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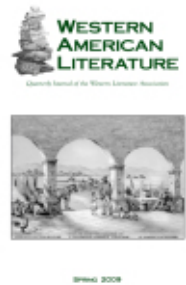
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POETIC TRAVELERS: FIGURING THE WILD IN PARKMAN, FULLER, AND KIRKLAND

KEN EGAN JR.

Francis Parkman, Margaret Fuller, and Caroline Kirkland brought far more than supplies and servants when they journeyed west—they came freighted with poetic lines. Nineteenth-century travel narratives incorporate an impressive amount of poetry. This surprising textual feature grants us a unique opportunity to consider the ideological and ecological implications of poetry for nineteenth-century US citizens. We discover that the lyric poem often served as a boundary condition of citizenship, the very testing ground for the self's relationship to polity and place. The poem created its own frontier condition, a liminal space between the reader's known world and the natural world of the North American landmass. The reader traversed that space, entering a virtual reality that could affirm or subvert assumptions about the "American" self and its relationship with the physical world. The poem could test the imperial self's claims for dominion over the wild.

FIGURING THE WILD

But how can poems stage an interaction with the wild? As ecocriticism has compulsively worried, what is the relationship between text and world, word and natural artifact? Do we get at the real thing, the natural phenomenon, or are we forever confined by language? Following Dana Phillips's neopragmatic lead, we can navigate past this impasse by asserting that the text generates an instrumental representation of the world that instigates response, debate, and sometimes revision. Put differently, poems often represent habitual or consensual images of the wild, figures that can mobilize multiple, often conflicting responses. We might imagine, then, that the scene of reading a nature poem involves three overlapping ecologies or lifeworlds: the writer's, the reader's, and the text's. How did these ecologies reinforce, resist, or simply ignore each other? How did a particular reader "uptake" a figural rendering of the wild? This analysis does not dismiss or diminish the consequences of reading for wild nature. The reader's responses will determine future beliefs, future actions. But it does accept as axiomatic the figural quality of nature, its "fashioning" in

poetry of the nineteenth century (or our own time). Readers might enter this space of mediation—this poetic frontier—to determine their ethical commitments to nature.

What was at stake in these reading practices? The antebellum citizen inhabited an anxious, unstable cultural identity that was undergoing challenge and revision. The nation and its citizens seemed to dwell in permanent liminality: “As important a component of the mid-nineteenth-century anxiety about national form as slavery ... was a less tangible set of concerns about boundaries, boundlessness, and the incorporation of space not yet mapped according to Euro-American conventions or organized according to Euro-American principles of order” (Baker 4). The lyric poem provided an occasion to encounter that anxiety, that role and ontological confusion. By traversing the poem—by entering into the frontier of reading—the citizen could potentially confront and resolve these doubts.

During the nineteenth century, the lyric poem provided an especially powerful instance of staging such an encounter, since the reader could memorize the text so that it became a portable virtual reality device. We know from contemporary testimony that memorization was a far more common practice than it is today (Zboray and Zboray 39–41). Nineteenth-century citizens carried Bible tracts, songs, oratory, and poetry in their heads. They could inhabit a text at any place or time of their choosing. In this way, the lyric poem provided the very vocabulary, the very language of the self: “The tension ... between poetry as an acculturating force and poetry as the key to self-knowledge or self-invention ... was not so much resolved as negotiated by readers as they both performed and internalized verses” (Sorby xv).

As US readers entered the space of testing their claims about and for nature, they did so within the horizon of ideological possibilities reproduced by the culture (Sorby xvii). The reader was acculturated into conventional, normalized ways of conceptualizing and responding to the wild, and these normalized assumptions defined the limit, or boundary, that would be tested by the reader’s experience of the poem. To invoke an illuminating analogy, landscape painting, “far from being the expression of an expansive democracy, was a cultural endeavor directed at consolidating a middle-class social identity utterly bound up with the civilizing mission” (Miller 11). This boundary marked the “habitual” or “common-sense” way of describing the natural world, and it is often poetry’s role to summon such conventional ways of seeing for affirmation as well as for ironic response.

More precisely, US citizens were fascinated by what we might call “latent destiny.” For all our scholarly and popular writing about a manifest

design, the direction of the future was anything but clear. Yet the futurist US citizen anticipated transformation. What would be its direction, its telos? And more specifically, what role would nature play in that destiny? In this way, the natural world was conceived as the staging ground for an emergent culture rather than as a self-contained, sufficient good. Participants in this culture pursued “second creation,” and so “the technological foundation story led the American eye to see not the landscape that was there but what it might become” (Nye 31). But Nye describes a consensus rather than a monolithic ideology; many “counter-narratives” emerged in nineteenth-century culture (14).

Readers could potentially respond to this limiting, or boundary, ideology in a number of ways: utter acceptance of its conditions without concern about its implications, an abject or complacent response that disavows the boundary situation as ideological or conceptual test; the subversion of the very notion of nature as second creation, an overturning of the empowering myth of empire; and, perhaps most typically, consideration of the specific direction of change, producing some strain or anxiety as the reader imagined a concrete, or defined, manifestation of “America.” The reader’s lifeworld, or ecology, upon encountering the textual world of the lyric poem was highly stable in its fundamental assumptions about the nature of nature and potentially very unstable about the specific trajectory of transformation.

POETIC TRAVELERS

These claims for the ideological import of poetry are borne out by prominent renderings of the frontier: Francis Parkman’s *The Oregon Trail* (1849), Margaret Fuller’s *Summer on the Lakes, in 1843* (1844), and Caroline Kirkland’s *A New Home, Who’ll Follow?* (1839). These narratives reproduce a surprising number of poetic passages, often serving as epigraphs to chapters. We typically read such excerpts as introductory matter, setting the tone or theme for the prose that follows. But we can reverse perspective by reading the subsequent chapter as an interpretation of the epigraph. In other words, I will consider how the writers provide reader responses to selected poetic passages embedded in their frontier stories. Doing so discloses a range of reactions to the boundary situation: Parkman represents the complacent citizen who takes for granted the wilderness as subject to US control; Fuller represents an almost diametrically opposed position, asserting the violence and ugliness of empire-building while projecting an American utopian culture; Kirkland occupies a middle ground between these two perspectives, reflecting upon the appropriate direction for remaking the wild.

The original subtitle for Parkman's travel story hints at his vision of wilderness: [*A Summer's Journey out of Bounds*]. The narrator remains very much a Boston gentleman on holiday. He traverses the space of Indians and untrammelled nature, amused, often disgusted, at times caught up in its beauty, its uncanniness. This boundary situation by no means destabilizes or challenges his sense of himself as Brahmin, as a highly cultured citizen of a superior civilization: "For my part, I was in hopes that Shaw and Henry Chatillon were coming to join us. I would have welcomed them cordially, for I had no other companions than two brutish white men and five hundred savages" (188). In another revealing moment, Parkman pauses in mid-description of a US mountain range to recall his travels in Italy, particularly his visits to St. Peter's Basilica and a Catholic monastery. The American wilderness summons memories of the young gentleman's sentimental education in Europe.

And that intellectual and imaginative leap points to Parkman's thesis about these spaces "out of bounds":

Great changes are at hand in that region. With the stream of emigration to Oregon and California, the buffalo will dwindle away, and the large wandering communities who depend on them for support must be broken and scattered. The Indians will soon be corrupted by the example of the whites, abased by whisky and overawed by military posts; so that within a few years the traveller may pass in tolerable security through their country. Its danger and its charm will have disappeared together. (176-77)

He accepts as historically inevitable the eclipse, the degradation, of Indians and wilderness. He certainly expresses no love or respect for those western immigrants (he can't wait to leave them in the dust as he sets out on his adventure among the Indians in what we now call Wyoming). He doesn't bother to claim that the impending changes are for the good of humanity or land—he feels no need to do so. As he urges at every opportunity, the savage Indians can make no claim upon the reader's sympathies; they are truly beyond culture, beyond the benefits of art, learning, science. They inhabit a childlike mystical world of familiars and spirits, comically vulgar in their manners and appearance.

But how do these assumptions show themselves in Parkman's responses to poetry? His epigraphs return time and again to canonical moments of invoking wild nature in British and American poetry (Byron is a special favorite, not surprising given his persona as a highly sophisticated, world-weary traveler). The narrator often treats these passages as imaginative, elevated renderings of his experiences on the ground in the



Mary Nimmo Moran. *ACROSS THE WATER*. Ca. 1880–1890. Etching on paper. 14.9cm x 20.2cm. Courtesy of the Smithsonian American Art Museum.

far West of America. The opening epigraph, quoted imperfectly from Shelley, reads, “Away, away from men and towns / To the silent wilderness” (9). (Parkman’s revisions to his source material, whether conscious or not, frequently suggest his bias or emphasis in drawing upon a particular passage. In this case, he omits a line that would evoke a British countryside rather than the great American desert.) The following chapter confirms the narrator’s desire to flee the constraints of proper New England society, a desire to break out of the bounds set by status and education. Yet we’re reminded often that this is a temporary suspension of the social rules, a time-out for the young gentleman to test his mettle and observe the wild Indians before their destruction. In other words, there is little consideration of the wild as a good unto itself, worthy of respect and defense. The western tour is of a piece with the tour of Italy. It is part of the necessary education of the callow cultural leader. The natural world serves the private development of an elite member of US culture.

To be fair, Parkman does render diverse landscapes of the far West, suggesting attention to detail and to place that might lessen the reader’s sense of his indifference to the concrete reality of that world. He uses a sketchbook technique to characterize what we now call diverse ecosystems: the river valley of the Missouri, the plains of Kansas, the lands

surrounding the Platte River, the mountains beyond Fort Laramie. But two patterns slowly emerge: the horrific desert-like qualities of the plains, so different from the lush New England landscape of his longing; and the anti-sublime effects of mountain and valley, a refusal to acknowledge the elevating, spiritual powers of the US landscape (in this sense, he seems quite at odds with the very poets he quotes, especially William Cullen Bryant). A passage from a ballad by Oliver Goldsmith, introducing chapter 13, revealingly titled "Hunting Indians," captures this near-despairing sense of the American wild: "—I tread, / With fainting steps and slow, / Where wilds immeasurably spread / Seem lengthening as I go" (154). Perhaps because he suffered from dysentery during much of the journey, Parkman often communicates a sense of the wilderness as immeasurable, protracted, expansive to a frightening degree. There's a lurking sense of aesthetic and emotional frustration: the narrator longs to spend time with the Indians, to inhabit their fast-disappearing world for a time, then return to the bounded safety of home. But these children of nature don't always play along in the young gentleman's game. They inconveniently follow their own rules for hunting and camping, moving to rhythms at odds with the sojourner's. And the wild itself disarms him with its sheer scale, its vastness. It seems to go on forever, terrifying in its lack of form or shape.

Yet Parkman's responses to his poetic sources are often more subversive, more ironic than I have so far suggested. Lucy Maddox has wittily argued that Parkman's purpose in writing *The Oregon Trail* was to "rescue" the Indians and the wilderness from the poets and novelists so that he could reclaim them for historians in his own scholarly writing on North American tribes (162–68). Given the variability and vastness of the West, Parkman sometimes finds his sources inadequate to the task of characterizing its difference, its uncanniness. Take the opening epigraph from Shelley quoted above: the narrator quickly discovers that the wilderness is anything but silent. The Missouri frontier is packed with immigrants, trappers, and ne'er-do-wells headed for the Oregon Trail. The natural world itself, once Parkman reaches the plains, is buzzing with sounds, with life, whether wolves or mosquitoes. Indian camps are cauldrons of cacophony: screaming children, clattering women, boastful men. Perhaps Parkman insinuates the Emersonian moral that British poetry is not adequate to the task of figuring the US wild. (Yet Bryant is the only US poet quoted, and only four times in the space of a 300-page narrative.) Or perhaps Parkman advocates the more radical position that the autobiographer and historian must speak truth, the real, against the eloquent but uninformed poets.

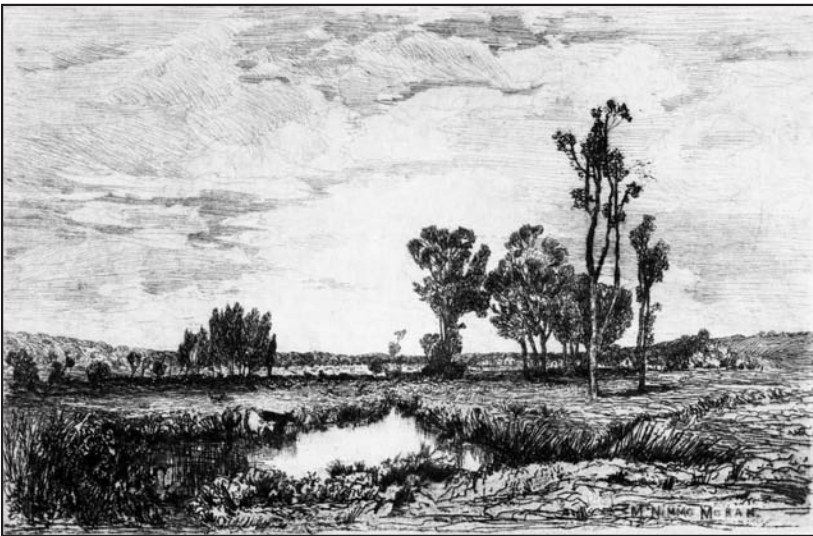
That skepticism is certainly implied by the persona's take on the longest poetic passage in the text, the epigraph to chapter 19, "Passage to the Mountains," extracted from Byron's *Childe Harold*:

"Dear Nature is the kindest mother still,
Though always changing, in her aspect mild;
From her bare bosom let me take my fill,
Her never weaned, though not her favored child.
O, she is fairest in her features wild,
When nothing polished dares pollute her path;
On me by day and night she ever smiled,
Though I have marked her where none other hath,
And sought her more and more, and loved her best in wrath"
(239)

If Byron's lyric evokes the sublime, Parkman initially rejects that ascription to the Wyoming Rockies: "On the next morning we entered once more among the mountains. There was nothing in their appearance either grand or picturesque, though they were desolate to the last degree, being mere piles of black and broken rocks, without trees or vegetation of any kind" (240). And the people living closest to this daunting environment summon this moment of disdain: "For the most part, a civilized white man can discover but very few points of sympathy between his own nature and that of an Indian. ... Nay, so alien to himself do they appear, that having breathed for a few months or a few weeks the air of this region, he begins to look upon them as a troublesome and dangerous species of wild beast, and if expedient, he could shoot them with as little compunction as they themselves would experience after performing the same office upon him" (242). We seem at a very far remove from kind Mother Nature. While Parkman does provide a few sublime prospects in the remainder of the chapter, the journey ends with this recognition: "At length, from the broken summit of a tall sandy bluff we could see Fort Laramie, miles before us, standing by the side of the stream like a little gray speck, in the midst of the boundless desolation. ... It seemed to me the very centre of comfort and civilization" (252). In *The Oregon Trail*, then, the lyric poem does not become the occasion to test, let alone revise, Parkman's concept of the US wilderness as subject to second creation. Once the summer ends, the narrator gladly returns to the comforts of civilization, having completed his temporary immersion in a world fast disappearing. The traveler's work is done—it has prepared the Harvard graduate to begin the writing of US history, the story of the inevitable decline and fall of the wild.

Margaret Fuller also uses a summer out of bounds to advance self-culture, but she is a decidedly more spiritual or prophetic witness to the US frontier than Parkman: “Drawing on historical sources, contemporary travel books, and her own first-hand experience of life in prairie land, Fuller used the opportunity of visiting the frontier to meditate on the state of her own life and of life in America—both as they were and as she hoped they might become” (Smith xx). Whereas Parkman’s rhetoric stresses his status as a keen, frank observer of the actual, Fuller is always on the lookout for the potential, the latent, the soon-to-be. She is a transcendentalist utopian (featured as a frequent conversationalist at Brook Farm before she set out on this sojourn). She often critiques the materialism and utilitarianism of the settlers, yet she does not reject wholesale the ideal of establishing a pastoral culture in the then far West.

Unlike Parkman, who relies upon published contemporaries and classics for his extracts, Fuller often generates her own verse, demonstrating the Zborays’ claim that antebellum readers were often inspired to become creators as well as consumers of poetry. She seems to have set out to fulfill Emerson’s call for a truly indigenous poetics. She seeks an apt language, an eloquent voice for the Illinois, Wisconsin, and Michigan landscapes of prairie and lake. In this way, Fuller stages her own liminal, or frontier, experience, disclosing with unusual clarity the citizen’s struggle to conceptualize her relationship with the wild.



Mary Nimmo Moran. *CATTLE IN A POND*. 1881. Etching on paper. 14.8cm x 22.7cm. Courtesy of the Smithsonian American Art Museum.

At times, Fuller registers “the wilderness’s complaint,” an elegy for the wild spaces of the old Northwest:

Some dried grass-tufts from the wide flowery plain,
 A mussel shell from the lone fairy shore,
 Some antlers from tall woods which never more
 To the wild deer a safe retreat can yield,
 An eagle’s feather which adorned a Brave,
 Well-nigh the last of his despairing band,
 For such slight gifts wilt thou extend thy hand
 When weary hours a brief refreshment crave? (2)

This passage strikes at the heart of the US imperial dream, summoning the land and people lost in the process of settlement. Yet it also reveals a deep paradox, even contradiction, at the core of this counter-narrative: the simultaneous bemoaning and acceptance of that very act of claiming and transforming a place. In a sense, that contradiction is inevitable if one grants Emerson’s claim that “nature is the symbol of spirit.” While the assertion endows the physical universe with radiating significance, it also subordinates the land to the spiritual meaning and development of the universe (i.e., human beings). Fuller frequently intimates that she would prefer that the wilderness remain intact, yet given the inevitability of westward migration, settlers might as well make the best of it. That is, US citizens might at least aspire to a more elevated, aesthetic form of settlement:

The old landmarks are broken down, and the land, for a season, bears none, except of the rudeness of conquest and the needs of the day, whose bivouac fires blacken the sweetest forest glades. I have come prepared to see all this, to dislike it, but not with stupid narrowness to distrust or defame. On the contrary, while I will not be so obliging as to confound ugliness with beauty, discord with harmony, and laud and be contented with all I meet, ... I trust by reverent faith to woo the mighty meaning of the scene, perhaps to foresee the law by which a new order, a new poetry is to be evoked from this chaos. (18)

Fuller frequently links this search for a new law to the status of women on the frontier, longing for equal partnerships between males and females in this emerging social space. It was as if Fuller looked for evidence that her dream of redefined gender roles, published in the form of “The Great Lawsuit” during her travels, might be realized on the ground of this uncanny western world. As Joan Burbick observes, “The frontier ... becomes a space where class-bound definitions of gender per-

sist doggedly, but the possibility of their breakage and transformation is imminent" (73).

When Fuller concentrates her attention on the Indians, she assaults the attitude toward native peoples exemplified by Parkman:

We take our turn, and the Philosopher
Sees through clouds a hand which cannot err,
An unimproving race, with all their graces
And all their vices, must resign their places;
And Human Culture rolls its onward flood
Over the broad plains steeped in Indian blood. (117)

In the prose passages that frame this poetic moment, Fuller challenges the imperialistic assumptions of "the Philosopher." She claims, for instance, that in some ways Indian women share greater equality with their male counterparts than do whites. She also astutely calls attention to the ways in which US culture has created the very beings it rejects: "All their claims, all their sorrows quite forgot, in abhorrence of their dirt, their tawny skins, and the vices the whites have taught them" (113). Even more radically, the narrator discovers an organic metaphysics in Indian cultures, one that might model in part the US response to the wild: "All places, distinguished in any way by nature, aroused the feelings of worship, which, however ignorant, are always elevating" (127). And so Fuller concludes that "the civilized man is a larger mind, but a more imperfect nature than the savage" (136). Fuller holds herself up as the model utopian citizen, celebrating the natural landscape, recognizing injustice to aboriginal peoples, and projecting a better, more refined pastoral culture that synthesizes wilderness and civilization, indigenous theology and European literature.

One suspects Caroline Kirkland would have scoffed at Parkman's Brahmin bravado and Fuller's naïve idealism. Though published first, *A New Home* can be read as an anticipatory critique of the frontier stories to follow. No doubt this acerbic attitude emerged in large part from Kirkland's having actually lived on the Michigan frontier (rather than simply having taken a time-out from her New England life): "Written under the pen name, Mary Clavers, this book presents a thinly fictionalized chronicle of the two years (1837-39) Kirkland spent with her husband and children in rural Michigan" (Borup 229). The narrator appears as one of the "learned women" who have recently garnered attention in studies of antebellum reception: "typically they were white; and variations notwithstanding, they were relatively privileged. Perhaps most notably, nearly all of them had received the most advanced education then available to women in the United States" (Kelley 57). Poetry plays a prominent, even crucial role in

this fictionalized personal narrative. Whole sections of the text read like advanced literary criticism from the 1830s. How does Kirkland respond to nature poetry of the early nineteenth century? Does she undergo a boundary experience, or does she summon poetry to affirm preexisting attitudes?

Her settlement narrative might be read as an extended commentary on the opening epigraph, once again excerpted from the default US poet of the wild, Bryant:

Here are seen
 No traces of man's pomp and pride; no silks
 Rustle, nor jewels shine, nor envious eyes
 Encounter * * *
 Oh, there is not lost
 One of earth's charms; upon her bosom yet
 After the flight of untold centuries
 The freshness of her far beginning lies. (3)

The passage seems to assert the edenic purity, the pre-fall feminine charms of the wild. Rather than exhibiting the artificial glitter of high society, US nature displays “her” first and best attributes, the organic, the uncorrupted. It is as though the US citizen could step back to the pre-fall garden, recover the simplicity and wonder of the world before Eve’s transgression, Adam’s lapse. In other words, Bryant’s speaker insinuates that wild nature is a sufficient good, not the fitting object of transformative energies.

But it does not take the reader long to discover that this epigraph poses a kind of emotional and intellectual trap. In this consistently sardonic, anti-romantic text, Bryant’s flight of fancy seems not just inappropriate but disingenuous. The wilderness Kirkland’s surrogate comes to know defies the sentimentalizing mode of such lyric moments. If Kirkland will ultimately affirm the boundary ideology of “America” as second creation, she will at the same time challenge, even subvert a sentimental mode of discourse. (As the narrator memorably observes at one point, “Who can be sentimental and hungry?” [15]). Nathaniel Lewis persuades when he asserts that Kirkland advocated the transformation of the Michigan wilderness through technology (54). Revealingly, she often quotes Francis Bacon, an influential advocate for remaking nature through human ingenuity. You can’t go home again, if home means an unreconstructed wilderness. There are too many mudholes, too many discomforts, too many dangers.

Kirkland’s narrator pauses often to satirize her own obsession with wildflowers, a prominent symbol for the beauty and wonder of unvar-

nished nature. (Fuller shows a similar though far less cynical fascination with these manifestations of an innocent natural order, often lapsing into the pathetic fallacy.) She observes that “the wild flowers of Michigan deserve a poet of their own,” suggesting that the talents, the vision, of British poets cannot do justice to the variety, the uniqueness of this place (5). But the very next paragraph begins, “Since I have casually alluded to a Michigan mud-hole, I may as well enter into a detailed memoir on the subject” (5). This anti-romantic attitude culminates with the chapter-ending observation, “We journeyed on cheerily, watching the splendid changes in the west, but keeping a bright look-out for bog-holes” (8).

Yet the narrative that follows does not lapse into a simple, demythologizing rant. Kirkland frets the direction of change on the frontier, the possibilities for building a meaningful, sustainable culture. Similar to Fuller, she often pauses to describe embarrassing lapses in judgment, taste, and manners by settlers, but those acerbic insights give way to anxiety, at times bordering on despair, about what may come of this transformational project. “For Kirkland, the ‘West’ is a site where a culture must be created from ... heterogeneous and often conflicting groups, and *A New Home* traces the process of their slow and usually testy mutual accommodation” (Zagarell xxix). This anxiety is expressed in the mordant, almost minatory title, “Who’ll Follow?” Have the settlers constructed a culture that will attract and sustain other US citizens, or is this a temporary, failed project?

The evidence is not encouraging. Chapter 20 is introduced by a passage from Felicia Hemans, an important source of nature poetry for female writers and readers of the antebellum period:

I come, I come! ye have called me long,
 I come o’er the mountains with light and song!
 Away from the chamber and sullen hearth!
 The young leaves are dancing in breezy mirth. (78)

This evocation of spring introduces the narrator’s meditation on the possibilities of growing lush vegetables and flowers in the fertile soil of Michigan. If Kirkland has warned the reader against the dangers of wandering from the wagon into the bog of the wild, she can now encourage with the prospect of creating a fecund garden in the wilderness: “Nobody can deny that our soil amply repays whatever trouble we may bestow upon it. Even on the first turning up, it furnishes you with all the humbler luxuries in the vegetable way, from the earliest pea to the most delicate cauliflower, and the golden pumpkin, larger than Cinderella’s grandmother ever saw in her dreams” (81). But the narrator’s neighbors respond to this embarrassment of riches with a simple, deflating thought: “Taters grow

in the field, and 'taters is good enough for me" (82). Yet another Hemans passage inspires a dire commentary on British immigrants to Michigan: "We will rear new homes under trees which glow / As if gems were the fruitage of every bough" (139). That pastoral dream gives way to Kirkland's caustic claim that "many English families reside in our vicinity, some of them well calculated to make their way any where; close, penurious, grasping, and indefatigable. ... And after one has changed one's whole plan of life, and crossed the wide ocean to find a Utopia, the waking to reality is attended with feelings of no slight bitterness" (139-40).

And yet, the narrator cannot completely abandon the fantasy of wilderness as the site of a US incarnation. A later chapter opens with a moment of Byronic pathetic fallacy: "Are not the mountains, waves and skies a part / Of me and of my soul, as I of them? / Is not the love of these deep in my heart / With a pure passion?" (145). While the reader has been trained to anticipate the undercutting of such natural sympathy, the subsequent chapter lends support. Perhaps Kirkland sensed her barbs were too sharp, her satire too savage toward Michigan settlers. Perhaps she expressed a sincere regard for the benefits of her frontier situation. In any case, Kirkland provides a supporting gloss on Byron's romantic reverie when her character asserts, "After allowing due weight to the many disadvantages and trials of a new-country life, it would scarce be fair to pass without notice the compensating power of a feeling, inherent as I believe, in our universal nature, which rejoices in that freedom from the restraints of pride and ceremony which is found only in a new country" (148). Although this moment of sentimental patriotism is short-lived, and hardly typical of the narrative as a whole, it reminds a contemporary reader of the enduring power of that fantastical notion, "Nature's Nation."

Parkman, Fuller, and Kirkland trace alternative, at times conflicting, responses to the boundary situation of US citizenship, the claim that the wild provides the source material, the literal ground for an emerging national culture. Granting that these are unusually sophisticated readers, they nonetheless represent divergent reader responses in antebellum culture. They show that lyric poetry, whether US or British, provided the very language, the defining discourse of national identity and that readers by no means slavishly granted the poem its claims. Instead, the lyric poem supplied the occasion to reconsider the meaning, the direction, the validity of latent destiny. In this sense, these writers typify literate pioneers traversing the space of verse to decide the destiny of "American" space.

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