846, the General Assembly passed a new act to provide for the building’s erection, and appointed William Russell West as architect, and J. O. Sawyer as general superintendent. In 1854, West resigned and N. B. Kelly succeeded him. In 1856, a new board of commissioners ordered that the building’s plans be submitted to Thomas U. Walter and Richard Upjohn as consulting architects. In 1858, Isaiah Rogers succeeded Kelly as supervising architect. The building was completed finally in 1861. See Thomas E. O’Donnell, “The Greek Revival Capitol at Columbus, Ohio,” The Architectural Forum 42 (January 1925), 5 – 8.


alone, Cole designed the Gothic Revival St. Luke’s Church in Catskill, New York (Figure 2.3). Not long after the Ohio State Capitol project, a fire destroyed the original church of St. Luke’s on September 11, 1839.\(^{87}\) Cole’s plan for the Gothic Revival church dates to 1839 – 1840.\(^{88}\) Chapter Two compared the similarities between Cole’s plan for St. Luke’s and his painting of the Gothic church in *The Architect’s Dream*. Another similarity exists between Cole’s other architectural project, his plan for the Ohio State Capitol, and the long Doric order of pilasters in the right half of *The Architect’s Dream* (Figure 2.1). Both “Letter to the Publick” and *The Architect’s Dream* demonstrate a thorough understanding of both Gothic and classical architecture; but in both, Cole gave preference to Gothic. In his essay, Cole wrote about the Gothic’s “genius of Christianity,” and in the painting he communicated a similar Christian spiritualism with the Gothic church’s lofty towers and light-filled stained glass windows.

Even though Cole only worked on these two architectural designs, he considered himself a part of the architectural field as long as four years prior to the Ohio State Capitol project. Both in 1834 and 1835, Cole listed himself as an architect in the New York City Registry. However, in those earlier years, the only architectural works he participated in were painted. By 1834, he had painted at least twenty landscapes with architectural subjects. By declaring himself an architect, especially in the context of

\(^{87}\) The new building was consecrated August 10, 1841. See Chapter 2 for a detailed description of Cole’s design and the building’s history.

\(^{88}\) Drawings for the church are at the Detroit Institute of Art.
“Letter to the Publick,” Cole demonstrated how much those architectural subjects meant to him.  

In the final paragraph of “Letter to the Publick,” Cole explained two contemporary trends in domestic architecture: the English Cottage Style and Italian Villa Architecture. The first, to Cole, fit better in his native England than the American landscape where it felt totally out of place, while the second offered a greater chance for adaptation to this country. Cole described the English Cottage Style as picturesque; however, it failed to accommodate the warmer and sunnier climate of America. Instead, he considered villa architecture far better suited for the American climate. “It [the English Cottage Style] does not harmonize with the American landscape and the Climate being more sunny than that of England more shade is required than is to be found in the English Cottage Style. Large Piazzas, deep recesses, projecting roofs, great breadth of style is demanded by the American Landscape & climate.”

Cole’s differentiation between English cottages and Italian villas seems to follow the aesthetic division between the picturesque and the sublime.

The English Cottage, picturesque & complete as it is when seen in some shady nook hidden like a bird’s nest & only to be found on searching, looks [mean?] & [d…tion?] when placed on the ample hills that rise from the Hudson River. From the Italian Villa Architecture I imagine we can adopt much – its bold & varied outlines, simple in its parts but varied in its aggregate it affords simplicity with variety and a capability of being adapted to any international economical arrangement that may be required.

89 Cole’s interest in architecture may have been rooted in Freemasonry. David Bjelajac discusses the links between architectural interest and Freemasonry in “Thomas Cole’s Oxbow and the American Zion Divided,” American Art 20, no. 1 (Spring 2006), 60 – 83.

– and regularity of forms not entering into its elements, additions always true may by judicious management be made to contribute to its effects.\textsuperscript{91}

One corresponded better to the English picturesque, while the other harmonized with America’s bold and sublime wilderness.

Early travel descriptions in American newspapers referred to picturesque cottages in England as early as 1826, but the term “English cottage style” did not become commonplace until the later 1830s.\textsuperscript{92} By 1836, American architects and writers occasionally referred to English Cottages on American soil.

Nothing can be more admirable for imitation, than the English cottage style, as it is perfectly adapted to our climate, and in good keeping with our taste in ornamental gardening; and we would earnestly recommend to our architects, to important plans and elevations of these buildings, which constitute the true style of domestic architecture, rather than to go on multiplying among us the abortive temples and palaces, with which the land already groans. Let them remember, as a general rule, that a house is made to live in, and the convenience of the occupants is the first thing to be considered; after this, the ornaments may be thought of.\textsuperscript{93}

\textsuperscript{91} Cole, “Letter to the Publick on the Subject of Architecture.”

\textsuperscript{92} For example, a travel section from The New-York Mirror described: “Instead of great unfinished wooden houses, which are scattered through the country in America, rags and old hats serving for windows, the front yards filled with stones or logs, you find here a one story thatched cottage, with diamond-shaped window glass, set in lead, through which you may see pots of flowers, neat in arrangement, and beautiful in variety. In front is a small flower garden, inclosed [sic] by hedge. Even more common cottages, that apparently have stood a century, and where there must be much poverty, have the same aspect of neatness. These flower-pots and gardens may be of little use, but they certainly evince a refined taste in the female occupants.” “English Cottages,” The New-York Mirror: A Weekly Gazette of Literature and the Fine Arts, January 14, 1826, 197.

While the term English Cottage started to appear in newspapers and magazines in the 1820s and 1830s, it only became more of a commonplace with the publication of works by Alexander Jackson Davis and Andrew Jackson Downing.

Alexander Jackson Davis first discussed English Cottages in his *Rural Residences: Consisting of Designs, Original and Selected, for Cottages, Farm-Houses, Villas, and Village Churches with Brief Explanations, Estimates, and a Specification of Materials, Construction, Etc.*, 1837. Davis wrote, “The bald and uninteresting aspect of our houses must be obvious to every traveller; and to those who are familiar with the picturesque Cottages and Villas of England, it is positively painful to witness here the wasteful and tasteless expenditure of money in building.”\(^94\) Cole did not list *Rural Residences* in an 1839 catalogue of books, however he knew Davis’s works by this time as he apprenticed his nephew, Henry Bayless, to the architectural firm Davis shared with Ithiel Town in 1835.\(^95\) Davis’s pattern for a rustic cottage in *Rural Residences* contains Gothic elements with its prominent high gables, which resemble pointed arches (Figure 3.5).\(^96\) But the cottage appears generally symmetrical, and while it has a steeply-pitched roof, it lacks extensive eaves to provide shade from the harsher American sun.

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\(^{95}\) Bayless kept in touch with Cole mentioning how busy Davis was in a letter from 10 January 1837, Albany Institute of Art.

\(^{96}\) Note that the cottage’s “rustic” appearance was entirely intentional and fitting in line with Picturesque aesthetic theories. Sidney K. Robinson addresses the idea of rusticity: “The appearance of rusticity belies the self-consciousness employed to fashion the
In 1842, Andrew Jackson Downing published a book on cottage design, *Cottage Residences: or, a Series of Designs for Rural Cottages and Cottage-villas, and their Gardens and Grounds, Adapted to North America.* In it, Downing not only described English Cottage Style as adapted for the American landscape, but he also included a chapter on Italian Villas, the second style Cole discussed in his final paragraph of “Letter to the Publick” (Figure 3.6).97 Cole favored the Italian Villa design for its adaptability and irregularity. Both Downing and Cole stressed the irregular or varied form as the chief advantage of Italian Villa design; while describing the villa, Downing stated that “It is highly irregular.”98 However, their roofs differed. Downing emphasized the importance of a comfortable terrace attached to the house, but Cole focused more on multiple projecting roofs for the purpose of dramatic shade: “Large Piazzas, deep picture. Real shepherds may play the pipes and sing about love, but they do so directly, not as a reflective representation of nature and art. Only someone who no longer, ever, relied on the earth for direct sustenance can manage the distancing required to make art out of the pastoral setting.” Robinson, *Inquiry into the Picturesque* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 31.

97 Downing’s cottage is similar to Davis’s in its translation of Gothic into smaller scale domestic architecture. Downing specifically described it as follows: “The elevation of this cottage is in the English cottage style, so generally admired for the picturesqueness evinced in its tall gables ornamented by handsome verge-boards and finials, its neat or fanciful chimney-tops, its latticed windows, and other striking features, showing how the genius of pointed Gothic architecture may be chastened or moulded into forms for domestic habitations.” Downing, *Cottage Residences* (1842), repr. *Victorian Cottage Residences* (New York: Dover Publications, 1981), 42.

Downing described “The Irregular Villa in the Italian Style” as appealing more to people “who have cultivated an architectural taste, and who relish the higher beauties of the art growing out of variety.” Downing, *Victorian Cottage Residences*, 114.

recesses, projecting roofs, great breadth of style is demanded by the American Landscape & climate.”

Cole’s emphasis on roofs recalls passages from his two essays published after his return from Sicily in 1842. In the first, he described “Flat roofs and projecting stone balconies from the upper windows are perhaps the most characteristic features of the houses.”

Cole’s description, therefore, combines Downing’s Italian style for a villa with the actual Sicilian houses he saw in Italy.

While Cole did not state the publication for which he intended his “Letter to the Publick” to appear, he most likely meant it for The Knickerbocker, or New-York Monthly Magazine. Its similarity in length, address, and purpose to “Letter to Critics on the Art of Painting,” increases the likelihood that he meant it for the same publication as that essay.

The Knickerbocker, or New-York Monthly Magazine first was published in January 1833 and continued under that name through 1862. Named for Washington Irving’s fictitious narrator Diedrich Knickerbocker from A History of New York, published in 1809, it became a very popular literary journal to which many well-known American writers contributed.

That Cole contributed at least six times to The Knickerbocker.

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makes it highly probably that he read the magazine regularly and that he intended it to be the recipient for “Letter to the Publick.”

Cole wrote “Letter to the Publick on the Subject of Architecture” between 1836 and 1848. During that time he also designed two buildings and executed a number of paintings with architectural subjects in addition to mentioning to Adams the possibility of an essay on architecture for publication in 1840. This context for Cole’s work helps connect his theoretical and written interest in architecture to his paintings, such as The Architect’s Dream and his paintings of architectural ruins.

Together, Cole’s designs and writings demonstrate a strong interest in architecture in general, from its earliest origins to its applications in the New World landscape. Just as in The Architect’s Dream, “Letter to the Publick” explores multiple styles and periods of architectural history. Cole considered those stages of historical development important as well when he painted his landscapes based on Cooper’s The Last of the Mohicans, as the following chapter discusses. Furthermore, while his architectural subjects include numerous classical references, his essay on architecture demonstrates that he explicitly preferred Gothic architecture for its Christian and spiritual associations. “Letter to the Publick on the Subject of Architecture” covered architectural progress, styles, and typologies. Cole wrote it with the purpose of improving the reader’s taste in the matter of good architecture, to express his idea of beauty, and to promote the Gothic.
Chapter 4

COLE’S AMERICAN INDIANS AND THE GOTHIC OTHER

In 1826, James Fenimore Cooper published his second Leatherstocking novel, *The Last of the Mohicans: A Narrative of 1757*.1 Between 1826 and 1827, Thomas Cole painted five finished landscapes based on scenes from the novel.2 He chose moments of action from the novel placed in the wilderness that involved confrontations between Euro-Americans and American Indians.3 These clashes represent more than just a

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2 The four located paintings are: *Landscape with Figures: A Scene from “The Last of the Mohicans”*: The Death of Cora (1827), Van Pelt-Dietrich Library Center, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA; *The Last of the Mohicans: Cora Kneeling at the Foot of Tamenund*: The Death of Cora (1827), Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, CT; *The Last of the Mohicans: Cora Kneeling at the Foot of Tamenund* (1827), Fenimore Art Museum, New York State Historical Association, Cooperstown, NY. The location and exact title of the fifth painting are presently unknown.

In addition to the five finished paintings based on the subject, Cole also painted a sketch of the subject: *Romantic Landscape (Last of the Mohicans)* Study in 1827, which Dr. David Hasack purchased. The study is now in the collection of the New-York Historical Society, New York, NY. The sketch appears to be a study for the second version, *Landscape, Scene from “Last of the Mohicans:” Death of Cora*.

3 I use the term Euro-American in reference to the racially white figures of European ancestry in Cole’s paintings and Cooper’s novels. African Americans do appear in some
conflict between two cultures; they stand for discursive concepts of the civilized and the primitive. Dwarfed by the surrounding landscape, these painted encounters provide similar associations between the American Indian and the wilderness as those connections between the Gothic and the wilderness in Cole’s painting, The Architect’s Dream. Just as the Gothic Revival church in The Architect’s Dream visually relates to the American-like landscape, the American Indians belong to the wilderness as well.\textsuperscript{4} Cole’s wilderness paintings that include American Indians connect the people to the landscape and associate them with the idea of the Gothic by using the devices of gothic novels.

This chapter uses a multi-disciplinary approach to compare literary techniques and Cole’s landscapes paintings. It begins by exploring the historical traditions of gothic fiction and firmly roots Cooper’s novel in that milieu. While many scholars have analyzed both Cooper’s fiction and Cole’s paintings based on Cooper, this chapter focuses more on the Gothic tropes in both The Last of the Mohicans book and paintings than scholars previously have done, including distancing effects, and the American

\textsuperscript{4} While Cole omitted any figures of American Indians in the left half of The Architect’s Dream, he included some Old World figures in the distance of the painting’s right half. Note however, that the viewpoint of the Gothic left half leaves out the ground surface itself, and any figures present would necessarily stand out of sight.
Indian as a frightening potential villain who conflates good and evil.\(^5\) These elements combine in both the written and painted versions to create a sense of the Gothic sublime. Rooted in European historical fiction, American versions of the gothic romance genre frequently looked to the American wilderness and the American Indians who dwelled there in lieu of European medieval castles and evil monks or banditti. This chapter further examines the Euro-American tradition of portraying American Indians as Noble Savages, or a primitive Other, which influenced Cole’s representations.

The chapter continues with an examination of Cole’s *Last of the Mohicans* paintings. Through his use of figures in the landscape, Cole depicted the narrative components based on Cooper’s story. However, the surrounding landscape dwarfs the figures and the action in all four compositions. This examination demonstrates that Cole’s painted wilderness parallels the medieval settings of gothic novels. Furthermore, this chapter shows that Cole’s representations of American Indians within that wilderness, especially in his *The Last of the Mohicans* paintings, relate to gothic novels’ treatments of villains and conflict. The American Indians from *The Last of the Mohicans*

appear as the Other to the hegemonic Euro-American. The chapter concludes by comparing Cole’s representations of American Indians with Euro-Americans within different landscapes. Cole’s images present the Euro-American frontiersmen imposing upon the virgin landscape, destroying it as they went along, while the American Indian appears at home in, or a part of the wilderness itself.⁶ Cole’s series from *The Last of the Mohicans* uses tools and ideals from gothic literature to emphasize the American Indians’ and wilderness’s Gothic characteristics.

A part of romance literature, Horace Walpole wrote the first gothic novel in 1764, entitled *The Castle of Otranto: A Story*. While the gothic novels following Walpole have plenty of variations, they generally adhere to three main thematic points set by Walpole. First, they use a distancing effect, setting the narrative in a time or location removed from the reader’s time and place. Distance from the reader’s sense of normalcy allows for a more fantastic plot scenario outside of the realms of accepted contemporary reality. This sense of difference allows for feelings of the uncanny and terror. Anything becomes possible in these imaginary realms, including exciting danger, lust, imprisonment, ghosts, and apparitions. Expressions of fear and desire especially overwhelm the characters drawing from the aesthetics of the sublime. The theme of nostalgia, another defining characteristic for the gothic novel, permeates the stories with longings for the past, especially the medieval period, and its traditional social hierarchies. Finally, the gothic

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⁶ Burns explains: “Cole’s landscapes opened up a gothic space where that inner world of doubt and dread tangled with the outer world of haunting history and foreboding change.” Burns, *Painting the Dark Side: Art and the Gothic Imagination in Nineteenth-Century America*, 3.
novel presents frightening villains who challenge rationality and confuse preconceived notions of good and evil.\footnote{7}  

The genre’s name comes from the earliest gothic novels’ placement of the narrative in an imagined medieval setting.\footnote{8}  The gothic novel aims to provoke a sense of awe or terror, often through descriptions of eerie and paranormal occurrences. Medieval castles and abbeys, removed in time and place from their contemporary readers, provide


\footnote{8} Walpole placed the narrative for The Castle of Otranto in a medieval castle, 1095 – 1243. Other examples include Clara Reeve’s The Old English Baron: A Gothic Story (1777), which was set in the first half of the fifteenth century. Ann Radcliffe’s The Castles of Athlin and Dunbayne (1789), Romance of the Forest (1791), The Mysteries of Udolpho (1796), and The Italian (1797), all use Gothic castles or abbeys for a good portion of their narratives. The genre derives its name from these predominantly Gothic settings. Note, however, that not all gothic novels were necessarily set in a Gothic period or place. The distancing effect expanded to include Orientalism such as in the case of William Beckford’s Vathek (1786), set in an Arabian-type location. It also included approximately contemporaneous time but set in Catholic countries far removed from English, Protestant, ideals, such as in Ann Radcliffe’s A Sicilian Romance (1790), or Matthew Lewis’s The Monk (1796).
more plausible settings for the supernatural. These medieval settings held pre-Reformation, Catholic associations, which include superstition, feudalism, tyrannical absolutism, and Jacobitism. Using a historical setting, authors following Walpole’s example, such as Ann Radcliffe, Clara Reeve, Eliza Parsons, Charles Maturin, and Mathew Lewis, created a kind of distancing effect. By removing the narrative from readers’ sense of normalcy, whether in time or place, gothic novelists were able to move away from reality into the realm of fantasy. They understood that a modern European landscape set during the Age of Reason might not allow readers to give in to the feelings of irrational horror dreamt up in their narratives. Therefore distance, whether in time, space, or both, became a crucial component of the gothic novel.

9 See my discussion in Chapter 1 of the connection between the Gothic Revival and anti-Catholic, anti-Jacobite sentiment. Michael Charlesworth connects these fears with the origins of the gothic novel. “The abbey ruins are the focus of Protestant Whig hate of Roman Catholicism – and they focus Hanoverian Whig guilt about the violent damage they have done to the body politic by their usurpation of the ‘true’ kings, and consequent damage to the divine and natural order of relations between a king and his people and country… My suggestion, based on the evidence of the ruined abbey, is that the vestigial Whig doubt and guilt about their desecration of the sacred relationship between king and nation contributed to the gothic novel.” Charlesworth, “The Ruined Abbey: Picturesque and Gothic Values,” in The Politics of the Picturesque: Literature, Landscape and Aesthetics Since 1770, eds. Stephen Copley and Peter Garside (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 75 – 76.

10 Robert D. Hume explains how one of the most significant components of gothic novels is “a setting in space or time or both sufficiently removed from the reader of 1800 that there would be no intrusion of everyday standards of factual probability and morality. Thus most of the stories are set in Southern France, Spain, Italy, or Germany, and usually in the sixteenth century or earlier. Time and place are irrelevant (real historicity is very slight) as long as they are vague or remote.” Robert D. Hume, 286.

11 Jane Austen’s hero Henry Tilney best describes the attitude toward the Gothic historical setting in her satire Northanger Abbey, written in 1798 but not published until 1818: “Remember the country and the age in which we live. Remember that we are English, that we are Christians. Consult your own understanding, your own sense of the probable, your own observation of what is passing around you. Does our education
such as a medieval setting, or place, such as a distant or exotic land, creates a boundary, which helps separate a narrative from its readers. This separation allowed gothic novelists to explore in greater depth the possibilities of the irrational, the imagination, the emotional, and the romantic, rather than such contemporary neoclassical ideals as order and reason.¹²

Charles Brockden Brown wrote the first American gothic novels.¹³ Lacking Europe’s medieval past with its castles and abbey, Brown found another way to distance his narrative from his reader’s sense of the everyday by using real situations, such as the prepare us for such atrocities? Do our laws connive at them? Could they be perpetrated without being known, in a country like this, where social and literary intercourse is on such a footing, where every man is surrounded by a neighborhood of voluntary spies, and where roads and newspapers lay everything open? Dearest Miss Morland, what ideas have you been admitting?” Austen, Northanger Abbey, in The Complete Novels of Jane Austen, vol. 2 (New York: Random House, 1992), 489.

¹² Durant explains how gothic novels purposefully draw upon associations that differ from neoclassical ideals in Durant, 519.


Brown’s American gothic novels are: Arthur Mervyn, Or, Memoirs of the Year 1793 (1799); Edgar Huntly, Or, Memoirs of a Sleep-walker (1799); Ormond, Or, the Secret Witness (1799); and Wieland, Or, the Transformation: An American Tale (1798).
yellow fever epidemic in Philadelphia or American Indians, to create psychological terror.\textsuperscript{14} He rooted these situations in a familiar reality, but distorted and exaggerated them in the manner of the grotesque. The grotesque in art looks to an ornamental style that utilizes familiar objects, such as leaves, flowers, or animals, but applied in such a manner as to subvert the natural world.\textsuperscript{15} Grotesque realism envisions the human body in

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\item Burns compares Cole’s early landscapes with Brown’s novels. She refers to them as “ravaged and dark,” and they “figured the young Republic as a land haunted by the same violent and bloody history that shadowed the American wilderness of the novelist Charles Brockden Brown.” Burns, \textit{Painting the Dark Side: Art and the Gothic Imagination in Nineteenth-Century America}, 3.

\item Wolfgang Kayser writes that grotesque designated “a specific ornamental style suggested by antiquity, understood not only something playfully gay and carelessly fantastic, but also something ominous and sinister in the face of a world totally different from the familiar one – a world in which the realm of inanimate things is no longer separated from those of plants, animals, and human beings, and where the laws of statics, symmetry, and proportion are no longer valid. This meaning ensues from a synonym for grotesque which came into usage during the sixteenth century: the dreams of painters.” Kayser, \textit{The Grotesque in Art and Literature}, trans. Ulrich Weisstein (New York: Columbia University Press, 1981), 21 – 22.

\item Maximillian E. Novak defines the grotesque as “the combination of conventionalized organizational structures, ideas and characters in fiction dealing with the supernatual and bizarre from the time of Horace Walpole to the present day.” Maximillian E. Novak, 50.

\item Ringe writes that Brown looked to generalities of the European Gothic mode instead of the traditional English method of a distant past setting which would not have worked in an American context. For example, he drew from the contemporary yellow fever epidemic in Philadelphia for a source of horror and terror. Ringe, \textit{American Gothic: Imagination and Reason in Nineteenth-Century Fiction}, 36.

\item Fielder writes that Brown “established in the American novel a tradition of dealing with the exaggerated and the grotesque, which impose themselves on us, not as they are verifiable in any external landscape or sociological observation of manners and men, but as they correspond in quality to our deepest fears and guilts as projected in our dreams or lived through in ‘extreme situations.’” See Fielder, 142.
\end{enumerate}
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a state of flux, mobile and hybrid. In Rabelais and His World, Mikhail Bakhtin describes how grotesque realism especially emphasizes the body’s lower stratum, aspects of its more base, and dirty physical needs. He explains that: “the essential principle of grotesque realism is degradation, that is, the lowering of all that is high, spiritual, ideal, abstract; it is a transfer to the material level, to the sphere of earth and body in their indissoluble unity.”

European gothic novels emphasize the grotesque body and its needs in descriptions of lust and rape. Brown similarly portrayed themes of lust and rape in Wieland, but also expressed revulsion at the body’s physical needs in his descriptions of disease and epidemics. Cooper even used the term grotesque in The Last of the Mohicans to describe Duncan’s observations of the paint on an American Indian in the Huron camp: “it was impossible to discover the expression of his features, through the grotesque mask of paint under which they were concealed.”

The use of the grotesque as a literary method took a sense of the familiar and distorted it into fantasy and terror. Cole

Many European gothic novels used visual apparitions to challenge or confuse perceptions. Brown, however, shifted this stress on distortion to the sense of hearing, especially for example in Wieland.


continued that tradition and portrayed the American wilderness as a sublime and frightening landscape, far removed from his contemporaries’ normal experiences.\textsuperscript{18}

For Cooper, the wilderness provided similar sublime associations as did many of the tropes used in European gothic novels, such as danger from non-Protestant, uncivilized threats.\textsuperscript{19} The wilderness in general held undomesticated animals and savage American Indians, and Colonial settlers found the wilderness of Cooper’s narrative especially hostile until after the Seven Years’ War established English sovereignty of the area.\textsuperscript{20} By the early-nineteenth century, the urban-dwelling readership felt sufficiently removed from the wilderness to provide the requisite distancing effect.\textsuperscript{21} By 1824, New


\textsuperscript{19} Charles Brockden Brown’s \textit{Edgar Huntly} certainly influenced Cooper’s representations of the American wilderness and Indians. However, Cooper inserted a degree of generous humanity into his depictions of Indians, whereas Brown’s treatment focused on their “uncivilized state, actuated to killing and pillage in revenge for the wrongs inflicted upon them… They are savages who break into murderous revolt and are put down by superior civilization and order. They are untamed and are described in stern words with no sentimental tone.” Lulu Ramsey Wiley, \textit{The Sources and Influence of the Novels of Charles Brockden Brown} (New York: Vantage Press, 1950), 217.

\textsuperscript{20} William Howard Brown writes that the area of present day Warren County (the Lake George and Glens Falls region) was unsafe for settlers until after the war. Until that time, the English and French, along with their American Indian allies, fought over the region. See William Howard Brown, \textit{History of Warren County New York} (Queensbury NY: Board of Supervisors of Warren County, 1963), 1.

\textsuperscript{21} In the fifty years following the Seven Years’ War, the population of Warren County grew to 7,565 in 1810. Then, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, the area grew even more around lumber businesses reliant on the Hudson River’s 850-foot drop through the county, which drastically changed the appearance of the landscape. William Howard Brown, 3 – 5.
Yorkers gained affordable access to the Hudson River landscape via steamship. This kind of tourism helped tame the wilderness, further distancing it. Charles Brockden Brown, Robert Montgomery Bird, James Fenimore Cooper, and Nathaniel Hawthorne all used the historical American wilderness for distinctly American gothic novels. Like these written works, Cole provided paintings of the wilderness so that his contemporaries could experience the sublime from a position of safety.

Cooper used the Seven Years’ War in 1757 for his historical setting in *The Last of the Mohicans*. Set sixty-nine years prior to its publication date, he provided a multigenerational removal for most of his readers. This distance allowed Cooper to combine historical facts from the war, such as the siege of Fort William Henry, with fictional personalized dramas. His combination of history, action, and landscape scenery Cooper’s audience was so removed from the wilderness of his novels that it became purely the world of fantasy. Leslie Fiedler notes that Cooper, like Sir Walter Scott, created “fantasies of flight from civilized comfort to primitive simplicity because they were sure that no one would believe them any more than they believed themselves.” Fiedler, 153.

Kenneth Myers explains that the development of landscape tourism in New York was possible only after the wilderness had been tamed and objectified to the point of commodification. In 1824, the United States Supreme Court ruled that the Fulton-Livingston monopoly on Hudson River steamships was unconstitutional, and prices dropped tremendously. Tourism to the area increased dramatically, and brought civilization with it. See Myers, *The Catskills: Painters, Writers, and Tourists in the Mountains, 1820 – 1895* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1987), 31 – 32.

shows the influence of the historical novels of Sir Walter Scott. Readers can therefore fantasize about the terrors of the sublime wilderness along with its inhabitants, while maintaining a safe distance.

Gothic novels’ use of distancing also enabled writers to weave feelings of nostalgia into the narrative. Nostalgia, defined by a feeling of longing, or a constructed desire for something inaccessible, looks back in time to the unobtainable. Objects of

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In regards to any perceived rivalry between himself and Scott, Cooper wrote, “I have always spoken, written and thought of Sir Walter Scott (as a writer) just as I should think and speak of Shakespeare – with high admiration of his talent.” Cooper to Samuel Carter Hall, 21 May 1831, in Cooper, *Letters and Journals*, vol. 2, 83.


25 I draw my definition of nostalgia from the works of Svetlana Boym, David Lowenthal, and Susan Stewart especially who all emphasize that the object of nostalgia is never obtainable.

Svetlana Boym explains that nostalgia “is a longing for a home that no longer exists or has never existed. Nostalgia is a sentiment of loss and displacement, but it is also a romance with one’s own fantasy.” Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), xiii.


Arthur Dudden describes nostalgia’s longing for an earlier condition and its implication of “a certain dissatisfaction with present circumstances, and very likely also a
nostalgia become unobtainable not only because the passage of time prevents any real return to the past, but also because they never existed in reality the way they appear in artificial memory or imagination.\footnote{26} Imaginings of the past never match up with realities.


David Lowenthal presents a similar theory of nostalgia. He argues that feelings of nostalgia are for the ideas of the past, rather than the past in reality. Therefore people always locate the mythic Golden Age in the unobtainable past. Furthermore, nostalgia requires a sense of estrangement; nostalgia’s object needs to be anachronistic. See Lowenthal, “The American Scene,” \textit{Geographical Review} 58, no. 1 (1968), 76 – 78; Lowenthal, \textit{The Past is a Foreign Country}; and Lowenthal, “Past Time, Present Place: Landscape and Memory,” \textit{The Geographical Review} 65 (January 1975), 1 – 36.

Raymond O’Brien explains that “nostalgia is a commodity that colors our view of the past and, when we draw upon and recycle elements from that supposedly more preferable past, it often conditions the way we deal with the present. This nostalgic evocation of an idealized past can be a powerful catalyst to the preservation of what is perceived to be environmentally aesthetic.” See O’Brien, \textit{American Sublime: Landscape and Scenery of the Lower Hudson River Valley} (New York: Columbia University Press, 1981), 11.

Susan Stewart defines nostalgia as “a sadness without an object, a sadness which creates a longing that of necessity is inauthentic because it does not take part in lived experience. Rather, it remains behind and before that experience. Nostalgia, like any form of narrative, is always ideological: the past it seeks has never existed except as narrative, and hence, always absent, that past continually threatens to reproduce itself as a felt lack… Nostalgia is the desire for desire.” Stewart, \textit{On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection} (Durham, Duke University Press, 1993), 23.

Alan Wallach draws attention to how a nostalgic longing for the past “could also involve a sense of a more complex historical development, a sublimated or mythic version of the actual history.” Wallach, “Thomas Cole and the Aristocracy,” in \textit{Reading American Art}, eds. Marianne Doezema and Elizabeth Milroy (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 88. Wallach also explains how Cole painted his landscapes for a more aristocratic group of patrons “in a manner that appealed to the aristocracy’s growing capacity for nostalgia. Classes or social groups in decline often exhibit a tendency to dwell upon the past.” Wallach, “Thomas Cole and the Aristocracy,” 88.

\footnote{26} For example, many of the gothic novels, especially the works of Ann Radcliffe, had successful conclusions when the heroine and her hero overcame their adversaries and
Nostalgia for the Gothic developed during the mid- to late-eighteenth century, especially with a longing for traditional hierarchies and religious fervor. As a result of these nostalgic tendencies, most gothic novels address the hierarchies of aristocratic class structure, while the heroines represent perfect Christian virtue. Cooper’s *The Last of the Mohicans*, while set in the American wilderness rather than a medieval castle, still adheres to rigid class structures. Major Duncan Heyward descended from the old landed gentry class in Scotland. In the American colonies, his family owns a large plantation placing him securely in the upper class. The two heroines of the story, Alice and Cora Munroe, also follow the traditional Gothic romance formula for their religious and moral purity.

were able to marry and live happily ever after. Unfortunately, these stories of women escaping rape and death because of their innocence and purity of heart are farfetched.

27 Barrett Kalter explains some of the sources for eighteenth-century nostalgia for the Middle Ages. “Nostalgia for the Middle Ages, variously expressed in interior design, buildings, landscape gardening, paintings, and literature, was born of dissatisfaction with the present, its erosion of traditional hierarchies, its rationalism and dullness, its political corruption and irreligion.” Kalter, “DIY Gothic: Thomas Gray and the Medieval Revival,” *ELH* 70, no. 4 (203), 991.

Robert Miles discusses how Gothic nostalgia “registers an anxious wish to recoup the last moments in Western history when the supernatural was knowable, when metaphysical presence lay behind words, emblems, events, behind human and natural signs.” Miles, “The Gothic Aesthetic: The Gothic Discourse,” *Eighteenth Century* 32, no. 1 (1991), 41.

William Stafford discusses nineteenth-century nostalgia for feudalism because of the perceived loyalty attachments between lords and vassals and for medieval monasteries because they provided relief to the poor. See Stafford, “‘This Once Happy Country’: Nostalgia for Pre-Modern Society,” in *The Imagined Past: History and Nostalgia*, eds. Christopher Shaw and Malcolm Chase (New York: Manchester University Press, 1989).
Cooper based the action in *The Last of the Mohicans* on real historical facts, such as the massacre at Fort William Henry, and he created a fictitious group of American Indians: the Mohicans. He had to fabricate the group because of the novel’s premise that the character Chingachgook represents the very last of this people. While the story begins with two Mohicans, Chingachgook and his son Uncas, the younger Mohican dies at the narrative’s end, wiping out hope for the future of their people. The implied death of the older Chingachgook will therefore bring about the total extinction of his race. This sense of irreplaceable loss brings about a feeling of remorse. Cooper emphasized this regrettable loss especially by describing Uncas’s “beautiful proportions.”

However, while unfortunate, Cooper implied that the American Indians inevitably would...
lose to the course of civilization, as though they were children who must ultimately grow up. The sense of nostalgia, therefore, becomes all the more prevalent, as the loss of Uncas and the Mohican people becomes just as inescapable as the loss of childhood innocence.

In addition to using distance to remove the narrative of gothic novels from the realm of the familiar or the realistic, writers in this genre further challenged rationality through their choice of frightening villains. While these narratives often include thieves, outlaws, and banditti, their most malevolent characters derive from figure types who readers usually associate with safety and goodness, such as family members or the clergy. Convention often demands respect for and obedience to these figures. Fathers, uncles, and aunts torment the protagonists with imprisonment, abandonment, or even sexual abuse. Vicious Catholic priests, monks, and nuns often appear as well in medieval settings. Late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth century English Protestants, or the

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31 Lora Romero writes “just as Freud in his essay on ‘The Sexual Aberrations’ collapses the ‘primitive’ or ‘archaic’ and the infantile, Cooper conflates racial difference and temporal distance on an evolutionary continuum of human history. In other words, it is as though for him aboriginals represent a phase that the human race goes through but which it must inevitably get over. Regardless of whether the ethno-pedagogic text celebrates equilibrium… in equating the savage and the juvenile it starts by assuming that certain Americans must vanish.” See Romero, “Vanishing Americans: Gender, Empire, and New Historicism,” American Literature 63, no. 3 (1991), 393.

32 Dawson especially examines this trait of paradoxical villains and the common threat of incest in Gothic Romance novels in “Melmoth the Wanderer: Paradox and the Gothic Novel.”

33 The first gothic novels used specifically pre-Reformation settings, for example, Castle of Otranto, sets the narrative between 1095 and 1243. Later gothic novels relaxed their requisite medieval settings and expanded to include the post-Reformation years of
majority of early gothic novel readership, often associated Catholicism with superstition, corruption, and the irrational. ³⁴ Gothic novels manifest these fears. Ann Radcliffe and Matthew Lewis, for example, created villains from monks and priests who commit murder and ravish innocent maidens. ³⁵ These villains conflate notions of good and evil, thus increasing the elements of terror in the novel and going against Protestant values of civilized society. They first appear trustworthy, only to betray and violate that trust. Cooper also followed this model; in *The Last of the Mohicans*, he initially introduced the villain Magua as a trusted American Indian guide meant to lead Cora and Alice Munroe safely through the wilderness, but who then would attempt their murder later on.


³⁵ For example, Ann Radcliffe’s villain in *The Italian* (1797) is the monk Schedoni, who kidnaps and nearly murders the heroin, Ellena Rosalba, who is also his niece. Matthew Lewis’s villain Ambrosio in *The Monk* is a monk. Seduced by Matilda, a woman disguised as another monk (who turns out to be the devil disguised as a woman disguised as a monk), Ambrosio then rapes and murders a young girl named Antonia.
Americans, lacking medieval architectural settings, drew from a different contextual source for their Gothic narratives: the American wilderness.\textsuperscript{36} Within the American wilderness, American Indians comprised the direst perceived potential threats. American gothic novelists often wrote about the wilderness as a terrifying place specifically because of the presence of American Indians who committed terrible atrocities.\textsuperscript{37} Cooper’s \textit{Last of the Mohicans} even included one such historical act of horror committed by American Indians during the Seven Years’ War: the massacre of English who surrendered at Fort William Henry. The savagery of American Indians generated moral confusion, paralleling the villainous monks and priests in the European gothic novels. Many Europeans considered American Indians primitive and potentially dangerous, but also innocent. After their earliest encounters, Europeans concluded that America’s inhabitants were comparatively primitive people.

Enlightenment scholars first used the term primitivism to denote peoples living in a state of civilization that they believed less advanced than contemporary European

\textsuperscript{36} Note that Cooper wrote four historical novels set in Europe: \textit{The Bravo} (1831); \textit{The Heidenmauer, or the Benedictines} (1832); \textit{The Headsman, or the Abbye of Vignerons} (1833); and \textit{Mercedes of Castille, or the Voyage to Cathay} (1840). However, while set in the European past, none of these works qualifies as a gothic novel.

\textsuperscript{37} For example, Charles Brockden Brown’s \textit{Edgar Huntly}, 1799, tells the story of a Euro-American man who sleepwalks, leaving his comfortable bedroom, and wakes to discover himself in the wilderness. There, he encounters a cougar and Indians. Brown connects the cougar and the Indians as equally dangerous and terrifying. In \textit{Nick of the Woods}, 1837, Robert Montgomery Bird wrote about a Quaker living on the frontier. Attacked by Indians and left for dead, the traumatized white man escapes into the woods to wreak vengeance on all Indians. Bird not only vilified American Indians, but he implied that their wildness is contagious. Note that Brown also used more traditionally European Gothic-styled villains as well, such as the Theodore Wieland in \textit{Wieland} (1798) who heard voices, kills his family, and attempts to murder his sister as well.
civilization. Primitivism evolved into the belief that some other societies are simpler and happier than one’s own society, and yet, at the same time, inferior to one’s own society. This presents a problematic belief of superior cultural advancement over the primitive subject. The theory of primitivism exists within the construct of a dominant discourse, where Europeans defined so-called primitives in relation to their own marks of civilization and society. From the European or Euro-American hegemonic perspective, primitivism therefore created the concept of us versus them. Europeans or Euro-Americans constituted the us, and American Indians became the them in this equation, relegated to a sense of the “Other.” Representations of the primitive frequently use


39 Homi Bhabha’s definition of hegemony helps explain the power struggle implied in the term primitivism. “Hegemony is itself the process of iteration and differentiation. It depends on the production of alternative or antagonistic images that are always produced side by side and in competition with each other. It is this side-by-side nature, this partial presence, or metonymy of antagonism, and its effective significations, that give meaning (quite literally) to a politics of struggle as the struggle of identifications and the war of positions.” Bhabha, The Location of Culture (New York: Routledge, 2004), 42 – 43.

40 Bhabha asserts that “cultures are never unitary in themselves, nor simply dualistic in the relation of the Self to Other.” Instead, “production of meaning requires that these two
exoticism in order to emphasize the differences between notions of us and them. Those differences include space and time: the primitive subject belongs to a less advanced and earlier, or more innocent form of culture.

The oxymoronic term Noble Savage helps explain the duality of the primitive yet innocent traits attributed to American Indians. The term first appeared in Marc Lescarbot’s *Nova Francia, or The Description of that Part of New France which is One Continent with Virginia* in 1609, and it helped to define the American Indians as the Other to civilized Europeans.⁴¹ American Indians appeared savage in contrast to places be mobilized in the passages through a third Space, which represents both the general conditions of language and the specific implication of the utterance in a performative and institutional strategy of which it cannot ‘in itself’ be conscious.” Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 52 – 53.


⁴¹ Terry Jay Ellingson explains that the works of Jean-Jacques Rousseau often receive attribution for the term Noble Savage, but while Rousseau discussed similar concepts, he never actually used the term Noble Savage (“bon sauvage”). After its origin in the seventeenth century, it fell out of use until John Crawford reintroduced it in 1859 as part of a racist overhaul of the Ethnological Society of London. Ellingson, *The Myth of the Noble Savage* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), xv. Therefore the term Noble Savage was not popular during Cooper’s or Cole’s lifetimes. However, I use it here to help explain some of the interpretations of the specific characters in Cooper’s narrative, especially Chingachgook and Uncas.

For more on the Noble Savage, see Connelly, “The Origins and Development of Primitivism in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century European Art and Aesthetics;” Hoxie Neale Fairchild, *The Noble Savage: A Study in Romantic Naturalism* (New York:
civilization’s accepted norms, and they regularly exhibited seemingly contrasting or dual natures. This tension between savage and noble or virtuous spoke to a connection between divine nobility and cultured civility. It represented a form of civility different


Note that term Noble Savage was not exclusively reserved for American Indians. It applied to many other non-Europeans as well.

42 Several scholars in the mid-twentieth century examined examples of primitivism as representative of the Biblical Adam. Adamic primitives, blended in with their paradisiacal surroundings rather than standing apart from those surroundings, as did civilized Europeans. Often, the Indian’s placement in paradise called into question the values of civilization over nature. They lived in paradise, yet they were uncivilized and not Christian. Proponents of this theory considered American Indians similar to the original inhabitants of Eden before the Fall, ignorant of any sin in Judeo-Christian terms. This myth of the American Adam-type Indian caused conflict with Euro-Americans for evangelizing or Christianizing American Indians also meant destroying their innocence in European terms. However, while authors such as David W. Noble use this theory as a tool for examining Cooper’s works, it is unclear whether Cooper himself believed in such a theory. For scholarship on the American Adamic myth, see: R. W. B. Lewis, The American Adam: Innocence, Tragedy, and Tradition in the Nineteenth Century (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1955); David W. Noble, “Cooper, Leatherstocking and the Death of the American Adam,” American Quarterly 16, no. 3 (1964), 419 – 431; Bernard Rosenthal, City of Nature: Journeys to Nature in the Age of American Romanticism (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1980); Charles L. Sanford, “The Garden of America,” Modern Review (Calcutta India) 92, no. 1 (July 1952), 23 – 32; and Henry Nash Smith, Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1970).
from the hegemonic European view, yet still familiar. Cooper, described this kind of
duality in his description of Uncas:

Though his person was more than usually screened by a green and fringed
hunting-shirt, like that of the white man, there was no concealment to his
dark, glancing, fearless eye, alike terrible and calm; the bold outline of this
high, haughty features, pure in their native red; or to the dignified
elevation of his receding forehead, together with all the finest proportions
of a noble head, barred to the generous scalping tuft. It was the first
opportunity possessed by Duncan and his companions to view the marked
lineaments of either of their Indian attendants and each individual of the
party felt relieved from a burden of doubt, as the proud and determined,
though wild expression of the features of the young warrior forced itself
on their notice.43

Uncas appears bold and noble, yet he is still very much a savage. Cooper even used the
term savage virtue when he described the pair of Mohicans, Uncas and Chingachgook, as
“revered for their courage and savage virtues.”44 This duality helps reinforce the feelings
of familiarity with virtue and difference from the savage. For Cooper and his audience,
the Mohican Indians represented the Other, while Duncan Heywood represented the
centric Euro-American view.

These mixed feelings Euro-Americans felt for American Indians as Noble
Savages, or barbaric savage, surface in gothic novels.45 The potential conflation between

43 Cooper, The Last of the Mohicans, 57.

44 Cooper, The Last of the Mohicans, 142.

45 Note that Charles Brockden Brown even compared Indians to Gothic castles in
European novels when he wrote in the preface to Edgar Huntly: “One merit the writer
may at least claim; that of calling forth the passions and engaging the sympathy of the
reader, by means hitherto unemployed by preceding authors. Puerile superstition and
exploded manners; Gothic castles and chimeras, are the materials usually employed for
this end. The incidents of Indian hostility, and the perils of the western wilderness, are
far more suitable; and, for a native of America to overlook these, would admit of no
good and evil made for a ready villain adhering to the European gothic novel motif.

Cooper described two different kinds of American Indians in his novels. He included both the villainous savage and the noble-type savage such as Chingachgook or Uncas, as described above. Cooper accentuated their inherent nobility by describing them as chiefs, from a noble bloodline of the Delawares. Pitted against these good American Indians stands the Contrasting brutal and treacherous Magua and the Hurons:

The adventurous Huron raised his head above the shelter of the canoe, and, while it glided swiftly down the stream, he waved his hand, and gave forth the shout, which was the known signal of success. His cry was answered by a yell and a laugh from the woods, as tauntingly exulting as if fifty demons were uttering their blasphemies at the fall of some Christian soul.

Cooper used the language of European gothic fiction when he described some of his American Indian characters as demonic. He furthered this association with European traditions by describing them as from “a picture that Salvator Rosa would have delight to draw” repeating a frequent threat in the works of Europe’s novelists.

Cole’s paintings that include American Indians follow a long tradition of representing the first inhabitants of the Americas as different from Euro-Americans.
primarily in terms of dress. Cole painted at least twenty-one landscapes that include figures of American Indians. Although usually small, viewers recognize the figures by

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49 Many of the first images of American peoples after European encounters emphasize their primitiveness in relation to hegemonic European concepts of civilization, especially by drawing attention to American Indians’ nakedness and savagery, such as Jacques Le Moyne de Morgues, *René de Laudonniè and the Indian Chief Athore visit Ribaut’s Column* (c. 1570), Martin de Vos, *Personification of America* (1595), Jan van der Straet, *Vespucci Awakens a Sleeping America* (1600). Several early English examples, such as John White’s watercolors from 1585 depicting the Algonquian in Virginia, display American Indian subjects as if they were on display in a theater, or scientific curiosities, depicted without any presence of the English with whom they interacted. For a discussion of White’s paintings, see Joyce E. Chaplin, “Roanoke ‘Counterfeited According to the Truth,’” *A New World: England’s First View of America*, ed. Kim Sloan (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 51. Chaplin also explains that White’s images created a distancing effect between the colonized and the colonizers, which was a characteristic approach of the English colonies as opposed to Spanish practices.

Later-eighteenth-century paintings show interactions between Europeans and Indians, but with boundaries carefully defined by skin color, costume, and placement within a composition. For example, Benjamin West’s paintings *Death of General Wolfe* (1770), in the National Gallery of Art, Ottowa and *William Penn’s Treaty with the Indians* (1771 – 1772), now in the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, Philadelphia.

their scant clothing and dark skin. As figures, they neither dwarf the landscape nor impose upon it; instead, they blend into the wilderness both visually and figuratively. For example, in *Landscape with Dead Trees*, 1828, Cole painted a solitary American Indian in the center of the composition standing looking over a lake (Figure 4.1). His skin tones and minimal apparel mimic the colors of the rocks and trees surrounding him. Furthermore, the minute size of the American Indian designates him as a detail within the landscape. Like the blasted tree, the rock formations, or the water itself, he belongs in the landscape.

Cole’s acquaintance with Cooper as well as the novel’s huge popularity may have helped influence his decision to paint five landscapes from *The Last of the Mohicans*. The two met in 1826, and Cooper even invited Cole to join his exclusive Bread and

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50 Cole’s American Indian paintings include: *Fall of the Kaaterskill* (1825), unlocated; *Falls of the Kaaterskill* (1826), private collection; *Kaaterskill Falls* (1826), Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, CT; *Landscape with Figures: A Scene from “The Last of the Mohicans”* (1826), Terra Foundation, Chicago, IL; *Romantic Landscape* (1826), North Carolina Museum of Art, Raleigh, NC; *Autumn in the Catskills* (1827), Arnot Art Museum, Elmira, NY; *Indians Viewing Landscape* (1827), private collection; *Landscape, Scene from “Last of the Mohicans”: the Death of Cora* (1827), Van Pelt-Dietrich Library, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA; *The Clove: Catskills* (1827), New Britain Museum of American Art, New Britain, CT; *The Last of the Mohicans: Cora Kneeling at the Foot of Tamunund* (1827), Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, CT; *The Last of the Mohicans: Cora Kneeling at the Foot of Tamunund* (1827), Fenimore Art Museum, New York State Historical Association, Cooperstown, NY; *Landscape with Dead Tree* (1828), RISD Museum of Art, Providence, RI; *Last of the Mohicans* (1828), unlocated; *View on Lake Winnipeseeogie* (1828), Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, CT; *Chocorua’s Curse* (1829), unlocated; *Distant View of Niagara Falls* (1830), Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago, IL; *American Lake Scene* (1844), Detroit Institute of Art, Detroit MI; *Coral Peak, NH* (1844), Maier Museum of Art, Randolph College, Lynchburg, VA; *Cross in the Wilderness* (1845), Louvre Museum, Paris; *Lake Scene* (1846), Mint Museum of Art, Charlotte, NC; and *Indian Pass – Tahawus* (1847), Museum of Fine Arts, Houston TX. In addition to the finished paintings, Cole made a number of sketches and drawings of American Indians.
Cheese club, which exposed Cole to potential patrons. Furthermore, Cooper himself helped in the commissioning of the fifth, now unlocated, Leatherstocking painting. In addition to reading *The Last of the Mohicans*, Cole mentioned reading the following gothic novels in a catalogue of books from 1839: Ann Radcliffe’s *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, 1794, and Charles Maturin’s *Melmoth the Wanderer*, 1820. Both were very popular novels, which used the medieval past, foreign countries, damsels in distress, and terrifying villains to communicate the Gothic. Cole also listed “36 vols. Scotts novels” in an undated book list. While the works of Sir Walter Scott do not always fit the category of gothic novel, many of them use history for distancing effect in a manner similar to their more frightening Gothic counterparts. Cole may have recognized this distancing effect, and its emphasis on the imagined past, as similar to his own efforts to work from the imagination rather than just copying nature exactly as he saw it. He wanted to be more than just a “mere leaf-painter,” and instead worked from his imagination in the same way that the Gothic writers worked from the past to create fiction.

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51 The Bread and Cheese Club was a social club, also known as The Lunch. Its memberships included Gulian C. Verplanck, who purchased Cole’s *View of Sleepy Hollow* (1835), unlocated. The Bread and Cheese Club was also important because it served as a kind of precursor to the Sketch Club (now the Century Club). For more on the Bread and Cheese club, see Nelson Adkins, “James Fenimore Cooper and the Bread and Cheese Club,” *Modern Language Notes* 47, no. 2 (February 1932), 71 – 79; Albert H. Marckwardt, “The Chronology and Personnel of the Bread and Cheese Club,” *American Literature* 6, no. 4 (January 1935), 389 – 399; and James T. Callow, *Kindred Spirits: Knickerbocker Writers and American Artists, 1807 – 1855* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1967), 11 – 13.

52 Cole Papers.

53 The undated book list is at the Detroit Institute of Arts.
In addition to their spectacular wilderness settings, Cole’s finished landscapes based on Cooper’s *The Last of the Mohicans* portray dramatic moments of conflict, which include Euro-American and American Indian protagonists as well as savage American Indian villains. The following sections demonstrate how Cole followed the traditional gothic novel formula by using distanced settings, gothic villains, and nostalgia in all four located paintings. For the distancing effect, he followed Cooper’s narrative and used the American wilderness. Cole enhanced the Gothic effect of the novel’s setting by dwarfing these action scenes within the wild and uncivilized landscape. The figures themselves appear small, seen from a distance within the larger, seemingly boundless landscape. The villain, Magua, lends confusion and conflict as he appears in each painting with a heroic counterpart. In each version, Cole included both heroic and villainous American Indians. This bifurcated moralizing demonstrates two possible sides within character types. In Cooper’s novel, it causes confusion about whom to trust when appearances might be deceiving. That confusion leads to a greater element of fear and suspense: both elements of the sublime, and important themes in gothic literature. The confusion appears when the reader or viewer must question which American Indian serves as the hero and which must stand for the villain. Malevolent American Indians seem especially frightening because they represent both examples of gothic villains and a personification of the

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Other. Furthermore, each painting also includes a victimized woman. The viewer fears both the wilderness and dangerous American Indians for her character’s sake.

Just as nostalgia plays an important role in gothic novels, it also appears in both Cooper’s narrative and Cole’s paintings. At the story’s end, after the death of Uncas, Chingachgook remains, the last of his people. Cooper felt some regret for the American Indians’ destruction, but he considered it unavoidable. Many theories of progress, contemporary to Cooper and Cole, suggested that all the American Indians and other forms of so-called Primitives would inevitably die out. Even Benjamin Rush’s theories about progress stated: “In proportion as the white people multiply, the Indians will diminish; so that in a few centuries they will probably be entirely extirpated.” The natural progress and advancement of civilization included their demise. Cole wrote about the death of the American Indians in his unpublished narrative, “The Death of Chocorua:”

The sun of the red man is set: he vanished from the hills like light when the night comes. He falls like the withered leaf and the winds moan over him. The white man digs the grave of the Indian & builds a fire over his bones. Why does Chocorua linger on the grave of his father, when he cries from the land of spirits: “Come.” “The earth is no longer the home of the red man, the Great spirit wants his red children & gives the earth to the white.”

The death of Chocorua stands for the death of all American Indians, no longer able to stay in a world now dominated by Euro-Americans. Cole’s description praises the

55 Benjamin Rush, “Medicine Among the Indians of North America,” 280. See Chapter 3 for my discussion on Rush’s theories of progress as they relate to architecture.

56 Cole, “The Death of Chocorua,” Cole Papers. A complete transcription appears in Appendix C.
American Indian’s noble stance, therefore adding to the sense of regretful loss: “And but for the waving of his dark locks in the passing wind, was as a proud Statue of Defiance sculptured from that mountain rock.” In the end, the barbarous white hunters murder Chocorua. Thus the members of the Euro-American, civilized world behave more savagely than the so-called savage American Indian.

Cole painted *Landscape with Figures: A Scene from “The Last of the Mohicans”* in 1826, the same year that Cooper published the novel (Figure 4.2). Cole chose the final climactic scene after Cora Munroe, the central female character, pleads with her captor, Magua, “Kill me, if though wilt, detestable Huron, I will go no farther!” While she begs, Uncas, the heroic Mohican, appears, but one of Magua’s assistants stabs Cora in the heart. Maddened by Cora’s murder, Uncas attempts to avenge her, but Magua kills him. Cole’s painting shows both Cora and Uncas lying dead upon the ground. Hawkeye, having just arrived, stands over them and aims his rifle at Magua who clings to a precipice after trying to escape by leaping over a chasm. The white man, Hawkeye, destroys the wild American Indian threat.

Hawkeye’s character serves as an important intermediary figure between American Indians and Euro-Americans. By birth a white man, he became the adopted

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57 Cole, “The Death of Chocorua.”

58 Now in the Terra Foundation for American Art, Chicago, IL.

59 Cooper, *Last of the Mohicans*, 421.

60 Hawkeye is the nickname for Nathaniel (Natty) Bumppo. Cooper gave his character many different names throughout his long career in the Leatherstocking novels, including
brother of his friend and companion, the Mohican Chingachgook. At the narrative’s end, Hawkeye reassures Chingachgook that he still has a friend even though he now stands as the last of his people.

The gifts of our colors may be different, but God has so placed us as to journey in the same path. I have no kin, and I may also say, like you, no people. He was your own, and a red-skin by nature; and it may be that your blood was nearer – but if ever I forget the lad who has so often fou’t at my side in war, and slept at my side in peace, may He who made us all, whatever may be our color or our gifts, forget me! The boy has left us for a time; but, Sagamore, you are not alone.61

Their relationship continues throughout the series until the death of Chingachgook in The Pioneers. However, while they live and hunt together, Hawkeye always makes clear their racial difference and the natural “gifts” that come with that distinction. Hawkeye creates slippage between the races and between the wilderness and civilization with which Cooper associated those races.62 In that way, he is like Benjamin Rush’s first “species of settler.” He resembles the American Indian in his practices, but he remains a part of the Euro-American community by self-identification.

The landscape in Cole’s painting dwarfs the narrative action, but Cole carefully placed Hawkeye and the sprawling bodies in the very center of the composition, drawing the viewer’s attention to the tiny figures. Furthermore, light bathes these small but

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Deerslayer, Hawkeye, Pathfinder, Leatherstocking, and La Longue Carabine or Long Rifle.

61 Cooper, The Last of the Mohicans, 439.

62 Roy Harvey Pearce describes Natty’s character as “the white man with all savage virtues and limitations conditioned by his white birth.” Pearce, “The Leatherstocking Tales Re-examined,” South Atlantic Quarterly 46 (1947), 526.
important figures while most of the surrounding landscape rests in shadows beneath stormy skies. Hawkeye, standing over Uncas and Cora, aiming his rifle, occupies the apex of a pyramid of bodies. Following the line of his rifle to the lower right, the viewer finds Magua clinging desperately to the walls of the cliff before Hawkeye’s fatal shot will hurl him into the darkness below. The last figure in the scene, Major Duncan Hayward, rushes in from the left and directs the viewer’s gaze back to the central action with his extended arm.

Cole used dramatic visual effects to enhance the narrative. Cooper’s story presents sublime, Gothic tropes of ravishment, murder, rescue, and revenge. As dark, dank medieval castles heightened the drama and mystery in European gothic novels, here Cole added more terror with a threatening thunderstorm and distant smoke in the landscape. Cole wrote about such a dangerous and exciting storm that he encountered on a mountain hike:

This was a moment of sublime expectation. A forked stream of fire kindled the gloom. Then came a crash as of a riven world, and echo hurled the sound from crag to crag. Then rose a whispering & the rain drops fell as though they might be counted; but anon the gush of torrents sounded on the ear… I entered a region where was neither height nor depth; it was a chaos such as the primeval one. In the midst of this uncreated, there were dream-like and ever varying images: light shot athwart darkness, and darkness extinguished light; sweet tones as of music were broken by harsh sounds as of thunder or the rent of earthquakes; there was no rest, no fixedness; all things were left unfinished, mingled in mysterious confusion.63

In a similar short story, “The Bewilderment,” Cole wrote about the dangers of the wilderness. After becoming lost after dark, the narrator stumbles among rocks and trees during a storm and ends up in an underground river. At that point, he remarked “I began to feel a kind of pleasure in the fearful sublimity of my situation.”\(^{64}\) The thunderheads in the first *The Last of the Mohicans* painting provides dramatic lighting and chiaroscuro similarly to the stormy turmoil Cole described in his prose sketches.

Magua’s figure connects visually with the surrounding landscape through his form and coloring. The earthy tones of the surrounding rocks blend with Magua’s skin color, and his crouched body seems to grow directly out of the rocks he grips in desperation. His twisted legs and arms mimic the tortured trunk and branches of the tree behind Hawkeye. The tree’s bright red leaves coordinate with his headdress and clothing’s color.\(^{65}\) Magua, the savage American Indian, matches the wild and turbulent landscape. Both appear as threats against the protagonists, and need to be subdued.

Adding to the complexity of the plot, Cooper implied a hint of romance between Cora and Uncas. Magua murders Cora, and Uncas has to die like the character in a tragic

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love story; the plot is truly Shakespearean. Their regard for each other consists mostly of looks between the two characters, and at one point Uncas even supports Cora in his arms. “Duncan willingly relinquished the support of Cora to the arm of Uncas and Cora as readily accepted the welcome assistance.” In the end, Uncas dies while attempting to avenge Cora’s death. However, Cooper did not kill them off just for plot drama. The interracial union between a white woman and the Mohican would have been unacceptable. Cora’s situation is even more difficult. Cooper positioned her as biracial; her mother “was the daughter of a gentleman of those [West Indies] isles, by a lady whose misfortune it was, if you will… to be descended, remotely, from that unfortunate class who are so basely enslaved to administer to the wants of a luxurious people.” However Cooper considered Cora to be sufficiently white, and he established her within the Euro-American society. While she was not white enough to marry a

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66 Cooper, The Last of the Mohicans, 176.

67 Roy Harvey Pearce explains “that the Indian and Cora should be united would be impossible in Cooper’s world of civilization and progress; hence, temporizing the issue by making Cora’s ancestry somewhat dubious, he must do away with them both.” Pearce, “The Leatherstocking Tales Re-examined,” 529.

68 Cooper, The Last of the Mohicans, 194.

69 Cooper described her appearance: “Her complexion was not brown, but it rather appeared charged with the color of the rich blood, that seemed ready to burst its bounds. And yet there was neither coarseness nor want of shadowing in a countenance that was exquisitely regular and dignified, and surpassingly beautiful.” Cooper, The Last of the Mohicans, 16.
white man, she was too white to marry an American Indian.\textsuperscript{70} For Cooper, their union could never be.

The Stevens family commissioned this painting for the Hudson River Steamer, \textit{The Albany}, so that travelers could admire it while journeying between New York City and Albany.\textsuperscript{71} The setting for \textit{The Last of the Mohicans} takes place in upstate New York around the historic Fort William Henry on Lake George, and the waterfalls, known today as Glens Falls, another sixty miles north of Albany. Tourists travelling up the Hudson River could therefore admire Cole’s historic landscape en route along the same river that featured in its story, even if their steamship route did not take them as far north. The painting serves as a point of comparison between the wilderness and the view the audience would have seen travelling up the Hudson in 1826. Commercial and tourist traffic boomed; the Erie Canal opened in 1825 bringing more traffic to the Hudson River between Albany and New York City, and that same route had many sightseers. While tourists were interested in nature, they also required comfortable accommodations and transportation. The infrastructure that supported these nature enthusiasts consequently

\textsuperscript{70} Chester H. Mills explains Cora’s racial oscillation between the white and non-white worlds. Mills, “Ethnocentric Manifestations in Cooper’s \textit{Pioneers} and \textit{The Last of the Mohicans},” \textit{Journal of Black Studies} 16, no. 4 (1986), 446 – 447. In Cooper’s narrative, Major Duncan Heyward asks Colonel Munroe for permission to marry his daughter. Munroe assumes Duncan refers to Cora, but Duncan prefers Alice, causing some confusion.

\textsuperscript{71} Colonel John Stevens assembled a collection of twelve paintings, which were displayed first in James Earle’s Philadelphia print shop in March, 1827, before being hung in the steamboat \textit{The Albany}’s main cabin by April 8, 1827. Kenneth John Myers discusses the commission and the Stevens’ exhibition space on \textit{The Albany} in “Art and Commerce in Jacksonian America: the Steamboat \textit{Albany} Collection,” \textit{The Art Bulletin} 82, no. 3 (September 2000), 503 – 528.
transformed the landscape itself.\textsuperscript{72} Even where landscape enthusiasts found examples of pristine or sublime wilderness, their experience of that landscape changed based on their close proximity to civilization and the number of other Euro-American visitors with them. Viewing Cole’s painting aboard \textit{The Albany} also allowed its audience to compare Cole’s historical setting and more contemporary scenes including Thomas Birch’s two views of New York harbor: \textit{View of the Bay of New-York, from Castle Garden, Castle William and Staten Island in the Background} and \textit{View of the Coast near Sandy Hook} (both 1827), which also hung aboard \textit{The Albany}.\textsuperscript{73} Birch’s seascapes with tall ships emphasize New York’s importance as a port. Set during the Seven Years’ War in 1757, Cooper’s story and Cole’s landscape follow the rules of gothic novels and contain perils far removed from civilized New York society, especially the threat of American Indians.\textsuperscript{74}


\textsuperscript{73} \textit{View of the Bay of New-York, from Castle Garden, Castle William and Staten Island in the Background} and \textit{View of the Coast near Sandy Hook} are both are the Museum of the City of New York, New York, NY. Kenneth John Myers discusses the historical contrast between these paintings in “Art and commerce in Jacksonian America,” 519.

\textsuperscript{74} Not many American Indians occupied Warren County, New York (the location for the narrative in \textit{The Last of the Mohicans}) in any permanent fashion. The area surrounding Lake George, while often used as hunting grounds, was contested by the Algonquin Indians of the north and the Iroquois of the south. Encounters with Indians in this region during this period were especially dangerous. For a history of the area and the American Indians there, see H. P. Smith, \textit{History of Warren County: with Illustrations}
Cole used this distancing effect in other paintings that included American Indians as well. In addition to the paintings based on The Last of the Mohicans, he painted several landscapes that depict American Indians without figures of whites. Besides lacking figures of Euro-Americans, these paintings stand apart from the landscapes based on Cooper’s narrative even more because they lack scenes of action. Instead of portraying fighting or the pleas of captives, Cole often inserted one or two American Indians unobtrusively into the wilderness to help identify the landscape as uniquely American. He included these figures even though reviews of his work often criticized his portrayal of the human figure. Usually small in scale and difficult to find in the


For a discussion of the changes and attitudes towards the landscape in the Hudson River Valley, see Raymond J. O’Brien, American Sublime: Landscape and Scenery of the Lower Hudson Valley. Kenneth Myers discusses the population and tourism growths in the Hudson River Valley. For example, the Catskill Mountain House (originally called Pine Orchard House) was built in 1824, overlooking the Hudson River in Greene County. There tourists found a safe and comfortable retreat from which to experience the wilderness without fear of Indians or other threats from the wilds. See Myers, The Catskills: Painters, Writers, and Tourists in the Mountains, 1820 – 1895 (Hanover: University Press of New England); and Roland Van Zandt, The Catskill Mountain House (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1966). Also, Steven Blakemore explains how the landscape in Cooper’s narrative differs dramatically from the 1827 landscape in “Without a Cross’: The Cultural Significance of the Sublime and Beautiful in Cooper’s The Last of the Mohicans,” 35.

Dimond explains that Cole’s use of American Indians in the landscape appealed to patrons looking for a uniquely American landscape. Dimond, “Eloquent Representatives: A Study of the Native American Figure in the Early Landscapes of Thomas Cole, 1825 – 1830,” 56.

Parry addresses the criticism of Cole’s figures in “Thomas Cole and the Problem of Figure Painting,” American Art Journal 4 no. 1 (1972), 66 – 86.
landscape, these figures appear as if they physically grow out of the landscape itself.

Cole implied a sense of otherness, not by direct conflict with other painted figures, but by an indirect contrast between the American Indians’ placement in the natural wilderness and the Euro-American viewer. In 1826, for example, the same year he completed the first *Last of the Mohicans* compositions, Cole painted *The Falls of the Kaaterskill* for William Gracie. The painting shows an American Indian standing on a ledge approximately two thirds of the way up the waterfall, seen from below (Figure 4.3). He stands alone, barely visible as his clothing blends in with the bright autumnal shades of red in the trees around him. In addition to visually relating to the surrounding landscape in term of coloring, he appears fixed within that landscape, unmoving, gazing into the distance. Cole exaggerated the American Indian’s solitude by omitting the presence of Euro-Americans in the landscape; by 1826, Euro-American tourists, not American Indians, were visiting these falls. Cole’s onsite sketch of the subject from earlier that year portrays a viewing platform built atop the falls (Figure 4.4). In addition to the observation deck, a refreshment stand also stood at this popular tourist spot providing for

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A review of Cole’s *Landscape, Scene from “The Last of the Mohicans”: The Death of Cora* and *Landscape Composition, St. John in the Wilderness* at the National Academy of Design in 1827 stated: “The figures in both, although subordinate, as they should be in common landscape compositions, might be better drawn; it is desirable that a landscape painter should draw the individual figure well. We know it is not so essential to him as to those in the higher department of history; he should, however, understand perfectly composition of figures, that his groups may compose with the other objects of his picture, and not be insulated parts of it.” D. Fanshaw, “Review,” *The United States Review and Literary Gazette* 2, no. 4 (July 1827), 250.

a safe and comfortable viewing position. It allowed for a feeling of civilization within the wilderness. By removing all such evidence of civilization, Cole distanced the landscape; he painted it as it would have appeared before the intrusion of Europeans in the American wilderness. By purposefully substituting an American Indian in the wilderness for all traces of Euro-Americans, Cole created a window into a landscape long gone. William Gracie, a wealthy New York merchant, commissioned *The Falls of the Kaaterskill*. Seeing the painting in his New York townhome allowed viewers to admire the wilderness as it once looked in the past from a position of safety and security, just as gothic novels allowed readers to experience thrills and excitement without directly encountering any real danger. However, the narrative effect of *Landscape with Figures: Scene from Last of the Mohicans* embellishes that sense of danger even more than *The Falls of the Kaaterskill* by Cole’s decision to paint such a climactic and dramatic moment. The combination of the sense of distance as well as danger, together create a visual version of a gothic novel.

Viewers on *The Albany* were able to witness firsthand how Cole’s painted landscape and its inhabitants differed from reality. Furthermore, the subject itself implies that sense of change. *Landscape with Figures: Scene from Last of the Mohicans* shows the moment from the narrative when just one Mohican survives: only Chingachgook

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remains. While Cole omitted Chingachgook from the scene, Uncas’s prostrate body lying in the center of the composition clearly reminds the viewer that the Mohican people survive just one breath from extinction. Even if Cora and Uncas had lived, any children they might have had would be a mix of three races, and therefore the purity of the Mohicans would be lost. The dead bodies of Uncas and Cora, lying in a pool of light, help accentuate the feeling of loss and regret, drawing attention to the narrative’s nostalgic elements.

Cole’s second Cooper-based painting presents the scene preceding and leading up to that of Landscape with Figures: A Scene from “The Last of the Mohicans.”

Landscape, Scene from “Last of the Mohicans”: The Death of Cora shows the moment when Cora pleads with Magua to let her go (Figure 4.5). Cole exhibited the painting at the National Academy of Design in 1827, and he included the following passage from the novel in the catalogue:

> “Woman,” [Magua] said, “choose! The wigwam or the knife of Le Subtil!” Cora regarded him not; but dropping on her knees, with rich glow suffusing itself over her features, she raised her eyes and outstretched arms toward heaven, saying in a meek and yet confiding voice – “I am thine! Do with me as thou seest best!” –But Cora neither heard nor heeded [Magua’s] demand. The form of the Huron trembled in every fibre, and he raised his arm on high, but dropped it again, with a wild and bewildered air, like one who doubted. Once more he struggled with himself and lifted his keen weapon again – but a piercing cry was heard from above them, and Uncas appeared, leaping frantically from a fearful height, upon the ledge.⁷⁹

⁷⁹ Cooper, The Last of the Mohicans, as quoted in Parry, “Cooper, Cole, and The Last of the Mohicans,” 183. The painting was available for sale when Cole exhibited it at the National Academy of Design. By the time of Cole’s death in 1848, W. E. Laight owned it according to the catalogue for The
By choosing this particular moment from the narrative, Cole set a stage for two separate fights. Magua threatens Cora, and Uncas threatens Magua.

In the first painting, Cole set the action between the Euro-American Hawkeye and the American Indian Magua. Here, Cole expanded the action to include a clash between the male American Indian Magua and the female Euro-American Cora, and he also included the conflict between the bad American Indian Magua and the good American Indian Uncas. One cannot distinguish the heroic and villainous American Indians based on dress alone. Only their actions from the story give away their nature. Cole set the evil Magua threatening Cora, against the noble Uncas, seen in the background, rushing forward with his hands raised over his head. The viewer knows that Uncas will arrive too late because both Uncas and Cora die in the story. However, Cole chose not to portray the moment of battle between the two American Indians. Instead, he selected a moment of violence between American Indian and Euro-American, using the sense of otherness to exaggerate Magua’s villainy. If Cole portrayed the two American Indians fighting, the viewer probably would be unable to distinguish the good from the bad because Cole depicted their bodies and dress so similarly. Both appear bare-chested and carry a gold-colored sash strung across a shoulder, which most likely serves as a powder-horn strap, but more importantly contrasts and draws attention to their rich brown skin tones. Furthermore, both wear similar red skirt-like loin cloths and feathered headdresses. The

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Exhibition of the Paintings of the Late Thomas Cole, at the Gallery of the American Art Union (New York: Snowden and Prall, 1848), 13, catalogue number 36.

80 Magua turns when he hears Uncas’s approach, and another Indian actually kills Cora (seen behind Magua, also holding a knife). Then Magua kills Uncas.
viewer can only differentiate between them by their actions, assuming a familiarity with the narrative, rather than their physical appearance. Cole’s inclusion of the lengthy quote from the text in the exhibition catalogue ensured that the viewer could then distinguish the different characters.

Cora and Magua’s clothing contrasts in color as well as their skin tones. Cora wears a stark white dress, indicative of her innocence and virtue. However, the whiteness of her dress also implies a contrast between her cultured or civilized background and Magua’s place in the wilderness. Her dress appears unnaturally white. After marching through the forest, it is miraculously devoid of dirt. Instead of any staining from the earth, it reflects the whiteness of the clouds overhead. This whiteness reinforces Cora’s identification as Euro-American even though her racial makeup was more complicated. Magua’s scant clothing, on the other hand, mimics the red from the tree leaves around them; earth tones symbolize his base and carnal passions. Cole used these colors to further distinguish Magua’s American Indian character. Cora appears especially white by contrast.\footnote{Martin A. Berger explains the importance of protagonists in paintings appearing white by their contrast to non-white subjects. “In European-American culture, nonwhites have historically functioned as racial catalysts, transforming whites from individual human figures into symbols of an otherwise unmarked race.” Berger, \textit{Sight Unseen: Whiteness and American Visual Culture} (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 11.} By making Magua so different from Cora, so much more of an Other, Cole heightened the Gothic effect. Magua’s uncivilized difference makes him terrifying to both Cora and viewers alike.
Cole painted two nearly identical versions of Cooper’s narrative in 1827. Both called *Landscape Scene from Last of the Mohicans: Cora Kneeling at the Foot of Tamenund*, they were commissioned by Daniel Wadsworth and Robert Gilmor (Figures 4.6 and 4.7). In both, Cole portrayed the moment when Cora, Alice, Duncan, Hawkeye, and Uncas stand as captives before Tamenund, the Delaware chief. Cora begs for mercy after Tamenund orders that Magua should take her as a wife.

The sexual implications of Cora’s probable rape mark one of *The Last of the Mohicans* most obvious links to European gothic novels, which often used rape or the threat of rape to inspire terror. Here, the Gothic villain Magua threatens to ravish an innocent heroine, similar to the threats of forced marriage in the works of Ann Radcliffe.

Cooper further complicated the sexual tension by implying a mutual interest

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82 Daniel Wadsworth’s version is now in the Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, CT. Robert Gilmor’s version is now in the Fenimore Art Museum, New York State Historical Association, Cooperstown, NY.

83 Beard notes that these two representations are “almost a miracle of fidelity to the scene Cooper imagined.” Beard, “Cooper and His Artistic Contemporaries,” 118.


85 The most candidly described rape in an English gothic novel was Matthew Lewis’s *The Monk* (1796), in which Ambrosio rapes Antonia. However, the threat of rape and forced marriage occur in several gothic novels. For example, in Radcliffe’s *The Romance of the Forest* (1791), the heroine Adeline’s would-be protector Pierre de la
between Cora and Uncas, which again marks a similarity to the works of Radcliffe. In both *The Romance of the Forest*, and *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, Radcliffe described how the heroines Adeline and Emily refuse to accept the men their guardians push on them, not only because of a general revulsion of their evil characters, but also because these women love other men. Similar to Cora, Adeline and Emily love men who they believe that they can never have. In the case of Radcliffe’s heroines, lack of money represents the primary impediment. Cooper articulated race as the obstacle. However, in the works of Radcliffe, fortunes change as characters come into wealth, and both *The Romance of the Forest* and *Mysteries of Udolpho* end with weddings and true love. Cooper, on the other hand, implied that Cora and Uncas could have no future together. Racial differences present an insurmountable social barrier resulting in their only possible ending: death.

More than one hundred American Indians encircle the central action to witness Tamenund’s judgment. They stand on a plateau restricted by massive boulders on one side, and the void of a cliff on the other. The presence of the many American Indians’ bodies forms a barrier similar to the landscape’s natural topography that prevents the heroes’ or heroines’ escape. Like the massive stonewalls of a medieval castle in European gothic novels, the American Indians serve as a formidable impediment to the

Motte tries to force her into a marriage with the Marquis de Montalt. When Adeline refuses, de la Motte allows the Marquis to abduct her. Eliza Parson’s *The Castle of Wolfenbach* (1793) describes how the uncle of the heroine Matilda plans to rape her and thus force her into marriage. In Radcliffe’s, *Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794), Emily’s guardian (her aunt’s husband) attempts to force her to marry Count Morano, who later attempts to abduct her.
protagonists.\textsuperscript{86} Beyond the encircling American Indians, both versions include a daunting rocky landscape that also prevents the escape of the central figures. Cole changed the presentation of the rocks between the two versions. Whereas the Wadsworth version has a large pillar of rocks and a dark rocky mass resembling a cave behind the figures, the Gilmor painting has more large boulders in the foreground and one large boulder directly behind the central action.\textsuperscript{87} Cole visually associated the American Indians and the rocky landscape as they both imprison the story’s figures.

Cole painted the version for Daniel Wadsworth first.\textsuperscript{88} That he completed a nearly identical version for Robert Gilmor helps demonstrate the popularity of the subject

\textsuperscript{86} Castles serve to imprison characters in several English gothic novels, especially in Radcliffe’s \textit{Mysteries of Udolpho}.

\textsuperscript{87} Wallach describes the phallic-looking pillar in the Wadsworth version as evoking “the acute sexual tensions underlying Cooper’s story via the unmistakable symbolism of a huge phallic rock and, adjacent to it, an enormous cave – the latter virtually identical to ‘the cave of birth’ in the first painting of his ‘Voyage of Life’ series” in Wallach, “Thomas Cole: Landscape and the Course of American Empire,” 79. Parry argues that Cole would not have painted a cave on top of a mountain, a geological impossibility. But even if it not an actual cave, it appears to be a very dark shadowy space representing some kind of a void. See Parry, “Cooper, Cole, and \textit{The Last of the Mohicans},” 161. Rebecca Bedell also discusses these two geological formations, writing that the boulder’s threatening position, an example of diluvial drift, alludes to the Indian threat to Cora Munroe in “Thomas Cole and the Fashionable Science,” \textit{The Huntington Library Quarterly} 59, no. 2/3 (1996), 367.

\textsuperscript{88} He worked on Gilmor’s version directly from Wadsworth’s. Wadsworth wrote to Cole asking for the painting back when he finished the second version: “Will you order such a frame for the “Last of the Mohegans” [sic.] as you would like best to see it in, –& send it with the Picture by the Steam Boat, as soon as you have done the Copy [for Robert Gilmor Jr.] entirely to your mind. – and let me know what is the cost, both of the picture & the Frame, & I will send you the money.” Wadsworth to Cole, Hartford, 5 November 1827 in McNulty, ed., \textit{The Correspondence of Thomas Cole and Daniel Wadsworth}, 17.
matter from *The Last of the Mohicans* and its appeal to Cole’s patrons. Cole described the second painting in a letter to Wadsworth:

I have finished the picture for Mr Gilmor, it is not an exact copy, and I think it is better than yours – after you left here I commenced a copy immediately, but found after working at it four days I could not paint it, it was drudgery. I then took a fresh canvass and began another picture varying the composition from yours. I went on with feeling and have not finished it – I have finished a view of the White Mountains for you which I will send with the others. I hope you will be pleased with it – I [shall] be glad to hear that you have succeeded in finishing sketches to your satisfaction, the sight on one of them has given me an idea for a picture which I intend painting – You wished me to get a frame for the Last of the Mohicans – I have done so it pleases me, but I am afraid it may not please you & Mrs Wadsworth. Perhaps I have gone to too high a price perhaps it is not the kind of frame you would like if it does not meet with your entire approbation send it back I can dispose of it – There is a good deal of ornament about it – it is better for the picture on that account as it reflects much light upon it – the picture is much sunk and will not appear to advantage until varnished – I shall be greatly obliged if you can let me have it next Exhibition.  

Cole himself liked the composition, and expressed no hesitancy at painting it a second time. Wadsworth liked it as well. In a letter to the artist, Wadsworth gushed,

Of the “Last of the Mohegans [sic]”, I can hardly express my admiration, the Grand & Magnificent Scenery, – the Distinctness with which every part of it made to stand forward, & speak for itself. – The deep gulf, into which you look from real precipices, – The heavenly serenity of the firmament, contrasted with the savage grandure, & wild Dark masses of the Lower World, – whose higher pinnacles only, catch a portion, of the soft lights where all seems peace, – The calm & lovely lake, which seems to lead the eye to regions far, far, off – till it is lost among the pale blue mountains, & “is left to stretch on to infinitude” – And all these objects so exquisitely finished, that it appears as if each one had been the object of particular care, – blending the Whole perfectly – rendering it at once to hold you so soft, – so striking yet so harmonious – that seen near, as at a moderate distance it gives equal pleasure. – You speak of “Varnishing The

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“Picture” do you mean The White Mountains or the – “Mohegans” – it seems to me that nothing can improve the last.\textsuperscript{90}

That sense of infinitude in the far distances of the landscape, combined with the savage grandeur of the mountains and wilderness help further express the aesthetics of the sublime. Just as the narrative moment that Cole chose to paint epitomizes Gothic tropes with the theme of ravishment and terrifying villains, so too the landscape with its immense and overwhelming mountains reinforces the feelings of terror and awe necessary for the Gothic.

Cole painted a fifth, now unlocated landscape based on Cooper’s Leatherstocking tales, commissioned by Cooper himself for the English poet, Samuel Rogers.\textsuperscript{91}

\textsuperscript{90} Wadsworth to Cole, Hartford, 4 December 1827 in McNulty, ed., \textit{The Correspondence of Thomas Cole and Daniel Wadsworth}, 22 – 23.

\textsuperscript{91} After Samuel Rogers’s death in 1856, the painting, item 631, was sold by Christie and Manson, London, on May 3, 1856. A copy of the sales catalogue at the Boston Athenaeum, Boston, MA includes handwritten annotations in the margins listing the buyers’ names and purchase prices. Cole’s painting was sold to Hyde, Esq. for eleven pounds. It was Hyde’s only purchase at the auction. Christie and Manson, \textit{Catalogue of the Very Celebrated Collection of Works of Art, the Property of Samuel Rogers, Esq., Deceased, Comprising Ancient and Modern Pictures; Drawings and Engravings; Egyptian, Greek, and roman Antiquities; Greek Vases; Marbles, Bronzes, and Terra-cottas, and Coins; Also, the Extensive Library, Copies of Rogers’s Poems, Illustrated; the Small Service of Plate and Wine} (London: Clowes and Sons, 1856), 60, item 631. Unfortunately, the trail goes cold after Hyde’s purchase.

Note that Cooper initially commissioned a painting from Cole in 1827 through Charles Wilkes as intermediary, while Cooper was in Europe. It remains unclear if Cooper intended this painting to be for Samuel Rogers or for himself. He possibly originally intended the painting for himself, and then later decided that Rogers should be its recipient as Cooper was wary of such a large expenditure. Wilkes wrote to Cooper: “Cole has not painted your picture, or if he ever painted one intended for you he has dispatched of it, by which you will be a gainer for he is very much improved. I read to him what you said in your letter & I told him that whenever he had a picture ready for you, I would take to & have it transmitted to you, and so I left it. He is anxious to make a
sent his commission to Cole through Charles Wilkes, a mutual acquaintance from New York.92

Will you tell Cole to take a subject of his own, I should like it to be as near as possible without being a copy of the picture of Mr. Hone, and put something into it, that he may call the Leatherstocking, and paint the thing in the course of the summer. I do not want the autumn leaf. A little sunshine and shadow are more to my taste. This picture I wished packed, carefully, and sent to Samuel Rogers, Esquire, (Pleasures of Memory Man) St. James’ Place London. Will you pay for it, retaining enough of my money for that purpose.93

picture to please you & I believe would like to wait until your return, in which however I did not encourage him. Whenever he is ready, I will pay him & we can afterwards arrange the repayment. By the way, he has raised his price to at least fifty dollars & if the picture is a large one, he gets twice as much – He has orders to employ him for twelve months to come. I am very glad at his success for he is very modest & unassuming, very anxious to impress & very little satisfied with what he has yet done, feeling the aspirations [page torn] & conscious that he can [?] it do better…” Wilkes to Cooper, 29 December 1827, James Fenimore Cooper Collection, Beinecke Rare Books and Manuscript Library, Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut (hereafter referred to as Cooper Collection).

After Cole’s death in 1848, Cooper described the Rogers’ painting’s commission, and how he was unable to make a purchase for himself: “While in England in 1828, I requested Mr. Charles Wilkes to order a picture for me from Cole, and to send it to Rogers, the well-known poet. This was done. The picture, I presume, is still in Mr. Rogers’ possession, though I rather think not considered one of the painter's best. My means have never allowed me to employ artists as I could wish to do, a large and expensive family requiring most of my spare cash. Had it been otherwise, I could have found great satisfaction in possessing works from the pencil of Cole.” Cooper to Noble, 6 January 1849, in Cooper, Letters and Journals, vol. 5, 396.

92 Wilkes purchased Cole’s 1828 painting The Garden of Eden.

93 Cooper to Wilkes, London, 7 May 1828, in Cooper, Letters and Journals, vol. 1, 263. Philip Hone’s painting, to which Cooper referred, is Lake with Dead Trees, 1825, now in the Allen Memorial Art Museum, Oberlin College, Oberlin, OH. Rogers wrote the poem The Pleasures of Memory in 1792.
According to Wilkes, Cole meant to deliver the painting to Rogers in person during his trip to Europe the following year.94 The exact subject of the painting remains uncertain, but Cole at least considered it a scene from Last of the Mohicans at some point in the process:

Mr Cooper has written about his picture & wishes one similar to Mr Hones Dead Tree Lake – and consequently the picture you saw here will not suit him – The picture if you recollect was intended to be a scene from the Last of the Mohicans but I am going to change the foreground entirely & make another subject of it – when it is done – if you think proper I will send it to Hartford & if your friend [Alfred Smith] is pleased with [it] he may take it, if not I shall be satisfied. It will be entirely different from your picture.95

Therefore, the picture Cole painted in November 1827, as he described to Wadsworth, differed from the painting that he actually shipped to England, because he felt it was not similar enough to Hone’s painting Lake with Dead Trees. However, Cole clearly indicated that he intended the painting for Rogers be a scene from The Last of the Mohicans. When Cole completed the work for Rogers, Wilkes wrote a detailed description of the painting to Cooper:

Leatherstocking is introduced climbing a hill near the center of the picture, I think, beckoning to his companion to follow him & the whole is a kind of cento, composed of real views taken from nature & well joined

94 Wilkes wrote to Cooper, New York, 30 September 1828: “Cole is just now at Boston – when he returns, I will urge him. If he goes to Europe as he intended, he shall carry the picture and deliver it to Mr. Rogers, and if he abandons the voyage for this year, I will press him to finish and send it. He has your directions given to him in writing.” Cooper Collection. Also reproduced in Cooper, Correspondence of James Fenimore Cooper, ed. his grandson, James Fenimore Cooper, vol. 1 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1922), 154.

95 Cole to Wadsworth, New York, 10 November 1828 in McNulty, ed., The Correspondence of Thomas Cole and Daniel Wadsworth, 49.
together. I think this was as judicious because it is a merit, as an American picture that it should be a real portrait of American scenery. I objected to one or two trees, of which I did not like the shape, but I withdrew my criticism when he showed me an original sketch from nature of the very trees.  

The only other description comes from the sale catalogue of Rogers’s estate, which describes the overall landscape “A Romantic American valley, with Indians crossing a bridge over a cataract: grand effect of an approaching storm. *A Scene from Cooper’s “Prairie.” Purchased by Mr. Rogers from the artist.*” Most likely, the catalogue misidentified which of Cooper’s stories the painting represented, just as it misidentified the artist as “F. Cole” rather than Thomas Cole. Neither *The Last of the Mohicans* nor *The Prairie* specifically mentions a bridge, but both do mention streams or rivers. It therefore remains unclear which narrative moment Cole chose to paint even if he

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96 Wilkes to Cooper, New York, 14 February 1829, Cooper Collection.

97 Christie and Manson, *Catalogue of the Very Celebrated Collection of Works of Art, the Property of Samuel Rogers, Esq. Deceased; Comprising Ancient and Modern Pictures; Drawings and Engravings; Egyptian, Greek, and Roman Antiquities; Greek Vases; Marbles, Bronzes, and Terra-Cottas, and Coins; Also, the Extensive Library; Copies of Rogers’s Poems, Illustrated; the Small Service of Plate and Wine* (London: Clowes and Sons, 1856), 60. A second catalogue was published with just the lot numbers, purchaser’s name, and price: Christie and Manson, *Catalogue of the Celebrated Collection of Works of Art and Vertù, Comprising Ancient and Modern Pictures, Drawings and Engravings, Egyptian, Greek and Roman Antiquities, Vases, Marbles, Bronzes, Terra-cottas, Greek and Roman coins; the Extensive Library, Service of Plate, and Furniture; the Property of the Late Samuel Rogers, Esq.* (London: J. H. Burn, 1856), 16.

98 Dimond explains that it could represent the moment from *The Last of the Mohicans* when Natty leads the Delaware warriors along a stream while en route to rescue Cora from Magua. Dimond, 114.
originally intended it to represent *The Last of the Mohicans.* However, regardless of any presumed narrative context, Cole’s painting probably looked similar to the first four. By including both Leatherstocking and American Indians in a wild landscape, he presented a landscape removed from contemporary viewers’ experiences. Not only would the American Indians present a frightening danger, but also the cataract and approaching storm lend an additional element of the sublime. Furthermore, for an Englishman who had not visited the United States, the scene must have appeared even more wild and unobtainable than it would have to Cole’s American public, some of whom may have remembered the wilderness prior to the extensive development of the Hudson River valley. Even without seeing the actual painting, we can assume that this distancing effect, combined with the aesthetics of the sublime, lent a similar gothic novel quality to the painting as the first four.

All five paintings based on *The Last of the Mohicans* differ from Cole’s other work because they include both figures of American Indians and Euro-Americans. The presence of Euro-Americans, the figures of Cora and Alice Munroe, Duncan Heyward, and Nathaniel Bumppo, provide a stand in or surrogate for the viewer. They enable Euro-American viewers to imagine themselves participating in the action, drama, and excitement just as readers connect with the protagonists in gothic fiction.

Cole painted one other landscape that included both Euro-American and American Indians: *Chocorua’s Curse* (Figure 4.8). Completed in 1828, but now

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99 It is also possible that Cole did not paint any specific moment from any of Cooper’s stories. It could simply represent a more generic image of Leatherstocking and some assortment of Indians in the wilderness.
unlocated, we know the painting only through an engraving by George W. Hatch that appeared in *The Token, A Christmas and New Year’s Present* in 1830. The engraving of Cole’s painting appeared along with a story about Chocorua by Lydia Maria Child. In that story, Chocorua’s son died by accidental poisoning, and Chocorua blamed the neighboring whites for his loss. He then murdered the family he believed responsible. In revenge, the whites killed Chocorua. Child’s story tells Chocorua’s tale from the point of view of the Euro-Americans, who lived in fear of American Indians in the “olden times” of colonial settlement. Its tone reads very differently from the narrative Cole wrote, “The Death of Chocorua.” In Cole’s narrative, Chocorua becomes the victimized hero murdered by Euro-Americans. Much like English gothic novels that cast the villains out of traditionally trusted figure types, such as priests or family members, Cole turned the characters more familiar to his Euro-American audience into the villains. He described them as “monsters; they delighted in the shedding of blood,” who “brandished their weapons of death and with cruel deliberation took aim at his [Chocorua’s]

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100 *The Token, A Christmas and New Year’s Present* 3 (Boston, 1830), 257.

101 Lydia Maria Child, “Chocorua’s Curse,” *The Token, A Christmas and New Year’s Present* 3 (Boston, 1830), 257 – 265.

102 Child, 258.

103 Dimond argues that symbolically, the hunters represent the greater strength and moral turpitude of popular democracy as it assailed the noble savage. He notes that because the painting appeared in in the election year of 1828, Chocorua represented the martyred victim as an attack on Andrew Jackson and Jacksonian democracy. Dimond, 159 – 165. Cole may have indeed intended the painting to carry such political ideals. However, it also connected the hunters to the confusing villains of the European gothic novels.
defenseless bosom.” The painted version marks the moment just after the hunter fired his gun and Chocorua fell. Afterwards, “the dying man half raised from the rock, cast a withering gazing on his murderers, & uttered a fearful malediction.” Chocorua sits up very much like the first or second century BCE Dying Gaul. The hunter who fired his gun still looks towards his victim, while another behind him turns to flee in fear of the power of the dying American Indian’s curse; the actions of the hunters are the actions of cowards.

Cole’s landscapes with scenes of conflict between Euro-Americans and American Indians, as well as his paintings of American Indians in the landscape, emphasize the surrounding wilderness. In Chocorua’s Curse, the view of the surrounding mountains appears just as sublime as in his written narrative.

The state of N Hampshire is a land of beauty & sublimity. Its forests lakes and wild mountains are thrown together like a heap of jewels, in which gem reflects its beauty on gem. In the picturesque chain of the Sandwich Mountains, the eye of the traveler rests upon one peak that towers preeminently. It rises from the wooded plain, high amidst the solitude of heaven; an eternal pyramid of unhewn granite and the pride of Giza or Babel’s architectural mount man’s noblest efforts; wants sink into nothingness by the side of this mighty work of the Great Architect.

Cole also painted a group of very different landscapes that included only Euro-Americans in the landscapes. But whereas his paintings with American Indians emphasize the wild

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104 Cole, “The Death of Chocorua.”
105 Cole, “The Death of Chocorua.”
106 Dimond explains that Cole compared Chocorua to Dying Gaul just as he compared Andrew Jackson to Caesar. Dimond, 159.
107 Cole, “The Death of Chocorua.”
nature of the setting, the scenes with hunters and farmers appear less wild. Cole’s images of American Indians alone in the wilderness differ from those of only Euro-American men in the wilderness due to the American Indians’ ability to relate harmoniously to their surroundings. Several paintings show Euro-Americans in a frontier wilderness setting. Here settlers build log cabins, carry axes, and clear the land for crops, such as in *Landscape*, 1825, in which a man chops wood clearing the land around his home for settlement and civilization (Figure 4.9). These kinds of landscapes appear safe; the settlers control their surrounding environment and impose order upon it, therefore negating any dangers. The American Indians, on the other hand, exist in an undomesticated natural world. That wilderness appears sublime to a civilized Euro-American audience for it contains the dangers and terrors of nature as well as American Indians. Cole visually emphasized these potentially dangerous threats just as the gothic romance writers used these same devices to terrify readers through written words.

Instead of blending in with their surroundings, these Euro-American men impose themselves upon the landscape, transforming it in their efforts to cultivate the wilderness.

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108 Cole’s paintings of Euro-Americans in a frontier wilderness setting include: *Cattle with Distant Mountains* (1822), Farnsworth Museum, Rockland, ME; *Landscape* (1825), Minneapolis Institute of Arts, Minneapolis, MN; *Daniel Boone at his Cabin at Great Osage Lake* (1826), Mead Art Museum, Amherst, MA; *View of L’Esperance on the Schoharie River* (1826), private collection; *View Near the Village of Catskill* (1827), De Young Fine Arts Museum of San Francisco, San Francisco, CA; *A View of the Mountain Pass Called the Notch of the White Mountains (Crawford Notch)* (1839), National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.; *The Hunter’s Return* (1845), Amon Carter Museum, Fort Worth, TX; *Genessee Scenery* (1847), Memorial Art Gallery of the University of Rochester, Rochester, NY; and *Home in the Woods* (1847), Reynolda House Museum of American Art, Winston-Salem, NC. For a discussion of Cole’s paintings of Euro-American frontiersmen, see: Parry, “Thomas Cole’s *The Hunter’s Return*,” 2 – 17.
Cole disapproved of these civilizing practices that left the landscape so altered. In his painted landscapes and writings, Cole repeated the motif of a man using an ax to chop wood in the forest several times to represent Euro-Americans’ regrettable destructive impact on the wilderness. For example, Landscape, 1825, depicts a man chopping wood. A brick mill with water wheel stands in the background, and the surrounding land portrays evidence of clearing. Euro-American frontiersmen improved upon the land, prepared it for farming, and provided the means for building permanent structures, just as Benjamin Rush had outlined when describing his “species of settlers” in the previous century. To improve upon and civilize the landscape, they had to destroy its wildness. By making the landscape tame, the process of civilization removed the frightening effects of the wilderness, thereby removing its Gothic qualities. In another example, The Hunter’s Return, 1845, Cole created a scene of comfort by removing the wilderness’s threats, including the threat of American Indians (Figure 4.10). He enhanced that feeling of complacency by including a snug log cabin with smoke curling from its chimney. That comfort came at a price: tree stumps surround the cabin, evidence of the violent destruction of the landscape. The process of taming the wilderness required its annihilation.

In addition to painted lamentations, his 1834 poem, “On seeing that a favorite tree of the Author’s had been cut down” bemoans the loss of the forest and humankind’s destructive nature:

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And is the glory of the forest dead?
Struck down? Its beauteous foliage spread
On the base earth? O! ruthless was the deed
Destroying man! What demon urg’d the speed
Of thine unpitying axe? Didst though not know
My heart was wounded by each savage blow?
Could not the loveliness that did begird
These boughs disarm thine hand and save the bird
Its ancient home and me a lasting joy!
Vain is my plaint! All that I love must die.
But death sometimes leaves hope – friends may yet meet
And life be fed on expectation sweet –
But here no hope survives; again shall spread o’er me
Never the gentle shade of my beloved tree.110

Cole’s choice of words describes a lack of hope for the future as well as regret for past destruction. He loved the tree and mourned its loss to the savage ax. The Last of the Mohicans paintings look to that lost past where the trees, like the people, disappeared.

At the end of The Last of the Mohicans, Chingachgook remains as the last of the fictitious Mohican people. Just like the wilderness and the tree from Cole’s poem, the advancement of civilization obliterated Chingachgook’s race. Part of a past that no longer existed for Cooper’s or Cole’s audience, the Mohicans parallel the Gothic castles of European gothic novels. Cole’s representations of the American Indian in a landscape that still appears wild produces images far removed from his contemporary urban viewers.111 This effect of distance helps to relate Cole’s The Last of the Mohicans


111 Note that the first version was available to urbanites en route to Albany on board The Albany. Daniel Wadsworth’s version hung at the National Academy of Design exhibition in 1828, the same year Cole painted it. Dr. David Hasack submitted the study for the second version to the National Academy of Design exhibition in 1831.
landscape paintings to the gothic novel that inspired him. Both Cooper’s novel and Cole’s painted versions of the narrative follow the same tropes as European gothic novels. Neither Cooper nor Cole needed to represent actual Gothic architecture to produce this general effect of the Gothic. Instead, they wove the Gothic into their art forms through the use of distance, nostalgia for an unobtainable past, and the aesthetics of the sublime.
Chapter 5

HISTORY AND RUIN

In 1835, while working on the series of paintings *The Course of Empire* for his
friend and patron Luman Reed, Thomas Cole wrote in his journal about his fears for the
future of the United States of America.

Americans are too fond of attributing the great prosperity of their country
to their own good government instead of seeing the source of it in the
unbounded resources & favorable political opportunities of the nation. It
is with sorrow that I anticipate the downfall of this republican experiment –
its destruction will be a death blow to Freedom. For if the Free
government of the U States cannot exist a century where shall we turn?
The hope of the wise & the good will have perished – and the scenes of
tyrranny & wrong, blood & oppressions, as have been acted since the world
was created – will be again performed as long as man exists. There is no
perfectibility in this world. Evil seems necessary for the production of
good and good is like a stream flowing swiftly towards a precipice &
dashes down the tumultuous waters below are the same as those above.
But those above in the smooth stream are pure those below are turbid –
may my fears be foolish – a few years will tell.¹

Cole based his warning for America’s future collapse on his belief that history progresses
in cycles; every civilization that rises must ultimately fall. Visually, Cole portrayed
history’s cycles and civilization’s inevitable rise and fall in a widely viewed series of five
paintings entitled *The Course of Empire* as well as a number of paintings representing
classical and Gothic architectural ruins.² Those paintings of ruins depict the fall of

¹ Thomas Cole, journal entry, 21 August 1835, Cole Papers.

² While there may be more, I have identified twenty-three paintings of medieval ruins
by Thomas Cole. They include: *Newstead Abbey* (unfinished study for *Newstead Abbey*
at Sunrise (1830), private collection; Newstead Abbey, Sunrise (1830), unlocated; Aqueduct Near Rome (1832), Mildred Lane Kemper Art Museum, Washington University, St. Louis, MO; Landscape Composition, Italian Scenery (1832), Memorial Art Gallery of the University of Rochester, Rochester, NY; Ruined Castle and River (1832), Brooklyn Museum, Brooklyn, NY; Ruined Tower (1832), Albany Institute of History and Art, Albany, NY; Salvator Rosa Sketching Banditti (c. 1832), Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, MA; Landscape: Moonlight (1833), New-York Historical Society, New York, NY; Ruined Tower door panel (1836), Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, CT; Genevieve (1828), private collection; Italian Coast Scene with Ruined Tower (1838), National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.; The Present (1838), Mead Art Museum, Amherst, MA; Tower with Moonlight (1839), private collection; Landscape with Tower in Ruin (1839), Currier Museum of Art, Manchester, NH; Tower Landscape (1839), George G. McMurray Collection; Ruins of Kenilworth Castle (1841), Worth B. Stottlemeyer Collection, Juniata College Museum, Huntingdon, PA; Study for Ruins of Kenilworth Castle, England (1842 – 1843), private collection; Ruins of Kenilworth Castle (1843), unlocated; Italian Autumn (1844), Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, MA; Italian Autumn (1845), Spanierman Gallery, New York, NY (this is a copy of the same subject currently in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston); Il Penseroso (1845), Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles, CA; Part of the Ruins of Kenilworth Castle, England (1846), Samuel T. Freeman & Co., Philadelphia, PA; and Gothic Ruins at Sunset (c. 1847), Kennedy Galleries, Inc., New York, NY.

Cole also painted at least twenty-two paintings of classical ruins: A View Near Tivoli (1832), Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY; Aqueduct Near Rome (1832), Washington University Gallery, St. Louis, MO; Compositional Study for the Ruins of the Temples of Paestum (1832), private collection; Interior of the Colosseum, Rome (1832), Albany Institute of History and Art, Albany, NY; The Cascatelli, Tivoli, Looking Towards Rome (1832), Columbus Museum of Art, Columbus, OH; View of the Temple of Paestum (1832), private collection; Fountain of Egeria (1833), unlocated; Italian Scene Composition (1833), New-York Historical Society, New York, NY; Course of Empire: Destruction (1836), New-York Historical Society, New York, NY; Course of Empire: Desolation (1836), New-York Historical Society, New York, NY; Italian Landscape (1839), Butler Institute of American Art, Youngstown, OH; Mount Etna, IBM Corporation, Armonk, NY; Temple of Segesta with the Artist Sketching (1842), Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, MA; Ruins of the Temples of Agrigentum (1843), unlocated; Mount Etna from Taormina (1843), Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, CT; Roman Campagna (1843), Wadsworth Athenæum, Hartford, CT; Mount Etna from Taormina (1844), Lyman Allen Art Museum, New London, CT; The Vale and Temple of Segesta, Sicily (1844), The New-York Historical Society, New York, NY; L’Allegro (1845), Los Angeles County Museum, Los Angeles, CA; Arch of Nero (1846), Newark Museum, Newark, NJ; Campagna die Roma and Torri di Schiave (1846), unlocated; and Column of Ancient Syracuse (unknown date), unlocated.
different civilizations: ancient Greece, Imperial Rome, and the medieval period. This chapter explores how Cole applied his understanding of cyclical history and associationist theory to landscapes of classical and Gothic ruins in order to show how cultures rose and fell, then rose and fell again. Cole thought that people cause this unavoidable cyclical course of history, because people create culture and therefore ultimately bring about their own ruin. In America, Cole believed that civilization measured in terms of nationalism was advancing quickly to its peak, and he dreaded the inevitable national fall into oblivion.

This chapter begins by examining the origins of the cyclical theory of history and compares it to other prominent theories of history and progress. It then presents a thorough analysis of Cole’s paintings of ruins that exhibit these theories of history. While other scholars address aspects of both his classical and Gothic ruins paintings, no study concentrates on this group as a whole. Cole’s representations of both classical and medieval architectural ruins demonstrate civilization’s rise and fall. However, the two styles held different meanings for him: one stood for a pagan civilization, the other for Christianity. This chapter addresses these differences in order to contextualize Cole’s attitudes toward the Gothic. By painting both classical and Gothic ruins, Cole meant to remind his American viewers that not just pagan, but Christian cultures too would fall.

Unlike the painting *The Architect’s Dream*, which portrays a variety of architectural styles at their peak, Cole’s images of ruins stand as testaments to past cultures that reached their climax and then slipped away. In the ruins paintings, Cole

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3 Chapter 2 discusses Cole’s 1840 painting *The Architect’s Dream*. 

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showed past architectural styles and specific buildings as they appeared in his own time.
Therefore, these works communicate a sense of acquired historical change. Their ruinous
state serves as a patina of history gained over time. That sense of historical
transformation functions as a reminder to viewers that all things change over time. By
examining Cole’s paintings of ruins, this chapter demonstrates how not only the
monuments of yesterday fell into ruin, but also, Cole believed, the splendors of his day
would ultimately collapse as well.

Cole’s belief in history’s cycles followed a long tradition. The cyclical theory of
history maintains that societies continuously rise and fall as they either observe or
disregard God’s law.\(^4\) Many seventeenth-century naturalists based their belief in
history’s cyclical nature on theories of denudation and the decay of nature; just as water
and wind eroded the earth, so too human sin spoiled the world causing its corrosion.\(^5\)

\(^4\) For scholarship on the cyclical theory of history, see Rutherford E. Delmage, “The
Society* 91 (1947), 307 – 314; Arthur Alphonse Ekirch, *The Idea of Progress in America,
1815 – 1860* (New York: P. Smith, 1944); James William Johnson, “What was Neo-
Classicism?” *Journal of British Studies* 9, no. 1 (1969), 49 – 70; Edwin A. Miles, “The
Young American Nation and the Classical World,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 35, no.
Century America,” *American Quarterly* 6, no. 2 (1954), 147 – 163; Wallach, “Cole,
Byron, and the Course of Empire,” *Art Bulletin* 50, no. 4 (December 1968), 375 – 379;

\(^5\) The theory of the decay of nature is an old one. St. Cyprian wrote in the third century
about the decay of nature. See Ernest Lee Tuveson, *Millennium and Utopia: A Study in
L. Davies explains how seventeenth-century writers, such as Robert Hooke, Sir Matthew
Hale, Richard Bentley, and Thomas Burnet believed that nature’s degeneracy parallels a
decadent universe in Davies, “The Concept of Denudation in Seventeenth-Century
However, while followers of a philosophy of denudation believed that nature existed in a perpetual state of decay, believers in cyclical history trusted that new civilizations would periodically rise and develop. They believed in essence in an endless cycle of life.

Eighteenth-century writers, such as Jonathan Swift, Edward Wortley Montagu, James Bowdoin, and Henry Saint-John Bolingbroke continued to assume a cyclical basis for history disseminating the idea further through popular novels and histories. The theory

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6 In the third voyage of Jonathan Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels*, Gulliver hears about the immortal Struldbrugs. Their immortality, according to Gulliver and Swift, allows them to circumvent history’s cycles. Specifically, it “would probably prevent that continual Degeneracy of human Nature, so justly complained of in all Ages.” Swift, *Gulliver’s Travels* (1726; repr. New York: Signet, 1960), 225.

Edward Wortley Montagu wrote about history’s cycles in an effort to warn his contemporaries of their probable fall. “Unhappily, the resemblance between the manners of our own times, and the manners of those republicks in their most degenerate periods, is, in many respects, so striking that unless the words in the original were produced as vouchers, any well-meaning reader, unacquainted with those historians, would be apt to treat the descriptions of those periods, which he may frequently meet with, as licentious, undistinguished satire upon the present age.” Montagu, *Reflections on the Rise and Fall of the Ancient Republics Adapted to the Present State of Great Britain* (1759; repr. London, 1806), vi.

Delmage explains that eighteenth-century Americans looked to James Bowdoin’s “A Philosophical Discourse, Publickly Addressed to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, in Boston, on the Eight of November, 1780: When the President was Inducted into Office” for their interpretation of history’s cycles. See Delmage, “The American Idea of Progress, 1750 – 1800,” 313. Bowdoin wrote: “It is very pleasing and instructive – to recur back to the early ages of mankind, and trace the progressive state of nations and empires, from infancy to maturity, to old age, and dissolution: – to observe their
became especially popular during the Enlightenment with the neo-classicists, who looked to classical historians, such as Diodorus Siculus and Pliny the Elder, for inspiration.\footnote{Johnson discusses neo-classicists, such as Oliver Goldsmith, who refer to classical historians when considering history as a cycle of generation and degeneration in “What was Neo-Classicism?”}

After the discovery of the New World, many prior believers in cyclical history hoped that with the newly discovered land, so too a new a-historical era could commence. Seen by many seventeenth-century colonials as a new Garden of Eden, the Americas presented the chance for humankind to start over in grace, free of history’s inevitable

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origin, their growth, and improvements, their different governments and laws, their variant customs and religion: – to observe the progress of the arts among them, which at first were few and rude, suggested by their wants and necessities, but gradually increasing in number and perfection, in proportion to the enlargement of the community, and as the culture of them was encouraged: – to observe the rise and gradual advancement of civilization, of science, of wealth, elegance, and politeness, until they had obtained the summit of their greatness: – to observe at this period the principle of mortality, produced by affluence and luxury, beginning to operate in them: manifesting itself with greater or less vigour in a variety of ways; and finally terminating in their dissolution, brought upon them by the vices attendant on luxury.” Bowdoin’s address appeared in Memoirs of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences 1 (1783), 1 – 20. Merritt also refers to Bowdoin’s “Discourse” as a probable source of inspiration for Thomas Cole’s understanding of cyclical history. Merritt, “A Wild Scene: Genesis of a Painting,” 31.

Lord Bolingbroke especially applied the cyclical course of history to governments when he wrote, “The best instituted governments, like the best constituted animal bodies, carry in them the seeds of their destruction: and tho they grow and improve for a time, they will soon tend visibly to their dissolution. Every hour they live is an hour the less that they have to live. All that can be done therefore to prolong the duration of a good government, is to draw it back, on every favorable occasion, to the first good principles on which it was founded. When these occasions happen often, and are well improved, such governments are prosperous and durable. When they happen seldom, or are ill improved, these political bodies live in pain or in languor, and die soon.” Henry Saint-John Bolingbroke, Letters on the Spirit of Patriotism: on the Idea of a Patriot King and on the State of Parties, at the Accession of King George the First (London: A. Miller, 1749), 136.
cycles. Similarly, many nineteenth-century American novels address America as a figure of Adam before the fall. Indeed, James Fenimore Cooper’s Leatherstocking novels as a whole address this myth by portraying the corruption of the wilderness and American Indians on the part of European civilization. However, while Americans might see themselves as a new version of Adam or Eve living in the Garden of Eden in the American wilderness, the actions of the settlers themselves decide whether they

8 David Lowenthal describes how these colonial Americans believed themselves to be “a chosen people destined to complete the Reformation and to restore a prelapsarian state of grace.” The Past is a Foreign Country (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 109.


9 Lewis discusses how Hawthorne’s The Marble Faun and Herman Melville’s Billy Budd present the myth of the American Adam. See Lewis, The American Adam, 6.

10 David Noble writes that the American Adam should exist in harmony with nature, unrestricted by history and culture in “Cooper, Leatherstocking and the Death of the American Adam,” American Quarterly 16, no. 3 (1964), 420.

For more on the American Adam myth, see Chapter 4, Note 42.
would maintain that state of grace; if they err, they too would fall.\textsuperscript{11} John Winthrop presented such a warning in his sermon entitled “On the Modell of Christianity Charity,” written aboard the ship \textit{Arabella} in 1630 before settling the Massachusetts Bay Colony. He preached the belief that by creating a new society dedicated to God, the settlers would live in God’s grace, but if they ever abandoned their covenant, they would receive God’s wrath:

\begin{quote}
  The Lord will be our God, and delight to dwell among us, as his oune people, and will command a blessing upon us in all our wayes… The eies of all people are uppon us. Soe that if wee shall deale falsely with our God in this worke wee have undertaken, and soe cause him to withdrawe his present help from us, wee shall be made a story and a by-word through the world.\textsuperscript{12}
\end{quote}

Unfortunately for the early covenant communities, colonists experienced such hardships as Indian wars, extreme weather, and crop failures. These adversities, they believed, must have come from an angry God as punishment for their sins.\textsuperscript{13} Their struggles served as a constant reminder of their need to work to try to maintain a paradisiacal existence.

Therefore, they believed that they, as Americans, determined whether they lived in Eden or slipped back into the decadent European cycle of history.

The political turmoil of the mid- and later-eighteenth century dispelled the belief in America’s Edenic nature for many. During this period, two variations of a theory of

\textsuperscript{11} James Fenimore Cooper poignantly reminded his readers of humankind’s role as the spoiler of Eden in \textit{The Crater or Vulcan’s Peak} (1847) and \textit{Wyandotté} (1843).

\textsuperscript{12} John Winthrop, “A Modell of Christian Charity” (1630), printed in \textit{Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society} 3\textsuperscript{rd} Series, 7 (1838), 47.

\textsuperscript{13} Perry Miller explains the early colonials’ beliefs and disappointments in “Errand into the Wilderness,” \textit{The William and Mary Quarterly} 10, no. 1 (1953), 8 – 9.
progress became especially popular. The first, popularized in America by Benjamin Rush, considered the theory of savages, progress, and civilization. Based on his study of American Indians, and Euro-American settlers in Pennsylvania, Rush believed that historical progress advanced from one stage of development to the next, from savagism to civilization. This progression aimed ultimately to reach an agrarian, pastoral Golden Age, when humankind might both benefit from civilization as well as leading natural lives similar to those Rush believed the American Indians, or savages, led. This theory looked to a Golden Age in the future that also utilized parts of humanity’s past. The other theory of progress, based on the works of English philosophers William Godwin, 


15 Rush believed it was the American Indian’s “natural” lifestyle that contributed to their better childhood mortality rates and lack of “artificial diseases” such as smallpox or venereal diseases. He wrote “Let our children be educated in a manner more agreeable to nature.” Rush, “Medicine Among the Indians of North America,” 289. Cole did not make any reference to Rush’s theories, however, Rush’s status as an important American theorist, physician, as well as signer of the Declaration of Independence, meant he was a very prominent and well-known figure at the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth centuries. Even if Cole were not aware of Rush, Rush’s theories were well accepted by his contemporaries, and Cole probably understood their import. For a discussion of Rush’s influence, see L. H. Butterfield, “The Reputation of Benjamin Rush,” Pennsylvania History 17, no. 1 (1950), 2 – 22.

Other similar ideas of progress as a continual sequential development of improvement included positivism and progressivism. Positivism and the followers of Auguste Comte hold the law of three stages. Humanity passes through three successive stages: the theological, metaphysical, and positive stages. See Mary Pickering, “Auguste Comte and the Saint-Simonians,” French Historical Studies 18, no. 1 (1993), 211 – 236. Progressivists, such as Henry More or Thomas Burnet, believed that progress signifies improvement, moving along a course of historical perfectibility. See Tuveson, Millennium and Utopia: A Study in the Background of the Idea of Progress.
Adam Ferguson, and Adam Smith followed a line of progress from simple to increasingly complex systems of culture and civilization. This theory looked to a future that would be different and better than both the past and the present.¹⁶

After the Revolutionary War, many Americans believed that the founding of the new democratic republic marked a break with previous theories of progress. It indicated the beginning of a new age, the millennium, which might break free once and for all of history’s cycles.¹⁷ Based on Biblical prophecy, millennialism encompassed the belief in the impending Apocalypse preceding a thousand-year reign of peace.¹⁸ The millennium of peace eventually would result in the final judgment of humanity and the enduring reign of a new heavenly Jerusalem.¹⁹ Because of its basis in scripture, believers felt that this


¹⁸ Revelation 20:4 – 10 explains the millennium and Apocalypse.

¹⁹ Revelation 21 – 22 explains the New Heaven and New Jerusalem.
new Eden fell outside history’s normally repetitive or cyclical nature. Therefore, the millennium in America meant the chance to break free of the cycle forever.

As popular as these ideas of progress and millennialism were, however, Cole did not believe in them. Cole associated the millennialists, with their noisy and intense camp meetings, with democratic mobs. Politically, he identified with the Federalist aristocracy; many of his earliest patrons were members of this group, including John Trumbull, Stephen Van Rensselaer, and Daniel Wadsworth. Cole also became increasingly involved in the Episcopal Church, which closely aligned itself with the Federalists as well. Cole, like the Federalists and later Whigs, saw America’s Democratic Party, especially under the leadership of Andrew Jackson, tragically following history’s cycles. He feared that America would follow the precedent of prior European civilizations, such as the fall of ancient Greece and Rome, because, according

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21 Wallach describes Cole’s Federalist beliefs and patrons in “Thomas Cole and the Aristocracy,” 82 – 89.


23 Wallach writes that Cole’s *The Course of Empire: Consummation of Empire* “suggested democracy sliding into demagogy and mob rule” in “Thomas Cole and the Aristocracy,” 90.
to his religious beliefs, humankind was inherently sinful.\textsuperscript{24} Writing to an American audience in 1844 in \textit{The Knickerbocker, or New-York Monthly Magazine} about classical architectural ruins in Sicily, especially the ancient Greek temples, Cole drew a parallel between the downfall of ancient civilizations and America’s future.\textsuperscript{25} He warned Americans especially that pride leads to destruction.

Another lesson we may learn from the fate of ancient states: It is to beware of presumptuous pride and overweening conceit; these are the result of inconsiderate ignorance. It was through presumptuous pride that Athens fell... Our only means of judging of the future is the past. We see that nations have sprung from obscurity, risen to glory, and decayed. Their rise has in general been marked by virtue; their decadence by vice, vanity, and licentiousness. Let us beware!\textsuperscript{26}

Contemporary readers would have understood Cole’s warning about pride to be a pointed attack on Andrew Jackson and Jacksonian democracy. Whigs often compared Jackson to Caesar and Napoleon, examples of imperial or tyrannical rule, and portrayed him as full of pride in political cartoons.\textsuperscript{27} Cole associated these traits with signs of impending

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{24} Wallach, “Thomas Cole and the Aristocracy,” 89.
\item \textsuperscript{25} In Sicily, he visited the Greek temple of Segesta and the ruins at Taormina. He returned from Europe July 30, 1842.
\item \textsuperscript{26} Thomas Cole, “Sicilian Scenery and Antiquities, Number Two,” \textit{The Knickerbocker, or New-York Monthly Magazine} 23, no. 2 (March 1844), 243 – 244.
\item \textsuperscript{27} Ross Barrett, Angela Miller, and Alan Wallach discuss Cole’s series \textit{The Course of Empire} (1836), in relation to anti-Jacksonian ideas. In the central painting of the series, \textit{Consummation of Empire}, a grand procession marches across an arched bridge in the foreground. The crowd carries a heroic figure wearing bright red robes over their heads. Both Miller and Wallach hypothesize that Cole wanted this imperial hero to represent Andrew Jackson. Miller connects this imperial image of Jackson to contemporary caricatures relating him to Napoleon, such as the lithograph \textit{Grand March between the Kinderhook Poney and the Ohio Ploughman} (New York, 1836). Furthermore, Miller relates Cole’s procession in \textit{Consummation} to the common pro-Jackson parades before
\end{itemize}
doom and began painting his first landscapes with architectural ruins during Jackson’s presidency. 28 James Fenimore Cooper similarly warned his audience about America’s place within the cycles of history in his novel The Crater, or Vulcan’s Peak:

But he has lived in vain, who has dwelt his half century in the midst of civilization of this our own age, and does not see around him the thousand proofs of the tendency of things to the fulfillment of the decrees, announced to us ages ago by the pens of holy men. Rome, Greece, Egypt, and all that we know of the past, which comes purely of man and his passions: empires; dynasties; heresies; and novelties, come and go like the changes of the seasons; while the only thing that can be termed stable, is the slow but sure progress of prophecy. 29


See also my discussion in Chapter 4 relating Cole’s The Curse of Chocorua (1828) with possible anti-Jacksonian implications during Jackson’s election year.

29 Cooper, The Crater, or Vulcan’s Peak (New York: Burgess, Stringer & Co., 1847), 142. For more on Cooper’s opposition to Jacksonian democracy, see Douglas T. Miller, Jacksonian Aristocracy: Class and Democracy in New York, 1830 – 1860 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), 19. Cooper also recognized that one of democracy’s disadvantages was its liability to popular impulses, as well as its propensity to create demagogues. “The true theatre of a demagogue is a democracy, for the body of the community possessing the power, the master he pretends to serve is best able to reward his efforts.” Cooper, The American Democrat (Cooperstown: H. & E. Phinney, 1838), 99.
Cooper’s and Cole’s belief in the cyclical nature of history stood at odds with many Jacksonian democrats’ belief that the future would be better than the past, and America was progressing towards a better civilization. A critic for The New-York Mirror summed up that confidence in America’s future in a review of Cole’s Course of Empire series.

While the critic praised the poetic nature of series, he rejected Cole’s warnings.

He has accomplished his object, which was to show what has been the history of empires and of man. Will it always be so? Philosophy and religion forbid! Although such as the painter has delineated it, the fate of individuals has been, still the progress of the species is continued, and will be continued, in the road to greater and greater perfection. When the last to destroy shall cease, and the arts, the sciences, and the ambition to excel in all good shall characterize man, instead of the pride of the triumph, or the desire of conquests, then will the empire of love be permanent.30

Instead, Cole, like Cooper, feared that the future would bring decay and decline.31

Cole’s series The Course of Empire, which he painted for Luman Reed in 1836, shows an entire cycle of history for one civilization, from a primitive to a cultured to a ruined state, over the course of five paintings (Figures 3.1, 3.2, and 5.1 – 5.3).32 In the first painting, Savage State, Cole combined architectural references to American Indians with men of European heritage. While the peak of that civilization appears European with classical architecture, Savage State, references the American landscape by including


31 The cyclical theory of history with its focus on decay relates to Mikhail Bakhtin’s explanation of degradation cyclically resulting in rebirth. Bakhtin, Rabelais and his World, 21.

the impermanent architecture of American Indians (Figure 3.1). At least six conical structures of stretched skins over wooden frames stand in a circle around a large fire in the middle ground on the right side of the composition. A swirl of storm clouds surrounds the landscape and primeval wilderness, as a kind of Gothic trope. Men in animal skins carry bows and arrows and hunt on foot. The wild human inhabitants and their tepee dwellings root the scene in a specifically American setting. However, when Cole first planned the series while in London in 1829, he initially wrote in his journal that “as this subject is the picture of man & the world this not of any particular nation or country – the Architecture as well as costumes ought not to be then of any particular nation.” Cole must have changed his mind though, for he crossed out the second part of the sentence referring to architecture and costumes, and he went ahead in the finished 1836 painting to include the specifically Native American tepees connecting the series to the American landscape.

While Cole included this reference to the architecture of American Indians, he left out American Indians themselves. Rather, the men hunting in Savage State appear to be white men wearing skins. The primitive man in Savage State, in contrast to Cole’s representations of American Indians discussed in Chapter 4, wears furry animal skins around his waist and across one shoulder. His skin appears tanned from exposure to the sun, but its color and highlights look considerably lighter than any of Cole’s images of American Indians. Furthermore, the primitive man has a bushy beard that accompanies his thick and disheveled black hair, unlike the bare-faced American Indians Cole painted.

By identifying these hunters as racially European or Euro-American, Cole presented his presumed Euro-American audience with a view of themselves. Through this racial discourse, he showed their particular past, rather than the past of any Other.\footnote{Martin A. Berger explains that by leaving out images of racial difference from the artist and assumed viewers itself speaks to a racial discourse about how Euro-Americans see themselves. Regarding the lack of nonwhites in William Sydney Mount’s \textit{Fair Exchange, No Robbery} (1865), Berger explains that it “shows the centrality of racial discourse in structuring how European-Americans thought about themselves and their nation.” Berger, \textit{Sight Unseen: Whiteness and American Visual Culture}, 40.}

Even while European in appearance, these primitive men resemble his paintings of American Indians in the sense that Cole also removed them from contemporary New York City viewers, where Cole exhibited \textit{The Course of Empire} in a rented space at the National Academy of Design.\footnote{Luman Reed died four months before Cole finished the series in October 1836. With the permission of Reed’s family, Cole exhibited the series at the National Academy of Design, Clinton Hall, New York. Two contemporary magazines praised the series and included Cole’s descriptions for each of the five: \textit{The American Monthly Magazine} 2 (November 1836), 514 and \textit{The Knickerbocker, or New-York Monthly Magazine} 8 (November 1836), 629 – 630. Cole earned $1,289 in entrance tickets, which cost $.50 each, or $1.00 for a season’s ticket. \textit{The New-York Evening Post} advertised the ticket cost (21 October 1836), and Theodore Allen reported the total profit to Cole from New York, 27 December 1836, Cole Papers. Therefore, between one thousand three hundred and two thousand five hundred seventy eight people saw \textit{The Course of Empire} in New York.} Cole therefore combined evidence of European men with a primitive American environment. The climax of the cycle, \textit{Consummation of Empire} (Figure 5.1) depicts classical, Mediterranean-inspired architecture. Cole used styles from European history to emphasize Europe’s sense of history. After his second trip to Europe, Cole wrote, “In returning, I remarked that, although American scenery

See my discussion in Chapter 4 for just how removed New York City viewers were from Native Americans and the wilderness.
was often so fine, we feel the want of associations such as cling to scenes in the old world.”

Even as he combined European and American elements within the five paintings of the series, they all represent one place. Each painting in the cycle shows the same mountain in the background, tying the entire series together. This helps connect the American landscape setting from the beginning of the series with that of the classical setting of *Consummation*. By drawing from Europe’s history, Cole hoped that American viewers might realize their own future would mimic Europe’s past.

Cooper understood the message of history’s cycles in *The Course of Empire*. He specifically referred to the paintings in the novel *The Crater, or Vulcan’s Peak*, likening Cole’s painted subjects to the island his protagonist attempted to colonize with a kind of utopian society:

> [The volcano] might be said to resemble… that sublime rock, which is recognised as a part of the “everlasting hills,” in Cole’s series of noble landscapes that is called “the March of Empire;” ever the same amid the changes of time, and civilization, and decay, there it was the apex of the Peak; naked, storm-beaten, and familiar to the eye, though surrounded no longer by the many delightful objects which had once been seen in its neighbourhood.

Cooper’s description of Cole’s paintings reminds the reader of the inevitability of historical cycles as well as their universality. The rise and fall of history occurs not just in Europe, but everywhere in the world, including old colonies and new nations. Even the island in *The Crater*, settled so carefully to ensure paradisiacal success, falls prey to

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37 Cooper, *The Crater, or Vulcan’s Peak*, 224
civilization’s self-destructive nature. That comprehensiveness served as a reminder to both Cooper’s and Cole’s American audiences that they were not exempt.

Like *The Course of Empire*, Cole’s pair of paintings, *The Past* and *The Present*, represent a specific site: a Gothic castle with tower, over a period of time. Painted in 1838 for Peter Gerard Stuyvesant, (Figures 5.4 and 5.5) the two paintings depict a medieval castle during its glory in the Middle Ages, and again as Cole’s contemporaries might see it in the nineteenth century. In *The Past*, Cole used the medieval castle with tower as the background for a jousting tournament. *The Present* depicts the same site, but with the castle and tower in ruin. Nature totally overruns a place once full of spectacular culture, and now a lonely goatherd attends his flock where once crowds enjoyed the theatrical entertainment. When Cole first thought of the topic for this pair of paintings in 1827, he wrote in his sketchbook, “this might be American scenery – a scene in its primeval wilderness – with Indians.” The finished pair, however, depicts an entirely European scene, although a generic one. By substituting a European medieval setting for an American setting, Cole portrayed how even a Christian community fell, whereas an American Indian past destroyed by a Christian American present would not impart the same warning to contemporary Americans. Many of Cole’s contemporaries

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38 The protagonist, Mark Woolston only wanted Episcopalian settlers with high morals and a variety of useful skills, but later settlers arrived who were not particularly invited. These later additions included clergy from different denominations, causing general disagreement and discord. In the end, a massive earthquake destroyed the colony. Thus nature destroyed even a religiously-minded Utopian community.

39 *The Past* and *The Present* are in the Mead Art Museum, Amherst, MA.

40 Cole, sketchbook, 1827, Cole Papers.
believed in the inevitability of the destruction of the American Indian population, such as the Scottish historian William Robertson, or the American Benjamin Rush.  

Cooper’s *The Last of the Mohicans* even brought this idea of inevitable demise of the American Indian to popular fiction. Therefore, by showing the progression of Gothic architecture’s ruin, Cole allowed American viewers to understand more clearly his warning about history’s cycles, regardless of their Christianity.

In his paintings of classical ruins, Cole also made clear his aversion to Andrew Jackson as a demagogue. Most of the Roman monuments he painted were from the Roman Imperial period, such as the Colosseum, the Claudian Aqueduct, or the Arch of Nero (Figures 5.6, 5.7, and 5.8). Anti-Jacksonian viewers would have seen these Imperial ruins as a warning to Americans to avoid the mistakes of Rome’s examples, because of Rome’s ultimate failure: its ancient glory now stands in ruins. Cole understood at least some of Imperial Rome’s history from Edward Gibbon’s *History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, which he listed in one of his book lists.

Cole, like Gibbon, understood that Christianity could not save a civilization from demise.

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41 In *History of America* (1777), William Robertson explained that civilization’s task was to transform the wilderness into a cultivated garden. The extinction of the Indians, according to Robertson, was inevitable. See my discussion in Chapter 4 about Benjamin Rush’s belief in the inevitability of the American Indians’ demise, Cooper’s handling of the subject, and Cole’s paintings of Cooper’s narrative on the subject.

42 Burns explains that “Cole came to see in the ruins of Europe the specter of what America might become, its ‘Castles’ reduced to heaps of rubble.” Burns, *Painting the Dark Side: Art and the Gothic Imagination in Nineteenth-Century America*, 19.

Whigs criticized Jackson’s overuse of executive veto powers, which they believed resembled absolute monarchy more than a democratic presidency, as well as Jackson’s expansionist policies, which they likened to the conquests of Imperial Rome.\textsuperscript{44}

More than just ruins of specific monuments, Cole portrayed how nature took over the architecture. For example, Cole depicted Interior of the Colosseum, 1832, from inside the monument (Figure 5.6). Shown from the interior, the famous arena consists of arched walls and crumbling blocks. Describing the Colosseum in 1832, Cole wrote:

\textbf{I would select the Colosseum as the object that affected me the most. It is stupendous, yet beautiful in its destruction. From the broad arena within, it rises around you, arch above arch, broken and desolate, and mantled in many parts with the laurustinus, the acanthus, and numerous other plants and flowers, exquisite for their colour and fragrance. It looks more like a work of nature than of man; for the regularity of art is lost, in a great measure, in dilapidation, and the luxuriant herbage, clinging to its ruins as if to “mouth its distress,” completes the illusion. Crag rises over crag, green and breezy summits mount into the sky. To walk beneath its crumbling walls, to climb it shattered steps, to wander through its long, arched passages, to tread in the footsteps of Rome’s ancient kings, to muse upon its broken height, is to lapse into sad, though not unpleasing meditation.}\textsuperscript{45}

\textsuperscript{44} During his presidency, Jackson vetoed twelve bills (more than all the previous presidents combined). His opponents, such as Henry Clay and Daniel Webster, especially disapproved of his attempts to destroy the Bank of the United States, which Jackson feared favored the rich too strongly, while opponents attributed the bank to America’s stable economy. Jackson was very involved in the Indian Removal Policies of the 1830s and 1840s. Both Arkansas and Michigan joined the Union under his presidency as well. For details about Jackson’s presidency, see David S. Reynolds, \textit{Waking Giant: America in the Age of Jackson} (New York: Harper Collins, 2008).

\textsuperscript{45} Thomas Cole, journal entry, Naples, 14 May 1832, and reprinted in Noble, \textit{The Life and Works of Thomas Cole}, 159.
Inside the monument, the dark green color of weeds contrasts sharply with the pale tans of the stone. Along with the lengthening shadows, these darker colors and tones take over the site providing a feeling of loneliness to the overall scene.

According to Cole’s belief in history’s cycles, after humankind falls prey to pride, vanity, and vice, nature will reassert itself as supreme. Lines from Cole’s poem, “Lament of the Forest,” help explain nature’s awesome power in overcoming human creations:

Seasons there were, when man, at war with man,  
Left us to raze proud cities, desolate  
Old empires, and pour out his blood on soil  
That once was all our own. When death has made  
All silent, all secure, we have returned,  
Twisted our roots around the prostrate shafts  
And broken capitals, or struck them deep  
Into the mould made richer by man’s blood.  
Such seasons were but brief: so soon as earth  
Was sanctified again by shade and art,  
Again resolved to nature, men came back  
And once more swept our feeble hosts away.46

The American landscape still contained forests and wilderness when Cole wrote these lines. However, he witnessed Americans’ destruction of that landscape. Cole visually represented that destruction in River in the Catskills, 1843.47 There, a man with an ax stands in the foreground, surrounded by tree stumps. Chopping down trees allows for such progress as the railroad visible in the background. Cole’s paintings and poetry,


47 River in the Catskills is at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Wallach examines the painting as antipastoral, or “a deliberate attack on the conventions of pastoral landscape painting and consequently on a pervasive, if often contested, ideology that lauded improvement and material progress” in Wallach, “Thomas Cole’s River in the Catskills as Antipastoral,” Art Bulletin 84, no. 2 (June 2002), 334–355.
filled with dire warnings, remind viewers and readers that as they raze the wilderness, they start the cycle, and so their own nature will destroy their creations and “raze proud cities.” All of Cole’s paintings of ruins show nature’s triumph just as in his poem.

Cole’s friend, the poet William Cullen Bryant, wrote similar lines in “Thanatopsis:”

Earth, that nourished thee, shall claim
Thy growth, to be resolved to earth again,
And, lost each human trace, surrendering up
Thine individual being, shalt thou go
To mix for ever with the elements,
To be a brother to the insensible rock
And to the sluggish clod, which the rude swain
Turns with his share, and treads upon. The oak
Shall send his roots abroad, and pierce thy mould.\(^{48}\)

Vines and trees grow over and through Cole’s ruins, breaking apart stones, and knocking down human achievements, just as in Bryant’s poem.

In addition to painting recognizable ruins from the Imperial Roman period, Cole also painted several examples of ancient Greek architecture, such as the Temples of Segesta and Paestum, and the Theater at Taormina (Figures 5.9, 5.10, and 5.11). In addition to receiving criticism for being overly tyrannical and similar to emperors of Rome or absolute monarchies, Andrew Jackson also drew ill-favor for his popular democracy, or *mobocracy*, similar to how late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth century historians described ancient Greek republics.\(^{49}\)

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\(^{49}\) Caroline Winterer explains how Americans read the following English histories of Ancient Greece, which described the ancient Greek republics as examples of *mobocracy*: Temple Stanyan, *The Grecian History* (1739); Oliver Goldsmith, *The Grecian History: From the Earliest State to the Death of Alexander the Great* (1774); John Gillies, *The
Painted the same year as *Interior of the Colosseum, Compositional Study for the Ruins of the Temples of Paestum*, shows the temples of Neptune, Hera, and Athena silhouetted against the sky.⁵⁰ Cole knew about the Greek temples near Naples in Italy from his copy of the 1822 poem *The Ruins of Paestum* by his friend, the poet Henry Pickering.⁵¹ Pickering’s poem uses the ruins at Paestum to discuss the cyclical nature of history:

Dream’d they, the founders of these structures vast,  
Who for eternity had haply built,  
That Nature here should one day reassume  
Her empire over Art? …  
The mighty walls, indeed, which here inshrin’d  
Those glorious works, soon humbled to their base,  
Shall, like the palaces and fanes august,  
Forever disappear! Yet Nature here,  
In youth’s perpetual bloom shall still strive…⁵²

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⁵¹ Cole lists Pickering’s poems in his undated booklist now at the Detroit Institute of Arts.

Pickering’s focus on how nature reclaimed buildings meant to stand for eternity corresponds with Cole’s painted ruins at Paestum. In his painting, Cole silhouetted the temples in the distance against the sky. The colonnades still support entablatures but no roof. In the painting’s foreground, Cole included piles of rocks. These ruinous mounds help illustrate for the viewer the temples’ future; over time they will continue to decay until they too become mere piles of stone.

Neoclassical architecture became increasingly popular during the first half of the nineteenth century, however Cole painted these classical examples in ruins, rather than in their prime. The central painting of the series *The Course of Empire: Consummation* portrays classicism at its peak, but Cole changed the composition and the classical buildings depicted in it at least once. After painting the first version of *Consummation*, he altered its classical architecture so that it would appear more similar to that of New York. In a letter written to his patron Luman Reed, Cole explained that he “had to tear down some of the buildings that were nearly finished, in order to make improvements, *a la mode* N York.” The original buildings were classical as well, but Cole probably

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53 For example, by 1832, the year Cole painted *A View Near Tivoli*, his first landscape with Roman Imperial ruins, several prominent neoclassical buildings already stood in New York City, including: John Vanderlyn, New York Rotunda, (1818); Martin Euclid Thompson, Branch Bank of the United States (1825); Josiah R. Brady and Martin Euclid Thompson, First Merchant’s Exchange (1826); Josiah Brady, Second Congregational Church (1827); Ithiel Town, New York Bowery Theater (1828); Martin Euclid Thompson and Ithiel Town, Church of the Ascension, (1828); and Ithiel Town and Alexander Jackson Davis, Park Hotel (1830).

54 Thomas Cole to Luman Reed, 7 September 1835, Cole Papers. Cole did not just paint over a few existing buildings within the composition, but rather in 1835, he started over from scratch. Parry explains how Cole reused the canvas from the first version of
based them on examples from architectural pattern books looking back to the classical Mediterranean world.\(^{55}\) The finished version of *Consummation* includes a building that may refer to the Parthenon, but also may refer to the Custom House, a Greek Revival building with a Roman-inspired domed interior space, then under construction in New York City.\(^{56}\) Similarly, the temple on the left hand side of *Consummation* has a Greek base, crowned by a domed circular Roman temple. By piling on Roman- and Greek-styled structures one on top of another, Cole referred to and critiqued the exuberance of classicism then prevalent in New York.

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\(^{55}\) Parry makes the connection between the original composition, visible in x-rays, and James Stuart and Nicholas Revett, *The Antiquities of Athens* (London: J. Haberkorn, 1762) which was in the collection of the American Academy of Fine Arts in New York, to which Cole had access. Parry, “Overlooking the Oxbow: Thomas Cole’s View from Mount Holyoke Revisited,” 36 – 39. Furthermore, Cole lists in one of his lists of personal book (undated, now at the Detroit Institute of Arts) “Leaks Topography of Athens” (William Martin Leake, *Topography of Athens* (London, 1841)), which may have provided architectural inspiration.

\(^{56}\) The temple in *Consummation*, the Parthenon, and the Custom House are all Greek Doric temples with eight columns along the front. Ithiel Town and Alexander Jackson Davis created the original plan for the Custom House in 1833. Shortly after, Town appointed Samuel Thomson to superintend the construction. Then in 1835, the commissioners appointed John Frazee architect and superintendent. Frazee completed the Custom House in 1842 after making several changes to Town’s and Davis’s original plans. Louis Torres explains the history of the Custom House in “John Frazee and the New York Custom House,” *The Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 23, no. 2 (October 1964), 143 – 150; and “Samuel Thomson and the Old Custom House,” *The Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 20, no. 4 (December 1961), 185 – 190.
James Fenimore Cooper described the popularity and, in his opinion, the overuse of classicism in *Home as Found*, 1838. In the narrative, after spending several years abroad, the Effingham family returns home to New York and discovers how Americans popularized the Greek Revival, a style they consider inappropriate for the American frontier.  

“An extraordinary taste is afflicting this country, in the way of architecture,” said Mr. Effingham, as they stood gazing at the eastern shore; “nothing but a Grecian temple being now deemed a suitable residence for a man, in these classical times. Yonder is a structure, for instance, of beautiful proportions, and, at this distance, apparently of a precious material, and yet it seems better suited to heathen worship than to domestic comfort.”

“The malady has affected, the whole nation,” returned his cousin, “like the spirit of speculation. We are passing from one extreme to the other, in this, as in other things. One such temple, well placed in a wood, might be a pleasant object enough, but to see a river lined with them, with children trundling hoops before their doors, beef carried into their kitchens, and smoke issuing, moreover, from those unclassical objects chimneys, is too much even of a high taste.”

Cooper based the Effinghams in large part on his own life. Like the fictitious Effinghams, Cooper himself had also just returned to the United States from a lengthy trip abroad. The story’s comments on American architecture and the excessive use of neoclassicism should be read as Cooper’s own thoughts after returning home.

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57 The Effinghams first return to New York City, and then travel to Templeton, NY by steamer. While on board the steamer, travelling up the Hudson River the characters discuss the Greek Revival.


59 Cooper returned to New York in 1833 after spending seven years in Europe.
Neoclassicism reminded Cole’s contemporary Americans of historical precedents and models for political virtue. Cole’s paintings of classical ruins, however, mocked these ideals by showing their physical destruction, reminding viewers that both Greek and Roman democracies and republics fell as well. That physical destruction, so removed from contemporary American building booms, created a very distanced feeling, but however remote they may have seemed in appearance, Cole feared that they foretold America’s future.

In addition to the paintings of classical ruins described above, Cole painted at least twenty-three landscapes with Gothic ruins. While some of those ruins depict specific locations, such as Newstead Abbey or Kenilworth Castle, both in England, the majority of those paintings (fourteen of the twenty-three) represent ruined Gothic towers. While

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61 For the complete list, see note 2.

62 The ruined tower paintings include: *Landscape Composition, Italian Scenery* (1832), Memorial Art Gallery of the University of Rochester, Rochester, NY; *Ruined Castle and River* (1832), Brooklyn Museum, Brooklyn, NY; *Ruined Tower* (1832), Albany Institute of History and Art, Albany, NY; *Salvator Rosa Sketching Banditti* (c. 1832), Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, MA; *Landscape: Moonlight* (1833), New-York Historical Society,
these towers differ in their states of ruin and locations, they appear similar in their overall design, standing at least two stories high and silhouetted against the sky. Most of them portray corbel arches along the top, which once supported projecting crenellated battlements, however, very little remains of those battlements. They all show evidence of decay over the years through fissures, surrounding rubble, and plant growth. The following sections examine Cole’s paintings of ruined medieval towers as well as his other depictions of medieval buildings in ruin and investigate the connection between representations of the Gothic and a Christian past.

Several of the towers quote John Constable’s Hadleigh Castle, 1829, with large cracks vertically bisecting a tower (Figure 5.12). Cole saw Hadleigh Castle at the Royal Academy’s 1829 exhibition when he was in London. Even though some of the

New York, NY; Ruined Tower door panel (1836), Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, CT; Genevieve (1828), private collection; Italian Coast Scene with Ruined Tower (1838), National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.; The Present (1838), Mead Art Museum, Amherst, MA; Tower with Moonlight (1839), private collection; Landscape with Tower in Ruin (1839), Currier Museum of Art, Manchester, NH; Tower Landscape (1839), George G. McMurray Collection; Italian Autumn (1844), Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, MA; and Italian Autumn (1845), Spanierman Gallery, New York, NY (this is a copy of the same subject currently in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston).

Hadleigh Castle is at the Yale Center for British Art, New Haven, CT.

towers themselves do bear a remarkable similarity to Constable’s tower, Cole changed their settings and surrounding landscapes, altering the scenes so that they became fictitious places. Even their titles either refer to generic sites, such as *Ruined Tower*, or to fantastical compositions, such as *Landscape Composition: Italian Scenery*, far removed from Hadleigh Castle’s actual location in Essex.

Cole’s paintings of both classical and medieval ruins emphasize his belief in cyclical history by portraying the physical signs of the collapse of culture’s built manifestations. However, classical and Gothic architecture represented two very different cultures for Cole: pagan and Christian. Cole’s contemporaries also recognized

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Note that Cole and Constable met the following year, and Constable gave Cole a small pen and ink sketch dated June 18, 1830. The sketch is now with the Cole Papers.

65 Several scholars expound on the associations between Gothic Revival architecture and Christianity. Agnes Addison writes that during the Gothic Revival, medievalists looked to the Middle Ages as an era of true Christian faith in “Early American Gothic,” in *Romanticism in America: Papers Contributed to a Symposium Held at the Baltimore Museum of Art*, ed. George Boas (New York: Russell and Russell, 1960). Clifford Edward Clark explains that the Gothic Revival “harmonized well with natural surroundings which gave it a picturesque look, but because of its origin in a more religious time, it was also thought to symbolize an eminently Christian form of private dwelling” in Clark, “American Architecture: The Prophetic and Biblical Strains,” in *The Bible and American Arts and Letters*, ed. Giles Gunn (Philadelphia: Fortress Press and Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1983), 112. Robin Fleming explains that Americans saw the root of pointed arches and Gothic tracery in the imitations of wooded groves and bowers from the Druids. They therefore saw the Gothic as an authentic Teutonic style that pious Germanic Christians gradually tamed and civilized. See Fleming, “Nineteenth-Century New England’s Memory of the Middle Ages,” in *Memory and the Middle Ages*, eds. Nancy Netzer and Virginia Reinburg (Boston: Boston College Museum of Art, 1995), 78. She also writes that by associating medieval architecture with a Saxon origin, American Protestants ignored any Catholic associations. Therefore, through this ahistorical memory of style, many nineteenth-century Americans were able to connect the Gothic to a romantic, idealized version of the medieval past, not actually present in the Middle Ages, but rather in popular poetry, paintings, and novels about the period. See Fleming, “Picturesque History and the Medieval in Nineteenth-Century America,” *American
these differences. Writing in 1836, the Rev. John Henry Hopkins explained how their different historical associations meant that they should be used for different programs in modern times.

The Gothic, breaking the horizontal line, and leading the eye upwards till its pinnacles vanish in the sky, seems adapted, by an easy correspondence, to the offices of that blessed religion, which takes the heart from the contemplation of earth, and directs it to its heavenly inheritance. While the Grecian, with its lengthened colonnades and its horizontal extension, running in lines parallel with the ground, seems suited, by its characteristic expression, to secular objects and pursuits. Hence we should recommend the Grecian and Roman architecture for all buildings designed for legislative, judicial, commercial, civic, or merely scientific purposes; but wherever the spiritual interests of our race are to be the primary concern, the elevated solemnity of the Gothic style is far more appropriate.

Even though Cole’s paintings of ruined towers do not specifically depict Christian ecclesiastical structures, they do represent a time in Europe when Christianity prevailed. Cole particularly associated Gothic architecture in general with Christian spirituality. He described its beauty as “partaking of the Genius of Christianity it opens a world beyond

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the visible in which we dwell." He further elaborated on the importance of medieval religious expressions as compared to the cultural education and ability of the Greeks and Romans in a letter published in *The Churchman*, writing:

> Let us attain higher things if we can, the deep religious expressions of Mediaeval art, unite it with the executive skill and learning of the Greek and great Italian schools, and with something may be of our own (for the resources of art are unfailing to true genius) and in the pursuit of excellence, take the path of artistic truth and work for God as the gothic artists did.

Cole’s description of the Gothic appears to follow the Platonic tradition of beauty’s origination in the divine. The Gothic signified for Cole a closer affinity to God and a moral and spiritual superiority. Similarly, the Cambridge Camden Society, leader of the English Ecclesiologist movement, considered people during the medieval period, aided by Gothic architecture, to have been “more spiritually-minded and less worldly-minded”

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67 Cole, “Letter to the Publick on the Subject of Architecture.” For a complete discussion of this essay and its implications, see Chapter 3.

68 Cole, “Letter to *The Churchman*.”

than their nineteenth-century contemporaries. Cole became a member of the Episcopal Church and included Anglican works in a list of books. Whereas Cole’s paintings of classical ruins refer to the inevitable downfall of even the most cultured civilizations, such as ancient Greece or Rome, brought down by imperialism or demagoguery, his Gothic ruins symbolize the destruction of cultures despite their religious Christian piety. Therefore, Cole’s American public could read a message about their own society in the ruins and a reminder that their own future prospects were not exempt from history, no matter how much they hoped the New World indicated a new beginning.

Cole emphasized the ruinous state of the towers by showing nature starting to grow back over the buildings. Cracks and fissures scar the stone structures. For example, in *Italian Coast Scene with Ruined Tower* from 1838 (Figure 5.13), a roofless tower stands along a coastline. Several large blocks of stone lie around the tower’s base, presumably fallen from the tower or some other ruinous structure no longer discernible. Cole described the painting as he worked on it:

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The Rev. John Henry Hopkins also made this connection between the spiritual and the Gothic Revival. See Note 66 above.

71 Cole’s booklist includes the following Anglican authors: Laurence Sterne and Richard Whately. Cole Papers.

72 Besides the ruined tower paintings listed in Note 62, Cole uses this same visible scarring of the architecture in The Course of Empire: Desolation as well. Over the course of time, the two background columns flanking the entrance to what once was the Empire’s port stand broken without their roofs, similar to the towers in Cole’s other ruined tower paintings.
I am now engaged in painting a Picture representing a Ruined and Solitary Tower that stands on a craggy promontory whose base is loved by a calm unruflled Ocean. Some rocky Islets rise from the sea at various distances, but the line of the Horizon is unbroken but by the Tower. The spectator is supposed to be looking east just after sunset. The moon is just ascending from the ocean like a silver vapour, around her are towering clouds still lighted by the sun. The moon the clouds the Islets are all reflected in the tranquil waters. On the summit of the Cliff around the ruin & on the grassy steeps below are seen sheep & goats & in the foreground seated on some fragment of the ruin is a lonely shepherd. He appears to be gazing intently on a distant vessel that lies becalming in the deep. Sea Birds are flying around the Tower... This picture will not be painted in my most finished style; but I think it will be poetical...  

Ivy grows up along the tower, demonstrating the triumph of nature over the man-made structure. Cole associated the ruined tower image with the more melancholy feeling of solitude, a very common theme in Gothic romance novels. For example, Ann Radcliffe especially combined the visual image of the Gothic ruins and the ocean with the theme of loneliness in *The Romance of the Forest*. Much of the narrative of that story revolves around a ruined abbey in which the heroine, Adeline, hides and describes as a "melancholy residence." There, as well as a route along a moonlit ocean, Radcliffe described scenes of loneliness and melancholy:

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73 Cole, journal entry, 22 May 1838, Cole Papers.

74 Many of Ann Radcliffe’s heroines were orphans or neglected by their parents, such as Emilia and Julia in *A Sicilian Romance* (1790); Adeline in *The Romance of the Forest* (1791); Emily St. Aubert in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794); Elena Rosalba in *The Italian* (1796). Charlotte Smith also presents the lonely orphaned child in the Gothic *Emmeline, the Orphan of the Castle* (1788). American gothic novelist Charles Brockden Brown also uses solitude as a theme for Clara Wieland in *Wieland, or the Transformation, an American Tale* (1798); and Edgar Huntly in *Edgar Huntly or Memoirs of a Sleepwalker* (1799).

Even this poor hope vanished, and left her to tears and anguish, such as this reverie, which began with a sensation of only gentle melancholy, now led to. She continued to muse till the moon arose from the bosom of the ocean, and shed her trembling lustre upon the waves, diffusing peace, and making silence more solemn; beaming a soft light on the white sails, and throwing upon the waters the tall shadow of the vessel, which now seemed to glide along unopposed by any current.  

While Cole painted a solitary shepherd boy instead of a distressed maiden, he captured the same mood. Just as Radcliffe associated specific locations with feelings of melancholy, so too Cole visually connected the sense of loss that accompanies the ruined Gothic tower with the loneliness that results when one mourns what is lost.

In *Tower with Moonlight*, a very similar composition also from 1838, Cole represented a scene from Samuel Coleridge’s poem “Love,” or “Introduction to The Tale of the Dark Ladié” instead of the lonely shepherd motif (Figure 5.14).  

Thomas H. Fail commissioned a landscape with Medora and Conrad from Lord Byron’s poem, *The Corsair*. However, Cole felt Coleridge’s poem would supply a better narrative for a landscape painting. Writing to Durand, Cole explained:

> You know Mr Fail chose Medora as the subject for his picture & I accepted it without considering it in detail; but lately I have had the subject in my mind, & have sketched for it but am not so much satisfied as I expected to be. In the first place it is rather an intricate subject for a landscape. As such there is a fine opportunity for expression but the Landscape must be subordinate. As a landscape (and particularly a landscape in which there ought to be great heights & depth) the Figures

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must be very small and merely insufficient to give a name to the Picture… I am afraid Mr Fail will be disappointed at finding Medora & Conrad not much larger than a couple of Gulls among the rocks. For my own part I should like to paint it mostly if the figures may be a subordinate to the landscape indeed I have a design, but I am inclined to think that there are subjects more capable, and more likely to give general pleasure. I will mention one that I have long thought of painting, and you will do me the favour to speak of it to Mr Fail as well as to give him my opinion on the subject of Medora. The subject I would suggest is in Coleridge’s exquisite poem called an “Introduction to the Tale of the Dark Ladie.” You must have read it but as you may not have the poem at hand I will transcribe a Stanza or two… [Cole then transcribes stanzas two through six of “Love.”] You will readily perceive how fraught with the pictorial is this passage from one of the most tender & exquisite poems in the Language. I don’t know but I prized it higher than the Corsair even… suggest this subject to Mr. F when you see him & let me hear I am as convenient.78

That Cole quoted five stanzas from Coleridge to Durand displays his evident enthusiasm for the poem and its pictorial potential. Cole captured these stanzas in the painting Tower with Moonlight.79

Oft in my waking dreams do I
Live o’er again that happy hour,
When midway on the mount I lay,
Beside the ruin’d tower.

78 Cole to Durand, Catskill, 31 January 1838, Cole Papers.

79 Note that Franklin Kelly refers to Cole’s letter to Durand as evidence that The National Gallery’s painting, Italian Coast Scene with Ruined Tower, refers to Coleridge’s poem. However, when Cole discusses the lonely shepherd boy in Italian Coast Scene with Ruined Tower, he never mentions any specific author or poetic source. Furthermore, as the National Gallery believes Hugh D. Scott purchased their painting from Cole, it most likely is not the same painting to which Cole refers when he discusses the commission from Thomas H. Fail in his letter to Durand. See Franklin Kelly, “Thomas Cole,” in Art for the Nation: Collecting for a New Century (Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 2000), 64.
The moonshine, stealing o’er the scene
Had blended with the lights of eve;
And she was there, my hope, my joy,
My own dear Genevieve!

She leant against the armed man,
The statue of the armed knight;
She stood and listen’d to my lay,
Amid the lingering light.

Few sorrows hath she of her own,
My hope! my joy! my Genevieve!
She loves me best, whene’er I sing
The songs that make her grieve.

I play’d a soft and doleful air,
I sang an old and moving story –
An old rude song, that suited well,
That ruin wild and hoary.⁸⁰

In the painting, Genevieve stands leaning against the sculpted tomb of a knight from the fourth stanza.⁸¹ Next to her, her lover plays the lyre seated on the grass. In the distance, the moon rises brightly in the evening sky, and the ruined tower covered with foliage stands behind the couple.⁸² Gothic novels, such as Radcliffe’s *The Romance of the Forest*, use Gothic ruins as settings to heighten the sense of mystery and romanticism.

Characters and readers alike question how such glorious structures could have fallen into

⁸⁰ Coleridge, “Love,” or “Introduction to the Tale of the Dark Ladié,” stanzas 2 – 6. Note that Cole misquoted the first line of the second stanza. He started it as “Whence in my waking dreams.” Also, Cole left out the fifth stanza altogether.

⁸¹ Cole made an earlier oil sketch of the subject, *Genevieve* (c. 1838), private collection.

such a state of neglect. They ask what disasters occurred to tear down stone, and most importantly, what happened to the inhabitants of these ruins?\textsuperscript{93} Coleridge and Cole both capitalized on this dramatic trope.

In three of his Gothic ruins paintings, Cole added another Christian reference: Catholic shrines. *Landscape Composition, Italian Scenery*, 1832, *An Italian Autumn*, 1844, and *Il Penseroso*, 1845, (Figures 5.15, 5.16, and 5.17) all contain shrines in a landscape with Gothic ruins.\textsuperscript{84} Both *Landscape Composition, Italian Scenery* and *An Italian Autumn* include the ruined towers and bridges that mark the sites of what once must have been magnificent castles. A woman appears in *Il Penseroso* kneeling in front of a shrine to the Virgin Mary constructed on the medieval ruins of Nemi.\textsuperscript{85} *Landscape Composition: Italian Scenery*, displays a shrine standing outside, but with a small roofed awning to protect its painting of the Virgin and Child. A man stands before the shrine, and someone (possibly the same man) recently placed a bouquet of flowers in front of the altar.\textsuperscript{86} In the later *An Italian Autumn*, a smaller, freestanding shrine hangs on a tree.

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\textsuperscript{93} For example, in Ann Radcliffe’s *Romance of the Forest*, the heroine Adeline discovers a manuscript written by some dying victim in the ruins of the abbey where she is staying, which speaks to some terrible horror.

\textsuperscript{84} *Landscape Composition, Italian Scenery* is in the collection of the Memorial Art Gallery of the University of Rochester, Rochester, NY. *Il Penseroso* is at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles, CA. *An Italian Autumn* is at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, MA and a copy of *An Italian Autumn* is in the collection of the Spanierman Gallery, New York, NY.

\textsuperscript{85} Cole drew and labeled the shrine while at Nemi, near Rome. The pen and ink drawing is in the collection of the Detroit Institute of Arts, Detroit, MI.

\textsuperscript{86} Parry identifies him as a brigand with a rifle. See Parry, *The Art of Thomas Cole*, 127.
Whereas the ruins in the paintings stand mostly in shadow while the sun sets behind them, the shrines glow in the sunshine. Cole’s use of Catholic shrines was another tool to help remind the viewer of the Christian connection to medieval architectural styles. By showing the mixture of contemporary uses of Christian devices and worship along with the ruins from medieval times, Cole demonstrated historical development and decline within an individual society. Roman Catholicism in Italy may have remained in power, but that failed to prevent the loss of architectural monuments.

In addition to his ruined-tower paintings, Cole painted several other subjects with Gothic ruins including Kenilworth Castle and Newstead Abbey. The ruins of Kenilworth Castle fascinated Cole to such an extent that he painted them at least four times, including a small yet detailed study (Figure 5.18).\(^87\) He visited the ruins while in England in 1841 and described them in a letter to his wife:

> The ruins went beyond my expectations. I must not attempt to describe them to you now, for the description would fill the sheet: yet the ivy-clad towers, roofless halls, whose floors are covered with green turf and flowers, and cropped by flocks of sheep, and over which, through the dismantled windows and ragged loopholes, the sun casts his wandering rays, inspired me with a melancholy pleasure… Had I been a magician, I would have conjured up the haughty Elizabeth to contemplate the scene with her eye beheld in its “pomp and circumstance” and where now “Ruin greenly dwells!” What a lesson to human pride! I made several sketches, from one of which I intend to paint a picture for Mr. Faile.\(^88\)

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\(^{88}\) Cole to Maria Cole, 22 September 1841, Cole Papers.
Cole’s letter alludes to Sir Walter Scott’s novel *Kenilworth*, and quotes from William Shakespeare’s play *Othello* as well as Lord Byron’s *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage* third canto, all of which he owned.89 Scott’s *Kenilworth* tells the story of Robert Dudley’s secret marriage to Amy Robsart while he tries to court the favor of Queen Elizabeth. Much of the action takes place at Kenilworth Castle, Dudley’s seat. Scott’s story, besides using the Gothic castle as its backdrop, follows many of the structures of gothic novels.90 Poor Amy finds herself imprisoned, lied to, and eventually murdered. Her husband loves her, but devilishly turns his back on her as his aspirations rise to the Queen. Cole then quotes from Shakespeare’s Othello’s famous speech following the theme from Scott’s *Kenilworth* of the innocent, wronged wife:

O farewell,
Farewell the neighing steed, and the shrill trump,
The spirit-stirring drum, th’ ear-piercing fife;
The royal banner, and all quality,
Pride, pomp, and circumstance of glorious war!91

Othello raves as he knowingly gives up both his career and his pride as he plots revenge on his guiltless wife. Cole’s reference to *Othello* in relation to Kenilworth castle serves as a reminder that even the mighty can fall, including not only a celebrated war hero, but architectural structures as well. Finally, Cole also chose Byron’s poem as a reference

89 Scott, *Kenilworth* (1821); Shakespeare, *Othello* (1622); and Bryon, *Chile Harold’s Pilgrimage* (1816). Cole owned all of Scott’s Waverly novels, Shakespeare’s plays, and Byron’s poetry, which he listed in an undated list of books now in the Detroit Institute of Art.

90 The earliest part of Kenilworth Castle dates to the 1120s. It was extensively reworked and enlarged in the thirteenth, fourteenth, and sixteenth centuries.

because that particular stanza describes a ruined castle covered in foliage. The last two lines of the forty-sixth stanza reads: “And chiefless castles breathing stern farewells /
From grey but leafy walls, where Ruin greenly dwells.”92 Cole thus combined multiple references to literary sources in a single painting of a Gothic ruin.93

In addition to painting Kenilworth Castle, Cole also painted two versions (one a study) of Newstead Abbey, Sunrise in 1830 (Figure 5.19).94 He exhibited the finished version at the British Institution in 1831. An American correspondent for the New-York Mirror saw the painting in Cole’s studio and described the viewing.

[Cole] speaks with enthusiasm of English scenery, and thinks some of it perfectly beautiful, particularly portions of Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire. The latter county has furnished him with a view of Newstead Abbey – the evening sun showering a flood of fading radiance upon the home of the Byrons, and throwing its parting shadows over the

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92 Cole quotes Lord Byron’s poem, Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage, canto 3, stanza 46.

93 Note that the version Cole exhibited at the National Academy of Design in 1843 received a scathing review: “Can this picture be by Cole – by the man whose former works gave him deservedly a foremost rank among the best landscape painters of the world? was our declamation, as we looked upon the blaze of staring green and yellow, of which it is composed. In point of color and effect, we are constrained to say that this production would be discreditable to the merest tyro in art, and we cannot sufficiently regret that Mr. Cole should have given the sanction of his name to so false and unworthy a style. True to his own genius, our young landscape painters need not desire a better or purer model, but committing, as he has done in this picture, high treason against that genius, his example should be shunned rather than imitated. We sincerely hope that Mr. Cole may speedily repent of his apostacy, and return to that station in art which he is so eminently qualified to adorn.” “National Academy of Design,” New York Herald, June 5, 1843, 2.

94 The study of Newstead Abbey, Sunrise, 1830, is in the Collection of Rena Bransten. Unfortunately, the finished version remains unlocated.
clear, tranquil lake in front. It was unfinished when I saw it, but will I think make a fine picture…

Cole visited Newstead during the fall of 1830, and he may have chosen to paint the site because of its connection to Lord Byron. Not only romantic, Byron’s poems connected in many ways to gothic fiction with their strong prevalence of moral confusion and paradoxical characters. Therefore, the subject of the Gothic structure as well as its connections to the gothic romanticism of Byron’s writings made it an ideal subject for Cole. Byron himself saw a connection between the fall of his family into financial ruin and the literal ruins of the Abbey itself, which he described in his poem “On Leaving Newstead Abbey” in 1803:

Through thy battlements, Newstead, the hollow winds whistl
Thou, the hall of my fathers, art gone to decay;
In thy once smiling garden, the hemlock and thistle
Have choked up the rose which late bloom’d in the way.

95 C., “Original Communications from our London Correspondent,” *The New-York Mirror: A Weekly Gazette of Literature and the Fine Arts*, March 12, 1831, 284. The writer mistook the sunrise for a sunset. Since the abbey sits on the east side of the lake, it would be impossible for the sun to set behind the abbey when viewed from the lake side.

96 Note that Cole painted at least three scenes that referred to Byron’s poetry. Cole based *Manfred* (1832), Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, CT, on Byron’s poem of the same title. When he exhibited *Fountain of Egeria* (1833), unlocated, at the National Academy of Design in 1833, Cole included lines from Byron’s *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage*, Canto 4, Stanza 117. *Landscape: Moonlight* (1833), New-York Historical Society, New York, NY, was based on Byron’s *Parasina*, the opening to which Cole included in the catalogue when he exhibited it in the 1834 National Academy of Design exhibition. Cole also originally intended to show a scene from Byron’s *The Corsair* but chose instead to paint a scene from Coleridge’s “Introduction to the Tale of the Dark Ladié” in *Tower with Moonlight* (1838).


Byron may have mourned the collapse of his family fortunes, but Cole’s contemporaries would also have been aware of the amorous scandals in Byron’s personal life. The specific connection between moral degradation and physical destruction of stone architecture appealed immensely to Cole. It served as the very warning that he wished to present to his American audiences. Just as glorious Gothic structures could fall, so too could individuals and societies.

Cole’s paintings of ruins, whether classical or medieval, do not depict the past. Instead, they depict past monuments as they appear in the present. Their destruction represents the destruction of past cultures, and they exist within the inevitable rise and fall of history’s cycles. However, even while Cole understood that all cultures were and are inevitably doomed to destruction, he could not help but feel awe and sympathy for what nature destroyed. For example, describing the ancient Greek ruins at Selinunte in Sicily, Cole wrote:

As he approaches, the stupendous scene of ruin strikes him with awe. There in a mighty heap lie column and capital, metope and cornice; and the mind is lost in wonder at the power that raised these giant structures, and the power that overthrew them. Only one complete column, and that without its capital, and several mutilated ones, remain standing of the great temple supposed to be of Neptune; the rest are prostrate; and all lying in one direction, bear evidence that they have been thrown down by an earthquake.

99 Cole listed “Galt’s Life of Byron” in his 1839 Catalogue of Books, Cole Papers, referring to John Galt, The Life of Lord Byron (London: Henry Colburn and Richard Bentley, 1830). The biography examined several instances of Byron’s immoral or amorous indiscretions, such as his affair with the married Countess Guiccioli.

100 Cole, “Sicilian Scenery and Antiquities, Number Two,” 237.
Cole chose words associated with destruction: ruin, overthrew, mutilated, and prostrate.
His description lends an anthropomorphic effect to the ruins themselves. By making the ruins sound almost human, Cole’s readers and viewers could sympathize more with their plight, and might be that much more willing to look to their own futures. Even if Cole painted European ruins rather than any specific American ruins, Europe’s history figured in America’s past. That past, according to Cole’s belief in the cyclical theory of history, would come back and be a part of America’s future.

European ruins serve as cautionary examples of America’s future. So, too, does the natural power of the American landscape. Cole expounded that reminder, writing: “Yet American scenes are not destitute of historical and legendary associations – the great struggle for freedom has sanctified many a spot, and many a mountain, stream, and rock has its legend, worthy of poet’s pen or the painter’s pencil. But American associations are not so much of the past as of the present and the future.”¹⁰¹ That future, while full of potential, could still bring destruction just as European civilizations saw in the past. Cole summarized many of these feelings of inevitability, hope, and despair in the face of history and the future in his 1843 poem, “The March of Time”:

Hark! I heard the tread of Time
O’er heaven’s ether fields sublime;
Through the portals of the past;
Where the stars by God were cast
O’er the illimitable vast!

Onward! Onward! Yet he strides;
Nations clinging to his sides
Kingdoms crushed, he tramples o’er:
Fame’s shrill trumpet – War’s deep roar
Blast-like rise – then speak no more.102

Time becomes a specter, death, and darkness. It tramples kingdoms and hope. This sublime and invincible force tears down pagan and Christian structures alike.

Many early-nineteenth-century Americans hoped their young country might be exempt from the rise and fall of history’s civilizations. With its pristine and virgin landscape, they looked to the United States as a chance to start over in a kind of prelapsarian state of grace. Cole also likened the American landscape to the Garden of Eden. However, he observed that human nature, the cause of all civilizations’ falls, would destroy the American landscape as well, writing: “We are still in Eden; the wall that shuts us out of the garden is our own ignorance and folly.”103 His many paintings of both classical and Gothic architectural ruins demonstrate the fall of past cultures. But the Gothic ruins refer to a distinctly Christian past, whereas the classical ruins look to lost pagan cultures. Gothic ruins therefore, remind an American viewing audience that even their Edenic landscape built on Christian values, would fall as well.

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Chapter 6

CONCLUSION: PICTURING THE GOTHIC

In 1837, Thomas Cole completed a pair of pendant paintings, *The Departure* and *The Return*, for William P. Van Rensselaer (Figures 6.1 and 6.2). When Cole first wrote about the subject in his sketchbook in 1827, he thought the pair should represent a youthful American scene in morning, and an elderly European scene at evening.

Morning and Evening – or the Departure and the Return – 2 pictures. 1st a youth taking leave of his family at the door of a cottage – morning a picturesque cottage an ancient … overshadowing it – an extensive view of mountains …. And a distant view of the ocean – the Youth full of …. Points towards the distant sun…. 2nd picture – The Youth returning a man & the family meet him again before the door of the cottage – the mother …. While the father appears to be thanking heaven for the happy return of his sun – All must appear older – the youth noble & manly and more. Than at his departure – the old man infirm… Morning may be an American scene – Evening an Italian… The morning – all… newness, youthful vigour – the Evening – Decay & Ruin. The morning be a wild scene with a hunting cabin.

By the time he actually completed the pair for Van Rensselaer ten years later, he changed the narrative content so that both paintings represented medieval Europe.

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1 *The Departure* and *The Return* are in the collection of the Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.


2 Thomas Cole, sketchbook, 1827, Cole Papers.
The story, if I may so call it, which will give Title and I hope life & interest to the Morning & Evening Landscapes – it is neither taken from written History nor poetry, but is a Fiction of my own if incidents that must have occurred frequently can be called Fiction – It is supposed to have date in the 13th or the 14th centuries. Having advanced as far I thought it might be appreciative to you to learn something of the work, which I am about to offer… In the first picture, illuminating a lofty castle which stands in eminence enhanced in woods. The distance is composed of mountains whose tops are yet covered with clouds… In the first picture a morning. A lofty Castle embosomed in the woods… In the foreground is a Sculpted Madonna by which passes a road that winds beneath Ancient trees & crosses a stream by a Gothick Building connected to the gate of the castle. Through this Gate issued a troop of knyts & soldiers who are seen in the glittering armor gathering across the Bridge …… In the second picture of the Return Evening in Autumn…. The yellow beams gild the pinnacles of an abbey which rises from shadowy woods – the sculptured Madonna stands a short distance from the foreground to clarify the scene & near to moving towards the castle is a mournful…. The Lord of the Castle is borne on a litter or dead or dying…

The change from juxtaposition of new and old worlds to two views of the same location over a period of time with the same protagonist sets up a continuous narrative between the paintings. This chapter explores how this decision more precisely communicates

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3 Cole to William P. Van Rensselaer, 15 October 1837, Cole Papers.

That Cole described the pair as a fiction of his own making is problematic. Parry convincingly describes how the poems of Thomas Gray, “The Bard” and “Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard,” likely influenced the characters and narrative substance to the paintings. Or more precisely, Cole drew from the visual iconography of popular images based on Gray’s poem rather than the narrative structure itself. See Parry, “Gothic Elegies for an American Audience: Thomas Cole’s Repackaging of Imported Ideas,” 34; and Parry, The Art of Thomas Cole, 194 – 198. Cole admitted to other literary sources for other works, so his denial here of an outside source implies that it was the contemporary images relating to the poems, rather than the poems themselves, that influenced him. Note however, that Cole owned a copy of works of Gray’s poems, which most likely included both “The Bard” and “Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard,” according to his 1838 book list, Cole Papers. Furthermore, the catalogue entry for the pair when exhibited at the National Academy of Design’s annual exhibition in 1838 describes them as “illustrative of Feudal manners and times” with no reference to Gray.
Cole’s faith in the cyclical nature of history. Individuals, like the knight, come and go, just as civilizations, buildings, and peoples such as American Indians came and went. This chapter demonstrates how, through his use of a continuous narrative structure in *The Departure* and *The Return*, Cole emphasized the sense of time and loss of his protagonist. This chapter further demonstrates Cole’s application of associationist theory to examine the Christian associations in the pair and compares them to the Gothic church in *The Architect’s Dream* and Cole’s “Letter to the Publick on the Subject of Architecture.” Then, this chapter examines how Cole’s fictionalized imaginings of the past lend an especially nostalgic view similar to the techniques of the gothic novelists. *The Departure* and *The Return* help bring together the primary themes of all the preceding chapters of this dissertation, especially the Gothic’s place in Cole’s theories of history and the associations Cole drew between the Gothic and Christianity.

Cole communicated his belief in history’s cyclical nature in two different ways in his *oeuvre*. The first exhibits nature and peoples before their destruction or fall, such as his *The Last of the Mohicans* compositions. The four extant paintings draw attention to the impending destruction of the Mohican people, and by implication, American Indians in general. The American Indians still exist in the landscape, but Cooper’s narrative and Cole’s painted versions suggest that in the future they will diminish to the point of extinction, just like the Mohican people who will be no more after the death of Chingachgook.\(^4\) *The Last of the Mohicans* paintings imply approaching ruin, but that

\(^4\) Chapter 4 explains Benjamin Rush’s theory of the inevitable annihilation of the American Indian.
ruin remains a future event. Cole’s second method of communicating the cyclical nature of history exhibits the results of the ravages of time. These include his paintings of classical and medieval ruins discussed in Chapter 5 as well as his continuous narrative series such as The Departure and The Return, Past and Present, and The Course of Empire. These three groupings demonstrate the inevitable loss and destruction that time brings through before and after imagery, which show physical, architectural ruins in their final compositions. Expulsion from the Garden of Eden, 1828, and Subsiding Waters of the Deluge, 1829, similarly display scenes post-fall, albeit without architectural structures.⁵

In The Departure, a knight leaves presumably for some distant battle, possibly a crusader bound for the Levant. But then, instead of a victorious and triumphant return, he comes home on a litter, presumed dead in The Return. He fell quite literally. This knight and Cole’s painted American Indians from Cooper’s The Last of the Mohicans represent fictitious characters or peoples from the past: the knight from a time several hundreds of years in the past, and the Mohicans from seventy-one years earlier than Cole’s paintings. As history lessons, the unnamed knight, Chingachgook, and Uncas, represent more than just individuals. They all represent cultures that were already gone by the time Cole painted them.

Cole’s examples of the results of history’s cycles also include several cityscapes of Florence. Between 1835 and 1838, he painted at least six landscapes of contemporary

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⁵ Expulsion from the Garden of Eden is at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, MA, and Subsiding Waters of the Deluge is at the Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, D.C.
Florence from sketches he made on his visit in 1832. They portray the medieval city of Florence as it appeared in Cole’s time, with some deterioration, but not completely in ruin. For example, the 1837 painting, *View of Florence from San Miniato* shows both stability and decay (Figure 6.3). The medieval towers of the Palazzo Vecchio and the Borgello as well as the dome of the Duomo stand proudly in the distance. These landmarks seem to defy history. However, the wall in the foreground clearly exhibits the ravages of time and nature’s encroachment: patches of rock crumble and plant growth attacks it from all sides. The four versions he painted of *View on the Arno*, present a similar conjunction of continuance and decay (Figure 6.4). Nature, represented by disorderly-looking plants or weeds, appears to push up against the stone walls and buildings flanking the river, but the old structures still remain intact and useable. These views of Florence exhibit a less extreme or less destructive vision of history’s cycles.

Florence certainly appears less ruined than Cole’s views of *The Colosseum* or *Italian Coast Scene with Ruined Tower*. The city witnessed several peaks of culture: during antiquity, the medieval period, and again during the Renaissance. However, these crests could only happen with valleys in between, which Cole made clear with nature’s steady advancement against civilization’s built environment. The feeling of inevitable decay,

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6 The paintings of contemporary Florence include: *View of Florence* (1837), private collection and *View of Florence from San Miniato* (1837), Cleveland Museum, Cleveland, OH. Cole also painted four versions of *View on the Arno* showing the view from the Florence house of Bostonian Horace Gray. They are now in: (1835), The Thyssen-Bornemisza Foundation, Lugano Switzerland; (1837), The Worcester Art Museum, Worcester, MA; (1838), The Shelburne Museum, Shelburne, VT; and an unknown location.
even when not overwhelming, of a popular city should have felt especially relevant to Cole’s American audience.

Cole applied his belief in the cyclical theory of history to many different types of landscape paintings. In *The Architect’s Dream*, he displayed the striking differences in landscape between the Old and New Worlds. In the landscapes with scenes from *The Last of the Mohicans*, he demonstrated a wilderness and people already destroyed by civilization's progress. Similarly, in his many paintings of ruins, Cole portrayed the remnants from cultures long ago and far away. All these works exhibit a strong difference in treatment between Europe and America, the Old World and New. However, they also serve as warnings for the future state of America: the inevitability that it will follow Europe into decay. If the glorious knight from *The Departure* and *The Return* could fall, what was the hope of a less heroic figure?

Just as *The Departure* and *The Return* exhibit Cole’s beliefs in the cyclical nature of history, they also express the strong association Cole drew between the Gothic as a period or style and the Christian religion. If it were merely to express the course of time through history, Cole could just as easily have painted an ancient Roman warrior leaving for and returning from some imperial campaign. However, by choosing to set the narrative within a Gothic setting, Cole specifically conveyed a Christian rather than pagan knight.

Cole connected this Gothic setting with religious Christian themes in several ways. First, the statue of the Madonna, the only detail that appears in both paintings, identifies the two paintings as showing the same location. Creating a panoramic vista
between the two paintings, Cole showed the Madonna from two opposite directions
between the two scenes. In *The Departure*, the viewer sees her from her back right angle,
watching over the knight as he departs, with the sun shining in her face. However, in *The
Return*, the viewer observes her from the front, with her face in shadow and the setting
sun behind her as she somberly welcomes home the knight’s litter. By repeating the
sculpture, Cole drew attention to what otherwise might be just a wayward detail.

In addition to the strong Christian presence of the Madonna watching over both
scenes, Cole included a Gothic church in *The Return*. Whereas the knight’s castle
appears visible in *The Departure*, he returns to the church, his spiritual home, rather than
his earthly home. There, standing partially in the shadows from the setting sun, the
church shines from within as a golden light emanates from its stained glass windows.
Just as the sculpted Madonna oversees both the beginning and end of this knight’s
progress through life providing a Christian reference, so too the structure of the Gothic
curch reminds the viewer of the knight’s Christianity, and the connection between the
Gothic and Christian spiritualism.

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7 A critic for the New-York Spectator also drew attention to the knight’s sad ending.
“Nos. 64 and 65. *The departure and return; scenes illustrative of feudal manners and
times*. A beautiful country, with a lordly castle crowning a hill – the season, early
summer – the time, morning. A knight comes forth from the castle. He is followed by a
gallant body of retainers. – Their chargers’ hoofs clatter over the causeway. Their
plumes and pennons flutter in the first morning breeze. They are bound for the wars –
they are full of courage and exulting hope. A holy palmer stands in their path, and warns
their fated leader, who turns away with haughty disregard, and with impatient gesture
calls upon his followers to quicken their pace. Again, the scene is different. Yet the
shrine of the Virgin appears to identify the locality. A judicious change in the point of
view has shut out the castle and brought in the adjoining abbey. The summer has passed
away – we see the bright foliage of autumn – and it is evening. The knight returns –
wounded, borne on a litter. His faithful steed follows with dispirited look. His numerous
explained it, especially in his “Letter to the Publick.” His written descriptions in that essay similarly describe his treatment of the church in *The Architect's Dream* and *The Return*. Both paintings reveal the sun shining through the churches’ stained glass windows, allowing them to glow from within with a heavenly radiance, contributing to their sense of grand and sacred inspiration. His “Letter to the Publick on the Subject of Architecture,” makes clear how Gothic architecture opens up a spiritual world that is “lofty, aspiring & mysterious.” In *The Return*, Cole summed up that connection between the Gothic and Christian heavenly ideals with the knight’s journey back to his home, his Gothic church, and ultimately, his maker.

Cole employed the Gothic to emphasize a time of Christian ideals. While many actual Gothic secular buildings lay in ruins during Cole’s time, Gothic churches still dominated European cityscapes. Gothic churches, such as in *The Return* as well as *The Architect's Dream* were, for Cole, highly symbolic of Christian ideals. Cole saw Gothic churches as landscapes for the imagination, where “the longings, the imaginings, the lofty

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train is reduced to a single retainer, who fatigued and dejected slowly lags behind. And lo! from the abbey comes forth to meet him the holy palmer whose prophetic warning we erst saw disregarded, but now behold accomplished. A delicious sentiment breathes through the compositions. There is indeed, even greater feebleness of pictorial effect than in No. 33 [*Dream of Arcadia*], but this is compensated by the character of unity impressed on the design, by the concentration of moral interest in the person and fate of the knight. The clear silvery tone of coloring in No. 64, and the sunset glow of its companion, are beautifully contrasted. The lengthening shadows, the stillness of the air and disposition of the clouds, in the latter, express very forcibly the idea of evening, and are highly poetic. Both are crowded with thoughts – this is their charm. We have spent many a delightful hour in the study of these fine creations, and ever do they grow upon us in their profound significance, their fullness of meaning.” *New-York Spectator*, May 21, 1838, 1.

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aspirations of Christianity have formed expression in stone.”

It is therefore especially fitting that these two paintings of churches in The Return and The Architect’s Dream portray imagined or fantastical scenes. Cole may have used actual Gothic structures as the inspiration for the churches in these two works, but he recreated them in entirely new fictionalized settings. In The Architect’s Dream, Cole revived an English urban cathedral and recreated it in the pristine American wilderness. In The Return, while probably drawing from contemporary Gothic Revival buildings in New York City, Cole transported the viewer out of the city and into a past where he or she can contemplate spiritual hope and salvation.

In “Letter to the Publick,” Cole rooted his preference for the Gothic in its association with Christian imagery and spirituality. The Departure and The Return portray those Christian associations most overtly through the Gothic church and the sculpture of the Madonna and Child; both represent sites of Christian worship. The Architect’s Dream similarly makes such an explicit connection between the Gothic and Christianity, especially as Cole dramatically separated the Gothic from the classical and pagan structures in the dreamscape’s right half. However, for someone who so thoroughly related the Gothic to Christian themes, ecclesiastical structures make up a

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very small percentage of Cole’s overall work. Technically a religious structure
originally, Cole and his contemporaries associated Newstead Abbey (1830) with Lord
Byron.11 Vesper Hymn (1838) portrays a church with a procession entering it as they
commence evening vespers based on Cole’s sketches from the Campi Flegrei during his
visit to Naples in 1832 (Figure 6.5).12 While generally based on a site near Naples, Cole
made many changes, before arriving at the final, more imaginative composition.13 In the
background stands Baia castle, a Roman ruin, to which Cole added a vaguely medieval-
styled tower. In the foreground, a woman kneels at a shrine. The church, mostly likely
based on the sixteenth-century Camaldolese monastery on the Campi Flegrei, still stands,
with a tower.14 However, it shows Cole’s typical signs of deterioration: ivy grows over
its tower, and the trees around it appear to take over its walls. Plants grow over the top of
a crumbling, open-air shrine with a broken column in the foreground. Both it and the
church remain useable, but one questions for how long, reminding the viewer that not
even Christian sites will last. Even the time of day, sunset, reinforces the idea of

11 See my discussion of Newstead Abbey in Chapter 5.

12 Vesper Hymn is at the Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, CT. It has also
been known as Vesper Hymn – Italian Landscape. John R. Clarke explains its
commissioning and subject in “An Italian Landscape by Thomas Cole,” Arts Magazine
54 (January 1980), 116 – 120.

13 John R. Clarke also explains how Cole combined several different studies from his
1832 Naples Sketchbook, now at the Detroit Institute of Arts.

14 John R. Clarke notes that Cole’s 1832 Naples Sketchbook includes the notation
“View of/from Campi Flegrei taken from the Monastery Camaldulense.” John R. Clarke,
119.
But while *Vesper Hymn* combines both elements of ecclesiastical architecture and ruin or decay, it appears more classical than Gothic, with rounded rather than pointed arches. It appears that Cole’s love for Gothic churches may have prevented him from painting an actual Gothic church in ruins.

Christian-connected buildings will fall into disuse and ruin similarly to the church in *Vesper Hymn* and the ruined towers that Cole painted. By focusing more on ruins, whether with Christian or pagan associations, Cole allowed nature and the landscape to dominate. Indeed, if he had painted American Gothic Revival churches in situ, he would have had to focus more on cityscapes. However, if he painted known cityscapes, then Cole would have been less able to apply his own imaginative improvements. He made a crucial business decision by focusing on the wilderness for his American settings, ruins set within a dominant landscape for European settings, and fantasy landscapes for the

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15 Note also that Cole painted several religious subjects devoid of buildings, such as *St. John Preaching in the Wilderness* (1827), Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, CT; *Hagar in the Wilderness* (1827–29), destroyed; *Garden of Eden* (1828), Amon Carter Museum, Fort Worth, TX; *Expulsion from the Garden of Eden* (1828), Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, MA; *Subsiding Waters of the Deluge* (1829), Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, D.C.; *Elijah at the Mouth of the Cave* (1830), unlocated; *The Dead Abel* (1831), Albany Institute of History and Art, Albany, NY; *Christ and the Woman of Samaria* (1832), unlocated; *Angel Appearing to the Shepherds* (1834), Chrysler Museum of Art, Norfolk, VA; *Angels Ministering to Christ in the Wilderness* (1843), Worcester Art Museum, Worcester, MA; *The Tempter* (1843), Baltimore Museum of Art, Baltimore, MD; *Life, Death, and Immortality* (1844), Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, CT; and *The Good Shepherd* (1848), unlocated.

16 Besides the views of Florence, Cole painted two views of Boston, but they show the city from such a far distance, that only the dome of the State House and the tower of Park Street Church identify them as Boston. Instead, the pastoral landscape to the South dominates both compositions. Both the 1828 and 1839 versions are in private collections.
rest. Ithiel Town rejected *The Architect’s Dream* because he wanted the landscape to dominate rather than the architecture. Town desired a landscape because Cole grounded his reputation on his ability to limn vivid landscapes. Contemporary newspaper reviews of Cole’s work also praised his ability as a premier landscape artist. The review of Cole’s *Sleepy Hollow* at the 1835 annual exhibition of the National Academy of Design described Cole as “the best landscape painter in the world… His conception, –his feeling of nature, –is beautiful: and nature on his canvass is not represented, but actually exists.” Cole also enjoyed painting those feelings of nature as they represented the beauty of God’s creations. In his “Lecture on Art,” Cole explained how art and God’s nature went hand in hand.

> Through Art we obtain higher glimpses of Nature. She withdraws the veil which hides from the vulgar eye the glorious infinitude of beauty which God has spread around us. Through Nature we contemplate Art and Art discovers the beautiful in Nature – they are mutual exponents and the true student of Art must be a Student of Nature, for in her are to be found all the types of Beauty.

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18 *The Knickerbocker, or New-York Monthly Magazine* 5 (June 1835), 552. Cole’s *Sleepy Hollow* was catalogue number 24. Unfortunately, it remains unlocated today.

However, the creation of real beauty in art involved more than just copying nature. It required the artist to exercise creative choice and select certain aspects from which to draw, rather than copy scenes, in order to attain a higher, loftier, poetic result.20

By Imitation is not to be understood the vulgar notion that copying whatever nature presents to the eye in her every day garb, in fac-simile resemblances, is the perfection of Artistic power. True Imitation selects from the great world around us the characteristic, the sublime and the beautiful: in its alembic separates the true from the accidental. In the lower ranges of Art, it is true, verisimilitude of Imitation forms a very important source of pleasure; but in loftier Art Imitation is the means through which the essential truths of Nature are conveyed.21

Cole’s poetic interpretation of nature brought him some praise from the critics. An essay on the state of the fine arts in America in 1839 specifically compared Cole to Salvator Rosa and Claude Lorrain for that poetic ability. “For grand poetical conception, the works of Cole are deservedly distinguished. There is an epic sublimity and grace about his pictures, which, without imitation, reminds us of Claude Lorraine’s and Salvator Rosa’s best manners, united.”22 However, in general, Cole felt that his poetic works were unappreciated. When he wrote in his journal describing Italian Coast Scene with Ruined

20 Donald Ringe discusses the connection between eighteenth-century Scottish associationist philosophy and the Hudson River School aesthetic that prioritized the poetic or “the expressiveness of poetry.” See Ringe, “Painting as Poem in the Hudson River Aesthetic,” American Quarterly 12, no. 1 (Spring 1960), 72. Robert Streeter discusses how Scottish associationism became especially important in America after the war of 1812 with a wave of nationalistic literature in his “Association Psychology and Literary Nationalism in the North American Review, 1815 – 1825,” American Literature 17, no. 3 (1945), 243 – 254.

21 Cole, “Lecture on Art,” 108

Tower, he described how pleased he felt with the overall effect, describing it as “poetical.” However, because of that very quality, he assumed “this picture will probably remain on my hands. It is not the kind of work to sell. It would appear empty and vague to the multitude. Those who purchase pictures are, many of them, like those who purchase merchandise: they want quantity, material – something to show, something palpable – things not thoughts.”

His biographer, Louis Legrand Noble agreed that this loftier style went unappreciated. “From pictures merely descriptive of wild nature, he went on to paint those poetically expressive of himself. This was at once regarded as an unfortunate step for one whose pencil was so true to the great features of American landscape. Even the judicious among his friends feared that he was forsaking his only proper path.” These concerns help explain why Cole did not focus more on poetic and architectural subjects over the landscapes even if he might have liked to.

*The Departure* and *The Return* stand among a number of Cole’s works depicting imaginary scenes with buildings as they once might have appeared long ago, as opposed to currently standing in ruins. The others that fall in this category include: *Landscape with Round Temple, The Course of Empire: Consummation of Empire, Dream of Arcadia, The Architect’s Dream, Return from the Tournament, and The Vesper Hymn: An*

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23 Cole, journal entry, 22 May 1838, Cole Papers.


Together, these works combine history and fantasy. The historic architecture provides the setting for idyllic views. As imaginings of the past, they also communicate a sense of nostalgia similar to Cole’s series of paintings representing scenes from *The Last of the Mohicans*. While Cole’s many paintings of ruins portray the devastation that time inflicts on buildings, these scenes of fiction show the past in its idyllic, romanticized glory. Cole emphasized that idealism to provoke a feeling of longing for the past, even if that past never actually existed as he painted it. This longing for the mythic past, and regret for its destruction in the architectural fantasy paintings, *The Last of the Mohicans* paintings, and ruins paintings all work to remind the viewer of history’s cyclical nature. Like the ruins paintings, these images of the past remind the

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26 *Landscape with Round Tower* (1832 – 38), Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, CT; *Course of Empire: Consummation of Empire* (1836), New-York Historical Society, New York, NY; *Dream of Arcadia* (1838), Denver Art Museum, Denver, CO; *Return from the Tournament* (1841), private collection; *The Vesper Hymn: An Italian Twilight* (1841), Toledo Museum of Art, Toledo, OH. Note that *The Vesper Hymn: An Italian Twilight* contains a tower that appears to be very similar to those in the ruined tower paintings (see Chapter 5 for a discussion of his ruined tower paintings). However, this tower appears intact rather than as a ruin. *Course of Empire: Consummation of Empire*, and *Past* also showed historically-styled buildings as they once might have been. However, these works were intended as part of a series viewed together to show the passage of time. The next works in *The Course of Empire* series, *Destruction* and *Desolation*, showed the same buildings in ruins.

27 Susan Stewart explains nostalgia in the context of “distressed genres:” “the nostalgia of the distressed genre is not a nostalgia for artifacts for their own sake; rather it is a nostalgia for context, for the heroic past, for moral order, for childhood and the collective experiences of preindustrial life. Thus we can understand why it makes little difference whether the artifact itself is real or a forgery: distressed genres are characterized by a counterfeit materiality and an authentic nostalgia. In fact, such genres point to the immateriality of all nostalgic objects. These artifacts of memory, these mnemonics, are artifacts of appearance, both partial and allusive.” Stewart, “Notes on Distressed Genres,” *Journal of American Folklore* 104, no. 411 (1991), 24.
viewer of what was lost. Even if Cole did fictionalize that past, it still communicates a sense of regret and loss.

The concepts of nostalgia and the cyclical theory of history seem to be at odds with each other since one yearns for the past, while the other maintains that the lost past will eventually come about again.\textsuperscript{28} However, in his renderings of historical cycles, Cole focused on the loss that accompanied cultures’ downfall. While inevitable, he did not want to hasten it. Cultures rise and fall, as he made clear in his ruins paintings, but the time between peaks, stretched on for too long for any individual to benefit. Therefore, Cole used both nostalgia and cyclical history tropes to lament an irretrievable past.

Cole treated the past in a highly romanticized manner. Just as \textit{The Departure} and \textit{The Return} work together as a pair to communicate a continuous narrative, \textit{Return from the Tournament} (1841) similarly extends or elaborates on the continuous narrative from \textit{Past} and \textit{Present} (1838) (Figures 6.6, 5.4, and 5.5).\textsuperscript{29} The later painting, \textit{Return from the Tournament}, portrays the same castle as the earlier pair but presumably just after the jousting tournament from \textit{Past}. Painted three years after \textit{Past} and \textit{Present}, and for a different patron, \textit{Return from the Tournament} presents an idyllic view of the medieval past with a picturesque barge on the river (very similar to those Cole painted in the different versions of \textit{View on the Arno}) and a knight trotting home after the earlier

\textsuperscript{28} Malcolm Chase and Christopher Shaw argue that a crucial requirement for nostalgia is the societal belief that time is linear with an undetermined future. See Shaw and Chase, “The Dimensions of Nostalgia” in \textit{The Imagined Past: History and Nostalgia}, eds. Shaw and Chase (New York: Manchester University Press, 1989), 2 – 4.

\textsuperscript{29} See Chapter 5 for my discussion of \textit{Past} and \textit{Present}. \textit{Return from the Tournament} is in a private collection.
festivities at the castle. The idealized view, similarly to Past, reveals no sign of the violence associated with tournaments. Instead, through his use of atmospheric haze as the sun lowers in the distance, the gentle shade of the trees, and the calming water of the river, Cole provokes a feeling of longing for a past that no longer exists. Even standing independently of Past and Present, the viewer understands that such a scene can no longer exist. Just as the American Indians from The Last of the Mohicans no longer exist, the noble knight of romantic poems and novels likewise is gone, if he ever existed at all.

Departure, Return, Past, The Return from the Tournament, Present, and The Last of the Mohicans paintings depict imaginary settings. However, in addition to all these fantasy scenes, Cole painted one landscape portraying the imagined past glory of an actual historic building: The Fountain of Vaucluse (Figure 6.7). Painted in 1841, The Fountain of Vaucluse represents the home of the fourteenth-century Italian poet, Petrarch, perched high on a cliff overlooking a river in southern France. Cole painted a fantastical version of Petrarch’s castle as it actually lay in ruins when he visited the site.


31 Fountain of the Vaucluse is now in the collection of the Dallas Museum of Art, Dallas, TX. Note that while Cole’s title did not mention Petrarch by name, educated viewers certainly would have understood the reference. When The New Mirror reviewed the work at the 1843 annual exhibition of the National Academy of Design, the critic specifically described it as portraying “the residence of the poet Petrarch.” The New Mirror, May 6, 1843, 76.
during his 1841 trip to Europe. Considering how architectural ruins were one of Cole’s favorite subjects, it is especially important to analyze his decision to paint the scene as it appeared historically, rather than in ruins as his contemporaries would have seen it.  

This historical portrayal may have been Cole’s attempt to represent a scene the way a gothic novelist might. Similar to a novel, *The Return, or The Architect’s Dream*, it exemplifies a work of fiction. Writing about his experience visiting the site, Cole described the ruins:

A scene different, indeed, from anything I had fancied opened upon us: a few straggling houses stood on the bank of the rapid stream, which descended a deep ravine in a tortuous course, dashing and foaming over its rocky bed. On the right rose a heap of rocks, several hundred feet high, crowned by a ruin, evidently a castle of the middle ages; on the left side of the stream, mountainous rocks arose, singularly marked with excavations, like the entrances of caves. At the upper end of the valley, from whence the water seemed first to burst forth, stood stupendous precipices, walls of perpendicular or impending rock, scarred, scooped, marked, and stained, mountain to the sky – a strange and impressive scene!

Cole made a small sketch onsite, but painted the final scene while in his studio in Rome at the end of 1841 (Figure 6.8). In his drawing, the ruins as Cole saw them appear

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32 Ruins within the landscape make up for nearly one quarter of Cole’s overall work. For a list of all his ruins paintings, see my discussion in Chapter 5.

33 Richard Wallace wrote, “*Fountain of Vaucluse* could almost have been done as an illustration of one of her [Mrs. Radcliffe’s] tales.” Wallace, *Salvator Rosa in America* (Wellesley: Wellesley College Museum, 1979), 121.


35 A photograph in the collection of Olana State Historic Site depicts a now unlocated drawing of the scene with the castle in ruins and a village along the water. My thanks go to Valerie Balint, Associate Curator at Olana, for her help in locating this photograph, even though the original drawing remains lost. Cole referred to his initial drawing made
miniscule compared to the grandeur of the cliffs both behind and below them. In the finished painting, Cole rotated the image from a horizontal layout to a vertical, emphasizing the height of the medieval towers rising up on the mountain, rather than the huge expanse of blank cliff wall in the background. Wisps of cloud pass in front of the background cliffs as well, breaking them up and reducing their dominance. The soaring castle rises high above the valley and rivals the majesty of the cliffs and other natural rock formations rather than merely disappearing into the landscape. Cole further heightened the sense of drama, as well as the composition’s verticality, by the placement of a gnarled tree at the very edge of the rocky river bank in the foreground. The tree twists and turns upward, all the while precariously balanced.

Viewers well-versed in literature attending the National Academy of Design’s 1843 exhibition, in which Cole exhibited the painting, understood that Vaucluse was Petrarch’s home, not only from historical readings of Petrarch, but also from popular travel literature written by Americans who visited the site. Understanding this literary on the spot, writing from Rome to his wife in a letter dated November 11, 1841, Cole Papers.

Cole originally included a figure in long red robes standing in the foreground, presumably Petrarch himself. However, he painted over the figure. The Metropolitan Museum exposed the figure during conservation works, documented it, and then covered it again. My thanks to Sue Canterbury, the Pauline Gill Sullivan Associate Curator of American Art at the Dallas Museum of Art for supplying the painting’s conservation history from both the Dallas Museum of Art and under its previous ownership at the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

The Metropolitan Museum claims that the National Academy of Design’s exhibition catalogue included three lines from Petrarch, which would have explained the site’s significance to any visitor unfamiliar with the site name. See Metropolitan Museum of Art, *American Paintings*, 232. However, the Metropolitan may have accidently attributed
significance of the location would also have helped viewers understand the historical aspect of Cole’s painted view. Just as in his landscapes based on *The Last of the Mohicans*, Cole depicted a historical scene that no longer existed.

*Fountain of the Vaucluse* differs from Cole’s paintings of ruins from the past by portraying Petrarch’s medieval castle intact. It also stands alone as Cole’s only painting of an actual Gothic structure as it once probably appeared, rather than an imaginary place. Considering Cole’s love of the Gothic, it initially seems surprising that this work stands out as an exception rather than the norm. However, instead of comparing it to Cole’s other architectural works, it relates more to his paintings of *The Last of the Mohicans*.

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The lines to this exhibition. *The National Academy of Design, Catalogue of the Eighteenth Annual Exhibition* 18 (New York: Israel Sackett, 1843), leaves out any quotations or descriptions of the painting. It merely identifies its catalogue number and title: 196. *Landscape – The Fountain of Vaucluse*. Rather, a quote from Petrarch appeared in the 1848 memorial exhibition following Cole’s death at the American Art-Union entitled “Exhibition of the Paintings of the Late Thomas Cole.” The quote read: “Chiare, fresche, e dolci acque, / Ove le belle membra / Pose colei che sola a me par donna / – Petrarca, Canzone XI.” The beginning of the catalogue noted that the descriptions (which would have included Petrarch’s quote) came from Cole himself. See *American Art-Union, Exhibition of the Paintings of the Late Thomas Cole: at the Galleries of the American Art-Union* (New York: Snowden and Prall, 1848).

Thomas Campbell’s *The Life of Petrarch* was published in 1841, the same year as Cole’s painting. The popular periodicals, *The New-York Mirror* and *The Knickerbocker, or New-York Monthly Magazine* reviewed Campbell’s book. *The New-York Mirror* also published several travel narratives written by Americans who visited Vaucluse in the 1830s – 1840s. By 1847, Petrarch’s connection to Vaucluse was well-enough known to be included in General Cushing’s speech commemorating the anniversary of the Mexican American war, July 6, 1847. In that speech, Cushing referred to the site of Monterey as having acquired a place in history “as enduring as poetry ever gave to the fountain of Vaucluse, or eloquence to the grove of Academus.” Cushing’s speech was printed in dozens of newspapers throughout the country.
Fountain of Vaucluse shows a building before its ultimate destruction just as The Last of the Mohicans paintings portray a wilderness and people before their inevitable demise.

The Departure and The Return combine those before-the-fall elements seen in Cole’s paintings of The Last of the Mohicans or Fountain of Vaucluse with the post-fall imagery of his architectural ruins paintings. Instead of using actual architectural ruins, however, he chronicled the fall of just one man. As the knight’s litter approaches the shadowy entrance of the Gothic church, it helps remind the viewer of his or her own impending future.

Cole’s “Letter to the Publick on the Subject of Architecture,” explains how he associated the Gothic with Christian spiritualism. The plays of light and soaring heights achieved by pointed arches, compound piers, pinnacles, and towers all provide inspirational feelings of awe and delight. He made this imagery manifest in works such as The Architect’s Dream as well as The Return. The Gothic, for Cole, expresses Christian architecture. Note though that Cole never just singled out Gothic churches in his writing for this associational response. Instead, his description of feelings connected with the Gothic applied to all Gothic structures including castles and towers, which he frequently painted in ruins.

History was crucial for Cole. Instead of a linear history, Cole believed that history moved in cycles with rises and inevitable falls. Within history, and caught up in its ebbs and flows were the opposing pagan and Christian religions, Old and New Worlds, civilization and nature, and classical and Gothic architecture. Cole explored America’s placement within these dichotomies and world history in his paintings of the
American wilderness and the American Indians who once inhabited that landscape, as well as in his painting *The Architect’s Dream*. In his paintings of European architectural ruins, he presented warnings to the American viewing public about their own future. Finally, in his writings about the Gothic, he expounded his favorite architectural style for its links to Christian spiritualism. His interpretation of history helped define the Gothic Revival in terms of the cyclical theory of history. Even the Gothic Revival would fall prey to history, as would America. He conveyed his certainty about history when he wrote, “It is with sorrow that I anticipate the downfall of this republican experiment – its destruction will be a death blow to Freedom.”

In many ways, he considered freedom synonymous with the Gothic. For through the Gothic, the mind “takes wing & soars into an imaginary world.”

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37 Thomas Cole, journal entry, 21 August 1835, Cole Papers.

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Appendix A:

COLE’S “LETTER TO THE PUBLICK ON THE SUBJECT OF ARCHITECTURE”

Letter to the Publick on the Subject of Architecture

To the Publick.

I may perhaps be considered as somewhat presumptuous for an individual whose profession is not that of architecture to advise you on such a subject, but impressed with the conviction that a few remarks on the principles of architecture & criticism on some of the buildings lately erected or in the course of erection may conduce to the improvement of taste I venture to address you. It is possible, even probable that some of the views & opinions I shall offer may not appear correct to suit the notions of many, but even so if by giving them I stimulate to a more general study of the principles of architecture I shall have accomplished my desire. My first thought was to address myself to Architects; but as that would have required me to address myself more technically & argue a greater degree of self-confidence than I possess & my object would only have been partially obtained I have taken this course. A poet has said that “A thing of beauty is a joy forever” & as truly may it be said that an ugly thing is a curse forever & most

1 Essay transcribed from Cole Papers.

2 Cole quotes the first line of John Keats’s “Endymion: A Poetic Romance,” 1818.
emphatically where that thing is wrought in stone – A Costly church or any other publick building destitute of grandeur or beauty, brands bad Bad Taste or the brow of the community in characters that centuries will not erase. Thousands yet unborn will turn away with disgust from those piles of masonry where architects have been destitute alike of the sense of the truly beautiful and the knowledge of those principles of Art & Nature from which emanates all that is excellent in Art. And with us how frequently alas the eye of taste where it seeks to be delighted is not by some strange embodiment of caprice or exhibition of architectural imbecility. On the other hand what a full & lasting source of pleasure is a fine piece of Architecture that is a benefactor to the city, a human triumph.

Art has subjected the laws of gravitation to its own ends, adapted the most obdurate materials to man’s wants & given them expression – the sublime – the beautiful – the picturesque – to the grand & beautiful & the mind by the contemplation & the humble critique as he walks beneath the shadow of some noble obstruction feels his soul expand his thoughts take a loftier flight – the patriot views it with pride & the traveler when wandering in foreign lands calls it to mind & loves his country more than ever. It is my intention to take a cursory view of the principles of architecture, but I will not trouble you with speculations as to the origins & earliest modes of its development. Those modes varied according to the circumstances under which they were produced. The philosophical history of all Art is substantially the same. [end of first page]

There has [been] three epochs the first is that in which Man in his wandering state piles up stones on logs & covers them with branches of trees so as to shelter him against the inclemency of the climate in which he lives. This is the modest form of the Art. The
second is the Utilitarian Age. Man arranges his material to the best advantage for his
common wants & necessitates. For the Third Epoch the materials are arranged not only
for comfort & convenience but are carved & symmetrically arranged. In this epoch the
feeling for the beautiful develops itself – Art becomes a Fine Art. Each of these epochs
has its characteristic principles which are Necessity – Fitness & Expression – And on
these principles architecture as well as the Other Fine Arts is founded.*

It is a very common notion among ignorant persons that there is no accounting for Taste, for Caprice
there is not; but taste is founded on unvarying principles. Persons of Good Taste may
differ but; this is no argument that there are no principles of Taste; but rather that this or
that principle mode is preferred in accordance with the dispositions or temperaments of
the individual. There may be some even among those who style themselves architects
who suppose that the Orders of Architecture are capricious inventions, conventional
forms, which may be & altered at pleasure without any deviation from good
taste. Such are very much mistaken for the distinction & characteristic beauty of each
order is like a musical chord in which if any note is changed with a transition to another
chord it becomes a discord – those characteristic form expression which as I have said
before is what makes Art a Fine Art – Expression depends on proportion with width &
Ornament but mostly on the forms. The Doric the Ionic the Corinthian called now

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3 Cole struck out “symmetrically arranged & carved” here.

4 Cole includes a star footnote here. The footnoted text reads: “These principles of emotion & by the artist’s skill to stone – produced in accordance with the laws of Gravitation & the necessities of man – necessity or utility the ground work. Express the [?].
Grecian orders which have been esteemed the perfection of Architecture, are each the working out, if I may so express myself, of a distinct Man. The expression in stone of a certain emotion of the mind. In the Doric we have the expression of Grandeur & Majesty, in the Ionic of a lofty Elegance In the elaborate Corinthian – richness & beauty. The Doric may fully be compared to sublime Jupiter himself. The Ionic to the proud & stately Juno. The Corinthian to Venus around whose graceful brows luxuriant locks of gold are waving in the breeze. In the completeness of Grecian Architecture every proportion, moulding [sic] is accounted for, either they are necessary or apparently so without turning to the easy solution of Taste/Caprice, such is the completion. I think we want a word to express proportions with proportions to mass, something like the [?] time effect. [end of second page]

Of Grecian Architecture that it might aptly be termed Lithic Philosophy. For Architecture to arrive at the perfections which are seen in the best examples of Greece, Ages of experience & thought must have been necessary & the human mind have travelled by slow degrees from the rude column of unheroic stone such as formed the Druidical structures through the stupendous portals of Egyptian Art to unsurpassed

5 Cole numbered his pages. Page three is the verso of page one; page four is the verso of page two; page five has a blank verso; and page six is only half a page. At the bottom of page six turned upside-down, however, Cole started page three with the following lines: “For Architecture to arrive at the perfection we find in the best examples of Greece, Age of expression & thought much have been required.”

6 My thanks to Ellery Foutch who helped to interpret Cole’s handwriting in this sentence.

7 Cole circled the word “mind.”
beauty of Grecian architecture – Symmetrical & complete the mind dwells on this monument of human skills with satisfied delight in the completions &c…… Roman Architecture is depraved Greek. The forum was borrowed but the spirit was lost & it became more & more rude until it sank in the uncouth in congruities of (7th & 8th centuries) what are called the ‘dark ages’ – But from this ruin sprang a style of Architecture in which the combined elements of Ancient Art mingled together to produce effects hitherto unknown & to satisfy desires to which Christianity seemed to have given birth in the human mind – that is the Gothick. In it architecture aspires to something beyond finite perfection it leaves the philosophic completion of Grecian Art when all is finished to the eye & touch & appeals to the imagination. Partaking of the Genius of Christianity it opens a world beyond the visible in which we dwell. The characteristic expression of this style is not to be looked for in the details as in Grecian Art so much as in its aggregation, the why & the wherefore of its parts are not always indicated. No longer confined like the Grecian Temple to the simple paralelogram, in the gothic Cathedral the labored stone is piled into forms that sometimes appear almost fantastic – in its seemingly interminable aisles, columns soar in clustered bands with everlasting play of light & shade some single & slender as a wand near aloft lifting arches that span the twilight maid as though in defiance to the laws of gravitation. All is lofty, aspiring & mysterious. Its towers & pinnacles climb toward the clouds like airy fabricks. Ever hovering on the verge of the impossible on it the mind does not dwell with satisfied

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8 Cole crossed out Temple here.

9 Cole struck out “gray Cathedral” here.
delight, but takes wing & soars into an imaginary world. The longings, the imaginings, the lofty aspirations of Christianity have formed expression in stone. [end of third page]

I have said that the Grecian Orders of Architecture are founded on unvarying principles of Nature & are consequently not capricious inventions. I would add that there cannot be any other order invented that will not be a combination or modification of them. But it must not be inferred that the modern architecture has no recourse but the new citations of what has already been done & that Architecture has reached the bounds of perfection. No! If we may not invent new orders we may arrange, combine & adapt these primitive orders to our particular purposes & climate. There may be a Doric building that is not quadrangular as Ionic or Corinthian one of many sides & parts – The Gothick is a composite & what a glorious one it is, and other styles may spring forth from the peculiar demands of climate & locality. Hitherto Modern Architects & American ones in particular have in general been contented with being near copyists – they have taken the Grecian Temple for every kind of purpose Churches Banks Statehouses Warehouses and other houses have been cut to this pattern & generally to the Dorik [sic.] order. The material mattered not, whether the ponderous Granite the convenient brick or the light wood all was wrought into the same form all went to the “Dorian Measure.”

The country is bespattered with Grecian absurdities – had there been complete specimens of any Order there would have been some satisfaction for the eye of Taste, but scarcely without exception the Order attempted is mutilated & distorted or denuded of its fitting ornaments that it may be accommodated to the multifarious demands of modern life – In the many buildings there is seldom more than a Grecian Portico & that is generally
attached to a square structure of no order perforated with the pediment & metopes entirely destitute of sculpture with bold unmeaning spaces when there ought to be richness of effect. Villas of this mode may be called classic but they suggest anything but classical ideas. They are more apt to remind us of the Boxes we see in front of the Tallow Chandler’s Shop with a row of candles suspended in front by way of sign or sample. Such porticos, piazzas as they are called afford neither shelter nor shade, being too high & too shallow for either the one or the other – of no use whatever except to support a huge pediment whose bald triangle seems spread out as temptation to the painters to write thereon “Poverty of Taste” in large letters.

Nothing can be more absurd than the Grecian Orders, as they are commonly rendered, in wood. Stone or some composition resembling it is essential to them – had there been no such material, nothing but wood, the skill & Taste that developed those beautiful orders in the mode we have them would have wrought out something far different. Stone on account of its ponderosity & priability requires mass, and that mass is a source of grandeur. Wood on the contrary has great strength, tenacity & is extremely light compared with stone, a wooden rod of ten feet long or more, an inch in diameter, may be extended without breaking – but it would be next to impossible to make a rod of

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10 Cole wrote something very similar on another undated paper, possibly an earlier draft for this essay although incomplete. He wrote, “grecian porticos which afford neither shelter nor shade & yet appear to be the most important part of the building. In fact the parts square box of a house behind appears to be attached to the portico rather than the portico to it. They always remind me of a Tallow-Chandler Box with a row of candles suspended in front as a sample.” Cole Papers. For a full transcription of this draft, see Appendix B.
half that length of stone & if made it would either break on lifting up or by [?] the [?]
below. It is evident therefore that a building of wood ought to be constructed in a much lighter manner than one of stone – if there are columns they may be very slender & the intercolumnation wider. The ornaments may be more varied & projecting – there is an incongruity in a massive wooden building – for mass & durability have an intimate connection in the mind – no one expects a wooden building to endure for centuries. And to use more material than is necessary in a work of architecture is to deviate from one of the fundamental principles of the Art which is fitness, and certainly from the utilitarian idea of economy.

The English Cottage style has of late made its appearance among us. It is picturesque and well suited to the climate of England, but my impression is that it looks like an exotic here. It does not harmonize with the American landscape and the Climate being more sunny than that of England more shade is required than is to be found in the English Cottage Style. Large Piazzas, deep recesses, projecting roofs, great breadth of style is demanded by the American Landscape & climate. And there cannot [end of fifth page] be a doubt that such features, when taste has wrought its way & cast off the trammels of mere imitations, will be found characteristic of American Villa architecture. American landscape is generally broad & grand & its architecture ought to harmonize with it. The English Cottage, picturesque & complete as it is when seen in some shady nook hidden like a bird’s nest & only to be found on searching, looks [mean?] &
[d…tion?] when placed on the ample hills that rise from the Hudson River. From the Italian Villa Architecture I imagine we can adopt much – its bold & varied outlines, simple in its parts but varied in its aggregate it affords simplicity with variety and a capability of being adapted to any international economical arrangement that may be required – and regularity of forms not entering into its elements, additions always true may by judicious management be made to contribute to its effects.

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11 Cole wrote something very similar on another undated paper, possibly an earlier draft for this essay. He wrote: “The Italian Villa style appears to have to be the one which could be adapted to our [?] with the greatest facility. The English Cottage style is certainly very picturesque & complete for the English Climate but we have more sun & want more shade and greater Breadth of parts.” Cole Papers. For a full transcription of this draft, see Appendix B.

12 Cole struck out the last line “But it must be of brick or stone – a wooden tower is a preposterous thing.”
Appendix B:

DRAFT OF ESSAY ON ARCHITECTURE

“I am inclined to think that the gothick cannot strictly be called a style of Architecture. Its parts are in fact the other orders modified and arranged in another manner. Its clustered columns are full banded Corinthian – Arches do not distinguish orders they are moods of construction – merely it’s the combination of the other orders on a more compendious principle. Its parts are not complete in themselves as in a Grecian Building, but only effective in aggregation. They are not the stanzas in the Epic but the words – for the Grecian the parts are sentences & stanzas of Cantos.

“The mummeries were performed under the portico or in Front where the Altar was placed. In this nave of commons I know why must this be taken for a Bank or a Custom House. Except it may be that the Customs House officers are the Priests & at stated times they must appear in their Robes & offer up sacrifices to some political deity – and look at those villas with imaginary grecian porticos which afford neither shelter nor shade & yet appear to be the most important part of the building. In fact the [p?] square box of a house behind appears to be attached to the portico rather than the portico to it. They always remind me of a Tallow-Chandler Box with a row of candles suspended in [front?] as a sample. Our climate demands porticos as rather [p?] as we call them we [now?] both shelters for shade. Property [Roofs?] dupe [secessor? Recalling?] will

1 Undated draft of an essay is in the Cole Papers.
distinguish our Villa architecture. The Italian Villa style appears to have to be the one which could be adapted to our with the greatest facility. The English Cottage style is certainly very picturesque & complete for the English Climate but we have more sun & want more shade and greater Breadth of parts.”
There is a grandeur in the mountain wilderness, not found elsewhere. It has more than the silence of the ocean when calm: more than the ocean’s tumult when the tempests are abroad. At times the forests sleep & the streams as they steal through the umbrage, whisper softly like gentle waves on a sandy shore, and the mountains Lake the hues and quietness of the calm heaven into which they lift themselves. But when storm drives his terrible chariot over the hills, then the forests heave with waves blacker than dark tossings of the deep south-sea; and the mountains amidst the thunder clouds, quiver in their loftiness like the highest wave of the great deluge ere it stooped over the remnant of the ante-diluvian world – and what wilderness is more sublime than that of the New World? Where exists such utter solitude? In the parched desert of Africa there is silence – monotony; but where the sun shines with ashen blaze, the mind does not acknowledge that sense of utter solitude. But in the thick shadowy forest where a somber twilight prevails even at noontime man feels that he is a lonely being. Around him is an almost sepulchral gloom – a deathlike stillness. [end of page 1]

But even in that gloomy quietude, there is a charm. He feels like a spirit – he is exempt from the turmoil of the world, he gazes on the works of God with eyes unclouded by the earth of which he is formed. When he stands on the shore of some calm unrippled lake, which the mountains have locked up as a gem; there is nought to remind him of

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520 Thomas Cole, Cole Papers.
man. The crags have no dark towers frowning above them, over which the story of the deeds of [mailes ?] knights of the obstinate defense of the besieged, or the high daring of the besiegers, shows a halo of romantic interest. Nor do the calm waters reflect the gray monastic pile, under whose sacred arches saints are said to have lived & died, and after death worked wondrous miracles. No! The history of human actions performed a thousand years ago does not hallow the wild scenes of the New World. But there is a mightiness in her untamed features of which the impress of man’s power would deprive them. On the furrowed sides of the mountains we read the history of the storm & the earthquakes of the winds, the floods and the lightning for the past thousands of years. And still these ramparts of the world are unbroken, and in their storm forms we may read the tale of ten thousand years to come. [end of page 2]

But the wilds of America are not devoid of the interest of human events. The proud Indian has roamed through them. Here are many spots which his traditions and superstitions have hallowed – where he has died in defense of his inheritance, & where he has glutted his revenge in the blood of the white man. Too often are the scenes of the wild connection with the story of blood & violence; but interwoven with them are instances of exalted bravery, & fortitude. Among the tales of the Wilderness that of the death of Chocorua is highly affecting.

The state of N Hampshire is a land of beauty & sublimity. Its forests lakes and wild mountains are thrown together like a heap of jewels, in which gem reflects its beauty on gem. In the picturesque chain of the Sandwich Mountains, the eye of the traveler rests upon one peak that towers preeminently. It rises from the wooded plain, high amidst the solitude of heaven; an eternal pyramid of unhewn granite and the pride of Giza or Babel’s
architectural mount man’s noblest efforts; wants sink into nothingness by the side of this mighty work of the Great Architect.

Spent with the fatigues of unsuccessful chase, [end of page 3] Chocorua flung from him his bow and quiver, and sat on the topmost rock of that lofty mountain: a desponding man. He gazed as from the clouds on the fair earth that lay beneath him. It spread out like the rich mosaick floor of some vast palace. On every hand forests of deep green stretched into immensity, & from their dark bosoms countless lakes threw forth beams of silver light. The mountains crossed the far horizon and spanned the depths of ether, like supernal arches extending to some distant world. It was a gorgeous scene; a paradise in which the sunbeams loved to dwell.

But thoughts of sadness came thick in the soul of Chocorua, as he gazed on the scene, and his voice rose on the silent air. This is the inheritance of my Fathers, the hunting ground of the chiefs of old! The birthright of Chocorua! Wherefore then is the fire of any wigwam extinguished and my children without food! Wherefore is Chocorua like a bird over the wild waters, without a resting place for his feet! Wherefore unhappy! Because strangers are come up from the great lake and over the earth! They shadow the land like a dark cloud & bear in their hands lightning that destroys afar. In the day of my youth the deer were plentiful; they sported round these hills like the mists of the morning, and the arrow carried death when it flew; now they fly [end of page 4] far off like clouds, and the arrow falls to the ground. In those days the red man looked from the rising to the setting sun & saw no pale face, and the smoke of the wigwam rose on every wind.

The sun of the red man is set: he vanished from the hills like light when the night comes. He falls like the withered leaf and the winds moan over him. The white man digs
the grave of the Indian & builds a fire over his bones. Why does Chocorua linger on the
grave of his father, when he cries from the land of spirits: “Come.” “The earth is no
longer the home of the red man, the Great spirit wants his red children & gives the earth
to the white.” The words of Chocorua as he mused on the fate of his people were
interrupted by sounds of human voices, breaking the airy solitude. A band of White
hunters climbed the mountain’s summit. They gathered around the Indian, and looked
upon him as on the wild beast of the forest; whose life was valueless but for the sport of
the hunter. At that time there was peace between the whites & the Indian tribes, but that
availed nothing with these monsters; they delighted in the shedding of blood, and the lone
& defenseless Chocorua was doomed to be the victim of their cruelty – Chocorua quailed
not before them. He feared not death, he longed to be emancipated. [end of page 5] In
the wantoness of barbarity they gave him the choice of death – to leap from the verge of
that fearful precipice into the gulf that opened in misty distance below or to wait the
unerring rifle-shot. Chocorua stood erect against the sunset sky, nor spoke, nor moved in
answer or in supplication. And but for the waving of his dark locks in the passing wind,
was as a proud Statue of Defiance sculptured from that mountain rock. They brandished
their weapons of death and with cruel deliberation took aim at his defenseless bosom.
His limbs were firma & untrembling & his eye sank not. They fired, and Chocorua fell.
His warm blood drenched the rock. The tide of life ebbed quickly, but this spirit of
retribution for a moment stayed the current. The dying man half raised from the rock,
cast a withering gazing on his murderers, & uttered a fearful malediction. He fell back,
and the soul of Chocorua winged its way from the earth on the last beam of the setting
sun.
The curse fell on their ears like the sound of an earthquake: that night they felt its power. Trembling the homicides shrank from the presence of the dead, and hastened from the scene of blood with their load of guilt, but ere they left it a black cloud enveloped them & a portentous blast shrieked by. Night came on. The fierce & wailing winds were abroad. The blasted leaves were tossed to & fro. The deer trembled in his hiding place. The eagle forsook his craggy seat, for the midnight sky was troubled. Darkness and wind and lightning all conspired to make night terrible. The trees were torn from their high places, and the torrents loosed from the rent thunder clouds, dashed down the steeps with overwhelming fury. The toppling rocks thrown from their foundations, boomed down the precipices, & smoking shot through the forests – leaped – fell and thundered on, as if hurled by the fierce spirit of desolation. What breathing thing could live. The murderers sought; but found no place of shelter. The roarings of the tempest came to their ears, like the dread voice of Chocorua foretelling their doom. And their doom was sealed. The next sun that rose shone upon the heaped rocks and earth that entombed the murderers of Chocorua.

The Curse hangs heavy on the land to this day. And the Cattle of the whites perish on the hunting grounds of Chocorua. [End of page 7]