

# Landscape and Seascape Influence on the American Literary Imagination: Contributions of James Fenimore Cooper, Mark Twain and Herman Melville to the Development of the American Literary Vision

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## Abstract

Literary landscaping refers to the imaginative representation of nature and the physical environment in the fictional writings of authors who display profound love and attachment to nature and the environment. It emphasizes the presentation of characters and events in a part romanticized and part mythical connection with the soil. Landscape or seascape is as such the natural habitat, the total environment of plant and animal and their ecology as presented in fictional creations. It also emphasizes a mythical as well as practical or realistic attachment to the soil resulting from personal experiences utilized for commentary on human existential problems. Early American writers, therefore, derived inspiration from the land and the experiences of early settlers which were ingrained in their fictional writings. The idea of land and seascape or the wilderness and the unknown world seems to have featured more prominently although not restricted to American Literature because of the vast expanse of land and sea available to the early settlers and which land and seascapes had a mythic or even religious significance on the imagination of not just the ordinary inhabitants but also writers. The significance of land and seascapes to the people results in a highly romanticized vision of the environment in the American Literary imagination. The vision of perfection and idealism appears in the works of early writers who present a picture of frontier life, the wilderness and its potential for human development. This paper attempts to portray the appeal of landscape and seascape and their effect on three American writers as they utilize same in their imaginative constructs that afford them an opportunity to articulate the American dream and the problems of attainment of that dream in a land that promised unlimited possibilities of actualization. The paper also attempts to show how this imagination has actuated a new genre of American Literature in *The Midwestern Pastoral*.

**Keywords:** landscape, seascape, literary imagination, wilderness, identity, American dream, realism and romanticism

## QUOTE:

Beauty passes; at the end,  
All is an unfathomable dark drown  
Beauty is truth, truth Beauty-that is all  
Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.  
--- Gerard Manley Hopkins

## INTRODUCTION

American literary artists, old and new, have been acutely aware of the beauty and attraction of land and seascapes and their influence on American imaginative writing but they have equally lamented the destruction of this beauty by industrialization and cosmopolitan growth. Stephen Trout observes that William Barillas's study on mid-western Literature

- Establishes a distinct genre, the mid-western pastoral – novels, poems, autobiographies, even non-fiction essays on ecology – that looks deeply into the landscape of the American mid-west, recognizing its underappreciated beauty, mourning its defilement by utilitarian farming practices and urban sprawl, and honoring what is best in its inhabitants whether indigenous or immigrant.

Several writers, among them Robert Abrams(2003),Frederick Turner(1992),Alfred Kazin(1988) Annie Proulx(2008) Lee Schweninger(2008) Loree Westron(2011) and a host of others have recognized and depicted the impact of landscape on the American literary imagination. However, this write-up centers on the forerunners whose imagination profoundly impacted on the establishment of a unique American tradition of literary creativity as well as the definition of an American philosophy of life. Native American land and seascapes are, therefore, eulogized for having played a major role in the shaping of the American imagination and are central in the identification of a unique American literary experience. American land and seascapes i.e. the wilderness, the rivers and the seas were vastly utilized by American artists and played a distinct role in character formation and

the artist's definition of a unique American identity and philosophy of life. Indigenous American settlers valued the wilderness for what it offered as is evident in the writings of James Fenimore Cooper as well as the ideal picture of the New found land presented by Michel-Guillaume-Jean de Crevecoeur in his *Letters from an American Farmer (1782)* which writings formed the basis for European and Universal interpretation of American society though sometimes adjudged as over embellishment and presenting an excessively romantic picture of the realities of frontier life in America. While the white settlers developed a deep love and attachment to the land and valued its nurturing capacity and the opportunities the land offered for individual advancement, the aboriginal Indian tribesmen had a different kind of attachment. Theirs was not just a nurturing relationship as they also saw and regarded the land as a deity and as such maintained a relationship that was intrinsically woven into every fiber of social and spiritual life thus, viewing their lives as inextricably rooted to the land. Between the aboriginal Indian tribesmen and the settler white American views and attachment to the land, there appears to be a dichotomy or oppositional outlook. While the settler Americans' attachment to and value for the land was more for its economic and commercial endowment, the aboriginal Indian's view was a spiritual and cosmic attachment which rooted him to the land since to him land was sacred and worth preserving. The two views therefore had far reaching consequences on landscape and its meaning to the people. Fenimore Cooper in his Leather-stocking tales subtly brings out this oppositional stance of the white settler Americans and the aboriginal Indians in his unveiled admiration of Natty-Bumpo, the character he creates and situates with nature in his knowledge of the forests but who never admired or trusted the Indians though they shared the same admiration for nature and the environment. Mark Twain and Herman Melville on the other hand developed the influence of seascape on the American imagination. Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, *Tom Sawyer* and *Life on the Mississippi* represent very succinct portrayals and utilization of Native American material particularly the use of vernacular idiom which situates him as a regional American artist. Melville in his *Typee*, *Omoo* and *Moby Dick* also utilizes seascape to articulate the American love for adventure and the confrontation between innocence and experience as well as the difficulty of penetrating human motives in *Benito Cereno*.

Perhaps a major point to note about the three writers, Cooper (1789 – 1851), Melville (1819 – 1891), and Twain (1835 – 1908) is that their lives spanned over a century of American socio-cultural, economic, political and literary development. During this period (from Cooper's birth in 1789 to Twain's death in 1908) America, like most other continents, was undergoing rapid socio-cultural and socio-political changes occasioned by the industrial revolution and the romantic movement both of which impacted greatly on landscape and the American dream particularly in the consciousness of writers in Europe and America. The impact of industrialization and its attendant growth of cities with large homogenous populations, though seen as normal, hardly appealed to the literary sense of writers who started shifting attention to a general recognition of the poor and uneducated masses who they felt deserved better treatment. In Europe, Hopkins' poems and Dickens' novels were admired for their portrayal of Local uneducated characters in their works as well as their reverence for natural landscape. American romantic writers were not left out as they also decried the impact of the industrial revolution, the quest for materialism and the botched American dream in their eulogized presentation of nature, the wilderness and the seas as well as their significance to human growth and development.

In all of these writers, the pervading influence of land and seascape on their literary imagination is not debatable particularly as we discover that the settings and character development of these writers cannot be divorced from land and seascape influence which has also been largely depended upon for the portrayal of ideas and the explication of viewpoint. Natty-Bumpo and Huckleberry Finn, therefore, represent Cooper's and Twain's views of the emergent American society and its unbridled destruction of the natural environment and its beauty while Melville's pessimism about human achievement is aptly portrayed in *Moby Dick* which presents us with the image of Ahab, a hero-Villain and his obsessive mania. The three writers, therefore, rely heavily on Native American land and Seascapes for the propagation and sustenance of a National character and identity. Particularly, the characters of Natty-Bumpo and Huck Finn become representative of archetypal national characters of the American society in the process of transition. They seek an identity and express the meaning and relevance of their lives within the New found land, the land of unlimited opportunity. What this paper aims at is, therefore, an analysis of the intensity of feeling expressed about land and seascape as well as the extent to which it can be seen as a major influence on the writer's literary imagination in the portrayal of the American environment of their era. This will also assist us in the assessment of the influence of land and seascapes on the development of a unique literary tradition. It will, as well, sustain the view and possible validation of the personalities of the bush ranger or ideal pioneer settler and frontiersman in Cooper, the Sailor and/or river explorer in Twain and the transcendental pessimist in Melville all of whom contribute to the shaping of the modern American consciousness of their society and philosophy. The writers, therefore, present us with stories that portray characters who are not only stereotypical but are tough, hardworking and set the pace for the American national identity, forged and molded through trials and encounters in the wilderness and the seas. The independent and adventurous personalities of the early settlers is aptly reflected in these characters who persevere through thick and thin and so symbolize the spirit of the American renaissance and the modern

American philosophy of the manifest destiny as well as the American dream. The characters also display a depth of loyalty unsurpassed in American literary annals and which loyalty underlay their survival in an isolated wilderness or perilous seascape. The apt utilization of land and seascapes by these writers has vastly aided the construction of personal and national identities for Americans which, in turn, assists readers in an understanding of not just the individual American but also their national ideology and cultural affinity. Through their own exploits within the environment, these characters learn to appreciate their milieu and ground themselves in an ideology that becomes a national myth. Land and seascapes, real or imagined thus become an essential part of the national history of America as created and sustained by the writers and has greatly influenced the way Americans think and see themselves and their nation; Yankee land, the land of Unlimited opportunity, but only if you work hard.

Land and seascapes also create a sense of collective or shared identity and experience; a kind of regional attraction and belonging which accounts for the creation of a regional literature as distinct from the national consciousness. Regionalism thus becomes a strong feature of the American literary consciousness accounting for the distinction decipherable in such writers as Mark Twain, Bret Harte, Sarah Orne Jewett, Edith Wharton, Kate Chopin, Willa Cather and Hamlin Garland etc. for whom regionalism provided defining features for a literature steeped in local dialect, distinctive speech forms and cultural outlook on life. One can, therefore, venture to assert that these writers i.e. Cooper, Twain and Melville, in their literary output, have attempted to establish a connection between the American land and seascapes and the development of a unique American identity and Literary consciousness. Their stories become an act of rediscovery and revalidation of American lives and, to some extent, their regional character. From this perspective, an attempt is made at an assessment of the success or otherwise of each writer in his bid to locate the American spirit with the land and how land and seascapes have conditioned the writer's imagination towards an acceptance of the challenges posed by the new environment.

#### **JAMES FENIMORE COOPER AND THE WILDERNESS: INNOCENCE AND EXPERIENCE**

James Fenimore Cooper is often accredited with the creation of a myth of the American West through his imaginative painting of the wilderness in his narratives, specifically "the leather stocking tales." This mythical West is said to have "transcended the reality of life on the frontier." Cooper is therefore known to have influenced, more than any other American writer, the imagination of writers who were responsible for the establishment of a unique American literary tradition. One, therefore, finds Cooper's literary descendants, in terms of characterization or the creation of renegade characters, in such writers like Melville, Twain, Faulkner and even Fitzgerald. Cooper grew up in Cooper's town, a tiny wilderness settlement on Lake Otsego and we learn that he

- Was raised in the rural luxury of the family "Manor house," [where] he roamed the edge of a wilderness that stretched a thousand miles to the Mississippi (concise Anthology)

This physical wilderness landscape within which Cooper traversed in his childhood was to become the biggest influence on his imagination and to catalyze the creation of what is regarded as among the best and unique literature of the Americans that painted American landscape as opposed to the European tradition that appeared in colonial literary creations. Cooper becomes an originator, the first imaginative writer, who, like Irving, was interested in the American past – the history, the myths and legends that were to impact on the American literary consciousness in the creation of a national identity. But Cooper's imagination was not only fertilized by the forest or wilderness landscape. The sea was another influence and was responsible for moderating his literary responses as he was early exposed to sea-faring as a common sailor in his teens. These two, the wilderness and the sea, are to feature in nearly all his novels whose settings are largely responsible for the outlook and consciousness of his characters. Natty-Bumpo, the common, simple forest man displays profound love for the wilderness and becomes the archetypal representative of the American frontiersman, the renegade responsible for the establishment of the American character.

Cooper is also accredited with the writing of the first novels that "dealt with American scenes and events" *The Spy* and *The Pioneers* were, therefore, hailed as satisfactory works, at least in their thematic thrust and focus, to the patriotic hunger of the American public of his era, and their quest for excitement and adventure. The spirit of liberty was thus kindled in the wilderness and the seas as Cooper's and later Melville's and Twain's land and seascapes actualized innate urges of Americans for freedom and adventure in their literary creations. Cooper is, again accredited with the establishment of "a genre of accurate and detailed sea fiction," with the publication of *The Pilot* (1824) while *The Spy* (1821) marked the advent of the American historical novel. The wilderness thus provided Cooper with a landscape setting for his frontier romances. To him, the wilderness landscape became a metaphor for his attack on the American loss of innocence and the excessive propensity for materialism characteristic of metropolitan life. Cooper attacked the appeal of civilization which was fast eroding the innocence and simplicity of the wilderness environment typified in the grandiose simplicity of Natty-Bumpo. Natty-Bumpo thus becomes Cooper's creation of an archetypal Western or Frontier renegade hero representing

the ancestral lineage from which have descended many literary heroes created for American popular fiction, among them Melville's and Twain's heroes. Cooper, therefore, displays an equally strong attachment to the sea and the forest, utilizing same for his comments on American life and ideals. Behind the façade of this landscape is the subtle criticism of civilization and a corresponding eulogy of the wilderness in its sense of upholding a collective identity which binds the people together. Louise Erdrich (1985) therefore argues that

- The telling and retelling of stories that took place in a landscape which the people already knew intimately, reinforced their understanding of their surroundings and made [p]lace and people inseparable.

Cooper was a successful portrayer of American scenes and his imagination was fertilized by American rivers, brooks and forests which sustained American love for adventure. Americans eulogized Cooper's portrayal of the vast seas and the soothing freshness of the forests. The introduction to Cooper in the concise Anthology of American Literature describes his stories as

- Frontier tales [that] transplanted the chivalric romances of Europe to the forests of the new world and served as forerunners of an endless series of American stage coach and wagon train epics.

His biography portrays his pre-occupation with farming and gardening and so we learn of him that "he often composed on walks through the woods, following mountain paths or strolling along the lake shore to his farm." These experiences are graphically replicated with a touch of his imagination in the very detailed picture of the forests and rivers he presents to us in *The Leather-Stocking tales*. The tales present us with the best picture of the American natural environment and the Indian lives therein. Leon Howard (1959) states in his introduction to *The Pioneers* that Cooper drew his material

- Partly from his imagination and partly from his childhood memories of personal experience and family stories about the settlement on Lake Otsego.

Cooper could not have had a better landscape than the wilderness setting for his near epical representation of the conflict between the settler Americans and the aboriginal Indians as presented in *The Pioneers* and *The Last of the Mohicans* as well as his acceptance of the profundity of natural justice and feeling over civil justice as enunciated by the new metropolitan American society. In his wilderness setting, Cooper seems to be echoing the notion that civilization destroys natural humanity. One gets the impression that through Natty-Bumpo's domestication in the wilderness, Cooper's advocacy is the marriage of white civilization with nature and the "primitive" represented by the forest and the Indians among whom Natty lives but never really quite identifies with Indian life even in his acceptance of the forest and its natural attraction and freshness. Natty-Bumpo instead represents Cooper's admiration of nature and the love for freedom characteristic of the American spirit. Natty's aloofness and treatment of Indians depicts the white settlers feeling of superiority over the Indians whom they decimate along with the natural environment.

Cooper's relevance as a pioneer American writer therefore thrives on his ability to depict exciting action in a vast natural setting like the wilderness which landscape he beautifies in the alluring presentation of the simplicity and grandeur in the characters of Natty-Bumpo and Chingachgook, the noble Indian guide whom Natty could never trust. Cooper's eulogy of the environment thus becomes more relevant in today's world in which the retention of the natural environment is being strongly advocated and celebrated thus calling for a return to nature and preservation of natural landscape wherever it exists. The advocacy is best depicted in his novel *The Prairies* in which he captures the unwarranted destruction of the forest landscape in the building of industrial settlements. Today the advocacy is foremost in the minds of environmentalist thus making Cooper a 21<sup>st</sup> century environmentalist and so more worthy of celebration than ever before. But Mark Twain in his *Fenimore Cooper's Literary Offences* berates Cooper for his fascination with the wilderness and the forest to the exclusion of artistry in his creation of *The Leather-Stocking Tales*. In this castigation of Cooper, Twain inadvertently brings out Cooper's real intention in the tales which was to create fantastic romances devoid of stark realism. Twain failed to see in Cooper the story-teller who does not insist on truth and exact representation of realistic scenes, which, however, he achieves in his pictures of the forest environment. Twain instead sees these as faults in creativity when he observes that

- Another stage property that he [Cooper] pulled out of his box pretty frequently was his broken twig. He prized his broken twig above all the rest of his effects and worked it the hardest. It is a restful chapter in any book of his when somebody doesn't step on a dry twig and alarm all the reds and whites for two hundred yards around... there may be a hundred handier things to step on, but that wouldn't satisfy Cooper... In-fact the Leather-Stocking series ought to have been called the Broken Twig Series.

The incessant reference to the "broken twig" which Twain condemns can, in fact, be seen as a symbolic destruction of the forest along with innocence which is why Cooper harps on it. Cooper's disapproval of modernism and metropolitan life is aptly portrayed in Natty-Bumpo's love and attachment to the forest. The forest and the wilderness symbolically represent innocence and simplicity which are being destroyed in preference for cosmopolitan life and experience with its attendant corruption and crass materialism.



## MELVILLE'S SEASCAPE AND THE CONCEPT OF HUMAN NATURE

In his introduction to Hawthorne's short stories titled *Mosses from an old Manse*, Hermann Melville (1850) observes about the book *Moby Dick* which he was writing at hand "you must have plenty of sea room to tell the truth in" which statement immediately situates Melville with the familiar and attractive vast seascape which he aptly utilizes, like Cooper's wilderness, to comment on human nature and the unlimited possibilities of the human mind. If Shakespeare created the characters of Iago and Shylock, Marlowe that of Barabbas to enable them examine the human propensity for evil and villainy, Melville goes even further in this venture to utilize the vastness of the sea as symbolically representative of the limitless human capacity to contain and unleash evil. Melville's bosom friend and also profound American author, Nathaniel Hawthorne, in his *The Scarlet Letter*, *The Minister's Black Veil* and *Young Goodman Brown* is equally obsessed with the nature and essence of evil and man's incapacity to penetrate the recesses of the human psyche. (Ganyi 2013). Melville's land and seascapes are both real and imaginary. In *Typee*, *Omoo*, *Redburn* and *White-Jacket*, he relies on the physical experiences gained from sea voyages he personally undertook and which enrich his imagination and sustain the narratives' strength of realistic portrayal of seascape and character delineation. The richness of the works, therefore, derives from personal observation which Melville achieves through a good blend of romance and realism attractive to his American audience. Richard Chase (1962) observes that Melville

- Was not a fictional inventor; particularly the voyage books including *Moby Dick* depend a good deal on Melville's own experiences of knocking around the world as a Sailor... for the voyage in the South Seas did as much to give Melville's imagination its essential form as did the Mississippi river Mark Twain's imagination or the "International scene," Henry James' imagination.

*Mardi*, however, is a product of an imaginary landscape which is symbolic of perfection after which humanity, including Melville himself, yearns for but which is very elusive or unattainable. Richard Chase posits that the artlessness of *Mardi* nearly costs Melville his literary reputation which was gained through his early works that utilized seascapes. Says Chase, "but when he moves out of the sea to *Mardi* and *Pierre*, his reputation becomes blurred." The realism that Melville achieves in his novels therefore derives first from the strong influence of the South Seas to which he was well acquainted and secondly from his powerful imagination. The vastness of the sea and its impenetrable and unfathomable depths thus symbolically represents the unexplainable recesses of the human mind. Land becomes too narrow for this exploration and so Melville relocates Ahab to the sea and its vast expanse of water to attempt to expand the human potential for evil. Melville is not alone in this as Cooper also locates his action on the seas and the vast wilderness which land and seascapes provide the writers with ample canvas to paint a picture of the limitless capacity of man for both good and evil as well as the capacity of nature to contain **the good** and **the evil**. Though *Mardi* is not considered a great artistic success, it nevertheless took a toll on Melville's intellectual exploration of the human psychic essence and led Newton Arvin (1962) to assert that *Mardi* was written

- At the cost of a heavy drain on Melville's psychological resources, and he was not yet ready to move on to another effort of comparable scope and difficulty.

But Melville vigorously returns to seascape once more in *Redburn* and *White-Jacket* as in *Typee* and *Omoo* before them, all of which deal with sea voyages of adventure attractive to his American readership of the period. What Melville sought for in his works was a tranquil transcendental truth and quietude, which, like all other romantic transcendentalists – Margaret Fuller, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau etc. he assumed existed but which Melville later discovers was unattainable leading to his pessimism about human progress. Seascape becomes Melville's canvas for the exploration of the essence of human existence but the inability to arrive at a fulfillment in this quest turns him, together with his friend Hawthorne to dangerous "skeptics" and writers who have been described as "dark romantics" (Gibson and Arms, 1962; Fogle Harter, 1964) who developed a contemptuous and angry attitude towards human failures and endemic ineptitude. Arvin again posits that

- What he [Melville] rejects is not the profounder moralities of democracy... but a cluster of delusions and inessentials that, as he felt, had got themselves entangled with the idea of democracy in American minds; the delusion that political and social freedom is an ultimate good, however empty of content;... that physical and moral evil are rapidly receding before the footsteps of progress.

Melville's disagreement and pessimism about these beliefs and concepts stem from his discontent with debase humanity and led him to assert that "evil is the chronic malady of the universe." On his anti-transcendentalist disposition, Arvin avers

- Melville saw no such tendency in nature or history; on the contrary he had failed to find in nature any warrant for the aspirations of humanity... and he had failed to find in history – or in his own experience – any warrant for a belief in human perfectibility.

To explore these human tendencies or failures, Melville turns to space and seascape that offer limitless opportunities for the interpretation of the concept of the new or unknown world. Land and Seascape become a dominant feature of 19<sup>th</sup> century American writing and its influence on the imagination is well romanticized but

not to the exclusion of pessimism in human affairs. Because of his pessimism within the backdrop of the general romantic optimism of the era, Richard Chase (1962) again argues that Melville, unable to convince himself of human progress only achieves a midpoint in the American literary imagination when he balances transcendental optimism with his insistence on a vision of the “dark side of the American imagination.” Says Chase

- The confident “Yea” of Whitman and the transcendentalists has always been balanced by the skeptical “Nay” of the darker imagination.

Melville seems to be very aware of this in himself and in his friend Hawthorne when speaking of Hawthorne’s work he asserts

- He [Hawthorne] says No! in thunder; but the devil himself cannot make him say yes. For all men who say yes lie.

The last sentence “for all men who say yes lie,” sums up Melville’s own conviction about human frailty and inadequacy which prevent man from achieving the ideal perfection desirable in life. Land and seascape, real or imagined become the major determinant of the 19<sup>th</sup> century American literary output. While Cooper penetrates the wilderness with his Natty-Bumpo, Melville and Twain rely on the seas and rivers of America, while Whitman symbolically utilizes the imagery of “leaves of grass,” within the backdrop of nature and the environment to bring out the effect of natural setting on the imagination as he presents the picture of the ideal American in his *Democratic Vistas* (1871). In their writing therefore, we tend to see Melville and Hawthorne as complementing each other in their quest for truth in human life. Their pessimism enables us to view the dark and limitless possibilities of the human mind but while Hawthorne and Cooper rely on land and the forest in the developing cosmopolitan American environment, Melville predominantly depends on his own factual experiences at sea, colored by his imagination, to also make the same observations about humanity’s imperfection which culminates in his creation of Ismael, the only character in *Moby Dick*, who is the repository of the infallible truth about human nature and its undependability and through whose imagination we perceive the conflicts in Melville’s conception of universal humanity.

#### **MARK TWAIN AND THE MISSISSIPPI: THE MAKING OF A LITERARY IMAGINATION**

Samuel Clemens or Mark Twain as he was pseudonymously known started his literary career with his preoccupation with the West and the tall tales that were characteristic of the mining district to which many Americans were attracted in the quest to acquire material wealth. Twain’s boyhood, we learn, had been spent in Hannibal, Missouri on the Mississippi river. The river thus becomes the major influence on the shaping of this famous writer’s imagination and artistic development. His vision of the American environment is inevitably tied to and moderated by his experiences of the American seascape. As a young steam boat pilot on the Mississippi, his experiences, no doubt, were imaginatively utilized and translated into the writer’s vision of his society and its operations and aspirations. To this extent, Twain’s first novel, *The Gilded Age* (1873) was an assertion of his vision and a subtle satire of the boom times of the post-civil war years of flamboyance and unbridled ostentatious living. It, therefore, gives us a clue of the writer’s leanings and his preference for the ordinary people. His boyhood reminiscences in Hannibal helped inform his imagination in the writing of “Child” perceptions of the American environment in *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (1876) and *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884), works that in no small way have aided the perception of America in the outside world. Also, his experiences as a steam boat pilot on the Mississippi are vastly utilized in *Life on the Mississippi* (1883), a novel that portrays the mannerisms of the ordinary people and their habits and local dialects. Against the background of his love for the countryside, Twain’s literary imagination was characterized by sharp and serious criticism of societal injustice and human folly. A reading of *The Man that corrupted Hadleyburg* (1900) and *To the Person sitting in Darkness* (1901) places Twain on the same pessimistic pedestal as Melville and Hawthorne in their obsession with debase humanity and loss of confidence in human progress and development. Twain’s achievement as a writer, therefore, thrives on his effective utilization of local or regional character which is sustained by his personal experiences with seascape. Most of his characters are either children or lowly locals who serve as vernacular spokesmen and counterpoint in the deflation of the bloated values of American cosmopolitan culture. *Huckleberry Finn* is acclaimed as a masterpiece of American literature in its mastery of dialect and its presentation of simplicity and innocence alongside experience and corruption as well as the artful medley of a romantic and realistic imagination, all of which are united in the journey on the river which serves as a unifying influence. On the other hand, *The adventures of Tom Sawyer*, though initially rejected as corruptive also derives from the same seascape experiences and together with *Huckleberry Finn* and *Life on the Mississippi*, they have shaped Universal views of American society and played an inestimable part in the development of the American literary imagination. In all these works, Twain displays “profound insight in the utilization of American material” particularly local dialect which aids the establishment of a regional character in American literature and influenced many generations of literary production in America. Wyck and Otto Bettman speak of Twain in glowing terms as having made

- The Mississippi a focus of the National mind... through him this greatest of American rivers became a

dwelling place of light, one of the enchanted countries of the imagination, a world, uncolonized hitherto, where the mind had never been at home and where henceforth it was always happy to rest. Like Cooper's *Leather-Stocking Tales*, Twain's works were imaginative recreations of frontier life and culture presented in an untainted reality devoid of sentimental and false reportage that was characteristic of American tourist views about Europe. In this, Twain broke America's attachment to a European literary tradition and provided grounds, like Fenimore Cooper did, for the flourishing of a new American literary identity. His *Adventures of Tom Sawyer* and *Huckleberry Finn*, as earlier observed, will then provide the base for a new American literature which was broader and more national in outlook than the writings of the predecessors that adopted the form and style of Europe. Ernest Hemingway was to remark later that "all modern American literature comes from *Huckleberry Finn*" thus portraying the debt he and many other American writers owed Mark Twain. Furthermore, Brooks and Bettman described Twain as

- The frontier story-teller, the great folk writer of the American West, and he raised to a pitch, unrivaled before him, the art of oral story-telling and then succeeded in transferring its effects to paper.

And like most Americans before and after him, Brooks and Bettman conclude

- Twain was a symbol of the New American, fresh, arresting, ebullient; his tastes, feelings and interests expressed those of the nation.

Also, in her preview of Twain, Nina Baym, the general editor of *The Norton Anthology of American Literature* evokes the overriding influence of the Mississippi seascape on Twain as she writes

- It will be hard to exaggerate how deep the rich material of Twain's Mississippi boyhood ran in his memory and imagination. To get to it, Twain had in effect, to work chronologically backward and psychically inward....

The influence of seascape therefore allows Twain to present fascinating scenes which his imagination and experience work on to provide us with a vivid picture of the river and its surrounding environment which we see in *The adventures of Tom Sawyer* and which are recorded by Nina Baym in her observation that

- In this work... he evokes not only "the great Mississippi, the majestic, the magnificent Mississippi rolling its mile-wide tide along, shining in the sun," but also his most intimate ties to the life on its surface and shores.

The same seascape influence is powerfully felt in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* within which Twain's artistry and love for the common folk are portrayed in

- Its unpretentious, colloquial, yet poetic style, its wide-ranging humor, its embodiment of the enduring and the widely shared dream of innocence and freedom, and its recording of a vanished way of life in the pre-civil war Mississippi valley have instructed and moved people of all ages and conditions all over the world.

## CONCLUSION

Because of their strong reliance on land and seascapes, and, to a very large extent, their realistic presentation of material, these writers, along with Nathaniel Hawthorne and Edgar Allan Poe, have been accused of not being versed in the art of fiction writing in the tradition of Henry James. Each of them is considered a failure in terms of artistic excellence yet their greatest legacy and achievement is recognized in their provision of an American literary identity unique and derived from an ardent reliance on American land and seascapes. Their imagination was very strongly fertilized by their defiant reliance on the façade of the land and seascapes they created and were familiar with through their personal experiences. They are, therefore, eulogized as writers of romance narratives but with flat and undeveloped characters; yet theirs was a new tradition that awaited its flowering in writers like Scott Fitzgerald, Ernest Hemingway, William Faulkner and other 20<sup>th</sup> century American writers. In all of their writings, the invaluable influence of land and seascapes on their imagination is unmistakably present and has helped in no small measure in the molding of the patriotic consciousness of these writers in an environment that required their vision to bring it to fruition and the fulfillment of the "American dream." Furthermore, it is worthy of note that their strong reliance on land and seascapes to comment on human life affords them the opportunity to achieve a very high degree of realism in their writings. They used land and seascapes that situate their characters within and among the ordinary people, the common folk. Twain's reliance on colloquial and vernacular speech forms is outstanding in this vein. His creation of characters drawn from among the ordinary folk or ordinary walks of life known to him as well as the simple language he uses in his river or boy narratives set the atmosphere for the development of a truly American style and literary consciousness. To these writers, landscape i.e. the plains, the trees, the flowers and rocks and seascape i.e. the rivers, the bays, the brooks of America represented the perfection and fullness of God in nature untouched by man. Landscape or seascape was therefore the metaphor of idealism representing the innocence of primordial man in the wilds as opposed to the aristocratic civilization and ideals of industrialization. As a final modernist view of landscape influence on American literature Annie Proulx (2008) concludes that

- Beyond the tangible landscape lies another which is perceived rather than seen, a landscape in which all

of preceding time continues to exist.

This is the American literary landscape, conditioned and actualized by the physical and tangible land and seascapes seen from the imagination of these great writers. Modern America lives in the consciousness of contemporary American literary artists who have depended extensively on the style and vision of their predecessors to create a new genre, *The Midwestern Pastoral*, which is a kind of romantic imagination of the wilderness in the midst of modernization. Among the best of these writers are outstanding modernist American literary artists like Willa Cather, Aldo Leopold, Theodore Roethke, Jim Harrison and James Wright whose environmental relevance Stephen Trout recognizes when he posits that

- For these writers, the aim of writing is not merely intellectual and aesthetic, but democratic and ecological. In depicting and promoting commitment to local communities, human and natural, they express their love for, their understanding of, and their sense of place in the American Midwest. Students and serious readers, as well as scholars in the growing field of literature and the environment, will appreciate this study of writers who counter alienation and materialism in modern society.

These writer's vision and imagination is catalyzed and sustained by the land and seascape influences reflected in the imagination of the originators, Cooper, Melville and Twain who set the pace and dictated the mode of expression.

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