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The Romantic Spirit in American Painting 1800--1870

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PREFACE

The historian conveniently assigns the name "period" to a segment of time in history. A period so designated is not confined to specified limits, but develops over a time and diminishes only gradually. The romantic movement in American painting may be defined by examining the events of the times and their effect on the lives of men who interpreted the American scene through artistic forms.

My research concentrates on the circumstances which resulted in the paintings of this period, because those events shaped the American nation, and as a consequence, American art. I have selected painters and works which I believe represent the spirit of the times. The works may be artistic failures or the painters may be relatively unknown, but in my analysis, I wish to illustrate that in a larger sense, this art was not a failure, if it expressed the ideas and hopes of the American people. My criterion will be: was this art a valid expression of the times in which it was created?

I will examine significant trends in the American scene of this period in order to correlate them with the painters and their subjects. I have found that the creative process is affected by political, social and economic undercurrents, and I shall try to uncover significant aspects of these phenomena to point out their influence on

American painting. An accurate picture of the Romantic movement can be obtained only by delving into the endless chain of events which preceded 1800.

I have incorporated the suggestions of professors, students and family into this paper. Dr. Gilbert Carpenter's lectures on American art provided me with additional insights into this particular period as related to world art. My deepest thanks are extended to my advisor and teacher, Dr. Richard Bardolph, who provided the original idea for this research by awakening a keen interest in American social and cultural history.

INTRODUCTION

The American colonies were settled by people from various European nations, beginning in the seventeenth century. The colonists came from different backgrounds and different cultures, but arrived with many of the same hopes and aspirations for a better life--freedom to worship as they pleased, to farm and live in peace. In many respects these people were dissenters, but as they settled in the new land, dissent bred co-operation for the sake of continuity.

Europe was in a state of unrest. There was economic rivalry for empires in the New World--rivalries made possible by advances in science and inventions, which in turn stimulated intellectual and cultural progress. The Renaissance shook the religious unity which had dominated the mind of western man for centuries. Men began to appreciate the culture and values which life on earth had for them, and this humanistic mentality influenced the progress of man as new thoughts shaped his actions.

Coming to this strange land, the colonists brought with them their European ideas on art. Once here, however, the local conditions presented a curious contrast to these European ideals. As many of the people were fleeing church control, there was no patron for their art (by their own choice), and a formerly dominant subject was thus rejected for painting.[1] There was a grave lack of trained profes-

sional artists, art schools and pertinent literature on the subject. Most of the settlers had been unable to bring with them copies of the old masterpieces.

Furthermore, the conditions of everyday life in America simply did not permit one to roam in the woods to sketch or to contemplate noted artistic works, as the Romantic artists did in a later period. There was a pressing concern for providing the exigiencies of the day--to survive in this wilderness by fighting or befriending the Indian and by taming the environment to supply sustenance for the family. If in the course of making a pitcher for water, one had time to paint on it a native flower from indigo dye--well and good; but the function of the pitcher was of primary importance. Only gradually as the settlers achieved greater security in this new land did they have time to think about gratifying creative and aesthetic aspirations.

The influence of this frontier life is noteworthy for American art even today. It shaped the character and the mind of the American colonial and forced him to look at situations and deal with them in a realistic manner. He adapted his art to suit local conditions.[2] Even when idealism gained a prominent place in American thought and was expressed in its art, this practical, realistic propensity was evident at the same time. This characteristic was born with the American colonies, and its tradition is

not found to a great extent in European art.[3]

From the first, it must be noted, artists had come to America with expeditions, and they captured graphic representations of the new land and its native inhabitants. Captain John Smith made numerous sketches and water colors of the Jamestown settlement.[4] As the colonies prospered and thrived, the settlers began to think about art treasures in the old world, to regard their surroundings from an artistic standpoint, and to desire to add some of the fine arts to their lives. The deep pride which the colonists experienced in the success of their settlement was in part due to the awakened interest in the individual which the Remaissance had fostered. Consequently, they wished to preserve for posterity the likenesses of the family who had been born and had survived this experiment in frontier life. This family had given the colonist roots in a hitherto foreign land. It is not surprising that these portraits were factual records, often crudely rendered in either an aristocratic English setting or with no background at all save a somber hue. The former style represented the sophisticated romanticism of the aristocrats and denoted their social aspirations. The latter style was evident in the portraiture of the common, unpretentious folk and reflected the sober influence of Puritanism.[5]

Although the colonists came from many parts of Europe, increasing numbers were from England, and it is not sur-

prising that the first professionally trained painters were from England. The primary influences they encountered in Europe were the flat pattern type, stemming from the devotional art of Medieval and Renaissance painting in Northern Europe, thegenre Baroque art of the seventeenth century Dutch painters such as Rembrandt and Vermeer, and the florid High Baroque style inspired by Titian and Rubens. From these European influences was born the first American style in painting. In America these foreign elements were modified by the early unskilled limners and by artists to depict the American character and record the sitter's physical presence in detail.[6]

The importance of portraiture in American painting until the early part of the nineteenth century is noteworthy. While in the early days of the nation people wanted to preserve their family likenesses, as time passed, artists wished to expand the range of subjects. Prior to the nineteenth century they met with very limited success. People in general were not as interested in historical themes or landscapes. Appeals to the states and later to the national government for patronage of these themes were only partially successful. The American painter had no control over his public as an arbiter of taste. Not until Daguerre's camera appeared to rival portraiture did the latter's importance decline.[7] Landscape and genre painting in the nineteenth century were to have less effect on its demise.

By the middle of the eighteenth century this English influence in portraiture was dominant in America at a time when the political ties with that country were being strengthened at the request of King George III. During the last quarter of the century, Americans fought, won their political independence, and set up a republican form of government. These inner stirrings and strivings affected American art and artists, many of whom sailed to England for professional training at Benjamin West's studio.[8] Still, many artists preferred to remain, meet the challenge of forging a new nation, and create an image for all the world to see. This pride and patriotism mingled in the flood of Revolutionary War scenes and were conspicuous elements in the portraits of heroes depicted in classical and romantic terms.

THE ROMANTIC SPIRIT IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

Prior to the nineteenth century, art in America was largely found along the seaboard in the main cities, such as Boston, New York, Philadelphia and Charleston, South Carolina. Certain traditions matured in each region. In New England the combined family loyalty and Calvinistic interest in human character governed the artist's approach to portraiture. In New York, the Dutch settled and encouraged an indigenous school of artists, rudely trained, but observant and sensitive. The Middle Colonies were distinct in their diversity, having been affected by a mixed population to blend ideal, decorative, scientific and mechanical interests in their art, as exemplified by the artist Charles Willson Peale. The South patterned its art after the aristocratic way of life which was their model. Thus the portrait was an essential decoration in the southern home and steadily held its primary rank until after the Civil War.[9]

The American painters who reached maturity about the opening of the nineteenth century had little or no memory of the details of political ties with England.[10] Stirrings within the newly independent states to adjust to the constitutional form of government, to return to peacetime operations and to achieve a status worthy of a young nation, kept the inhabitants of the republic alert. As news of their accomplishments and innovations spread to other na-

tions, they in turn regarded themselves and the nation they had created with increased respect. Artists enthusiastically caught this spirit in American life. Americans were no longer colonists barely eking out an existence on foreign soil. They had more time to explore the beauties and wonders of their land.

This spirit was contagious. The English painter, Francis Guy, came to America in the late 1790's and painted landscapes and town scenes in the romantic tradition. His one-man show in 1820 was the first of its kind in America. Alexander and Archibald Robertson, Scottish brothers, also immigrated to America about the same time and taught landscape, among other types of painting, at their Columbian Academy in New York. Views of native scenery or urban street scenes were the vogue, especially because they were less expensive than portrait paintings.[11] Cities and towns were growing; the land was no longer a wilderness along the seaboard. Americans wanted to preserve familiar scenes and display them as a measure of their success.

"Man should have an eye to four things," said Palladio, "air, water, earth, and self mastery; the first three are things of nature, the fourth of power and of will."[12] These words embody the change in American painting after 1800. With the creation of the new nation, Americans decided that portraiture alone could not express their growing awareness of themselves and their environment. Inher-

iting the eighteenth century rational mind, they were nonetheless aware that science and reason alone were insufficient for a comprehensive view of life. And so, as the nation expanded and flourished under the new government, its artistic leaders urged the public to accept a wider range of themes.[13]

Late in the eighteenth century neoclassicism had appeared in art. Many believed that a return to antiquity would provide the key to future republican ideals. Depending on old formulae for style, these classical compositions were not creative from the artist's point of view. They had to represent nature's ideal or perfect form, not nature as the artist might see it.[14] The art of drawing was of prime importance for neoclassical art.

Value judgments respecting art changed at the turn of the century. People preferred to have less moralizing in their art, and classical subjects, Biblical and historical themes, as well as portraiture, declined in popularity. The tradition died slowly, however. One minor painter, Charles Robert Leslie, for example, wrote in 1813 that

> ...the pictures from modern poets do not take, and even if they should, it is uncertain how long they may continue in vogue. To insure a picture currency, therefore, it is necessary that it should tell either some scriptural or classical story.[15]

Many prominent nineteenth century painters would return to these themes at some time in their career. Historical paintings became more personal and psychological, often

more anecdotal, and thus more closely related to genre. That the vogue of portraiture suffered from moral convictions is suggested by one contemporary observer:

> ...we know that there are many who are willing to be the appenda [sic] to wealth and social rank, to keep a foothold in life by fostering pride and flattering vanity, but the true Artist has that desire for reverence and regard, not for himself, but for the truth given him to tell.[16]

Another factor which brought portraiture into disrepute among the artists was the fact that many who wished to paint another subject were forced into portraiture in order to support themselves.

The artistic ideas and values which supplanted neoclassicism were encompassed in the spirit of romanticism, a movement which encouraged the expression of intuition, originality and liberalism in form and subject matter. Romanticism focused unprecedented attention on landscape and genre, and their status on the aesthetic scale was greatly enhanced. Neoclassicism had proclaimed art's function to express timeless traditions and exalted ideals. Under these terms, genre was unacceptable since it reproduced the local, trivial, and the immediate. Landscape could never be more than a secondary art as a source of ethical meditation.[17]

George Washington had cautioned Americans to have "entangling alliances with none,"[18] and following the War of 1812, Americans turned their backs on transatlantic affairs.

Europe's standards of art were not entirely applicable to a nation which looked to the future, rather than to the past. Artist Asher B. Durand called for "an original school of art worthy to share the tribute of universal respect paid our condition of political advancement."[19] William S. Mount characterized the fresh approach to art: "Paint not for the few but the many."[20]

In America, romanticism was expressed in a variety of ways but always with optimistic overtones. Romanticism was the keynote of the American spirit after 1800, and was variously expressed by writers, architects, naturalists, scientists, and artists. There was a common bond among these groups which resulted in an interchange of ideas. Washington Irving made sketches and almost gave up writing because of his admiration for the painter Washington Allston. Both Robert Fulton and Samuel F. B. Morse were equally famed as painters and inventors. Thomas Cole wrote poetry in addition to painting and was a devoted friend of William Cullen Bryant. John James Audubon and Alexander Wilson were both artists and students of nature. William Dunlap combined painting with writing as well as theatrical management.[21]

There were several distinctive traits in American romanticism. The themes most often considered were "air, water, earth, and self mastery," and the belief that sentiment would have the final word on these themes. For all Americans there was wonder, awe and delight at the beauty

and mystery of life. Moreover, they felt a certain kinship with nature and assumed an attitude of passive submission to it. They extolled reverie, solitude and quiet reflection which would put them in tune with nature. They became idealistic, insisting that fundamental reality was spirit, not matter. In addition to the nature around them, Americans scrutinized human nature and delighted in its humorous side. Finally, romanticism was evident in the growth of American patriotism.[22]

The Romantics disdained the material progress and practicality of the eighteenth century. They appealed to the spiritual realm for answers, relying on intuition, sentiment and idealism for the key to the meaning of life. There was a demand to submerge oneself in nature for the attainment of self-mastery:

> Embosomed [wrote Emerson] for a season in nature, whose floods of life stream around and through us and invite us by the powers they supply, to action proportioned to nature, why should we grope among the dry bones of the past, or put the living generation into masquerade out of its faded wardrobe? The sun shines today also. There is more wool and flax in the fields. There are new lands, new men, new thoughts. Let us demand our own works and laws and worship.[23]

William Ellery Channing, a noted minister of the times, expressed his idea in a similar way:

> The great sources of wisdom are experience and observation; and these are denied to none. To open and fix our eyes upon what passes without and within us is the most fruitful study. Books are chiefly useful as they help us inter-

pret what we see and experience.[24]

Nature was the source of the most valuable experiences. In fact, Washington Allston felt that the artist could only construct; creation was a power possessed exclusively by God. Artistic originality, for him, was the power to assimilate the experience in nature into the artist's being and then reproduce it simply and faithfully as it was individualized by his own feeling.[25] The artists of this period were thus able to combine a "poetic touch" with a realistic rendering of nature as they saw it.[26] Science, which at this time was not highly specialized, was irrevocably entwined in art. It contributed to American art a certain accuracy of detail in drawing, as evidenced by the collections of John James Audubon, and scientific literature created enthusiasm for travel and exploration. Hence the artists of the nineteenth century journeyed over the American continent and even went to Europe, not for patronage or training, but for ideas for their paintings.[27] The writings of Alexander Humbolt were apparently the principal cause of Frederick E. Church's pictorial exploration of South America.[28] Examples of this kind could be greatly multiplied.

Although this romanticism was native to America, its ideals were influenced by European writers Goethe and John Ruskin. Goethe demanded that the artist turn to nature and copy it exactly in every picture he executed. In addition, he should devise a way to portray the harmonic idea

in nature which his soul has discovered.[29] Ruskin asked that in addition to the imitation of nature,

> Every picture should be informed throughout with a sentiment or a passion appealing to the sympathy of the spectator. Sublimity or awful grandeur, solitude, sweetness, cheerfulness, tenderness, fear, peace, love, pensive beauty, melancholy, etc., etc., may all speak from the landscape unaided by human figures.[30]

Furthermore, Ruskin felt that if art were used to teach truth, not just for luxury and delight, the whole nation would be elevated. Finally he maintained that

> you may read the character of men and nations in their art...for the character becomes passionate in the art and intensifies itself in all its noblest and meanest delights...a man may hide himself from you or misrepresent himself to you in every other way; but he cannot in his work: there be sure, you have him to the utmost.[31]

The first half of the nineteenth century in America has been characterized as the age of sentiment, of faith in the individual and the nation. The older, elitist Calvinist doctrines were cast aside in favor of a more equalitarian attitude. Man, inherently good, had the ability to achieve if only he could discover his potentialities. This was possible if and when man discovered his relationship to God and to nature. While these ideas were a revolt against classicism, they formed not a system, but an attitude. In New England this attitude was expressed by Transcendentalism; its principal proponents there were Ralph Waldo Emerson, Nathaniel Hawthorne and Henry David Thoreau. Hawthorne revealed the Transcendental attitude toward art in a short

story, "The Artist of the Beautiful."

> Thus it is that ideas which grow up within the imagination and appear so lovely to it, and of a value beyond whatever men call valuable, are exposed to be shattered and annihilated by contact with the Practical. It is requisite for the ideal artist to possess a force of character that seems hardly compatible with its delicacy; he must keep his faith in himself while the incredulous world assails him with its utter disbelief; he must stand up against mankind and be his own disciple, both as respects his genius and the objects to which it is directed.[32]

Transcendentalism collided with more rational, practical elements in other parts of the country. Horatio Greenough, a sculptor of the period, remarked:

> I object to these transcendental theories of life because of their genesis...because they threaten to pare down and clip the tendrils by which I cling to the concrete... .[33]

Politicians in the Jacksonian manner lauded the individual and his advance as a result of material progress. Their accent on individualism was not to make him retreat in solitude to contemplate, but to rise and join the masses to improve American society for the common man. This was so much the case that some noted the consequences for art:

> We are [said one critic] almost without the means of amusement and wholesome recreation, and the want glares upon us...in our too serious temper and manner...with us, artists have not to struggle against oppression...but against ignorance and the uncultivated taste of the public.[34]

These two divergent ideas found expression in the art of the period. In general, the landscapes depicted man's study and absorption in nature, while genre told the stories of every-

day life, comic, boisterous, cynical and cruel.

Related to the philosophy of the time were the stirrings in the religious community. New faiths appeared which reflected the optimistic spirit in the country. The Mormons, looking for a promised land, moved west and settled in the Utah territory. The Millerites or Seventh Day Adventists revealed the reforming zeal in their belief that Christ came to earth and found people celebrating the wrong Sabbath. For many, Transcendentalism became a faith.

The religious note was evident in the paintings of Edward Hicks. A devout minister, Hicks chose to illustrate a Biblical passage from Isaiah in his paintings--that of the animals inheriting the earth. He entitled his work "The Peaceable Kingdom", portraying the animals specified in the Bible observing William Penn signing a treaty of peace with the Indians. These symbolic elements are bound together by the calming influence of the landscape.[35] Likewise, many other landscapes displayed certain religious-philosophical associations so that analogies of nature might give a hint of the meaning of life.

A major force which at this time was effecting changes in American life was the rising spirit of materialism, against which the idealists and Transcendentalists directed their rebuke. The nation was expanding as a consequence of improved methods of transportation and communication which in turn reflected the advances in science and technology.

Better means of transportation were heralded by the immigrants who began to enter this country in significant numbers after 1830, and to settle not only in the large eastern cities, but also in the mid-west. The Germans and Irish were the predominant newcomers; the former were to have a definite influence on the western artists.[36] Americans joined the immigrants who were locating in the West, which offered fertile lands and many of the same opportunities the original colonies had offered. In the West, Americans again mixed with different cultures to produce an even more pragmatic, optimistic, sturdy individualism. The mass migration of population added to the common mixture of peoples from other nations and produced art characterized by fluidity and motion, as well as by a distinct lack of tradition and often a lack of formal training.

Inevitably, progress affected the nation's sections in different ways. The Northeast saw the growth of commerce and industry with the resultant growth of capital and the rise of cities which were the matrix of art academies, exhibits, and the cultivation of aesthetic appreciation of a native art. The Southern life became dominated by a minority, a landed gentry dependent on slavery for its existence and progress. Left outside the pale of advances in science, technology, education or reforms, the South retreated to enjoy its aristocratic ideals and protect itself from recriminations from outside its borders. The West,

representing the wave of the future as well as a reminder of the past original settlements, offered a third element of diversity in American life, providing color and excitement for those in the East and a rugged existence for its early pioneers. The rise of the common man in America, in all its aspects, was evident in the paintings of the period, particularly in those from the North and West.

LANDSCAPE AND GENRE PRIOR TO 1870

The more refined, somber side of romanticism was displayed in the early nineteenth century by the landscape artists, who reflected an apparent gentlemanly repose and quiet dignity.[37] The first generation of landscapists (1800-1820 roughly) discovered inspiration in nature, but having been trained in Europe, they continued to paint in that style upon their return. The vision of the past, the great, and the wonderful were major preoccupations of this group and resulted in a revival of Biblical subjects, frequently with a mystical overtone, and in memories of the Revolutionary War and colonial days.[38] Their style reflected grandeur, sublimity and awe-inspiring vastness. The crag, the precipice, the panoramic view and the twisted tree were frequently repeated. Receding space and atmospheric haze were characteristics of many of their landscapes. Figures, when introduced at all, were small, to emphasize the loneliness or vastness of the scene. Dramatic effects were produced by silhouetting dark against light areas.[39]

Washington Allston, the original romanticist in America, was the leader of this visionary painting. His work suggests the force of Michaelangelo, the grace of Raphael and the color of Titian.[40] A pioneer in the art of mood painting, Allston concentrated on Biblical scenes and landscape reveries. His paintings illustrate man's submergence in nature, the importance of water as an enveloping medium,

and the exploration of the soul.[41]

The first generation of Romantic painters harmonized their tendencies with the national dream of future greatness by painting monumental murals. Spurred on by the War of 1812, local and state governments offered limited patronage. Paris-trained John Vanderlyn tried to capitalize on this movement in hopes of bringing European culture to the United States. His panorama of Versailles was well received at first, but people were unwilling to pay a fee to gain entrance to the specially-built rotunda, and thus Vanderlyn's attempt to secure patronage from the masses failed. Except for the decoration of the National capitol, the mural movement died, and many of the murals have been lost.

A characteristic peculiar to American painting emerged with this first generation. This was the curious blending of the elements in the picture to produce a sense of passage of time, and yet to obscure the solid, factual aspects under an atmospheric haze. This Nordic strain was a direct inheritance from the German artists and was the result of contact with the German immigrants as well as the art school at Dusseldorf, to which many American artists went in the first half of the nineteenth century.

The overall effect of European landscape paintings led American artists in the second decade of the nineteenth century to consider their own native landscape as a subject for art. The painters in this period have been called the

Hudson River School. A school of art, as defined by Samuel Isham, is "a combination of traditions and methods, a technique, a particular sense of color, united to express a common ideal followed by the artists of a given nation at a given time."[42] The Hudson River School is noted for its lack of traditions and consistent methodology. The artists showed marked individuality, but were bound by a common spirit in their desire to render nature faithfully. They were more interested in establishing a tradition than in following one.[43] Their studies of nature reflect pantheistic realism, indicating a more direct relation between the painter and nature. Albert Bierstadt recaptured these pantheistic feelings in his panoramic scenes of the West after 1850. This deep serenity often indicated the artist's personal feelings toward the subject.

The Hudson River School believed the physical world to be symbolic of the spiritual, and therefore, the mere portrayal of external life around them would reveal the basic morality and idealism of the democratic way of life. Indeed the taste of the period combined nationalism, naturalism and morality, which suggested that art might improve life in America by engendering refinement and aesthetic appreciation.[44] The artists of this school believed the nobler the subject, the nobler the picture would be, and the way to express nature's beauty was in the most precise terms. Artists within this group differed on how much

they could depart from the depicting of nature. Asher B. Durand advised young pupils to study nature early for "its influence on the mind and heart," and then later in life they would not be confined to its strict rules. Thomas Cole expressed the true romantic idea when he wrote to William Cullen Bryant:

> Have you not found--I have--that you never succeed in painting scenes, however beautiful, immediately on returning from them? I must wait for a time to draw a veil over the common details, the unessential parts, which shall leave the great features, whether the beautiful or the sublime, dominant in the mind.[45]

Much of the Hudson River School's work was inspired by literature. There was a close correspondence between their paintings and the nature poetry of the day. This was particularly true of Thomas Cole, one of the leaders of the Hudson River School, whose religious and romantic temperament led him to paint Biblical scenes and moral allegories, as well as landscapes. There was concentrated pressure to conform and satisfy the double standard of realism and idealism. These artists were most successful in meeting this standard as they drew with precision and emphasized the picturesque or breath-taking grandeur of the scene. Unfortunately, they became more and more conscious of composing their pictures, and their works declined in quality, while the size of their canvases doubled after 1850, as theatrical effects required more and more space.[46]

The Hudson River School explored the native American

wonders in their works, beginning with views of the Hudson River Valley, Niagara Falls and the White Mountains. A generation later, artists heeded the call to go west, and their works included tableaux of the Grand Canyon, the volcanos of Mexico and finally the icebergs off Laborador and the jungles of South America. These locations provided vicarious thrills for those who did not venture beyond the settled regions of the East. Numerous travel books, such as Washington Irving's Tour of the Prairies, encouraged scenic exploration of the West. Communion with nature characterized the age, and the family picnic was a favorite pastime.

Some of the landscape artists of this first generation learned to paint by the apprentice system; others were pupils of established painters. As the second generation flourished and extended landscape in new directions--different subjects and novel techniques--they wished to study abroad. Financed by wealthy bankers and merchants such as Luman Reed, Robert Gilmore, Jonathan Sturges, Henry C. Carey and Nicholas Longworth, these artists went to Europe in search of subjects and ideas. The two most popular centers were Rome and Dusseldorf, followed by Paris, Florence and London. They desired to capture the primeval environment in America which they saw fading in the wake of industrialism. It was ironic that those who made money in industry encouraged artists to paint the natural landscape.[47]

The second generation matured with the ideals of Jacksonian Democracy. Thus they extended their paintings to include the common man. Genre was the natural consequence. Its homely, often humorous or satiric scenes of farm or frontier life fitted the taste of the era. The democratizing influence reached out into the realms of science, religion, the business world and education, thus changing the character of American society and demonstrating not only opportunity but imperfections. Emerson proclaimed: "America is a poem in our eyes; its ample geography dazzles the imagination."[48] While foreign travelers, such as Alexis de Tocqueville, complained that America was noisy, barbarous and crude, Emerson advised American artists to celebrate this domestic spectacle in their works.

The second generation received more attention and were more successful with the public. They could study at any of three art academies--Boston, New York, or Philadelphia. These academies offered free instruction, exhibitions and prizes. Artists were further encouraged by the American Art Union, a lottery set up in 1842. This Union had the twofold effect of encouraging artists as well as art appreciation, since membership was only $5.00 and funds were used for the artists' benefit. Painters responded: Thomas Doughty gave up his leather business to paint pastoral scenes; Asher B. Durand abandoned engraving for landscape.[49]

By the middle of the nineteenth century, the movement west had stirred followers of the Hudson River School. Under this influence of the West, the artists' canvases increased in size and grandeur. A compelling force to arouse the emotions with a magnificent sweep of the landscape was coupled with the innate desire to render each detail with precision. One might be engulfed by the picture as he came nearer and nearer to observe the details. The grandiose scale of the works of Frederick E. Church and Albert Bierstadt led one critic to comment that art's noblest function was not to imitate nature but to rival it.[50]

To depict the vistas in the West, coal-tar colors, invented in 1856 in England, were used with delightful results. The dominant hue, brown, used by the Hudson River School, was abandoned as paintings became rich and varied in tones of red and yellow. Artists experimenting with these colors and searching for a special effect with light are generally called luminists, and include John F. Kensett, Worthington Whittredge and Sanford Gifford.[51] George Inness, whom many refer to as the first truly great American landscapist, combined the quietude of Doughty, the breadth of Bierstadt, the knowledge of Durnad and infused it with a more profound, yet personal, lyrical quality.[52]

As art became an integral part of American life, the popularity of genre increased. This was the era when Americans discerned certain stock characters and some unique

traits and habits. Genre painters investigated man's relationship to other men and to nature.[53] Their style was predominantly realistic, which often entailed telling a story infused with psychological elements. Both humorous and serious, and sometimes cynical approaches were used. William Sydney Mount, a native of Long Island, New York, captured the "genial warmth of country life" in paintings of barn dances and eel spearing.[54] However, there is some cruelty in Mount's humor at times. A favorite joke was the sleeping Negro tormented by a child tickling him with a straw. Four of his pictures deal with the imminent whipping of children. This particular side of genre was not infrequently portrayed.[55]

As pioneers pushed west, the Mississippi River became important as a highway, a battleground, a road to opportunity, a barrier against religion and law; a boundary and a unifying force. Traffic along the Mississippi increased with the influx of settlers, and the flatboatmen, such as Mike Fink, provided subjects for music, art and literature. The painters of the Mississippi were concerned with preserving the facts, the life on the river and the landscape before them; the romance and poetry which their works portrayed were part of that life along the Mississippi. Most of the artists were interested in one aspect of the life there. John James Audubon, the best known and the earliest artist-explorer of that area was a naturalist. Seven of

them concentrated on the Indians, while the rest of the river artists depicted landscapes and town scenes. They traveled the Mississippi River, kept accurate, detailed journals and often later used their sketches for illustrating books. These artist-reporters had an encyclopedic attitude; they wished to expand and record man's knowledge of man and his world.[56]

The greatest Mississippi painter was George Caleb Bingham, who became a painter "by means of his own unassisted application and untutored study."[57] His unsurpassed contribution to the art of the Mississippi was genre. He alone was able to capture "that tough and roistering, oath-spouting harum-scarum race: the bargee, the keeler, and the voyageur."[58] Bingham studied art at the Pennsylvania Academy for three months were he saw the work of German genre painter John L. Krimmel, which greatly influenced his own art. His rough and picturesque life of the fur traders and the river boat scenes inspired writer Mark Twain. Bingham toiled, as he said, "to assure us that our social and political characteristics...will not be lost in the lapse of time for want of an art record rendering them full justice."[59] One can appreciate his scenes of political life in the West after reading commentaries on this colorful era. They are more accurate than usual, since Bingham himself was involved in the process, having been elected to the Missouri House of Representatives.

David Gilmore Blythe's small canvases depict the brawling, grimy life of frontier Pittsburgh, its dim saloons, outdoor horse markets and coal miners--all rendered with grotesque humor suggestive of the Dutch masters. His satirical, morbid comments on contemporary life were largely unacceptable to the public.[60] Likewise, John Quidor was rejected. His paintings were a humorous burlesque of Washington Irving's Knickerbocker Tales and other stories. From these sources he created a poetic, mysterious fantasy in a style and technique unusual for his day. He was almost forgotten even before his death and was not fully appreciated until the twentieth century, when he was rediscovered. In spite of the fact that some artists were rejected, American romanticism never became an escape for these artists. They were never "studio artists" at war with society. If they experienced bitterness and delusion, it was from lack of patronage, not because of any failure of the nation to achieve its goals, as was the case in France following the Napoleonic Wars.[61]

The relationship of man to nature and to his fellow men was probed by those artists interested in the Indian. George Catlin approached the Indian from an anthropological viewpoint. He portrayed the redman as a vanishing tradition which had to be captured for posterity. His travels took him to all parts of the West where he sketched and painted hundreds of portraits and scenes. His haste re-

sulted in paintings which are primarily of historical rather than artistic value. Many of the paintings done by other artists had a quasi-official status. Charles Bodmer's scenes were illustrations for Maxmilian of Wied Neuwild's anthropological treatise; Alfred J. Miller's paintings were a chronicle of Captain Stewart's travels, while others, such as John Mix Stanley, Seth Eastman, Charles Deas and Albert Bierstadt were members of government expeditions when they painted the Indians. One artist, George Winter, an Englishman who settled in Indiana in 1830, did firsthand sketches of the Miami and Potawatomi Indians just prior to their removal to the far west. His water colors were never sold and along with his detailed diary and journals were not displayed publicly until 1932.[62]

These artists attempted to penetrate the Indian mind and character besides giving a purely factual account of his dress and customs. Some artists adhered to the concept of the noble savage which lent romantic color to literature and to the more objective reports of William Bartram. Those who lived with the Indian generally lost these romantic illusions and the Indian became "a troublesome and dangerous species of wild beast."[63] Seth Eastman and Albert Bierstadt realized the unidealized Indian in their work. Later the role of the Indian was reversed and General Sherman's quote, "...the only good Indian is a dead one." is exemplified in the rendering of the red man as a stock

villain in paintings by Frederick Remington and other illustrators.

PORTRAITURE PRIOR TO 1870

While landscape and genre were attempting to establish a tradition in American art, portraiture, which had been the dominant subject for art in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, continued in the tradition of Gilbert Stuart. That his formula should be so flexible as to remain until the Civil War is a tribute to the originator. Without flourish and superfluous show he could "nail the sitter's face to the canvas."[64] Stuart had been acknowledged the greatest American painter in his day. Unfortunately he was not a gifted teacher and sent many of his pupils to Europe for study, thus stifling their native individuality. Portraiture after Stuart in this first part of the nineteenth century was never quite able to capture that vitality of character with such complete charm and accuracy.

In the beginning of the nineteenth century portraiture retained its prominent position in American art. Europeans regarded this as evidence of our flagrant vanity and self-confidence. "Everybody," reported Salmagundi in 1807, "is anxious to see his own phiz [sic] on canvas, however stupid or ugly it may be."[65] Prospects for the portrait improved except for the lull during 1808 with the Embargo. John Trumbull received $100.00 per head while Thomas Sully's annual income in his first year of painting amounted to $3,000.00. However, after 1815 there was an influx of

European painters who crowded the expanding field and intensified competition.

During the nineteenth century the trend was away from the statuesque neoclassical portrait to a portrait of mood. Americans were influenced chiefly by the English romantic portrait painter, Sir Thomas Lawrence. The more professional, austere influence from France was evident in the works of some of the American portraitists such as Samuel F. B. Morse, James and Rembrandt Peale, and John Vanderlyn. Most of them were interested in fulfilling the double task of painting a likeness and making it handsome enough to hang on a wall. Samuel Isham remarked that the portraiture of this period "has more likeness than character."[66]

One of the most popular portraitists was Thomas Sully, who ably captured the elegance, reflection and melancholy of his sitters, in the true English style. While Sully was fortunate enough to come under the English influence, others of this period felt the impact of the invention of the camera, and their works were devoid of feeling. Not only did their paintings lack study and reflection, but they resorted to staid formulae. They reflect social stratification rather than economic and political conditions.[67] Some portrait painters evidenced the new discoveries in science as they became interested in physiognomy and phrenology. One of the George Washington portraits was taken to England to be used in Lavater's book on phrenology.[68] For

the most part, however, portraitists were from the second rank during this period and were not in step with the general trends in American painting.

The chief interest in portrait painting emerged from the Mid-Atlantic and southern states. In the national capital particularly, the gathering of prominent personalities summoned many portrait painters. In the South, conservative taste did not encourage genre and landscape art. Its romanticism championed an aristocratic society and the preservation of the status quo. Genre would have portrayed some of the evils of slavery which was the bane of the plantation system. Landscape might have prompted men to leave their work and contemplate nature. Thus portraiture, as a decorative art, was the ideal form to compliment the southern way of life. Significantly enough, Samuel F.B. Morse went to Charleston, South Carolina to paint portraits and found it to be the friendliest city to that form of art.[69]

There were various factors involved in the decline of portraiture in this era. The new equalitarian spirit did not extol the dignity of any one class over another, as the previous classical spirit had done. Many of the artists were forced to resort to portraiture in order to maintain patronage, but they did so with an obvious lack of conviction. By 1825 the demand for likenesses had declined until they were often done as part of the training for landscape or genre painting.[70]

The daguerreotype, introduced in America by 1839, provided stiff competition for the portrait painter, who was compelled to rival an apparatus which could catch microscopic detail. However The Crayon, an art magazine of the times, maintained that photography could not "supply that refined feeling and sentiment which animate the productions of a man of genius."[71] Many portraitists used this invention to produce cheap likenesses and thus welcomed the camera as an aid to their art. For this reason, the artists no longer had any emotional bonds with the sitter and while his finished portrait convinced the eye, it lacked the life and vitality which earlier portraitists had been able to preserve. Hence many of the portrait painters became "centaurs of the modern art age, half man and half camera."[72] The camera also forced portraitists to concentrate on objective detail. The German influence, from the Dusseldorf school, was apparent; it stressed the art of drawing and modeling. This precision gratified the sitter who could recognize his likeness at once. As Mrs. Trollope, the English tourist in America noted, Americans admired close resemblance and careful finish in painting more than any other qualities.[73]

The foremost criticism of the portraits in this period emanates from their static, mechanical quality, the products of uninspired artists, many of whom were still clinging to English eighteenth century traditions. This painting was respectable rather than thrilling; while it filled a need

and provided income for its practitioners, it was over shadowed in this era by landscape and genre. By the middle of the nineteenth century, portraitists were studying in Europe more than just in England and were subsequently influenced more by the French and Italian schools.[74]

As the population moved west, leaving traditions behind, the artists born on the frontier desired to express their delight in their surroundings. These "primitive" artists, coming from all walks of life, painted in a manner completely foreign to the eighteenth century tradition adopted in the East. They were a purely American phenomena. Their technical artlessness demonstrates their lack of formal training. They exaggerated the trivial as the truth, and this more than anything else separated them from the more professional artists.[75] Their works are often unsigned and undated; thus they appeal primarily to the historian as an important key to the life and thought of the times. Judging from the number of extant primitive works, it is no wonder that an English art critic, Mrs. Anna Jamison, commented:

> While in America I was struck by the manner in which the imaginative talent of the people had thrown itself forth into painting; the country seemed to swarm with painters.[76]

CONCLUSION

Art for the many had been the desideratum for this period. Not only did the number of artists multiply, but as has been shown, portraiture lost its dominant position to other forms and subjects of painting. These new subjects reflected an awakened popular interest in art which the country had not known before. In response to this increased demand, the paintings of the period depicted its newest class of consumers, the common folk. At this time, America was primarily an agrarian society, and while paintings reflected the emergent industrial era, it was still constantly yearning for the clean, wholesome, rural life where one might walk and enjoy nature's beauties, unspoiled by mechanization.

As this simplistic world of farmers and merchants faded under the impact of the forces of consolidation--the railroad, the telegraph, industrial capitalism, steam power, city life--which produced the modern world, this era of romanticism and illusion faded also. Nonetheless, its importance remained undimmed, for the Gilded Age would look back on this earlier period of our history with fond memories and with some regret for the loss of the charm of country life.[77]

It is possible to conceive of the period prior to 1865 as expressing the national spirit because the artists were at one with the world. They were able to express the tastes, interests and affections of the people. The increasing num-

bers of immigrants made Americans discontented with the cold English style. The dynamic quality of the American artists permitted them to adapt but not to adopt these European tendencies to create a distinct American style.[78] The westward expansion played a distinct part in divorcing American from European traditions, for in that untamed land the pioneer had no contact with tradition. He was conditioned by necessity to be aware of the ends and means to provide for his survival. Fostering an individualistic spirit, Americans of the West were ready to match political independence with cultural independence.[79] The American artist of this period proved his rightful function as a pioneer expressing the ideas of his people in works which carry a hallmark of the time and place.[80]

Within this portion of the nineteenth century the romantic spirit prevailed. All other influences may be considered part of that larger one. While romanticism was a worldwide movement, there were certain unique features in its American form. Looking objectively at the works of art created in this era, one perceives the inferiority of the American representations. In a larger sense this may easily be accounted for by the immaturity of the nation. Significantly, the degree of rapprochment between the artist and his audience in America, which was attained in this period, clearly pointed to the twentieth century, when Americans would achieve maturity and advance to the position of a

leader in the world of art.

Alexis de Tocqueville commented: "In aristocracies a few great pictures are produced; in democratic countries, a vast number of insignificant ones." This idea does not seem to be valid. Rather Thomas Carlyle's viewpoint is more acceptable with regard to American art.

> The true past departs not.
> No truth or goodness realized
> by man ever dies
> or can die but all is still here
> and recognized or not, [81]
> lives and works through endless changes.

FOOTNOTES

[1]Jean Lipman, ed., What is American in American Art (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1963), p. 14.

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[3]John W. McCoubrey, American Tradition in Painting (New York: George Braziller, 1963), pp. 23-25.

[4]Edgar P. Richardson, Painting in America (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1956), pp. 27-28.

[5]Burne Hogarth, "The Craftsmen-Limners," American Artist XXV (Sept. 1961), 51-52.

[6]Burne Hogarth, "The Limner-Painters," American Artist XXV (Oct. 1961), 52.

[7]Jay Leyda, "The American Renaissance," The American Story, ed. Earl S. Miers (Great Neck, N. Y.: Channel Press, 1956), p. 164.

[8]James T. Flexner, The Light of Distant Skies (New York: Harcourt Brace Co., 1954), pp. 30-31.

[9]Edgar P. Richardson, "Regionalism in American Painting," Regionalism in America, ed. Merrill Jenson (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1951), pp. 264-265.

[10]Edgar P. Richardson, American Romantic Painting (New York: E. Weyhe, 1944), p. 6.

[11]Oliver W. Larkin, Art and Life in America (rev. ed. New York: Holt, Rinehart, Winston, 1960), pp. 136-139.

[12]Richardson, American Romantic Painting, p. 5.

[13]Hogarth, "The Craftsmen-Limners".

[14]G. H. Edgell, Maxim Karolik, John I. H. Baur, eds., M. and M. Karolik Collection of American Paintings (Boston: Museum of Fine Arts, 1949), p. xxvii.

[15]C. R. Leslie, Autobiographical Recollections (Boston: 1840), pp. 194, 200.

[16]Edgell, et. al., op. cit., p. xxix.

[17]James T. Flexner, That Wilder Image (Boston: Little, Brown Co., 1962), p. xi.

[18]George Washington, "Farewell Address," Documents of American History, ed. Henry S. Commager (5th ed. New York: Appleton, century, Crofts, 1940), p. 174.

[19]Flexner, That Wilder Image, pp. 9-11.

[20]Ibid., p. xii.

[21]Frederick A. Sweet, "American Painting Before the Civil War," College Art Journal IV, no. 4 (May, 1945), pp. 190-194.

[22]Richardson, American Romantic Painting, pp. 21-22.

[23]Ralph Waldo Emerson, The Complete Essays of Ralph Waldo Emerson, ed. Brooks Atkinson (New York: Random House, 1940), p. 3.

[24]William E. Channing, The Work of William Ellery Channing (Boston: American Unitarian Association, 1893), pp. 51-52.

[25]Richardson, American Romantic Painting, p. 9.

[26]Edgell, et. al., op. cit., p. x.

[27]Samuel Isham, The History of American Painting (New York: MacMillian Co., 1905), pp. 233-234.

[28]Edgell, et. al., op. cit., pp. xvi-xvii.

[29]Isham, op. cit., p. 139.

[30]Edgell, et. al., op. cit.

[31]Anon., Cosmopolitan Art Journal (No. 1, 1856), p. 5.

[32]Nathaniel Hawthorne, Democratic Review (No. 14, 1844), p. 608.

[33]Horatio Greenough, The Crayon (No. 1, 1855), p. 372.

[34]William Minst, Jr., North American Review (No. 52, 1841), p. 306.

[35]W. E. Henning, "Edward Hicks and the American Folk Art Tradition," Design No. 37 (Dec. 1935), p. 8.

[36]Perry T. Rathbone, Mississippi Panorama (rev. ed. St. Louis: Von Hoffman Press, 1950), pp. 30-31.

[37]James J. Jarves, The Art-Idea ed. Benjamin Rowland, Jr. (Boston: Harvard University Press, 1960), p. 172.

[38]Richardson, American Romantic Painting, p. 10.

[39]Edgell, et. al., op. cit., p. xl.

[40]Jarves, op. cit., p. 175.

[41]Richardson, Painting in America, p. 147.

[42]Isham, op. cit., p. 232.

[43]Edward A. Jewell, "Hudson River School," Creative Art X (March, 1932), pp. 222-226.

[44]Lillian B. Miller, "Patronage, Patriotism and Taste in Mid-Nineteenth Century America," American Magazine of Art (Nov. 1952), p. 326.

[45]William Cullen Bryant, "A Funeral Ode Occasioned by the Death of T. Cole," in Edgell, et. al., op. cit., p. xxxix.

[46]Edgell, et. al., op. cit., pp. xxxii-xlvi.

[47]Lillian B. Miller, op. cit., p. 328.

[48]Miers, op. cit., p. 162.

[49]Ibid., pp. 158-161.

[50]Larkin, op. cit., pp. 210-212.

[51]Richardson, Painting in America, pp. 219-221.

[52]Larkin, op. cit., p. 213.

[53]Edgell, op. cit., p. xlv.

[54]Miers, op. cit., p. 165.

[55]Edgell, op. cit., p. xlviii.

[56]Rathbone, op. cit., pp. 18-33.

[57]Ibid., p. 44.

[58]Ibid., p. 45.

[59]Miers, op. cit., p. 164.

[60]Edgell, op. cit., p. xlix.

[61]Richardson, American Romantic Painting, pp. 20-21.

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[63]Edgell, op. cit., p. xlvi.

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[65]Harold E. Dickson, "The Artists' Profession in the Early Republic," Art Quarterly VIII(no. 4, 1945), p. 262.

[66]Frank J. Mather, Jr., Charles R. Morey, William J. Henderson, The American Spirit in Art, Vol. XIII in Pageant of America (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1927), p. 17.

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[68]Dickson, op. cit., p. 264.

[69]Jean L. Brockway, "Morse--American Portrait Painter," American Magazine of Art XXV (Sept., 1932), p. 160.

[70]Flexner, That Wilder Image, p. 205.

[71]Edgell, op. cit., p. xxxv.

[72]Flexner, That Wilder Image, p. 216.

[73]Larkin, op. cit., p. 194.

[74]Neuhaus, op. cit., p. 60.

[75]Perry T. Rathbone, Maxim Karolik, Henry P. Rossiter, M. and M. Karolik Collection of American Water Colors and Drawings (Boston: Museum of Fine Arts, 1963), p. 6.

[76]Edgell, op. cit., p. xii.

[77]Richardson, American Romantic Painting, pp. 25-28.

[78]Peyton Boswell, Modern American Painting (New York: Dodd, Mead Co., 1939), p. 15.

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