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**Institutions:** [London School of Economics and Political Science](#)

**Published on:** 01 Oct 1998 - [Comparative Studies in Society and History](#) (Cambridge University Press)

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Version: Accepted (Refereed)

#### **Citation:**

Kaufmann, E. (1998)  
“Naturalizing the nation”: the rise of naturalistic nationalism in the United States and Canada - *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 40(4), pp.666-695

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# 'NATURALIZING THE NATION': THE RISE OF NATURALISTIC NATIONALISM IN THE UNITED STATES AND CANADA<sup>1</sup>

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## ABSTRACT

*This comparative study examines the role played by wilderness landscape in Canadian and American narratives of national identity. The comparison illustrates that this role changed during the nineteenth century in both countries. At first, narrators of both nations' collective identities viewed their land as an obstacle to be overcome, tamed and economically exploited. Later, under the influence of Romanticism, they adopted a different posture, ascribing to natural land a primordial, regenerative quality. The former, civilizing attitude toward the land, traceable to pre-modern ethnic, religious and classical traditions, is termed the 'nationalization of nature'. The latter pattern, by contrast, which is an entirely modern phenomenon, is referred to as the 'naturalization of the nation'. The former perspective attempts to impress national culture onto nature. Against this 'nationalizing' mood, the latter, 'naturalistic' sensibility reverses the direction of causation so that nature is seen to determine culture. Finally, the shift from 'nationalization' to 'naturalization' is shown to have been particularly pronounced in these two cases. This is attributed to the vastness of the North American wilderness. The lesson that this pattern brings to social theory is that while cognitive shifts in the subjective sphere greatly influence social representations like the nation, external referents like physical topography often constrain and shape such representations.*

## Introduction

Perhaps the most vexing problem in philosophy and social theory concerns the relative importance of material and ideal factors for social action. Karl Marx, for instance, with his notion of base and superstructure and his materialistic interpretation of the dialectic process, made a clean break from the idealism of his Hegelian heritage (McLellan 1977: 390; Swingewood 1991: 62-3). Nevertheless, idealism proved resilient, and later came to

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<sup>1</sup> I am indebted to Oliver Zimmer of the L.S.E.'s European Institute for the terms 'Naturalization of the Nation' and 'Nationalization of Nature' and for his translation of the Swiss-German quotations used here.

inform the thinking of both actor-oriented (ie. phenomenologist, ethnomethodologist, symbolic interactionist) and structure-oriented (ie. Functionalist, Structuralist) theorists.

This piece, through an analysis of the role of landscape in the articulation of national identity, attempts to illustrate that both ideal and material factors are important and share a dialectical relationship. On the one hand, intellectual currents like Romanticism played a vital role in altering perceptions of the landscape. Yet such construction took place within a set of 'external' geographic parameters which constrained and focused the creative energies of American and Canadian Romantics in similar ways.

### **The Romantic Importance of Wild Landscape**

The Romantic movement developed in the latter part of the eighteenth century as a reaction to the rational, universalistic thought of the Enlightenment and its material accomplice, modernization. One of the hallmarks of Romantic thought was the privileging of the *élan vital* (or 'life-force') of the unconscious, or nature, over that of rational consciousness and civilization (Taylor 1989: 349, 372). The emphasis upon *élan vital* that characterized the Romantic movement thereby led nations which possessed large tracts of unsettled or inaccessible wilderness to celebrate these elements of their landscape.

For some Romantics, such as the Expressivists and Vitalists (and to some extent the Transcendentalists), only inner nature and the self was seen to be of importance.<sup>2</sup> Yet for most, nature, both inner and outer, came to be celebrated. Outer nature, in the form of particular landscapes and peoples, was especially well-suited to nationalism, and loomed large in the work of early romantic nationalists like Rousseau, Herder and Fichte (Kohn 1994: 165; Barnard 1969). Romantic nationalist thinkers, the earliest of which were German, typically subscribed to the notion that nations were primordial, organic

<sup>2</sup> The Expressivist focus on inner nature is explained in Taylor 1989: 386-9. Bergsonian vitalism proved highly important during the modernist 'Renaissance' in Greenwich Village, New York during the inter-war years (Pittenger 1993: 223). Transcendentalism was an earlier phenomenon that was far less discriminating in terms of inner/outer nature. A brief discussion of this mid-nineteenth century movement can be found in Crunden 1994: 86-92.

outgrowths of nature, whose self-realization in terms of statehood and cultural expression was of paramount importance. Moreover, individuality and the nation were inextricably linked. As Georg Hegel put it, 'it is...through culture that the individual acquires standing and actuality' and the Spirit of State Power 'is the point of the self into which the many points or selves, through renouncing their *inner certainty*, are fused into one' (Hegel 1977: 298, 311).

### Pre-Romantic Traditions

Romantic nationalists did not break with earlier traditions, but rather built upon them. The classical tradition, for example, praised husbandry and venerated antiquity (Nash 1967: 9-15). The biblical tradition also lionized the tiller of the soil while pre-modern ethnic traditions ascribed meaning to certain monuments, architectural forms and landscapes as sacred sites (Armstrong 1982: 19-21, 293-4). In Anthony Smith's words, 'the passage of generations has wedded [populations] to the land, both in fact and in their (and others) perceptions. Their modes of production, patterns of settlement and folk cultures spring from their diurnal round of work and leisure, itself formed out of their ceaseless encounter with a particular environment' (Smith 1986: 183). In aggregate, these pre-modern precedents explain why the first romantic tracts glorified *human* landscapes, not natural landscapes.

There thus emerges a certain seamlessness, linking pre-modern forms of agrarian imagery and historicist ethnic identity with early forms of romantic nationalism. This strain of geographic nationalism, which has pre-modern antecedents, thereby attempts to generate a sense of 'homeland' and 'sacred' territory among a population. It does so by associating particular landscapes, whether rural or urban, with a community and its historical past. The need for familiarized territory therefore leads to an emphasis upon the imprint of a group's culture upon a particular piece of land. This form of geographic nationalism will be labeled the 'nationalization of nature', to emphasize the passive role that nature plays in this 'familiarized' conception of landscape.

In contrast to the 'nationalization of nature' is another form of geographic nationalism, 'the naturalization of the nation', a new phenomenon which owes its existence to later Romantic thought. Rather than exalt the civilization/familiarization of

*settled* nature, this conception inverted the traditional pattern, praising the uncivilized/primeval quality of untamed nature and stressing its regenerative effect upon civilization. It is the argument of this paper that this form of romanticism was channeled most vigorously into naturalistic nationalism in those nations that possessed an abundance of unsettled landscape.

In nineteenth century Europe, England and France exemplified the 'nationalization' pattern, with its emphasis upon tamed landscape (Lowenthal 1994: 22).<sup>3</sup> This was pointedly expressed by Jules Michelet in his *Histoire de France* (1833): 'Society, freedom have mastered nature, history has rubbed out geography. In this marvelous transformation, spirit has won over matter, the general over the particular, and idea over contingencies' (Claval 1994: 44). This did not mean that English and French Romantics eschewed raw nature - they sought it elsewhere with zest - but it did mean that their naturalism had to remain universalist and spiritual, rather than particularist and national.

By contrast, Switzerland, with its Alpine-dominated territory, provided the most powerful European example of a 'naturalized' nation. Hence there appeared in the writings of Swiss intellectuals like Johann-Kaspar Bluntschli or Ernst Bovet the myth of the Alps as the geographic crucible of the Swiss people (Bluntschli 1875: 14; Bovet 1909: 289). The Swiss were joined in their naturalistic nationalism by the Scandinavian nations (Denmark excepted)<sup>4</sup>, all of which possessed extensive tracts of wilderness. In North America, it was the Swiss-Scandinavian model, and not the French-English one, that came to triumph, despite the cultural ubiquity of English landscape aesthetics in both Canada and the United States. In consequence, both countries made natural landscapes central to their national identity and indulged in conspicuous displays of naturalistic nationalism.

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<sup>3</sup> As Lowenthal put it: '... the English landscape is not natural but crafted....Englishmen tame and adorn nature....' (Lowenthal 1994: 22)

<sup>4</sup> In explaining the development of northern Symbolist landscape painting in Scandinavia in the 1890's, for instance, Roald Nasgaard wrote that 'all...except Denmark, could boast of considerable tracts of unexplored wilderness, which, for various reasons, patriotic or spiritual, it became imperative to explore.' Moreover, the most important Danish Symbolist, Jens Ferdinand Willumsen, took his inspiration not from his native landscape, but from that of Switzerland and Norway (Nasgaard 1984: 15).

## Naturalizing the Nation: Western Landscape and American National Identity

The American experience illustrates best of all the distinction between the historicizing process referred to here as the 'nationalization of nature' and the primitivist focus that underlies the 'naturalization of the nation'.<sup>5</sup> On the one hand, we find a powerful, agrarian collective representation in the form of the 'Yeoman' image and the myth of America as a Garden of Eden. The presence of tilled field, settler's cabin, white schoolhouse or Baptist church provides the iconography of this myth of a tamed, settled, 'civilized' landscape or 'nationalized' nature.

On the other hand, emerging early in the nineteenth century is a primitivist construction, which exalts the leather-clad, nature-dwelling hunter of the 'wild' western frontier. This idea, when given nationalist interpretation, perceived the wild regions of America to be a source of primeval energy and purity, even a prospective source of cultural greatness. Hence the attempt to 'naturalize' the American nation.

### Traditional Attitudes Toward Nature

The colonial American attitude toward nature took several forms, which we may categorize as 'traditional' in that they issued from biblical and classical sources. First, nature was viewed as the biblical wilderness, a foreboding place of exile which promised danger even as it provided freedom and an environment conducive to ascetic moral purity. Second, nature was treated as an obstacle to be overcome, an uncivilized place of darkness to be filled with the light of God's teachings. After the revolution, this

<sup>5</sup> The shift postulated here was less in evidence in the South during the antebellum period because of the connections between the southern intelligentsia and an aristocratic plantation landscape. Moreover, as with the French-Canadians, since southerners were increasingly concerned with their own sectional identity in the 1815-1860 period, most (but not all) of the sources drawn upon in this essay (with its concern for *national* identity) are of northern origin. Indeed, the case can probably be made that the antebellum period of southern history, with its consecration of a sacred, settled, southern territory, provides an exception to the rule of a nationalization-naturalization shift. However, such an assertion would have to be substantiated by further research.



'light' came to encompass reason and liberty, which, it was hoped, would bring settled agriculture and great cities to the wilderness. A corollary of this view was that those who lived in the shadow of the wilderness were subject to the temptation to relapse into a state of barbarity, and had therefore to exercise great vigilance to maintain their civility. In time, this belief evolved into a 'theory of social stages' whereby those who lived closest to the frontier were deemed rude and unmannered, while civilization increased in proportion as one approached the eastern seaports (Smith 1950: 255).

The Puritan mind of the seventeenth century was firmly wedded to the opposition between civilization and wilderness. In consequence, the Puritans interpreted their New England surroundings as the biblical wilderness, full of devilish perils like the Pequot Indians, whose attacks in the 1630's were believed to be the work of Satan himself (Carroll 1969: 77). Michael Wigglesworth expressed this well when he described New England as a 'waste and howling wilderness' whose 'dark and dismal Western woods' were 'the devil's den' (Nash 1967: 36).

Yet New England, while acknowledged as the abode of the devil, was simultaneously considered a 'place of safetie' secure from the fires of conflict raging in the Old World. In the New World, the Puritans were chosen to endure hardship, but would emerge from their ordeal purer than the 'throng of a City'. In addition, there emerged the belief that the efforts of the colonists could convert the wilderness into a Garden of the Lord and win over the Indians to Christianity (Carroll 1969: 102, 117, 194; Greenfeld 1992: 406). There was also a sense of civilizing mission that would later admit of a more secular orientation: 'We shall be as a City upon a Hill' exclaimed John Winthrop, the first governor of Massachusetts, and 'the eyes of all people are upon us....we shall be made a story and a byword throughout the world' (Fischer 1989: 23).

The civilizing imperative of the Puritans, and their delight in taming the wilderness, also had its basis in the pastoral ideal. This agrarian construct was rooted both in the Judaic image of the shepherd and in the classical praise of husbandry derived from Hesiod and Virgil (Armstrong 1982: 19-21; Hofstadter 1955: 24-5). The force of this agrarian ideal emerges strongly in the writings of many eighteenth-century Americans, notably Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson and Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur. The latter, in his famous 1782 disquisition, 'What is an American?' went on to give this ideal nationalist interpretation when he wrote: 'Here are no aristocratical

families, no courts, no kings, no bishops, no ecclesiastical dominion...we are a nation of cultivators' (Smith 1950: 127-8).

The late eighteenth century ushered in a form of Republican, Rousseauan romanticism, which fortified the agrarian ideal. A prominent exponent of the new sensibility was Thomas Jefferson, who, in the manner of the Whig historians, foresaw the United States as a republic of Yeomen. The Yeoman was viewed as an ideal-type husbandman: self-sufficient, communitarian, morally upright and freedom-loving. The 'smallholder[s]' were, reasoned Jefferson, the 'most precious part of a state', a constituency which would form the bedrock of a virtuous Republic (Tuveson 1968: 109; Horsman 1981: 23; Smith 1950: 130).

The attitudes of the Puritans, Franklin and the Revolutionary generation toward the American agricultural landscape present clear expressions of a geographic national pride. Yet the pride implicit in America's agrarian republicanism (often contrasted with Europe's sinful urbanism) was offset by the low esteem accorded to frontier, as opposed to sedentary societies. As Crèvecoeur scornfully observed: 'To return to our back settlers...By living in or near the woods, their actions are regulated by the wildness of the neighbourhood...Thus our bad people are those who are half cultivators and half hunters; and the worst of them are those who have degenerated altogether into the hunting state. As old ploughmen and new men of the woods, as Europeans and new made Indians, they contract the vices of both' (Crèvecoeur 1782: 63-66). This image of frontier depravity is a stigma that even the most ardent of Revolutionary-era nationalists could not overcome. Nature would thus have to await the dawn of a more naturalist Romantic sensibility before she could securely enter upon the stage of American nationalism.

### The Rise of the Sublime Aesthetic

'Almost every thing in nature, which can be supposed capable of inspiring ideas of the sublime and beautiful, is here realized' wrote Jeremy Belknap in 1784. 'Aged mountains, stupendous elevations, rolling clouds, impending rocks, verdant woods, chrysal streams, and gentle rill and roaring torrent, all conspire to amaze, to soothe and to enrapture'. Belknap's description of the White Mountains of New Hampshire was echoed by another patriotic New England minister, Timothy Dwight, and by figures like Thomas Jefferson

who were becoming aware of the new European aesthetic of the sublime (Woolley 1897: 57, 59; Miller 1967: 156). The new sensibility, drawing on early versions of the Romantic idea, thereby opened the way for an appreciation of nature, which paradoxically was fused with biblical ideas, as in Belknap's exhortation that a New Hampshire scene was 'elder Scripture, writ by God's own hand' (Marshall 1988: 173).

The influence of nature went on to permeate all spheres of American intellectual life by the early nineteenth century, and proved influential in most branches of the arts and sciences (Curti 1946: 33). Nevertheless, its effect was felt first on the eastern seaboard, whereas along the frontier itself, attitudes toward nature remained traditional, whether in the religious or utilitarian sense. Even among public intellectuals of this period, there was a strong current of bombastic futurism, which viewed development as central and the past as a dead weight. American nationalism, therefore, was conceived almost entirely in futuristic terms. After all, 'American glory', the Revolutionary generation believed, 'beg[an] at dawn' and, in John Locke's words, 'in the beginning, all the world was America' (Lowenthal 1976: 93; 1985: 106-112). Early nineteenth century attitudes conveyed a similarly antinomian attitude to the past (Shour 1990: i, 72; Curti 1946: 30). As an Ohio paper of 1817 editorialized: 'Looking only a few years through the vista of futurity what a sublime spectacle presents itself! Wilderness, once the chosen residence of solitude and savageness, converted into populous cities, smiling villages, beautiful farms and plantations!' (Nash 1967: 23).

### The First Naturalizers

Despite the fervour of Americans' futuristic exhortations, these tended to mask an insecurity in America's lack of a past, a feeling of deprivation accentuated by historicist romanticism in Europe. In response to the European remark that 'you [Americans] are not a country, you are a continent', Americans could not feel secure merely by boasting about their future possibilities, but needed a romantic medicine to compensate for their insufficiently historicized landscape (Lowenthal 1985: 113-15). In response to these European challenges, Americans began to utilize the new aesthetic of nature for nationalistic purposes, hence the 'naturalization of the nation'.

In the visual arts, for instance, Thomas Cole began popularizing the scenery along the Hudson River in upstate New York. Cole's *Falls of Kaaterskill* (1826), to take but one example, made no concessions to civilization and clearly played upon the sublimity of American nature (Daniels 1993: 153). Later work, like *Genessee Scenery* (1847) or *Schroon Mountain, Adirondacks* had a more pronounced nationalistic feel, with streaks from heaven signifying the chosen nature of the upstate New York landscape, and hence the new nation. As Cole expressed it in his *Essay on American Scenery* (1836), 'The lofty Catskills...recede like steps by which we may ascend to a great temple, whose pillars are those everlasting hills, and whose dome is the blue boundless vault of heaven' (Marshall 1988: 384-5). In the same essay, Cole made explicit his new naturalistic nationalism: 'Though American scenery is destitute of many of those circumstances that give value to the European, still it has features, and glorious ones, unknown to Europe...and the most distinctive, and perhaps the most impressive, characteristic of American scenery is its wildness' (Nash 1967: 67). Cole went on to influence an entire generation of New York painters, including Asher Durand, Albert Bierstadt and several others, who collectively came to be known as the 'Hudson River School', a much cherished contribution to American cultural nationalism (Curti 1946: 35). Meanwhile, in Cole's wake flourished a lively tourist industry, in which it became, in Stephen Daniels' words 'nothing less than a national duty for Americans to admire the river scenery and to show it off to visiting Europeans' (Daniels 1993: 146).

A parallel development also emerged in the literary world by the 1830's. This began with the spread of a naturalist aesthetic, which first took root among writers in New England and New York, where traditional utilitarian and religious frontier attitudes were weakest. These intellectuals, connected by New York literary periodicals like *Knickerbocker Magazine* or the *Democratic Review*, responded in several ways to the new naturalist sensibility (Bender 1987: 141). For Henry David Thoreau, this took the form of a contemplative retreat to Walden Pond, near Concord, Massachusetts during 1845-47 (Thoreau 1908: 105-7). For others, like transcendentalists Ralph Waldo Emerson and Horace Greeley, sojourns at the Brook Farm colony in West Roxbury, Massachusetts during 1841-44 satisfied their naturalistic longings (Johnpoll 1981: 93). As Emerson related in his landmark address, *The American Scholar* (1837), 'Not out of those, on whom systems of education have exhausted their culture, comes the helpful

giant to destroy the old or build the new, but out of unhandseled savage nature...  
(Emerson 1893: 34).<sup>6</sup>

The literary magazines, meanwhile, were stridently stating the case for a distinctly *American* literature, a nationalist call which looked to the natural landscape for inspiration. For example, an anonymous piece in the 1838 issue of *Knickerbocker* declared that: 'We have the sublimities of nature, and by seizing on these, our poets might be immortal. We have noble rivers; eternal forests; the most stupendous mountains; and seasons full of glorious associations. The fall of the leaf, the dreary winter forests, the ocean prairies, and the picturesque Indian landscapes of the west, furnish materials unknown to England, capable of founding a distinct school, and yet how rarely are they sung!' (Marshall 1988: 212). This essay merely expanded upon a prevalent view that the 'boundless woods' of America would bring forth a culture superior to any other. As DeWitt Clinton queried: 'can there be a country in the world better calculated to exercise and to exalt the imagination....?' (Nash 1967: 70).

#### The Frontiersman as American Icon

Henry David Thoreau had waxed poetic about the virtues of 'a primitive and frontier life' in his writings at Walden, but he did so in the shadow of earlier naturalistic work, which attempted to wrap the American character in a naturalistic aura (Fussell 1965: 212). This presents a clear case of the 'naturalization of the nation'.

The treatment of the 'wild' frontiersman in American literature began with the legend of Daniel Boone, an eighteenth century Kentucky frontiersman who had been transformed into a mythical character between 1784 and 1815. This traditional myth, developed largely by John Filson in his *Kentucke* (1784), portrayed Boone as a hardy, Chosen civilizer conducting an errand into the wilderness. For example, Boone is described on the flyleaf of Filson's book as 'Incongruously...a dandy. Stiffly bound up in a high-buttoned vest, a cravat, and a coat in the style of pre-Revolutionary France, this melodramatic little man bears slight resemblance to the stereotype of the American frontiersman' (Slotkin 1973: 270). In this respect, the figure of Boone was arrayed in opposition to the wilderness, rather than in symbiosis with it. After 1820, however,

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<sup>6</sup> Many of these views were first expressed by Emerson in his essay *Nature* (1836).

biographies of Boone, notably that of Timothy Flint, began to introduce the idea of this frontiersman as an organic creature of nature, not in the vanguard of civilization, but in retreat from it. For instance, Flint, influenced by a cult of simplicity derived from Chateaubriand and Byron, wrote that 'American enterprize (sic) seemed doomed to follow him, and to thwart all his schemes of backwoods retirement' (Smith 1950: 56).

Boone also inspired James Fenimore Cooper, another member of the New York-New England *cénacle* whose work inaugurated the American literary tradition of the wild western hero. This began in 1823 with Cooper's third work, *The Pioneers*. In this novel, the protagonist, Natty Bumppo (or Leatherstocking) lives a life of subsistence hunting in the forest and, though clearly a white American, has absorbed many of the folkways of the native Indians (Slotkin 1973: 473). Leatherstocking thus plays an intermediary role between nature and civilization, fleeing the dictates of civilization, yet aiding its progress. The Leatherstocking series further developed the theme of the noble, organic American hunter, part-white, part-Indian in inspiration. Leatherstocking was, in fact, often contrasted to more traditional frontier axe-men like antagonist Billy Kirby in *The Pioneers*. Kirby was portrayed as a coarse figure who wantonly destroyed the forest and displayed the manners of an uncouth boor, in contrast to the more sublime sensibilities of Leatherstocking (Cooper 1827: 44-5).

In time, Cooper's Leatherstocking novels proved so popular that they gave birth to a national genre. Surveying 73 Western-theme dime novels of the 1860-93 period, for instance, Henry Nash Smith found that 'forty contain one or more hunters or trappers whose age, costume, weapons, and general functions entitle them to be considered lineal descendants of the great original [Leatherstocking]'. Leatherstocking's features even permeated the literary representations of real-life western heroes like Kit Carson, Buffalo Bill and cowboy Buck Taylor (Smith 1950: 95, 102-111). In this manner, nature was enlisted as a formative, distinguishing element in the American national character. As Walt Whitman so eloquently expressed in *Leaves of Grass* (1855): 'The Largeness of nature or the nation were monstrous without a corresponding largeness and generosity of the spirit of the citizen.... His spirit responds to his country's spirit.... He incarnates its geography and natural life and rivers and lakes' (Marshall 1988: 212).

Patrician Romanticism in the West

The introduction of the frontiersman as an American collective representation in the early nineteenth century did not displace the traditional figure of the Yeoman in the American consciousness. Yet the romantic emphasis placed upon the 'wild' west as opposed to the agrarian west helped to 'naturalize' the notion of the American Yeoman. The growing romantic appeal of the wild west is perhaps best illustrated by the western odysseys of artist Frederic Remington, novelist Owen Wister and president Theodore Roosevelt. All were born during the civil war into Eastern Establishment families. Yet all three turned their back on their inheritance to experience the vitality of the 'wild' west. Later, in their art (Remington), writing (Wister) and historiography (Roosevelt), each would write the western experience into their own personal narratives and, by extension, into that of their nation.

Remington's case provides an interesting starting point. A Yale-educated native of New York State, Remington invested his savings in a sheep ranch in Kansas, where he lived during 1883-85. During this period, he began the sketching expeditions which would later make him famous as realistic narrator of the 'authentic', 'wild' west. Remington tended to emphasize the conflict between man and nature in his work, which encompassed a wide variety of western topography, and he managed to fuse these variegated images into one naturalized American image: 'It is this process of confrontation, the result of an interaction between a certain kind of environment and, for all his sizes and shapes, a certain kind of individual, which Remington came to see as uniquely western' (White 1968: 104).

As was the case with Remington, Theodore Roosevelt turned his back on eastern gentility to experience the 'wild' west. Roosevelt's motive can even be traced to romantic childhood images of the West and its characters.<sup>7</sup> In describing the buckskin suit, for instance, he called it the 'most picturesque and distinctively national dress ever worn in America. It was the dress in which Daniel Boone was clad when he first passed through the trackless forests of the Alleghenies and penetrated into the heart of Kentucky...the dress worn by grim old Davy Crockett when he fell at the Alamo' (White 1968: 83-4).

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<sup>7</sup> 'I have been fulfilling a boyhood ambition of mine', Roosevelt wrote his elder sister in 1884, 'playing at [being a] frontier hunter in good earnest.' Roosevelt also had a buckskin made for himself and affected a strongly western image when he returned to New York to pursue his political career (White 1968: 83-4).

Roosevelt's naturalistic nationalism also appeared in the prose of his great multi-volume history, the *Winning of the West* (1889).

While this narrative work was first and foremost a celebration of the nationalization of nature by American civilization, Roosevelt took care not to exclude the formative impact of the wilderness on the nation. He stressed repeatedly that the frontier environment was dangerous and housed a native Indian population more tenacious than the aboriginals of Australia or Latin America, all of which helped shape the new American people. He also underscored the frontier's invigorating, ethnogenetic qualities, stressing that the new formative influences were analogous to those that formed the Englishman: 'The first American incomers to Kentucky', wrote Roosevelt, 'were for several years almost cut off from the bulk of their fellows beyond the forest-clad mountains; much as, thirteen centuries before, their forebears, the first English settlers in Britain, had been cut off from the rest of the low-Dutch folk who continued to dwell on the eastern coast of the Germanic Ocean' (Roosevelt 1889I: 247). In fact, Roosevelt's belief in the importance of nature as an ingredient in the American character was so pronounced that it later prompted him to support wilderness conservation as a means of keeping Americans in touch with their primordial heritage (Nash 1967: 150-51).

#### The Naturalization of the Nation in American Historiography

Roosevelt's endorsement of the nation-shaping qualities of the wilderness was not an original idea for his time, but instead drew upon the historiography of George Bancroft, one of the most popular American historians of the mid-nineteenth century. For Bancroft, an ardent student of German romanticism, the American type did not form until settlers crossed the Alleghenies. There, the Easterner was stripped of his European accoutrements and tutored in the ways of liberty by raw American nature. For instance, in Bancroft's estimation, Daniel Boone could be described as a 'natural' American product: 'At sixteen he went into the wilderness as a surveyor, and for three years continued the pursuit, where the forests trained him, in meditative solitude, to freedom and largeness of mind; and nature revealed to him her obedience to serene and silent laws' (Noble 1965: 29). Bancroft also had high praise for those statesmen raised in the



trans-Allegheny west ('the valley of democracy'), attributing the greatness of Andrew Jackson, and later Lincoln, to their humble frontier origins (Noble 1965: 34).

The path into the wilderness that Bancroft and Roosevelt had merely explored was now ready for its blazing consummation by the greatest frontier theoretician of them all, Frederick Jackson Turner. Perhaps the best known of American historians, Turner shook the historical establishment with his essay on the 'Significance of the Frontier in American History'. Read at the meeting of the new American Historical Association in Chicago in 1893, the paper was no less important to the identity of the nation than the Columbian exposition held nearby. The historiographical orthodoxy of the time, which even permeated the work of environmentalists like Bancroft and Roosevelt, held that the New World had bore witness to the unfolding of the Teutonic 'germ', a genetic inheritance from the Old World (Ross 1984: 917; Saveth 1948: 112-13, 137-40). For Turner, however, it was 'the wilderness that masters the colonist' and not the other way round. This American wilderness 'strips off the garments of civilization and arrays him [the American] in the hunting shirt and moccasin. It puts him in the log cabin of the Cherokee and Iroquois...In short, at the frontier the environment is at first too strong for the man...the outcome is not the old Europe, not simply the development of Germanic germs...The fact is, that here is a new product that is American' (Turner 1920: 4).

In Turner's work, what we see is a nationalist systematization of pre-existing popular ideas, which Turner, like every American, was exposed to through the media of the western romance and dime novel (Billington 1971: 82). In complementing Turner, for instance, Theodore Roosevelt remarked that 'you [Turner]...have put into definite shape a good deal of thought that has been floating around rather loosely' (Billington 1971: 82).

There is also a markedly naturalistic discourse in the Frontier Thesis in which the power of nature is seen coursing through the frontier into the western farmers and pioneers. There it shapes them into *natural* Americans in the image of Leatherstocking, melting down social, ethnic and regional distinctions to produce a society entirely different from that of the eastern seaboard (Turner 1920: 28).

Another point of significance in Turner's writing, which is traceable to the work of both Bancroft and Roosevelt, is the merging of Yeoman and Pioneer into one: the Westerner, or rather, the American. Thus the frontiersman is infused with the power of

nature, which in turn defines the entire nation. Contrast this notion with Crèvecoeur's position of a hundred years earlier that 'these new [frontier] manners being grafted on the old stock, produce a strange sort of lawless profligacy... The manners of the Indian natives are respectable, compared with this European medley... their [children] grow up a mongrel breed, half civilized, half savage....' (Crèvecoeur 1782: 64).

### Nationalized Nature and Naturalistic Nationalism in the Twentieth Century

The period from the turn of the century to the Great Depression saw Turner's work attain paradigmatic status in American historical circles, even as the United States became an urban nation, long since shorn of a western frontier (Bowden 1976: 127-8). This apparent anachronism is likely due to the power of the frontier myth, which, spurred on by romanticism, had developed unchecked since the early nineteenth century. In fact, the subjugation of the west and its 'wild' Indians by the railroad made the west 'safer' for tourism and ushered in a kind of democratic romanticism.

This phenomenon manifested itself commercially in several ways: Indians came to be recruited by the tourist industry and their artifacts mass-marketed by 1880 while, around the same time, short-grass prairie and desert became aesthetically popular. The case of the Indian chief Geronimo illustrates this cognitive shift: in 1876, he was a feared national outlaw. By 1900, he was a celebrity appearing at state fairs (Hyde 1990: 228-31). Meanwhile, hotel construction in National Parks shed its Victorian trappings (reflective of the imposition of civilization onto wilderness) and took on a 'rustic' style (reflective of a 'naturalized' aesthetic) during 1900-1913 (Hyde 1990: 251-88).

The closure of the frontier also facilitated the spread of frontier mythology in the form of 'western' motion pictures and periodicals (Smith 1950: 119-20; Lynd & Lynd 1937: 258). Yet despite its rising popularity, the tone of the frontier myth had changed: it now took on a more historical, nostalgic tone, a shift clear in the writings of Frederic Remington, Jack London, Frederick Jackson Turner and Owen Wister, among others (Gossett 1953: 215-260; Kaufman 1982: 37). This shift ushered in a return of the 'nationalized' west, since the western landscape had now been incorporated into the history of the American nation. The automobile tourist literature of the 1920's, which

associated highways with the routes of pioneers and historicized various natural sites, confirms this nostalgic trend (Shaffer 1994: 246-50).

Nevertheless, this 'nationalization of nature' did not displace the gains posted by the discourse of naturalistic identity. Instead, what emerged was a new coexistence of nationalized and naturalized identities. This emerges, for example, in the 'See America First' slogan of western tourism promoters, for whom American nature was both associated with history (ie. nationalized) and an attraction far superior to anything to be found in Europe, where there existed only the 'decaying remains of an earlier civilization in the old world'. Moreover, American tourism offered the 'effete' city-dweller a chance to renew his contacts with nature and the 'natural' lifestyles of the Native Indians and 'untamed' backwoods Anglo-Americans (Shaffer 1994: 82, 89, 120, 278).

In a similarly 'naturalistic' vein, the Regionalist movement of the 1930's rejected the modernist culture of urban America and drew upon the myth of the frontier, and the folk it had 'organically' created, as a source of romantic inspiration and national regeneration (Dorman 1993: xii). The enthusiastic public reception which the work of Regionalists like Thomas Hart Benton and Steuart Curry received should therefore be attributed to its resonance with pre-existent national myths (Doss 1991: 135-7).<sup>8</sup> In addition, the historicist focus on western pioneer settlement that was implicit within the movement was accompanied by a more purist naturalism. Luminist painters like Marsden Hartley and Arthur Dove, for instance, saw themselves as heirs of Emerson and Thoreau, and their landscape painting, like Canada's Group of Seven, generally refrained from including human beings (Nasgaard 1984: 205-6, 216, 234).

In fact, there were some naturalistic Regionalists, notably writer Lewis Mumford, who went so far as to portray the pioneer as a utilitarian philistine who defiled nature, something that flew in the face of most Regionalist tracts, which lauded the pioneer as a romantic folk figure (Dorman 1993: 86-7). Note that this stance represents a conflict between those who embraced a naturalized Anglo-American pioneer folk and those who favoured a more orthodox wilderness naturalism. Neither wished to tame the wilderness or its inhabitants and both could agree on the need to look outside the cities for romantic inspiration. However, while the former sought to revitalize the nation through contact

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<sup>8</sup> Some Regionalist artists, however, notably Grant Wood, depicted a more 'nationalized', pastoral nature.

with a 'naturalized' backwoods folk, those like Mumford and Hartley sought the 'naturalization' of the American nation directly from its wilderness source.

Throughout the twentieth century, the 'naturalization' process continued, though again, elements of the 'nationalization' mode persisted. For instance, many western films played upon the conflict between the civilization ('nationalization') of the west and its romantic ability to 'naturalize' the hero, and hence the nation. A good example of this phenomenon occurred in William Hart's *Tumbleweeds* (1925), in which the hero, accepting of progress and having opened the west for settlement, nevertheless laments, in naturalistic fashion: 'Boys, it's the last of the West'. In *The Savage* (1952), starring Charlton Heston, a similar tension reigns. Heston, who is raised by Indians, chooses his 'natural' Indian over his 'civilized' white identity. Yet he saves a party of white settlers to win the white woman he loves, thereby validating the 'nationalization' of the west (Lenihan 1985: 14, 68).

This duality reigned as well in the realm of children's historical fiction. For example, the novels *Caddie Woodlawn* (1936), *Golden Horseshoes* (1935) or *Young Mac of Fort Vancouver* (1940) endorsed Anglo-Indian intermarriage and envisioned a harmonious, shared west, though they portrayed a nationalizing hero (Scales 1991: 339-40). Other facets of the 1930s and 40s likewise captured the dualistic mood: witness the use of 'nationalizing' themes in, for example, Woody Guthrie's folksongs, which advocated Dam Building on the Columbia, and in the New Deal documentary film, *The River*.<sup>9</sup> Even so, in 1934, the Roosevelt administration oversaw the implementation of the naturalistically-inclined Indian Reorganization Act (Scales 1991: 282).

Since the Second World War, films like *Broken Arrow* (1950) and children's novels like *Calico Captive* (1957) and *Keith's Rifles for Watie* (1957) established a more explicitly naturalistic, critical tone towards Anglo-American nationalization. (Lenihan 1985: 64-5; Scales 1991: 416, 418, 420) The environmental movement, and the pivotal Wilderness Act (1963) seemed to herald a new dawn, marking the final triumph of naturalization over 'nationalization'. Yet the consistent pursuit (even if merely discursive) of a New Frontier - perhaps in space, science or commerce - by successive generations

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<sup>9</sup> I am indebted to a CSSH referee for these examples.

indicates that the 'nationalizing' mode of national identity has yet to be eclipsed (Keller 1998).<sup>10</sup>

To summarize, the closing of the western frontier in the United States did not spell the death knell for naturalistic nationalism. In historiography, in fiction, in film, art, literature and public rhetoric, the frontier lived on. In this manner, the idea of western landscape as a source of national distinctiveness persisted, even as American nature came to be named and framed with a narrative which 'nationalized' the west. As a result, in the new century, the American masses largely embraced the naturalistic nationalism of their elites. No longer would they view their nation, and themselves, as Christian nationalizers of a hostile wilderness. Instead, most Americans now considered theirs a 'natural' nation born of regenerative contact with a frontier source.

### **Naturalizing the Nation: Northern Landscape and Canadian National Identity**

#### The Perception of Landscape in Canadian Identity in the Pre-Confederation Period

In Canada, the celebration of untamed nature did not occur until the middle decades of the nineteenth century, and even then, took half a century to consummate. In the eighteenth century, for instance, English-Canadians (the principal narrators of Canadian identity)<sup>11</sup>, like their American counterparts, viewed their land through the Protestant lens of the Old Testament. As a consequence, for the Loyalists who founded English Canada, their new Canadian home was interpreted partly as a foreboding Wilderness, and partly as a new Garden of Eden. Dennis Duffy aptly describes the latter mood: 'Loyalists...proved themselves good, inescapably good, Americans in extending the [Calvinist] tradition [of election] to include their particular variant'. The sense that Providence has blessed His elect with prosperity is conveyed in a letter from Michael

<sup>10</sup> Heidi Keller, for instance, speaks of how the space race of the 1960s marked just one form of American 'techno-nationalism'. (Keller 1998)

<sup>11</sup> For more on this point, see Kaufmann 1997. Despite the general preponderance of anglophone voices, French-Canadian federal politicians like George-Etienne Cartier, Henri Bourassa, Wilfrid Laurier or Pierre Trudeau have made important contributions to the discourse of Canadian identity. For more on their views, see Cook 1986: 216 and Smith 1994: 149-50.

Grass, captain of a New York Loyalist militia company and a leader of the first arrivals at the Bay of Quinte, who wrote to the Kingston Gazette in 1811, praising 'HE who causeth the wilderness to smile and blossom like a rose' (Duffy 1982: 93, 95). These traditional utilitarian and biblical attitudes toward the land are clearly analogous to those in the eighteenth century United States from which the Loyalists had fled.

English Canadians also expressed the traditional agrarian/biblical fear of wilderness depravity. Trans-continental explorers David Thompson, Samuel Hearne and Alexander Mackenzie, for instance, in their travel journals of the late eighteenth century, described the 'convulsion[s] of nature' they found, and waxed eloquently about the desolation and barbarity of Canada's Northwest (New 1989: 43-5).<sup>12</sup> Susanna Moodie's *Roughing it in the Bush* (1852) and Catharine Parr Traill's children's book, *Canadian Crusoes* (1852), extended this tradition to the more settled context of Upper Canadian pioneer agriculture. Here again, the narrative is one of 'nationalization', stressing the advance of civilization against nature, while retaining a social distance between narrator and subject matter (New 1989: 54-7, 70-1). In general, therefore, treatment of the north (and the Canadian landscape in general) in the early nineteenth century was traditionalist in tone: it treated nature as a challenge to be overcome. Never was there a hint that untamed landscape was an asset or a source of primeval energy.

This all began to change by mid-century as Romantic ideas spread to Canada from Britain and the United States. From the beginning, this new sensibility involved an emphasis on the elixir of the New World environment and its uplifting effects. Perhaps the first writer to express the new *zeitgeist* was Major John Richardson: part-Indian, Loyalist, and a veteran of the war of 1812. Influenced by the work of both Sir Walter Scott and James Fenimore Cooper, Richardson began writing wilderness adventures from a romantic point of view. These tended to mix British-Canadian nationalism with primitivism and a sense of the sublime.

For example, his first important work, *Tecumseh; or, the Warrior of the West* (1828) glorified an Indian chief who fought with the British in the War of 1812. Dennis Duffy remarks that Tecumseh's character represented a departure from pre-existent forms, and represents the first Canadian pagan hero: 'Here is no nationalist St. Isaac

<sup>12</sup> It is interesting, however, that elements of the sublime appeared in Mackenzie's work after it was revised by his editors in London.

Brock, a Christian knight to be prayed into his monument, but the savage vengeance-seeker Richardson would later immortalize in Reginald Morton/Wacousta' (Duffy 1982: 60). The latter reference - to the protagonist in Richardson's most famous novel, *Wacousta* (1832) - describes a renegade Briton who, echoing Cooper's Leatherstocking, had 'gone native', again demonstrating Richardson's keen sense of naturalistic nationhood<sup>13</sup> (Smith 1994: 54; New 1989: 78; McGregor 1985).

More explicitly cleaving to the naturalistic-nationalist axis was William Kirby, a staunch Loyalist intellectual. Writing in 1846, he declared that the old country, now dotted with the marks of industrialism, might renew its contact with the landed traditions that made it great by finding new life in Canada. In a similar vein came the idea, in the 1850's, that the Canadian Loyalists were 'a superior breed of loyal Briton'.<sup>14</sup> This was due, Colonel George Taylor Denison later wrote, to the fact that the British race required 'the new blood in the Colonies [to] leaven the mass' (Smith 1994: 34). Carl Berger sums up this aspect of Canadian distinctiveness as follows: 'Because of the inevitable deterioration that was creeping over the urbanized and industrialized Englishman, cut off from the land, Canada was to be a kind of rejuvenator of the imperial blood' (Berger 1966: 17).

This period also brought forth the first calls for a native art and literature - comparable to the clarion cries of the New York literaries in the 1830's. In 1858, for instance, Lower Canadian statesman Thomas D'Arcy McGee crowed: 'We have the materials - our position is favourable - northern latitudes like ours have been famed for the strength, variety and beauty of their literature' (Staines 1977: 8). In 1864, McGee's call was echoed by Upper Canadian clergyman Edward Dewart, who declared that 'a national literature is an essential element in the formation of national character' (Woodcock 1987: 10). These writings, though eloquent, should not, however, be taken as an indication of the widespread development of naturalistic nationalism in Canada. Not only had the country yet to be officially born, but its wilderness was too

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<sup>13</sup> This point of view is contested by Ramsay Cook, who claims that Canadians, including Richardson, failed to naturalize their nation because they viewed it as an extension of British civilization into new territory, in contrast to Americans, who looked to the frontier to establish a stronger break from Britain (Cook 1986: 199-200).

<sup>14</sup> For more on the idea of Loyalist superiority, see Rasporich 1968: 150.

overpowering and its colonies were as yet too isolated from each other to generate a widespread sense of common nationality.

### Canadian Identity and Northern Landscape in the Post-Confederation Period

In 1867, the colonies of Canada East, Canada West, Nova Scotia and New Brunswick united to form one united Canadian Confederation. This event generated the first significant stirrings of Canadian national sentiment, though this new nationalism took place largely within imperial confines (New 1989: 24). The first such movement was Canada First, formed in 1868. The brainchild of W.A. Foster, Canada First expressed a Canadian national sentiment that was remarkably free of either British or American influence.<sup>15</sup> 'It is the duty of all Canadians,' Foster insisted, 'whether by birth or adoption to recognize the pressing necessity for the cultivation of a national sentiment which will unite the people of the various provinces more closely in the bonds of citizenship... That an organization which will draw the line between Canadians loyal to their soil and those who place their citizenship in a subordinate or secondary position, affords the surest means of cementing a confederation and securing political action in the interests of the whole Dominion' (Smith 1890: 6).

From the beginning, the new nationalism looked to Canada's northern climate and location for inspiration. For example, Canada First associate Robert Grant Haliburton, a Nova Scotia lawyer and provincial historian, proclaimed, in an 1869 address to the Montreal Literary Club that 'We are the Northmen of the New World'. The gist of Haliburton's argument was that Canada's cold climate and forbidding terrain would give birth to a 'healthy, hardy, virtuous, dominant race' (Berger 1966: 6; 1970: 53).

Drawing on Haliburton's work for the 1871 inaugural address of Canada First, William Foster further wrote, in a conscious attempt to distinguish Canadians from Americans, that 'The old Norse mythology, with its Thor hammers... appeals to us, -for we are a Northern people, -as the true out-crop of human nature, more manly, more real, than the weak marrow-bones superstition of an effeminate South' (Foster 1888: 25). Cast now in a new Darwinian vocabulary, such statements illustrate the close association that

<sup>15</sup> This position is disputed by Carl Berger, however, who argues that Canada First men were also at the forefront of the Loyalist revival and Imperial Federation movements (Berger 1970: 88-108).



Romanticism had begun to foster between Canada's northern wilderness and its new national identity.

### Northern Landscape and Canadian Cultural Nationalism

In parallel with the political nationalism of Canada First came a cultural nationalism centred on the arts, taking the Canadian landscape as its subject matter. Prior to Confederation, the Canadian terrain was generally considered 'a vast, hostile, dimly seen, unpoetical mass'.<sup>16</sup> Meanwhile, poets tried 'ineffectually to catch and express its [the land's] feeling in imitations of the clear, regular, elegant couplets and poetic diction which Pope and his school bred to civilized perfection in the garden of England' (Watt 1966: 243). Similar attitudes were prevalent in Canadian visual art. For example, British Army officers of the eighteenth or nineteenth century regularly painted Canadian forests in which 'the grass seem[ed] recently to have been clipped and the bushes trimmed' (Fulford 1991: 3).

After this period, however, change began to take place. In the forefront of the new change in aesthetic was the 'Confederation School' of poet-critics: men like Archibald Lampman, W.W. Campbell, Bliss Carman, Charles G.D. Roberts and D.C. Scott 'enjoined Canadian writers and painters to head to the 'cleanly' North, rather than to disport themselves in the jaded fleshpots of Europe' (Woodcock 1987: 10). Thanks to the efforts of this school, writers and poets by the 1880's no longer were 'bemoaning the inhuman and unpoetical nature of Canadian landscape' but instead began to celebrate it (Stacey 1991: 52-3; Watt 1966: 243).

This comes across clearly in an anthology of poetry entitled *Songs of the Great Dominion* edited by William Douw Lighthall, which struggles to naturalize the Canadian nation while simultaneously eulogizing its transformation into an agrarian idyll. 'The poets whose songs fill this book are voices cheerful with the consciousness of young might, public wealth, and heroism', he wrote in 1889, 'through them...you may catch something of great Niagara falling, of brown rivers rushing with foam, of the crack of the rifle in the haunts of the moose and caribou ... The tone of them is courage;- for to

<sup>16</sup> A notable exception can be found in the work of Paul Kane in the 1840's, who, like his contemporary George Catlin in the United States, depicted Native Indians in a primitivist style (New 1989: 116).

hunt, to fight, to hew out a farm, one must be a man!...Canadians are...the descendants of armies, officers and men, and every generation of them has stood up to battle... Canada, Eldest Daughter of the Empire, is the Empire's completest type!' (New 1989: 113).

In the visual arts, meanwhile, the Toronto Art Students League of 1886-1904 took up the torch of nationalism ignited by the Confederation School. Publishing in annual exhibitions and calendars between 1893 to 1904, this youthful organization made sketching outings to rural Canada to depict northern landscapes and folk life (Tooby 1991: 15). Around this period in the late nineteenth century, there also appeared a rising volume of northern adventure novels, often centering on such themes as 'life in the isolated Hudson Bay posts and the exploits of the lonely trapper' (Berger 1966: 20). This spiritual shift may be traced in the editorial transformation of the work of Catherine Parr Traill. As W.H. New observes, the 1882 Nelson revision of her *Canadian Crusoes* (1852), entitled *Lost in the Backwoods*, 'distort[ed] the book by cutting the journal passages, truncating the text, and emphasizing the romance of conventional wilderness both in its preface and in its illustrations. (By the 1900's, Nelson editions of *Lost* were reproducing 'wilderness illustrations' indiscriminately from other Nelson books, portraying the Rockies [and] western gunmen... as if they were all features of the Ontario backwoods....)' (New 1989: 56).

The period between 1896 and the first world war continued these patterns, and witnessed the northern theme's most rapid literary advance, with Ralph Connor, Robert Service and William Fraser, some the most popular figures in Canadian literature, serving as exemplars (Berger 1966: 20-21; Woodcock 1977: 78-9). Many of these stories (which together sold in the millions) were openly linked to the promotion of a naturalistic Canadian nationalism, as with Service's derision of American softness in 'The Cremation of Sam McGee' or Ralph Connor's assertion that a new Canadian type was forming in the northwest (Smith 1994: 138). Given all of these developments, it is perhaps unsurprising that Robert Stanley Weir's 1906 English language version of *O Canada*, the unofficial Canadian national anthem (alongside *God Save the Queen*) included the stanza: 'the true north strong and free'.

Certainly, as the previous paragraphs show, the northern idea had been amply expressed prior to the first world war. However, during the 1920's the northern

'naturalization' of the Canadian nation reached its apogee. This process was spurred on by a new English-Canadian cultural nationalism that sought to make a clear break with the British connection. Given the imperial attachments of the bulk of the English-Canadian population, this movement was, at first, largely confined to critical intellectuals. World War I, especially Canadian exploits like Vimy Ridge, had generated in them a heightened sense of Canadian (as opposed to British) identity while the carnage of war had dramatically dampened Canadian Imperialist fervour (Francis 1986: 83, 93; Vipond 1980: 43). Meanwhile, radicals like historian Frank Underhill came to be persuaded by the arguments of anti-imperialist academics like the British-based Union of Democratic Control, which began to influence Canadian historiography (Kennedy 1977: 91-2). The upshot of the preceding was the growth of an independent, sometimes anti-imperial, Canadian nationalism (Bashkevin 1991: 8).

Underhill and other English-Canadian intellectuals also began to consolidate their links through four associations: the Canadian League, the Association of Canadian Clubs (ACC), the C.I.I.A. and the League of Nations Society in Canada. These generally had memberships in the thousands, though the ACC's membership rose from the brink of collapse in 1919 to roughly 40,000 by the end of the 1920's. These associations tended to have interlocking memberships, academic links, well-circulated member journals and were centrally concerned with the question of Canadian national identity. For example, Margaret Prang, a participant in these nationalist currents, observed that there was a spirit of 'Canada First' to be found among 'the small groups of young university teachers and professional men...who established the *Canadian Forum* and debated public issues through its pages and who founded the Canadian League and later the Canadian Institute of International Affairs...' (Vipond 1980: 33).

The magazine *Canadian Forum*, for instance, stated as one of its aims 'to trace and value those developments in the arts and letters which are distinctly Canadian'. More explicitly, its first issue editorialized that 'Real independence is not the product of tariffs and treaties. It is a spiritual thing. No country has reached its full stature, which makes its goods at home, but not its faith and philosophy'. Literary critic W.A. Deacon expressed a similar sentiment in the mid-1920's when he declared that 'our struggle for nationhood needs writers and national magazines with *native force* behind them...' (Vipond 1980: 42-4, emphasis added).

One coterie of artists that brought Deacon's romantic 'native force' to life was the Group of Seven. Composed principally of Ontarian artists, this group of landscape painters first met during 1910-11, though they did not exhibit together until 1920. In the intervening years, the future Group members painted largely independently of each other, but began to explore northern themes, as with A.Y. Jackson's *Terre Sauvage* (1913), Tom Thomson's *Sketch for Northern River* (1912) or J.E.H. MacDonald's *March Evening, Northland* (1914).<sup>17</sup>

After 1920, the Group came together as a unit in what some view as a political act inspired by the cultural nationalism of the period. For example, the Group spent a large amount of time writing and speaking to the public as a means of proselytizing their work. Group members also explicitly set out to paint the rougher, rawer elements of the Canadian north (primarily the Shield country of northern Ontario) in vivid, sublime strokes. In doing so, they quickly incurred the ire of the genteel, Imperial Canadian art establishment. Nevertheless, the group used this conflict to symbolize the tension between Canadian and British identity and became active propagandists for the cause of an independent Canadian cultural nationalism (Woodcock 1977: 73). For example, the Group had strong links with *Canadian Forum* and *Canadian Nation*, the official organ of the rapidly growing ACC. *Canadian Forum* was perhaps the Group's strongest backer, and its relationship with the Group has been called 'symbiotic' by some observers (New 1989: 137-9; Vipond 1980: 41-42).

More germane to this discussion is the way in which the public statements of Group members reflect the prominence of the northern idea in the new, 'naturalized' Canadian nationalism. For instance, one member commented that in the minds of the Group, Canada was 'a long thin strip of civilization on the southern fringe of a vast expanse of immensely varied, virgin land reaching into the remote north. Our whole country is cleansed by the pristine and replenishing air which sweeps out of that great hinterland.' (Berger 1966: 21).

The Group of Seven's travails were soon given mythical interpretation. This began with F.A. Housser's widely read *A Canadian Art Movement: the Story of the Group of Seven*, published in 1926, in which Housser depicted Group members as heroic battlers for Canada fighting against the dead weight of Old World tradition:

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<sup>17</sup> Thomson, though an important formative influence on the Group, was not actually a member.

'Our British and European connection, so far as creative expression in Canada is concerned, has been a millstone around our neck... For Canada to find a complete racial expression of herself through art, a complete break with European traditions was necessary... what was required more than technique was a deep-rooted love of the country's natural environment... The message that the Group of Seven art movement gives to this age is the message that here in the North has arisen a young nation with faith in its own creative genius' (Cook 1986: 185).

Housser's stance was clearly informed by his links with several nationalist associations - his wife even edited the art page of the *Canadian Bookman*, the journal of the Canadian Author's Association. The myth of the Group was also enhanced by the legend of Tom Thomson, a figure that had influenced the Group of Seven by painting landscapes around the Algonquin Park region of Ontario. Thomson often ventured deep into the park by canoe, and drowned there while on a sketching trip in 1917. Thomson was thus viewed as an organic individual, an artist of the land who incarnated the virtues of the Canadian north, and hence the nation (Cook 1986: 205). In an essay entitled 'Canadian and Colonial Painting' (1940), for instance, Northrop Frye contrasted the genteel pastoralism of Horatio Walker with the 'twisted stumps, sprawling rocks and strident colouring' of Thomson, whom Frye believed had captured the 'sphinx'-like spirit of the mysterious north, a subjectivity that linked him, in Frye's mind, to explorers like Alexander Mackenzie and Simon Fraser (Frye 1971: 200).

Gradually, as a consequence of their work's popular resonance and as a result of their self-promotion and mythologization, the Group became the first (and probably only) Canadian art movement to communicate with the broader public. In fact, the Group's popularity rose to such an extent that R.H. Hubbard could write, in his introduction to a 1964 Tate Gallery catalogue that 'by 1938 the group's influence had spread to all parts of the country. In its own generation only a few resisted its hegemony' (Tooby 1991: 26). Meanwhile, the northern theme continued to act as a chrysalis for Canadian literature. Frederick Philip Grove, for instance, and a related school of 'prairie realists' in the 1920's and 30's, played incessantly on the relationship between the Canadian land and its folk. 'We [Canadians] are not surfeited at any time with the sweets

of the seasons', wrote Grove, 'our appetites are kept sharp; and what we lack in the breadth of our nature-experience, we make up for in depth, in intensity. I doubt whether people in the south ever become quite such ardent lovers of even the most trivial things in nature as we do' (Mitcham 1983: 68; Woodcock 1987: 11).

### The Northern Theme in Post-1918 Canadian Historiography

'Sooner or later', wrote historian A.R.M. Lower in the 1920's, 'our rigorous climate working on sterling stock [will] hammer out a vigorous and distinctive people, true men of the north...' (Levitt 1981: 3). As Lower's remarks illustrate, the northern 'naturalization of the nation' emerged strongly within English-Canadian historiography after the 'Great War'. Here, many Canadian writers drew upon a more established vernacular tradition which viewed Canadian farming as a struggle against nature in a harsh, isolated northern environment (Harris 1966: 34; Morton 1961: 89-90). In this respect, the seminal figure was Harold Innis. Innis, a professor of history at the University of Toronto, developed a Canadian variant of Turner's ideas known as the Laurentian Thesis in his work, *The Fur Trade in Canada* (1930).

The Laurentian Thesis postulated that the Fur Trade held the key to understanding Canadian history. Innis outlined two main reasons for this importance. To begin with, he wrote that Canada 'remained British because of the importance of fur as a staple product', and added that the British-run Northwest Company laid the foundations of the future dominion of Canada (Innis 1930: 265, 396). Moreover, while the agrarian movement westward defined the American experience, the great Laurentian Shield blocked a similar destiny for Canada, forcing it to remain tied to the French-Indian influenced staple economy of the Northwest. The staples gradually evolved, from fur to timber and minerals, but the essential point is that Canadians were participants in an inhospitable, rather than abundant land. Instead of settling the west, Canadians therefore remained 'directly involved in the production of the staple' (Innis 1930: 388). Theirs was hence a northern, not western destiny. More to the point, the newly historicized Shield, which extensively speaking, covers the vast Hudson's Bay drainage system, linked the North with the destiny of the populous South in one great national epic.

Innis' ideas proved immensely appealing to other Canadian historians, notably Donald Creighton, whose *Commercial Empire of the St. Lawrence* (1937) reaffirmed Innis' conclusions in the strongest terms and described the first true 'Canadians' as the fur traders of the North West Company - French and English heroes who, together, won the north for Canada (Creighton 1937: 67-73). After the second world war, Arthur Lower expanded on this idea, claiming that 'if the Canadian people are to find their soul, they must seek for it, not in the English language or the French', but in regional landscapes and in the 'unconquerable vastness of the north. From the land, Canada, must come the soul of Canada' (Levitt 1982: 140).<sup>18</sup> The Laurentian theme also ran through the work of other prominent Canadian post-WWII historians, notably William Morton, president of the Canadian Historical Association. Morton, for instance, in his *Canadian Identity* (1961) asserted that:

'Canadian history began when the Vikings crossed the frontier of fish, fur and farm across the North Atlantic...From that obscure beginning Canada had a distinct, a unique, a northern destiny. Its modern beginnings are not Columbian, but Cabotan. And when the French followed Cartier up the St. Lawrence, they were at once committed by the development of the fur trade to the exploitation of the Canadian Shield...The Canadian or Precambrian Shield is as central in Canadian history as it is to Canadian geography, and to all understanding of Canada...And this alternate penetration of the wilderness and return to civilization is the basic rhythm of Canadian life, and forms the basic elements of Canadian character' (Harris 1966: 28; Morton 1961: 4-5).

Morton's work thus represents the consummation of the northern idea, in which Canada is seen to have its origins in distinct, northern voyages of discovery, in contrast to the rest of the (Columbian) new world.

#### Northern Landscape and the Arts after 1945

<sup>18</sup> Lower had begun this line of thinking in *Settlement and the Forest Frontier in Eastern Canada* (1936), and continued this narrative into the 1960's with his *Forest: Heart of a Nation* (1963) (Berger 1986: 116-7).

In the post-war era, modernist abstraction came to the fore in Canadian art, repudiating the work of the Group of Seven much as Abstract Expressionism repudiated Regionalist art in the United States in the late 1930's (Woodcock 1987: 11-12; Doss 1993: 112-13). Nevertheless, Robert Fulford, a prominent member of the contemporary Canadian arts community, claims that each new generation of Canadian artists, though setting out to transcend the work of the Group of Seven, invariably 'return[ed] to the forests and even to the Group of Seven itself' (Fulford 1991: 10). Moreover, the Group still enthralled cultural critics like Northrop Frye, who stated in his introduction to a work on Lawren Harris (1969) that 'they [the Group] felt themselves part of the movement towards the direct imaginative confrontation with the North American landscape, which, for them, began in literature with Thoreau and Whitman... While the Group of Seven were most active, Romanticism was going out of fashion elsewhere. But the nineteen-sixties is once again a Romantic period... so it seems a good time to see such an achievement as that of Lawren Harris in better perspective' (Frye 1971: 208).

The new internationalist modernism of the post-war era also failed to stem the continuing tide of northern influence in Canadian arts and letters. Hugh MacLennan's *Two Solitudes* and *Precipice*, for example, which helped define Canadian literature in the 1940's and 50's, eagerly drew upon the now standard theme of Canadian naturalism (Woodcock 1987: 12). This trend continued into the 1960's and 70's in the work of prominent writers like Margaret Atwood, Margaret Laurence, André Langevin, Yves Thériault, Gabrielle Roy, Robert Kroetsch and Harold Horwood, prompting Alison Mitcham in 1983 to proclaim, somewhat ahistorically, that: 'Perhaps the most exciting creative force in contemporary Canadian fiction - French<sup>19</sup> and English - is the Northern Imagination. Increasingly, our most perceptive novelists have shown that the Canadian imagination in many of its most original flights is inspired by the North' (Mitcham 1983: 9). Some years later, George Woodcock extended this naturalistic Canadian narrative into the present, asserting that: 'An especially interesting trend (it is not organized enough to be called a movement) among the younger poets has been toward a return to

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<sup>19</sup> The fact that many French-Canadian writers wrote about the north should not be construed as a francophone expression of Canadian naturalistic nationalism. Rather, their narration of the north has generally occurred in the ontological context of French-Canadian identity or universalist spirituality.



the landscape, though in much less conventional ways than the confederation poets a century ago. The writers representing this trend-among them some of the best of younger Canadian poets-include Patrick Lane, Dale Zieroth, Sid Marty, Tom Wayman and Susan Musgrave' (Woodcock 1987: 16).

Even in the world of classical music, the pull of northern nature has been felt. For example, the famous Toronto pianist Glenn Gould 'found himself constantly preoccupied by the Canadian North, and the wilderness' despite his European training and big city roots. Gould even claimed that the north inspired his work, and Gould studied, wrote about and made radio documentaries on the North in the 1960's (Fulford 1991: 8). More recently, in 1991, Robert Fulford, in commenting on the impact of the north on the Canadian psyche, insisted that 'It is geography which sets the tone of Canadian culture just as it sets the rules of our working lives and governs our economic relations with other countries' (Fulford 1991: 11). Furthermore, John Ralston Saul, a prominent Canadian essayist and novelist, appealed to Canadians to reject southern (American) commercialism and the divisiveness of language (French vs. English) whilst uniting via the medium of northern landscape: 'Our destiny is tied to the territory of which we are custodians-that is, the northern half of the continent', wrote Saul in 1997. 'Not religion, not language, not race, but place is the dominant feature of civilizations...In more temperate, central countries, place is eventually dominated...[but] out on the margins, place is never dominated' (Saul 1997: 69, 158).

Bearing these ideas in mind, it is evident that the north continues to resonate as a theme in Canadian culture, even amongst those professing a more abstract modernist (or post-modernist) orientation. For the broader Canadian public, a similar truism holds, as is evident in the popularity of exhibitions of the Group of Seven's work (as with the permanent McMichael collection or in temporary showings such as that held in Vancouver during the summer of 1996), in the writings of novelists like Farley Mowat or in the painting of artists like Alex Colville, Robert Bateman and Paul Calle.<sup>20</sup>

### The Northern Sensibility and Post-War Canadian Identity

<sup>20</sup> Though Calle is American, his work features Canadian scenes, often inspired by the fur trade, which are popular in Canada. With regard to Bateman, his wildlife painting is not exclusively Canadian, but northern species have received extensive treatment in his work.

'Climate plays a great part in giving us our special character, different from that of our southern neighbours' announced Governor General Vincent Massey in his 1948 work *On Being Canadian*, 'it influences our mentality, produces a sober temperament ... Nothing is more characteristic of Canadians than the inclination to be moderate'. As Massey's statement shows, the rhetoric of Canadian political figures, like that of its historians, continued to resound with northern imagery after the second world war. Prime Minister John Diefenbaker, for example, played upon the northern theme frequently during the 1958 election campaign: 'I see a new Canada...A Canada of the North!', thundered Diefenbaker, whose successful bid for office nicely demonstrated the cultural resonance of this idea with the Canadian electorate (Berger 1966: 23). And in the late 1970's, the title of Thomas Berger's important federal report on cultural policy was entitled *Northern Frontier, Northern Homeland*, demonstrating how firmly embedded was the naturalistic notion that northern nature was a vital force behind Canada's cultural distinctiveness (New 1989: 214). Finally, and perhaps of greatest significance, with the decline of Canadian Britannicism, the northern myth stood 'shakily alone' as the only pillar of Canadian identity to emerge secure from the cultural tumult of the post-1945 period (Harris 1966: 41-2).<sup>21</sup>

To summarize, the efforts of Canada First in politics, the Confederation School in literature, the Group of Seven in painting and the Laurentian School in historiography helped to 'naturalize' Canadian national identity along northern lines, a feature which has persisted to the present day.

## **Conclusion**

This paper has attempted to demonstrate several points. First of all, on the level of nationalism theory, it has attempted to show that there are two ways in which nationalists can apprehend their landscape. The first, labeled the 'nationalization of nature', describes the process whereby a nation creates a 'homeland' by settling, naming and historically associating itself with a particular territory. By contrast, the second, termed the

<sup>21</sup> For more on the decline of Canadian Britannicism, see Schwartz 1967, Grant 1965, Cheal 1981 or Breton 1988.

'naturalization of the nation', refers to a dynamic whereby a nation comes to view itself as the offspring of its natural landscape. In the first case, the perceived direction of causation flows from culture to nature. In the second instance, the process has been reversed: nature now determines culture.

The American and Canadian cases both exhibited a shift of emphasis from 'nationalization' to 'naturalization' under the influence of Romanticism. In the American case, the West, which prior to the early nineteenth century had been viewed as a region of depraved wilderness to be uplifted and utilized for growth, came to be perceived as an organic source of national distinctiveness. In Canada, the North went through a similar transition - at first viewed as a horrid wasteland, it came to represent a source of national regeneration and authenticity.

At a broader theoretical level, both forms of geographic national identity outlined above are idealist constructions which were also shaped by material factors. Thus nations like Canada and the United States, whose territory contains (or contained) a geographic *reality* in which a significant portion of the land lay in the virgin state<sup>22</sup>, tended to 'naturalize' their nations to a greater extent than nations like Germany or England (but not Switzerland or Norway) whose landscape was largely settled. This should cause us to reassess the notion that social construction proceeds without the constraint of external referents.

On the other hand, the fact that the national identities in both cases underwent great change (against a backdrop of relatively constant geography), from 'nationalization' to 'naturalization' modes, suggests that geography is a highly malleable material for those who seek to shape collective representations. Taken together, these two arguments point to the need to seek out dialectical relationships between nature and culture - and their associated material and ideal realms.

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<sup>22</sup> This refers merely to the physical appearance of the land. Needless to say, North America's indigenous peoples had carved out a distinct lifestyle niche in harmony with this 'virgin' land.

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