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# Writing Natural History: Susan Fenimore Cooper's Investigations of the Cooperstown Region*

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## Abstract

Susan Fenimore Cooper was an early voice in the tradition of American nature history writing. She composed a nature journal entitled *Rural Hours* and many essays about nature and landscape. In her works, Cooper described the regional, natural environment around her home village—— Cooperstown, New York; her writings were one of the first American natural histories. Establishing Cooper as early female natural historian, this paper will focus on Cooper's investigations of the Cooperstown region.

In this essay, there are two principal parts. In the beginning, the paper will define natural history and establish Cooper as early female natural historian in America. In the second part, this essay will closely examine Cooper's effectiveness as a natural history writer: it will analyze how Cooper introduced generations of American readers to the knowledge and the understanding of the Cooperstown region and celebrated the American natural environment as a cultural resource; also, it will examine how Cooper

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conveyed her ecological ideas (such as the idea of the common links among all living species, and so forth) and advocated conservation ethic in her natural historical discourse, thereby introducing a pattern of proto-ecological thinking for American culture.

**Keywords:** Susan Fenimore Cooper, natural history writing, *Rural Hours*, *Essays on Nature and Landscape*, conservation ethic, proto-ecological thinking

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# 書寫自然史：庫柏對於庫柏鎮地域之探究*

盧　莉　茹**

## 摘　　要

庫柏是一位美國早期的自然史作家，她的代表作《田園時刻》一書可說是美國文學裡第一本由女性作家所書寫的自然史作品。可惜的是，庫柏的作品長期以來卻被許多代表主流典律的美國文學史選集所忽略或排除。有鑑於此，本文主要以庫柏及其作品為探討焦點，並以自然史論述之角度仔細檢視庫柏的《田園時刻》與《論自然與地景之散文》。本文欲指出，庫柏的自然史書寫一方面為美國的大地（特別是庫柏鎮地域）及本土物種做了詳實的觀察與紀錄，藉此教導其美國同胞有關本土自然史的知識，另一方面亦呈現了她對自然萬物的肯定與欣賞態度，進而為早期美國引進一套初期的生態思維與環境保護倫理。

**關鍵詞：**庫柏、自然史書寫、《田園時刻》、《談論自然與地景之散文》、環境保護倫理、初期生態思維

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# I

Nature writing, in the broadest perspective, refers to all texts that describe or study nonhuman environment. When exploring the nature writings in American literature, most critical studies only examine works written since the mid-nineteenth century, often citing Henry David Thoreau (1817-62) as the progenitor of the American nature writing tradition. Different from the readings of these critical studies, this paper will discuss a female nature writer who is a contemporary of Thoreau and who plays a crucial but still largely unexamined role in American literature——Susan Fenimore Cooper (1813-94).

Cooper was an early voice in the tradition of American nature history writing.[1] She composed a nature journal entitled *Rural Hours*,[2] and many essays about nature and landscape, such as "Later Hours."[3] In her works, Cooper described the regional, natural environment around her home village——Cooperstown, New York; Cooper's writings were one of the first

[1] Susan Fenimore Cooper——the daughter of a famous novelist, James Fenimore Cooper——is generally considered to be the first woman in America to publish a book of nature writing [Rochelle Johnson and Daniel Patterson, "Writing about Nature in Early America: From Discovery to 1850," in *Literature of Nature: An International Sourcebook*, ed. Patrick D. Murphy (Chicago: Fitzroy Dearborn, 1998), 10; Lorraine Anderson, ed., *Sisters of the Earth: Women's Prose & Poetry about Nature* (New York: Vintage, 2003), 359; Michael A Bryson, *Visions of the Land: Science, Literature, and the American Environment from the Era of Exploration to the Age of Ecology* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2002), 105]. Her *Rural Hours*, predating *Walden* by four years, is a record of the climate, weather, flora and fauna in the vicinity of Otsego Lake in New York, arranged as a year's worth of journal entries.

[2] Susan Fenimore Cooper, *Rural Hours*, ed. Rochelle Johnson and Daniel Patterson (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1998).

[3] Cooper's "Later Hours" and many essays about nature and landscape were collected in a book entitled *Essays on Nature and Landscape*; this book was edited and issued by Rochelle Johnson and Daniel Patterson in 2002.

American natural histories. Establishing Cooper as early natural historian in America, this paper will focus its emphasis on her investigations of the Cooperstown region.

Generally speaking, Cooper seldom receives critical attention in the history of American literature and in many anthologies of nature writing. It is worth noting that as of Cooper's nature history writings neither the mainstream *Norton Anthology of America Literature*,[4] nor the much-touted, revisionist *Heath Anthology of American Literature*,[5] contains any passages of Cooper's works. For anyone with more than a passing acquaintance with Cooper's works, this exclusion is amazing. Indeed, the anthologies listed above are guilty of excluding a huge body of what might be called nature or environmental writings. Also, Cooper does not receive much critical attention in the tradition of nature writing; for instance, in Thomas J. Lyon's *This Incomperable Lande: A Book of American Nature Writing*[6] and Bridget Keegan's *Literature and Nature: Four Centuries of Nature Writing*,[7] two anthologies of nature writing, Cooper's name and works are excluded. This paper, however, will focus on Cooper's natural history writings.

On the whole, Cooper's works were gradually noticed and discussed by a few scholars in the late-twentieth and early-twenty-first centuries.[8] Amy

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[4] Nina Baym, ed., *The Norton Anthology of American Literature* (New York: Norton, 2007).

[5] Paul Lauter, ed., *The Heath Anthology of American Literature* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2006).

[6] Thomas J. Lyon, ed., *This Incomperable Lande: A Book of American Nature Writing* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1989).

[7] Bridget Keegan and James C. Mckusick, eds., *Literature and Nature: Four Centuries of Nature Writing* (Prentice Hall: Upper Saddle River, 2001).

[8] For a very long time, Cooper was a neglected author in American environmental literature. After the emergence of ecocriticism and ecofeminist literary criticism in the 1980s, ecocritics began to get interested in some female nature writers. In 1991, a few passages of Cooper's *Rural Hours* were collected and appeared in Lorraine Anderson's *Sisters of the Earth: Women's Prose & Poetry about Nature*. In 1993, Vera Norwood, one the first ecocritics who

E. Hudock and Katherine Rodier, for example, introduced Cooper and her writings in *American Women Prose Writers, 1820-1870*,[9] regarding Cooper as one of "American women prose writers" in the nineteenth century.[10] And Cooper's major work, *Rural Hours*, was generally considered by many critics——such as Lawrence Buell,[11] Susan Goodier,[12] and Vera Norwood——to be a personal, daily journal, "daily diary,"[13] or "seasonal journal."[14] Another critic, Erika M. Kreger had traced the similarities between Cooper's prose writings (such as *Rural Hours*) and the sketchbook tradition, "short prose work emphasizing character and description rather than plot."[15]

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noticed the importance of Cooper in American literature, discussed Cooper and her writings in *Made from this Earth: American Women and Nature*. And in 1995, Marcia Myers Bonta also briefly introduced Cooper's writings in her *American Women Afield: Writings by Pioneering Women Naturalists*.

In 1998, Johnson and Patterson edited and reissued Cooper's *Rural Hours*. In 2002, Johnson and Patterson issued another work composed by Cooper——*Essays on Nature and Landscape*; this book collects Cooper's numerous essays. After the original texts written by Cooper become available in the late-twentieth and early-twenty-first centuries, Cooper gradually becomes recognized as a pioneer practitioner of American nature writing.

9 Amy E. Hudock and Katherine Rodier, eds., *American Women Prose Writers, 1820-1870* (Detroit: The Gale Group, 2001).

10 Hudock and Rodier, *American Women Prose Writers, 1820-1870*, xv.

11 See Lawrence Buell, *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture* (Cambridge: Belknap-Harvard University Press, 1995), 221. In his Environmental Imagination, Buell at one point identified Rural Hours as a "day book" (Buell, *The Environmental Imagination*, 221).

12 See Susan Goodier, "Susan Fenimore Cooper," in *American Women Prose Writers, 1820-1870*, 239.

13 Vera Norwood, *Made from This Earth: American Women and Nature* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993), 53.

14 Norwood, *Made from This Earth*, 25.

15 Erika M Kreger, "Rustic Matters: Placing the Rural Community Narratives of Alice Cary, Susan Fenimore Cooper, and Caroline Kirkland in the Context of the Nineteenth-Century Women's Sketching Tradition," in *Susan Fenimore Cooper: New Essays on Rural Hours and*

Nevertheless, to think of Cooper as a nineteenth-century woman prose writer who merely wrote sketchbooks or nonfiction journals is to miss the crucial fact that she is a natural historian (also called natural history writer or naturalist) who wrote natural history for her region——the rural Cooperstown. Different from the above-mentioned readings, this essay will contend that Cooper is a typical natural history writer in early America and that through her natural historical discourse, Cooper intended to educate her American compatriots the flora and fauna around them and to convince her readers that they ought to care about preserving the environment.

In her lifetime, Cooper recorded American natural history in a book entitled *Rural Hours* and composed many other essays (such as "Later Hours") collected in a book entitled *Essays on Nature and Landscape. Rural Hours* was one of the first American natural history and highly important in the tradition of American nature writing. On the whole, Cooper's natural history writings ranged from brief mentions of a day's weather to discussions of the many types of birds discovered in her village, and from an account of a visit to a nearby farm to a lengthy critique of men's exploitation and devastation of the natural environment in America. Recording the environmental conditions of her region and displaying her appreciation for both her region and her national culture, Cooper intended to teach her American compatriots the value of knowing what a place had been in its original wild state before civilization brought its impact.

In the following section, the essay will define natural history and establish Cooper as female natural historian in early America. Then this paper will closely analyze Cooper's natural history writings and carefully examine Cooper's effectiveness as a natural history writer: this essay will analyze how Cooper introduced generations of American readers to the knowledge and the understanding of the Cooperstown region and celebrated the American natural

*Other Works*, ed. Rochelle Johnson and Daniel Patterson (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2001), 193.

environment as a cultural resource; also, this essay will carefully examine how Cooper conveyed her ecological ideas (such as the idea of the common links among all living species, the attitude of sympathy and respect for nature, and so forth) and advocated conservation ethic in her natural historical discourse, thereby introducing a pattern of proto-ecological thinking and environmental concern for early America.

## II

Before establishing Cooper as a natural history writer, I would like to discuss the context and the definition of natural history in this section. In the mid- and late-eighteenth-century Europe, natural history became a flourishing discipline,[16] and it became a thriving discipline in America around the turn of the nineteenth century.[17] At that time, natural history as a term was generally used to refer to all descriptive aspects of the study of nature. Natural historians took for their subject matter all of what they called the Creation. Any object within the natural world——such as rocks, mountains, plants, animals, and so on——was a proper subject of natural historical inquiry; only man-made objects lay outside its scope.

In mid-nineteenth-century America, natural history had become a well-established genre and discipline. The term "natural history," according to Frank Bergon in his essay entitled "Wilderness Aesthetics," was rooted in the double meaning of the word "history" as it had evolved from Aristotle.[18] History, to the Greeks, meant "an inquiry" or "an account of one's inquiries," so that natural history came to mean an inquiry into the natural world and a systematic account of its observable forms.[19] However, the word "history" in

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16 Johnson and Patterson, "Writing about Nature in Early America," 3.

17 Michael P. Branch, "Early Romantic Natural History Literature," in *American Nature Writers*, ed. John Elder (New York: Scribner's, 1996), 1059.

18 Frank Bergon, "Wilderness Aesthetics," *American Literary History* 9, no.1 (1997): 130.

19 Bergon, "Wilderness Aesthetics," 130.

the Aristotelian sense also meant "a narrative or tale or story" in time.[20] Since many natural historians combined their "inquiry into nature" with a narrative of their daily walking (including their close observation of nature) or travels, it came to be accepted that natural history was an eyewitness account of nature encountered on one's walking or travels. In *Rural Hours*, for instance, Cooper closely recorded the landscape features (such as the general aspect and shape of the surrounding landscape), the common agricultural practices, the beauty of flowers and plants, and the intricate lives of the plants and animals she had observed in her daily walking around Cooperstown, inquiring into the lives of the plants and the habits of animals around her region.

Generally speaking, natural history, in the eyes of most eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Europeans and Americans, was a broad area of scientific and cultural inquiry circumscribing the present-day disciplines of meteorology, geology, archeology, ethnology, zoology, and botany; it encompassed "the aggregate of facts relating to the natural objects, etc. of a place, or the characteristics of a class of persons or things."[21] In their activities to explore the world of nature, natural historians primarily employed two basic procedures: observing and describing. Through these two procedures, natural historians offered people a way of looking at the natural environment, a way of describing what they saw, and an overarching scheme in which to fit what they had seen. Natural history, in short, offered people method, rhetoric, and context in their detailed study——including observations, perceptions, reflections, and descriptions——of the natural world.

Emphasizing objective observations and detailed descriptions of nature, natural history owed much to science, and it was regarded as scientific demystification of the natural world in the eighteenth and nineteenth

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[20] Bergon, "Wilderness Aesthetics," 130.

[21] Pamela Regis, *Bartram, Jefferson, Crèvecoeur, and the Influence of Natural History* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992), 5.

centuries.[22] Yet natural history was also viewed as belles letters, for it offered people with methods and rhetoric in their descriptions and representations of the nonhuman beings in nature and it presented individual's perception, reflection, and narration of the natural environment; a natural historian is always present, not only in the primary encounter with landscape, but also "in the subsequent processes of reflection, interpretive synthesis and eventual narration."[23] In other words, natural history deliberately brought together science and literature;[24] it was viewed as both science and belles letters.[25]

For a natural historian in early America, observable phenomena included land-forms, bodies of water, minerals, plants, mammals, birds, reptiles, fishes, amphibians, invertebrates——all the expected and unexpected flora and fauna——as well as weather, trees, landscapes, woods, forests, and so forth. Early American naturalists, generally speaking, exemplified the practice of natural history——the close and careful observations of plants, animals, and birds within a given environment——as expressed in descriptive and analytic essays. Such texts introduced generations of American readers to the life and physical character of rural and wild landscapes, communicated scientific knowledge about nature accessibly and eloquently, defined and celebrated the beauty and power of nature, and reflected upon the relationship humans had forged and might yet construct with their environment. As ecocritic Michael P. Branch suggests, early natural history literature not only

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[22] Lyon, *This Incomperable Lande*, 20.

[23] John Tallmadge, "Towards a Natural History of Reading," in *The ISLE Reader: Ecocriticism, 1993-2003*, ed. Michael P. Branch and Scott Slovic (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2003), 291-92.

[24] See Johnson and Patterson, "Writing about Nature in Early America," 3. In this essay, Johnson and Patterson define natural history writings as "texts in which authors, in representing the natural world in language, deliberately bring together science and literature, and description and meditation, in order to effect some artful end" (Johnson and Patterson, "Writing about Nature in Early America," 3).

[25] Branch, "Early Romantic Natural History Literature," 1059.

turned "American attention toward the cultural possibilities of the land . . . , [but also] valorized the dual urge to document wild nature and to express concern regarding its critical endangerment by human development."[26]

In early America, natural history writers——including William Bartram (1739-1823),[27] John James Audubon (1785-1851),[28] Alexander Wilson (1766-1813),[29] Thomas Nuttall (1786-1859),[30] Hector St. John de

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[26] See Branch, "Early Romantic Natural History Literature," 1059.

[27] William Bartram was an American naturalist, the son of John Bartram (1699-1777)——a famous naturalist who collected plants and established one of America's first botanical gardens outside of Philadelphia. William Bartram played an active role in the maintenance of his father's botanical garden, and added several rare species to it. On the whole, William Bartram was noted for his botanical and ornithological drawings, and he is also renowned for his natural history writing. In the late 1780s, Bartram completed the book for which he became most famous, *Travels through North and South Carolina, Georgia, East and West Florida, the Cherokee Country, etc.*, which was considered at the time to be one of the foremost books on American natural history.

[28] John James Audubon was a natural historian in the early nineteenth century. A painter and a writer, Audubon published *The Birds of America*——an audacious series of four volumes——in England between 1827 and 1838; in this text, he endeavored to delineate every bird native to the New England *life-size*. Less well known was Audubon's five-volume companion work, *Ornithological Biography* (1831-40), prose descriptions of all the birds illustrated in *The Birds of America*. Abound in animated pictures of primitive nature and pioneer life in America as well as vivid portraits of the birds and other characteristic animals, *Ornithological Biography* had a peculiar quality of awakening enthusiasm in the reader, who felt within him a new ardor for studying birds and American scenery, and for leading a life of adventure in the wilderness. Though his popular fame rested upon his achievements as a visual artist, Audubon was also a natural history writer who composed plenty of impressive prose works in addition to *Ornithological Biography.* Audubon's literary output included a substantial collection of descriptions of animals, anecdotes of frontier life, journals, memoirs, and miscellaneous articles.

[29] Like Audubon, Alexander Wilson is a painter and a writer of natural history in early America. His nine-volume *American Ornithology* or *The Natural History of Birds of the United States* (1808-1829) was the first bird guide in America.

Crèvecoeur (1735-1813),[31] Thomas Jefferson (1745-1826),[32] Cooper, and so forth——frequently described the impressive natural resources of New England. These naturalists were motivated by an impulse to document the natural history of an evanescent frontier and its nonhuman inhabitants; early natural history writers attempted to delineate a wilderness and to mourn its irrevocable loss before the march of westward expansion. Also, early American natural historians——such as Cooper and Audubon——helped introduced a pattern of environmental concern and ecological thinking for early America. In their writings, these natural historians also portrayed men's careless devastation of wild forests and woods, and then suggested the urgent necessity of protecting and preserving these wilderness areas and environment for posterity.

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[30] Like Alexander Wilson, Thomas Nuttall is a painter and a writer of natural history in early America. He is one of the great field men in American natural history. Traveling over a good deal of the United States and what was then the Louisiana Territory and Mexico, Nuttall composes a book entitled *A Journal of Travels into the Arkansas Territory during the Year 1819.* Also, Nuttall writes a book entitled *A Manual of the Ornithology of the United States and Canada*; published in 1832, this book remained the leading American bird book for most of the rest of the nineteenth century. See Johnson and Patterson, "Writing about Nature in Early America," 9; and see Lyon, *This Incomperable Lande*, 143.

[31] Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur is an eighteenth-century American naturalist who composes two works of natural history: *Letters from an American Farmer* and *Sketches of Eighteenth-Century America: More Letters from an American Farmer*. Crèvecoeur's works, on the whole, are a comprehensive look at America, constructed around a natural historical core that takes characteristic forms of the manners-and-customs account and the natural history essay on a single kind of flora and fauna. Natural history, in short, is the primary intellectual orientation of Crèvecoeur's *Letters from an American Farmers* and *Sketches of Eighteenth-Century America*.

[32] In the Revolutionary period, Jefferson's *Notes on the State of Virginia* (1787) was a significant contribution to American natural history writing. *Notes on the State of Virginia* distinguished Jefferson as a man well versed not merely in architecture, law, political philosophy, and statesmanship but also in the field of natural history.

In this paper, I would like to read Cooper's *Rural Hours* based on the tenets of natural history. In the following sections, I shall examine how Cooper applied the natural historical method to observe and record basic information about the natural productions in the territory she lived, thereby educating her American compatriots the flora and fauna around them, and I shall also explore how Cooper conveyed the ideas of ecological thinking (such as the attitude of sympathy and concern toward nonhuman creatures, the notion of the common links among all living species, and so forth) and advocated the conservation of forests and woods in her natural historical discourse.

## III

First published in 1850, *Rural Hours* is structured as a seasonally arranged journal, beginning March 4, on the cusp of spring, and ending on the last day of February the following year. Through the passage of the seasons, from spring to summer to autumn to winter, Cooper chronicles the happenings of the wild nature in her region, including the doings of the plants and animals. Generally speaking, *Rural Hours* can be considered the first book of natural history writing by an American woman.[33] In this book, Cooper writes to represent the nature in America. She focuses on the ecology of her Otsego Lake region, presenting her area's plant and animal life, as well as other aspects of her region: forests, rivers, weathers, weather patterns, and so forth.

In *Rural Hours*, the preponderance of content consists of careful

[33] In "Writing about Nature in Early America: From Discovery to 1850," Johnson and Patterson assert that *Rural Hours* is "the first book of nature writing by an American woman;" please see Johnson and Patterson, "Writing about Nature in Early America," 10. Also see Lorraine Anderson, ed., *Sisters of the Earth: Women's Prose & Poetry about Nature* (New York: Vintage, 2003), 359; and see Michael A. Bryson, *Visions of the Land: Science, Literature, and the American Environment from the Era of Exploration to the Age of Ecology* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2002), 105.

observations and objective descriptions of the weather, flowers, birds, and other plants and animals in mid-nineteenth-century America. Such extensive and consistent attention qualifies Cooper's book as typical natural history writing. The entry for June 5th in *Rural Hours*, for instance, offers a detailed description of the blooming of the early summer flowers:

> We amused ourselves with counting the different kinds of flowers growing on several of these little knolls. In one instance, we found fifteen different plants, besides the grasses, in a narrow circle about the swelling roots, six or eight feet in breadth; around another we counted eighteen varieties; another showed twenty-two; and a fourth had six-and-twenty kinds.[34]

Using many figures (or numbers) in these lines, Cooper offers readers the objective fact and scientific knowledge relating to the "growing" of summer flowers;[35] in this way, she establishes herself as a natural history writer in early America.

In another passage in *Rural Hours*, for more instance, Cooper employs a series of natural historical descriptions to represent a kind of rare bird in America——the Bohemian wax-wing:

> On two different occasions we remarked what seemed very large cedar-birds without the white line about the eye, and with a white stripe on the wings; but they were in a thicket both times, and not being at liberty to stay and watch them, it would not do to assert positively that these were the Bohemion wax-wing.[36]

Employing the method of natural history to closely describe the rare Bohemian wax-wing, Cooper carefully reports the identifying traits of the Bohemion wax-wing, such as its "white line about the eye" and its "white

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[34] Cooper, *Rural Hours*, 64.

[35] Cooper, *Rural Hours*, 64.

[36] Cooper, *Rural Hours*, 60.

stripe on the wings."[37] Her description of the Bohemion wax-wing includes details that are rendered with objective, detailed, and orderly observation.

What is more, in the above-quoted passages about the blooming of early summer flowers and about the Bohemion wax-wing, Cooper intentionally reduces her presence. In fact, one of the unique characteristics of Cooper's natural history writings is how little she writes herself into the text as a character, for Cooper knows that in her time the evolving subjectivity of the naturalists was male,[38] and believes that women should be circumscribed within the domestic roles and deeply concerned about their domestic duties. As a result, the "I" that is so common in the accounts of male historians——such as Bartram, Wilson, and Audubon——is rarely seen in *Rural Hours*. Much more often, when a human presence is acknowledged, it is acknowledged as a "we," as is evident in the passages above when Cooper recounts her observations of the blooming of flowers and the Bohemion wax-wing as something that she has done with others. By using "we" in her investigations into Cooperstown's natural history, Cooper creates a sense of shared and collective experience. And *Rural Hours* is a collection of such collective experiences, a year's chronicle of walks and observations taken with one's friends.

In Cooper's time (the middle of the nineteenth century), natural history was "a male-dominated genre;"[39] the evolving subjectivity of the naturalists——whether in literature or in an increasingly professionalizing science——was male.[40] And Cooper believed that "members of the female sex were most suited to the privacies of home and needed the thoughtful

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37 Cooper, *Rural Hours*, 60.

38 Norwood, *Made from This Earth*, 48.

39 Rochelle Johnson, "Placing *Rural Hours*," in *Reading under the Sign of Nature: New Essays in Ecocriticism*, ed. John Tallmadge and Henry Harrington (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2000), 79.

40 Norwood, *Made from This Earth*, 48.

protection of men."[41] Therefore, it is not surprising that in the very short preface to *Rural Hours*, keeping with Victorian norms of appropriate feminine behavior, Cooper modestly asserts that *Rural Hours* is "the simple record of those little events which make up the course of the season in rural life," characterizes the contents of the book as "trifling observations," and announces that "they make no claim whatever to scientific knowledge.[42] Such a disavowal of scientific pretension testifies to the cultural force of the gender norms that Cooper needed to negotiate to write her book. In actuality, the pages of *Rural Hours* are filled with natural history. Yet despite the predominance natural history has in her book, Cooper could not make an outright claim to be writing as naturalist.

In *Rural Hours*, Cooper frequently refers to the works of male naturalists, such as Audubon,[43] Wilson,[44] and Nuttall.[45] In "Winter" (one of the principal sections in *Rural Hours*), for instance, Cooper refers to the prominent figures in the field of natural history:

> . . . these Eagles prey upon ducks, geese, gulls, and all kinds of water-fowls; at times, they feed upon lambs, pigs, fawns, and even deer. Mr. Audubon gives a very spirited account of their hunting the

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41 Norwood, *Made from This Earth*, 26.

42 See Cooper, *Rural Hours*, 3. The fact that the first edition of *Rural Hours* in 1850 was anonymously credited to "a lady" (Bryson, *Visions of the Land*, 112) and that Cooper in her "Preface" to *Rural Hours* characterized the book as series of "many trifling observations on rustic matters" that "make no claim whatever to scientific knowledge" (Cooper, *Rural Hours*, 3) both signify her adherence to standards of feminine modesty. However, her claim that the book contained nothing of scientific note is humility taken too far. Though *Rural Hours* does not report on scientific findings or chart new territory, the text includes close and detailed observations of plant and animal species, habitat characterization, and discussion of behavioral patters and adaptations.

43 Cooper, *Rural Hours*, 56, 257, 265.

44 Cooper, *Rural Hours*, 22, 36, 74, 168, 187, 190-91, 216, 221, 265.

45 Cooper, *Rural Hours*, 256, 257, 265.

> wild swan, the male and female in company. Two instances are recorded in which infants have been seized by these powerful birds, one occurring in Georgia, and given by Mr. Nuttall, the other happening in New Jersey, and related by Mr. Wilson.[46]

This passage is a testament to Cooper's need to pay deference to the male authorities. Describing her region's "Bald Eagles" in these lines,[47] Cooper mentions the names and works of three male natural historians——Audubon, Nuttall, and Wilson. She uses their works to add further information to her own observations. Sometimes, Cooper refers to male naturalists' works to add an unusual memorable story, such as the one Wilson tells about how a pair of wood ducks persisted in returning to the same nest each year, even if a noisy woodworking project happened to be going on underneath it.[48]

Chronicling many of her own observations of nature in *Rural Hours*, Cooper sometimes comments upon the works of male naturalists in her natural history writings. Her references to male natural historians at times go well beyond mere acknowledgement and are often witty critiques of older theories. When Cooper relates her observation of the rare Bohemian wax-wing, for instance, she claims that "Learned ornithologists, with a bird in hand, have sometimes made great mistakes on such matters . . . ."[49] While meditating on the topic of migration behavior in swallows, for another example, Cooper wryly states that "It is amusing to look back to the discussions of naturalists during the last century"; past observers of birds had surmised that swallows spent the winter months either "torpid . . . in caves and hollow trees" or "under water . . . in the mud, at bottom of rivers and pools."[50] She finds it strange, from her mid-nineteenth-century vantage point (in which swallows

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[46] Cooper, *Rural Hours*, 265.

[47] Cooper, *Rural Hours*, 264.

[48] Cooper, *Rural Hours*, 190-91.

[49] Cooper, *Rural Hours*, 60.

[50] Cooper, *Rural Hours*, 166.

have been confirmed and classified as a migrating species) that "men, both learned and unlearned, often show a sort of antipathy to simple truth."[51]

As a female natural historian who ought to observe the gender convention of her society, Cooper often employs different and dissimilar ways to convey the scientific information about the natural world. The differences between Cooper's approach to writing natural history and male naturalists' approaches can be clearly seen when her accounts are compared to those of other male literary natural historians, such as Audubon. Both Audubon and Cooper describe hummingbird in their natural history writings. In *Ornithological Biography*, Audubon delineates a ruby-throated hummingbird. In the beginning, Audubon draws on the wonder of the bird as evidence of natural piety. Audubon then turns to a description of the arrival of spring and the hummingbird, one in which the sun has "genial beams" and the hummingbird "is seen advancing on fairy wings."[52] The fairy bird in this case becomes a hero, relieving the flowers of troubling insects. The magical imagery continues in the next paragraph. Audubon portrays the bird's brilliant, "fiery," shifting colors and likens its motion to "a gleam of light.[53] This scene itself shifts to Audubon's rapture at the hummingbird's mating habits. The mating scene naturally leads Audubon to a description of the hummingbird

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[51] See Cooper, *Rural Hours*, 166-67. The following lines contain Cooper's full comments upon the male naturalists' writings of natural history:

> It is amusing to look back to the discussions of naturalists during the last century, upon the subject of the migration of swallows: a number of them maintained that these active birds lay torpid during the cold weather in caves and hollow trees; while others, still more wild in their theories, supposed that swallows went under water and passed the winter in the mud, at the bottom of rivers and pools! . . . It would be difficult to understand how sensible people could be led to maintain such opinions, were it not that men, both learned and unlearned, often show a sort of antipathy to simple truths.

[52] John James Audubon, *John James Audubon: Writings and Drawings*, ed. Christoph Irmscher (New York: Library of America, 1999), 248.

[53] Audubon, *John James Audubon*, 249.

hatchlings in the nest and an account of their parents' affection. Finally, after five full paragraphs, Audubon turns to more traditional information about the hummingbird. He covers the date of their annual return to Louisiana, their perching, their nests, the flowers that they are fond of, their quarrelsome nature, their habit of flying into houses, and how to best procure specimens of hummingbirds. What is more, Audubon details what the hummingbirds feed on, stating that they feed on both insects and nectar, which is evidenced by accounts of what hummingbirds in confinement were fed and how they fared.

Cooper's delineation of the hummingbird begins with an evening observation on Friday, June 15 (in a section entitled "Summer" in *Rural Hours*). She mentions that the hummingbirds are frequently seen at this time of day and then commences a discussion of their favorite flowers and those they pass by. This touches on ground that Audubon covers as well. Nevertheless, Audubon simply comments that "the Ruby-throated Humming Bird has a particular liking for such flowers as are greatly tubular in their form,[54] and simply lists some before moving on to the bird's eating habits and his observations of the birds during feeding. Cooper reports the matter differently; in *Rural Hours,* she asserts: "there is something in the form of these tube-shaped blossoms, whether small or great, which suits their long, slender bills, and possibly, for the same reason, the bees cannot find such easy access to the honey, and leave more in these than in the open flowers.[55] Cooper's articulation of the hummingbird's favorite flowers is both more eloquent and more slippery than Audubon's. Cooper initiates her observation about the preferences for tubular flowers as if it were a casual, offhand comment: "there is something . . . ."[56] The statement, however, really is a scientific generalization about the behavior of the hummingbird——and notably one that has a reason attached: the tubular flowers suit their bills.

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[54] Audubon, *John James Audubon*, 252.

[55] Cooper, *Rural Hours*, 71.

[56] See Cooper, *Rural Hours*, 71.

Cooper in *Rural Hours* proceeds to support her "theory" through misdirection; she states: "often of a summer's evening have we watched the humming-birds flitting about the meadows . . . ."[57] The statement testifies to a verifiable observation, yet it passes itself off as a poetic and idle summer evening's amusement. The difference between Cooper's treatment and Audubon's is striking. Cooper frames the matter as a diversion that her readers might enjoy.[58] Audubon presents it as Inscrutable Fact.

The above-mentioned striking difference between Audubon and Cooper carries through the rest of Cooper's account of natural history. She will touch on several of the same topic as the esteemed ornithologist. She mentions the hummingbirds' fondness for perching on a twig, but quickly connects that with an observation from the day before. Her treatment of their nests, too, follows the same pattern of behavior into observation. In *Rural Hours*, when Cooper describes the habit of hummingbirds entering houses, she does so with a distinctly more domestic touch than Audubon does:

> The country people have a saying that when a humming-bird flies in at a window he brings a love message for someone in the house; a pretty fancy, certainly, for Cupid himself could not have desired a daintier *avant courier*. Unfortunately, this trick of flying in at windows is often a very serious and fatal one to the poor little creatures themselves, whatever felicity it may bring about to the Romeo and Juliet of the neighborhood; for they usually quiver about against the ceiling until quite stunned and exhausted, and unless they

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[57] Cooper, *Rural Hours*, 71.

[58] As a female natural history writer who should observe the gender convention of her society and the norms of appropriate feminine behavior, Cooper can not make an outright claim to be writing as naturalist. Therefore, in the preface to *Rural Hours*, Cooper modestly claims that *Rural Hours* is written only for "the writer's amusement" and diversion; see Cooper, *Rural Hours*, 3.

> are caught and set at liberty, soon destroy themselves in this way.[59]

Cooper's vision ends with a note of sympathy and concern for the hummingbirds who get trapped in the house. For Audubon, the bird's behavior is simply a maker that it "does not shun mankind so much as birds generally do."[60] But Cooper deconstructs such ideas through the contrast between the facts and fancy of the country legend. She uses an indirect approach to presenting knowledge about the natural world in America, trying to occupy the space as a female naturalist without upsetting the gender convention of her society.

## IV

In *Rural Hours*, Cooper remarks on her American compatriots' lack of the knowledge about native plants, asserting that "it is surprising how little the country people know on such subjects."[61] To solve this problem, Cooper's *Rural Hours* and *Essays on Nature and Landscape* intend to educate Americans about their native fauna and flora. Her chief method for achieving this educational goal is to deepen her readers' knowledge of the land and to compose natural history essays on the plants, animals, and geologic history of the Cooperstown region. In a footnote that Cooper writes for *Rural Hours*, she mentions the goal of the whole book:

> We are none of us very knowing about the birds in this country, unless it be those scientific gentlemen who have devoted their attention especially to such subjects. The same remark applies in some measure to our native trees and plants; to our butterflies and insects. But little attention has been given by our people generally, to these subjects. In Europe such is not the case; many persons there, among the different

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[59] Cooper, *Rural Hours*, 73.

[60] Audubon, *John James Audubon*, 253.

[61] Cooper, *Rural Hours*, 83.

> classes of society, are familiar with these simple matters. Had works of this kind been as common in America as they are in England, the volume now in readers' hands would not have been printed, and many observations found in its pages would have been unnecessary. But such as it is, written by a learner only, the book is offered to those whose interest in rural subjects has been awakened, a sort of rustic primer, which may lead them, if they choose, to something higher.[62]

Cooper in these lines is concerned about plenty of the themes of *Rural Hours* simultaneously. It is a testament to Cooper's need to pay deference to the male authorities; it is a reflection on differences between Europe and America; and it is a justification for the book (*Rural Hours*) itself. For our discussion, the last theme is the most significant. In this passage, Cooper informs her American compatriots that the exigence for *Rural Hours* is the lack of knowledge and understanding that Americans have about natural history. She hopes that although her book is but a "rustic primer," it will awaken a passion for "rural subjects" and American natural environment.[63]

*Rural Hours* and *Essays on Nature and Landscape*, on the whole, represent Cooper's ardent intention to educate Americans about the plant and animal life in America. In an essay entitled "Later Hours" (this essay is collected in *Essays on Nature and Landscape*), for example, Cooper closely reports the intricate lives of the plants, animals, and insects in and around the Cooperstown region; in the following lines, Cooper records the "hum," "movement," and "instincts" of the bees in her region:[64]

> The very hum of the bee, as it flies past us on its pleasant errand, inquest of some flower, or returning with its dainty load, is one of the most cheery of the voices in summer. The movement of the little

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[62] Cooper, *Rural Hours*, 330.

[63] See Cooper, *Rural Hours*, 330.

[64] Susan Fenimore Cooper, *Essays on* Nature *and Landscape*, ed. Rochelle Johnson and Daniel Patterson (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2002), 58.

> creature, also, is full of meaning, . . . ; it generally flies in lines more or less direct; we see here nothing of the idle roaming, vagrant flight of the gaudy butterfly, and nothing of the hesitating, doubtful, over-cautious pause of the plodding ant. The instincts of the bee are all lively and vigorous; it seems conscious that wherever grass grows, there some blossom will be found to reward its search, and it moves steadily onward until a head of clover, or perchance some prouder flower, offers the precious drop.[65]

Employing the method of natural history to delineate nature, this passage offers a detailed description of the bees in Cooperstown. In this way, Cooper presents and offers knowledge about the natural world for her American compatriots, thereby educating Americans about their natural world and instilling in them a pride of place based on this deeper knowledge.

To deepen her compatriots' knowledge of the land and to educate Americans about numerous plant and animal species in their country, Cooper composes natural history essays. Her writings is reminiscent of eighteenth-century nationalistic natural history texts by Jefferson, Crèvecoeur, Audubon, Nuttall, and others who share her essential belief that the writings about nature can be counted on to help Americans recognize the literary and cultural possibilities of the natural environment.[66] For Cooper, American

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[65] Cooper, *Essays on* Nature *and Landscape*, 58.

[66] The nationalism in Cooper's effort to educate American readers about the details of their natural objects echoes earlier efforts by American naturalists. In *Notes on the State of Virginia*, Thomas Jefferson loudly refutes Comte de Buffon's contention that American mammals are smaller and less robust than their European counterparts. The tremendous efforts of Wilson, Audubon, and Nuttall, who traveled extensively throughout the continent, to describe and to illustrate all the birds in the United States demonstrated their profound commitment to educating the American public about their land. Audubon and Nuttall produced plant and animal studies as well. Their works, especially the narrative vignettes, preserves a picture of nature's state in the early nineteenth century and offers a rich source of material for critical literary study.

natural environment can be the cultural resources requisite for constructing national subjectivity. Natural history literature, as Branch (a contemporary eco-critic) suggests, can turn "American attention toward the cultural possibilities of the land."[67] In actuality, during the early national period of New England, the discourse of wild environment constitutes not only a specifically American *nature*, but also a distinct concept of an American *nation*.[68] Wild nature, as William Cronon points out in his *Uncommon Ground* (1995), is both a "self-conscious cultural construction" and "thoroughly contested terrain."[69] For Cooper, representing the natural environment in America is a conscious discursive construction. In *Rural Hours and Essays on Nature and Landscape*, Cooper mainly employs the discourse of natural history to celebrate the American wild landscape and its inhabitants as a cultural resource. In the process of recording her observations of the natural world in her region, Cooper connects the colorful seasons in her region and a national literature; such connection comes almost as an afterthought following her critique of the Europeans. In a section entitled "Autumn" in *Rural Hours*, for instance, Cooper asserts:

> . . . the march of Autumn through the land is not a silent one——it is already accompanied by song. Scarce a poet of any fame among us who has not at least some graceful verse.[70]

In these lines, the poets "among us," the American poets, stand in clear contrast to the Europeans who fail to write anything "graceful" about autumn, and so the Americans have an advantage in their access to more colorful and

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67 Branch, "Early Romantic Natural History Literature," 1059.

68 David Mazel, Am*erican Literary Environmentalism* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2000), xviii.

69 William Cronon, ed., *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature* (New York: Norton, 1996), 39, 51.

70 Cooper, *Rural Hours*, 209.

more poetic subject matter.[71] Cooper's confidence in her fellow American nature writers is remarkable as she says "year after year the song must become fuller, and sweeter, and clearer" in *Rural Hours*.[72] This confident optimism contrasts dramatically with Ralph Waldo Emerson's vain search for his ideal poet: in an essay entitled "The Poet," Emerson asserts, "We have yet no genius in America . . . which knew the value of our incomparable materials."[73]

Through her natural historical discourse, Cooper writes to encourage a deeper knowledge and a deeper appreciation of the physical environment in America. She writes about the flora and fauna of her place in order to move her readers toward a fuller knowledge and a keener appreciation of their nation's natural environment. Cooper's appreciation of nature often emphasizes its beauty. In *Rural Hours*, Cooper frequently shows her astonishment at the sheer beauty of nature: "how beautiful is the exquisite native grace of flowers . . . yet how all but impossible for man to add to their perfection in a single point."[74] The sense of wonder also carries over to the animal kingdom. At one point in "Spring" (the first principal section in *Rural Hours*), Cooper marvels, "what a remarkable instinct is that of a sitting bird."[75] As a natural historian, Cooper seeks to alert her fellow citizens to the wonder and the beauty of nature in her region, to cultivate public appreciation for the beauty of the American environment, and to inspire her American compatriots a new faith in the viability of their natural environment as a source for national culture.

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[71] Cooper, *Rural Hours*, 209.

[72] See Cooper, *Rural Hours*, 210. In this way, Cooper's natural history writings value the natural products of the land and, by extension, the land; it values the America over the foreign; see Richard M. Magee, "Sentimental Ecology: Susan Fenimore Cooper's *Rural Hours*," in *Such News of the Land: U. S. Women Nature Writers*, ed. Thomas S. Edward and Elizabeth A. De Wolfe (Hanover: University Press of New England, 2001), 28.

[73] Ralph Waldo Emerson, "The Poet," in *Selections from Ralph Waldo Emerson*, ed. Stephen E. Whicher (Boston: Houghton, 1957), 238.

[74] Cooper, *Rural Hours*, 53.

[75] Cooper, *Rural Hours*, 23.

# V

In her natural history writings, Cooper endeavors to do more than just present the scientific knowledge and objective truth about the objects within the natural world: she also weaves an articulation of humanity's relationship with nature among the descriptions of flora and fauna. Through her natural historical discourse, Cooper presents the potential harmony between humanity and nature, conveys many proto-ecological ideas (such as the notion of reverence and respect for nature, the attitude of sympathy and concern toward nonhuman creatures, the idea of the common links among all living species, and so forth), and advocates conservation ethic.

The proto-ecological sensibility that Cooper advocates begin with the general sympathy and concern that she shows towards animals she discusses in her natural histories. The example given near the end of section "III" (on page twelve) in this paper, such as the concern that Cooper shows for hummingbirds that get trapped in the house, testify to the concern that Cooper repeatedly shows for other creatures. Importantly, Cooper's attitude of sympathy and concern toward nonhuman creatures is consistent through *Rural Hours*. Although there are some animals such as snakes and spiders that Cooper finds unappealing, she still evinces a clear respect; in this way, Cooper expresses her idea of ecological ethic. At the beginning of "Summer" (the second principal section in *Rural Hours*), for instance, after expressing her unease with spiders, asserting that "in their greyest aspect, these creatures are repulsive,"[76] Cooper will shift the perspective that she uses to look at them:

> Few People like spiders. No doubt these insects must have their merits and their uses, since none of God's creatures are made in vain; all living things are endowed with instincts more or less admirable; but the spider's plotting, creeping ways, and a sort of wicked expression

[76] Cooper, *Rural Hours*, 61.

about him, led one to dislike him as a near neighbor.[77]

Claiming that "all living things are endowed with instincts more or less admirable" in these lines,[78] Cooper, ahead of her time, expresses her attitude of respect for nonhuman nature and suggests that all living creatures——such as spiders——have their own intrinsic value or inherent worth on earth. What is more, in this quoted passage Cooper begins with a fact: few people like spider. She closes on a similar statement: human beings are uncomfortable having spiders around. In between this acknowledgement of human nature, Cooper shifts the perspective. Drawing on her natural piety, she advances an ecological point. God must have made the spider for a reason and given it a role in nature. Also, the tension created by the differences in these two points of view allows Cooper to interrogate her human presumptions. For a moment, the anthropocentrism at the heart of arachnophobia is brought to mind. In other cases, with animals more agreeable to the human imagination, Cooper can step from simply calling to anthropocentrism to celebrating life bio-centrically.

In another passage in *Rural Hours*, Cooper presents her proto-ecological sensibility, too. As part of her discussion of the migration of birds, Cooper considers the possibility that "no doubt the change of food, of air, of climate, is a source of enjoyment to the birds; nay, the very journey itself is probably accompanied with that gratification which is usually connected with the healthful, natural exercise of the higher powers of every living being."[79] Here, Cooper makes a remarkable leap to conceive that the migration of birds goes past instinct to being a source of enjoyment to them. For the moment, Cooper——and her readers along with her——step out of the human (or anthropocentric) perspective on a natural phenomenon and imagine it from the animal's (eco-centric) perspective. This is a form of

[77] Cooper, *Rural Hours*, 61.

[78] Cooper, *Rural Hours*, 61.

[79] Cooper, *Rural Hours*, 220.

eco-centrism that marks the basis of Cooper's proto-ecology.

Another aspect of Cooper's proto-ecological thinking is her recognition, through the scientific observation of plant, animal, and human communities, of the common links among all living species, not only in one particular place but in widely separated regions as well. In *Rural Hours*, Cooper enjoys following "these links, connecting lands and races, so far apart, reminding us, as they do, that the earth is the common home of all."[80] Such as passage is typical of Cooper, who frequently dispenses plenty of commentary or insight within the specific context of communicating the details of a plant, bird, or mammal. Something as simple and humble as a "common showy plant"——"the mandrakes or May-apples" in *Rural Hours*, [81] for example——is in fact an indicator of something more important, namely, a connection between otherwise divergent "lands and races" (for the plant is found in both North America and "Central Asia").[82] The actual foundation for this connection is Cooper's strong belief that "the earth is the common home of all,"[83] a phrase that anticipates more recent ecological thinking on the fundamental interdependence (or interconnectedness) of organism and their environment.

In addition to her recognition of the common links among all living species, Cooper's recognition of the decline of many species in Cooperstown also reflects her profound environmental concern and proto-ecological sensibility. In *Rural Hours*, Cooper often reports and laments the losses to the environment: she complains that "all our game-birds are rapidly diminishing in numbers," writes that "the reckless extermination of the game in the United States would seem, indeed, without a precedent in the history of the world," and laments that "Probably the buffaloes will be entirely swept from prairies,

[80] Cooper, *Rural Hours*, 56.

[81] Cooper, *Rural Hours*, 56.

[82] Cooper, *Rural Hours*, 56.

[83] Cooper, *Rural Hours*, 56.

once covered with their herds, by this generation."[84] She notes the rarity or "extreme" rarity of moose, elk, deer, bear, beaver, otter, and others in her region of New York State. Particularly striking in *Rural Hours* is Cooper's account of the death of what may have been Cooperstown's last deer; a group of villagers manages to save the deer, a tamed fawn and a village favorite, from the jaws of a hunting dog, only to have it later killed by a hunter; Cooper's narration of this event evokes a high degree of sympathy and concern for "one of the last of these beautiful creatures seen in the waters of our lake."[85]

In her natural history writings, Cooper chronicles the history of mankind's use and misuse of the land, too. Frequently, she describes land abuse that accompanies the establishment of an agrarian society, expresses concern about environmental changes, and voices a lament for nature's abuse.[86] In the following passage, for instance, Cooper poignantly criticizes the deforestation and the rapid destruction of primitive forests for fuel and lumber:

> One would think that by this time, when the forest has fallen in all the valleys——when the hills are becoming more bare every day——when timber and fuel are rising in prices, and new uses are found for even indifferent woods——some forethought and care in this respect would be natural in people laying claim to common sense. The rapid consumption of the large pine timber among us should be enough to teach a lesson of prudence and economy on this subject. It

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[84] Cooper, *Rural Hours*, 190.

[85] Cooper, *Rural Hours*, 149.

[86] In her natural historical discourse, Cooper often expresses concern about human abuse of nature and voices a lament for nature's abuse, a viewpoint decidedly at odds with mainstream mid-nineteenth-century American views of forests and prairie soils as vast resources to be tapped at will. In this respect, Cooper's natural history is surprisingly forward-looking, anticipating the wilderness preservation movement and the creation of the national parks system in America at the end of the nineteenth century.

> has been calculated that 60,000 acres of pine woods are cut every year in our own State alone; and at this rate, it is said that in twenty years, these trees will have disappeared from our part of the country! But unaccountable as it may appear, few American farmers are aware of the full value and importance of wood. They seem to forget the relative value of the forests.[87]

Lamenting for the thoughtless and unsustainable destruction of the pine trees, Cooper predicts the inevitable disappearance of the pristine woods in her region. Her natural historical discourse documents American natural environment and expresses concern regarding its critical endangerment by human development. In these lines, emphasizing that people should not forget "the value of the forests" in New England, Cooper suggests the importance of preserving pine woods and expresses her reverence for the original, wild condition in her region.

In *Rural Hours*, Cooper recognizes that agriculture and, especially, excessive logging threaten the remaining wooded areas and have in some cases changed their very character. As a result, she poignantly mourns her compatriots' "careless indifference" to the idea of "preserving a fine grove" and the pines in primitive forests:[88]

> In these times, the hewers of wood are an unsparing race. The first colonists looked upon a tree as an enemy, and to judge from appearances, one would think that something of the same spirit prevails among their descendents at the present hour. It is not surprising, perhaps, that a man whose chief object in life is to make money, should turn his timber into bank-notes with all possible speed; but it is remarkable that any one at all aware of the value of wood, should act so wastefully as most men do in this part of the world. Mature trees, young saplings, and last year's seedlings, are all

[87] Cooper, *Rural Hours*, 132.

[88] Cooper, *Rural Hours*, 134.

> destroyed at one blow by the axe or by fire; the spot where they have stood is left, perhaps, for a long time without any attempt at cultivation, or any endeavor to foster new woods.[89]

Mourning for her compatriots' ruthless and unsustainable destruction of "great," "majestic" pines in these lines, Cooper expresses her profound disappointment toward her fellow citizens' "waste" or "abuse" of the natural resources in both rural Cooperstown and in New England.[90] What is seriously lacking, Cooper feels, is a conservative approach to using the forest——in *Rural Hours*, although she never doubts the ecnonmic necessity of cutting trees, she criticizes the lack of foresight among those "whose chief object is to make money."[91]

In order to save the pines and other trees in American woods, Cooper advocates the idea of conservation ethic in her natural history writings. Cooper's conservation ethic is based on her conviction that the progress of civilization must be balanced with responsibility if the abundance and beauty of nature are to be enjoyed by future generation. Though the words *ecology* and *conservation ethic* had yet to be defined at the time of the first publication of *Rural Hours*,[92] Cooper's recognition that populations of certain plants and animals were declining not only demonstrates a proto-ecological viewpoint but also emphasizes the need for effective conservation. In *Rural Hours*, arguing for business prudence, Cooper points out that at the rate of consumption, the state's pines will be gone by 1870; moreover, she calculates that New York State's forest-based economic production surprisingly outstrips that of agriculture.[93] Given these realities, Cooper advocates the preservation of tree stands and selected old-growth areas, as well as planting new trees to replace logged forests. But beyond providing monetary incentives for conservation, Cooper in *Rural Hours* stresses that trees "are connected in

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89 Cooper, *Rural Hours*, 132.

90 Cooper, *Rural Hours*, 134, 135.

91 Cooper, *Rural Hours*, 132.

92 The term *ecology* was coined in 1873 by German biologist Ernst Haeckel.

93 Cooper, *Rural Hours*, 133.

many ways with the civilization of a country; they have their importance in an intellectual and in a moral sense."[94] Conserving trees, Cooper argues in *Rural Hours*, is not only practical; it avoids unnecessary waste——an economic, moral, and ecological virtue: "There is something in the care of trees which rises above the common labors of husbandry, and speaks of a generous mind . . . In planting a young wood, in preserving a fine grove, a noble tree, we look beyond ourselves to the band of household friends, to our neighbors."[95] Such a sensitivity for the integrity of Cooperstown's forests gives us the best insight into Cooper's conservation ethic.

On the whole, *Rural Hours* presents a way for Americans to take part in a nationalistic project of natural history education, which Cooper believes will lead people to kinder use of the land. In *Rural Hours*, Cooper thanks "the hand which has so long preserved them [the trees],"[96] and she also calls attention to the vulnerability of the trees, noting that "it needs but a few short minutes to bring one of these trees to the ground."[97] However, Cooper in *Rural Hours* calls to her fellow citizens' minds the "generations that must come and go, the centuries that must roll onward" before the wood will reach this state again.[98] Indeed, Cooper emphasizes that this is a work that humanity cannot accomplish. The implication, of course, is that the trees must be cherished and preserved because they cannot be duplicated by culture. Cooper's call for conservation in her natural historical discourse, to conclude, brings her compatriots to a new appreciation of nature.

To save the pine trees in her country, Cooper frequently speaks for the need to protect America's woods and forests. The following passage draws a conclusion with a call for environmental conservation in Cooper's *Rural Hours*:

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94 Cooper, *Rural Hours*, 133.

95 Cooper, *Rural Hours*, 134.

96 Cooper, *Rural Hours*, 119.

97 Cooper, *Rural Hours*, 119.

98 Cooper, *Rural Hours*, 119.

> The preservation of those old pines must depend entirely on the will of their owner; they are private property; we have no right to ask that they must be spared, but it is impossible to behold their hoary trucks and crested heads without a feeling of hope that they may long continue unscathed, to look down upon the village that has sprung up at their feet.[99]

In these lines, Cooper attempts to convince her compatriots of a moral obligation to cherish their natural environment. Obviously, Cooper sees the necessity and importance of woods and forests for earth. Through her natural historical discourse, Cooper presciently and prophetically suggests the significance of forest protection.[100] This proposal for forest protection in Cooper's natural historical discourse would eventually be realized by Gifford Pinchot (1865-1946)——"the father of American Forestry and the Forest Service,"[101] but not until one hundred years later, with the establishment of the US Forest Service in 1905.

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[99] Cooper, *Rural Hours*, 119.

[100] *Rural Hours* may be the most rhetorically powerful appeal for the conservation of forests at mid century. In many places of the book, Cooper argues for conservation of forests and of single trees. Cooper's striving toward conservation of American woods contributes to the eventual shift in American behavior and attitudes, from the pervading destruction and disregard of the wilderness to the preservation of large tracts of land that will be seen in the creation of the national park system at the end of the nineteenth century.

[101] See Chris LaLonde, *Grave Concerns, Trickster: the Novels of Louis Owens* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2002), 162.

Gifford Pinchot was the first American to choose forestry as a career; see Roderick Nash, ed., *American Environmentalism: Reading in Conservation History* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1990), 73. Also, Pinchot was "the first chief of the USDA Forest Service and an architect of the early conservation movement;" see Char Miller and V. Alaric Sample, "Gifford Pinchot and the Conservation Spirit," *Breaking New Ground*, ed. Gifford Pinchot (Coveli: Island, 1998), xi-xvi.

# VI

For a long time, Cooper has played a significant but largely unexamined role in American literature and in American nature writing tradition. Today, Cooper still seldom receives critical attention, and her prose writings continue to be regarded as daily journal or sketchbook.[102] Establishing Cooper as natural history writer in early America, this paper in turn has focused its attention on Cooper's investigations of the Cooperstown region. As a female natural historian, Cooper closely observes and carefully describes the geography, climates, plants, animals, and insects in loving details for Americans. By presenting the wonder and beauty of nature around her region and by bringing before her compatriots the variety of "natural productions"——such as "the handsome flowering dog-wood,"[103] "moose-wood," and "hobble-bush" in *Rural Hours*,[104] Cooper successfully educates Americans about their natural world and instills in them a national pride of place based on their deeper knowledge. Cooper believes that education is the key to preserving the natural environment. Ahead of her time, Cooper hopes that by educating people about the flora and fauna around them, she can also convince them that they ought to care about preserving the environment. Also, Cooper's natural historical discourse——her close observation, detailed study and careful description of nature, her attitude of sympathy and respect for nature, her concern about environmental change, and her lament for nature's abuse, her recognition of the common links among all living species——advocates the conservation of vital resources such as forests, and helps initiate a tradition of ecological thinking into American intellectual history. Through documenting and lamenting mankind's ruthless destruction

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[102] Buell, *The Environmental Imagination*, 221; Goodier, "Susan Fenimore Cooper," 239; Norwood, *Made from This Earth*, 53; and Kreger, "Rustic Matters," 193.

[103] Cooper, *Rural Hours*, 130.

[104] Cooper, *Rural Hours*, 214.

of trees and suggesting the significance of forest conservation, Cooper's natural history writings do not merely lead toward an ecological understanding of the world of nature, but also cultivate a new ethical sensitivity to nonhuman nature. In this way, Cooper introduces a pattern of proto-environmental ethics and ecological thinking for mid-nineteenth-century American culture.

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