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Rowing in Eden: Waterscapes in 19th Century American Art and Literature

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In American nineteenth century landscape painting there are a number of representations of lakes, rivers and scenes of rowing. In many early Hudson River School waterscapes scenes of rowing often portray an Edenic state, a situation of dreamlike inaction, timelessness and meditation. Toward the end of the century and well into the twentieth, rowing scenes rarely depict dramatic events, but when they do, it is often one of quest and self-expression, experienced against a background of symbolic or real death. But also these latter scenes tend towards an original ideal equilibrium, a frozen instant in time, rather than emphasizing movement and flux.

Pictures of lakes and rowing carry a particular meaning and importance in American culture mainly because of a relatively recent frontier or wilderness history in which the canoe and the rowboat played an important role on the many lakes and waterways and, secondly, because of the impact of Transcendentalism around the middle of the nineteenth century. This background of actual wilderness and people's romantic and religious ideas about it may have contributed to a particular kind of painting, *luminism*, in which man's relationship with water plays a particularly important role. The forms and conventions of the romantic transcendentalist-luminist landscapes provided models which were continued into the period of realism and further provided the imagery and mythology of landscape experience, in which rowing has a prominent place, in early twentieth century American culture.

In European myth, history, and literature, rowing a boat has often strong heroic and romantic connotations. Heroes like Ulysses, homeward bound from Troy, or the Norse Vikings would row their ships and boats in search of adventure and fame, engage in naval battle or suffer dramatic shipwreclts. Even from the ranks of galley slaves there would, in later times, come literary heroes like Jean Valjean or Ben Hur. In Romantic literature boating and rowing scenes occupy a prominent place. The Rhine and Lake Leman were favorite haunts for Byron's romantic heroes and Wordsworth praised the tranquility of the Lake District. Romantic love scenes, particularly in eighteenth and nineteenth century European painting or literature, could hardly be placed in a more romantic setting than when the artist put the elegantly dressed young couple in a rowboat or a punt on some pond or river surrounded by appropriate water lilies and the inevitable weeping willows along the banks. In the twentieth century the situation had become a popular stereotype and was, and still is, endlessly repeated in films and pulp fiction.

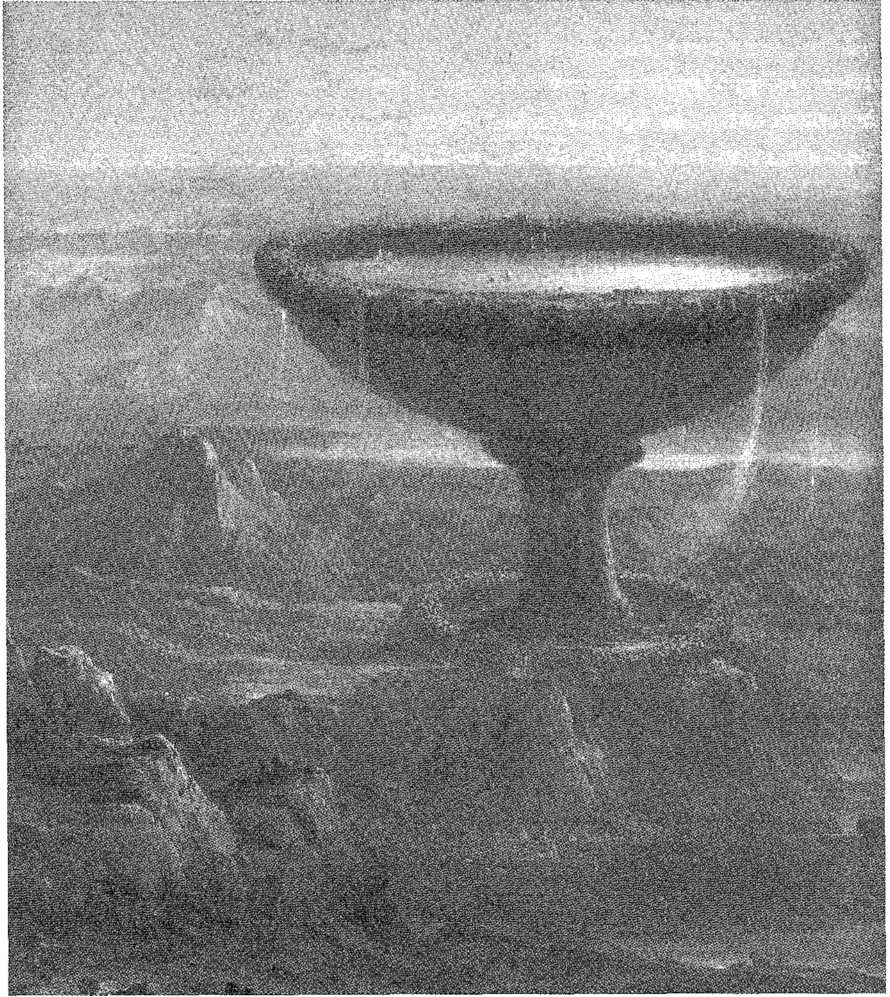
In the exploration and settlement of North America the native birch canoe and the rowboat obviously came to serve a very important practical function. In America the rower heroes were the native Americans, the trappers and fur traders, the *coureurs de bois,* the explorers of new land like Sieur La Salle, Meriwether Lewis and William Clark. Even the arrival of new technology like the steam boat belching smoke along the Mississippi inspired Mark Twain to write his praise of the beauty of the mighty river and its true hero, namely the river boat pilot. The European romantic scenes involving some boating on well-groomed ponds or along flowery river banks were certainly duplicated in America too, but they were mainly considered anomalous in the context of the American wilderness.

However, European colonists and immigrants carried the conventions of romantic boating with them, and the artists inevitably recast the American landscape within the conventions and requirements of European academic and allegorical art. The painter Thomas Cole (1801-48) provides an example of such efforts to restructure the virgin landscapes of America within the conventions of baroque claudian (Claude Lorraine, 1600-82) landscapes. The theme of the voyage on "the river of life" is an dld motif which Cole uses in his The *Voyage of Life* (1839) series. In *Childhood,* the first of four allegorical scenes, a small

boat carrying a child and its guardian angel issues from a circular opening of a cave. In Youth the young man in his boat sets out from the shore and in Manhood his boat is tossed about in a storm-filled scene. In the last scene, Old Age, an old man sits in the wreck of a boat. The angel flies ahead to lead the way across calm waters to the reward that lies beyond. The Voyage of Life exploits the obvious allegorical parallels between river and life. But the river has also another function, namely as an essential part of the Edenic landscape because, in the Biblical story, the river is the source of life and fertility: "There was a river flowing from Eden to water the garden, and from there it branched into four streams (Genesis 2.10)." The boat on the river may therefore represent a refuge, a temporary Eden separated from the land just like Huckleberry Finn and Jim on their raft are separated from the fallen and corrupt society on both banks of the Mississippi. And the water itself, liquid, limpid and mirrorlike, takes on a spiritual significance.

In The Titan's Goblet (1833) Cole has created a curious allegorical and surrealist picture showing a gigantic drinking vessel resting on the surface of the earth. The landscape on which the goblet rests is stony, dark and dramatic like on the first day of creation. The goblet contains a lake on which boats are sailing, and around the rim of the lake a civilization seems to be thriving. The goblet contains an Edenic pastoral lake landscape which contrasts sharply with the craggy and barren scenery around it. In romantic thought this rugged kind of landscape may illustrate Edmund Burke's definition of the term sublime[1]. In another painting by Thomas Cole, The Expulsionfrom the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve are seen leaving fearfully a sunny paradise to enter a dark, terrifying, stony landscape. The relationship between the two types of landscapes, the pastoral and the sublime in The Expulsion is much the same as in The Goblet. Eden is a pastoral scene with human dimensions, whereas the fallen world outside is one of immense mountains and cliffs

1 Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful (1757).*"The passion caused by the great and sublime in nature, when those causes operate most powerfully, is Astonishment; and astonishment is the state of the soul, in which all its motions are suspended, with some degree of horror. In this case the mind is so entirely filled with its object, that it cannot entertain any other, nor by consequence reason on that object which employs it. Hence arises the great power of the sublime, that far from being produced by them, it anticipates our reasonings, and hurries us on by an irresistable force."



Thomas Cole, The *Titan's Goblet* (1833), oil on canvas, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

in which the human figure disappears. "In terms of romantic art theory," comments art historian Jules David Prown, "they (Adam and Eve) were moving from the Beautiful to the Sublime."[2]

2 Jules David Prown, *American Painting. From the Beginning to the Armory Show (London:* Macmillan, 1980), **p.** 67.

Both the *Voyages of Life* series and *The Titan's Goblet* seem to give particular emphasis to the river and the lake as essentially allegorical elements of landscapes. In *The Goblet* the lake is elevated and exalted above the chaos of a dramatic mountain landscape below. In fact it points towards Henry David Thoreau's use of Walden Pond as a focal point in his attempt to regain a lost paradise.

In early nineteenth century American art a romantic landscape with lakes and water courses would often include a lone figure who would be contemplating a lake in the wilderness, as in the painting *In Nature's Wonderland* from *1835* by Thomas Doughty, one of the first American artists to devote himself to landscape. The scene is a wilderness with a lake in the center against a background of steep mountain cliffs. A single, small figure of a man, placed in the middle ground, is looking out over the lake. The painting contains many of the romantic notions of landscape that had already become stereotypes. The picture exemplifies also a convention in both painting and photography that has been called "the divided landscape" which means a juxtaposition of the pastoral and the sublime elements. As in *The Titan's Goblet,* the pastoral part of the picture is gardenlike, though uncultivated, but certainly fit for people to inhabit, whereas the sublime part of the landscape in the background, is one of precipitous mountains and cliffs, normally inaccessible and inhospitable to man.

Doughty's *In Nature's Wonderland* was painted by a Philadelphmn at a time when he was living in New England, about 20 years before Thoreau published *Walden.* The lake is the central image and symbol in Thoreau's *Walden* and an object for romantic and transcendentalist contemplation. "A lake is the landscape's most beautiful and expressive feature. It is the earth's eye; looking into which the beholder measures the depth of his own nature."[3] Thoreau might not have considered the measurements which he painstakingly made of the extent and depth of Walden Pond as exact measures of his own mind, but metaphorically the pond represents the human spirit. Thoreau describes it as having no outlet or inlet, it is fed by underground springs. The pond has clear anthropomorphic features. "The fluviatile trees next to the shore are slender eyelashes which fringe

3 H. D. Thoreau, *Walden and Civil Disobedience* (New York: Norton Critical Edn., 1966), p. 125.

it, and the wooded hills and cliffs are its overhanging brows."[4] He even bursts into poetry when attempting to identify with the pond:

> ...
> I am its stony shore,
> And the breeze that passes o'er;
> In the hollow of my hand
> Are its water and its sand.
> And its deepest resort
> Lies high in my thought.[5]

Thoreau even likes to think that Walden predates the Fall: "Perhaps on that spring morning when Adam and Eve were driven out of Eden Walden Pond was already in existence ..."

> In such a day, in September or October, Walden is a perfect forest minor, set round with stones as precious to my eye as if fewer or rarer. Nothing so fair and pure, and at the same time so large, as a lake, lies on the surface on the earth. Sky water. It needs no fence. Nations come and go without defiling it. It is a mirror which no stone can crack, whose quicksilver will never wear off, whose gilding Nature continually repairs; no storms, no dust, can dim its surface ever fresh; – a mirror in which all impurity presented to it sinks, swept and dusted by the sun's hazy brush, – this the light dust-cloth, – which retains no breath that is breathed on it, but sends its own to float as clouds high above its surface, and be reflected in its bosom still.[6]

Thoreau seems to have been attracted to lakes and rivers throughout his entire literary career. Apart from living on Walden Pond and writing about it, the other places he explored and wrote about were the Concord and Merrimack Rivers (A *Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers,* 1849) in addition to Maine and Cape Cod.

Thoreau's spiritualized Walden Pond and Melville's statement in *Moby-Dick* that "meditation and water are wedded forever" can be used as an appropriate gloss on much of luminist landscape and seascape painting in America from the 1840s into the 1860s. In American cultural history luminism in painting coincides with Transcendentalism and the two modes are clearly related. As Barbara Novak states,

4 *Loc.cit.*
5 *Ibid.,p. 130.*
6 *Ibid.,p. 126.*

> In the-mid-nineteenth century, the luminist vision lent itself to works that were of a piece with the most profound philosophic and literary developments of the time. For the luminist looked at nature as Emerson did, "with a supernatural eye," and with a clarity that was for Thoreau "as if I touched the wires of a battery." In a luminist landscape, nature is presented on a smooth mirror-like surface that shows barely a trace of the artistic hand. In removing his presence from the painting, the artist acts as a clarifying lens, allowing the spectator to confront the image more directly and immediately. Perhaps because of the absence of stroke, time stops, and the moment is locked in place – locked even more by a strong horizontal organization, by an almost mathematical ordering of planes in space parallel to the picture surface, and by deliberately aligned vertical and occasional diagonal accents.[7]

The intense realism of the luminists males the landscapes and the objects in them appear to be charged with a strong inner light or force or meaning. Luminism is, as the name indicates, the art of painting the light. Emerson maintained that "light is the first of painters"[8] and light was also the reappearance of the original soul. Quoting Emerson, Novak says about one of the luminists, Fitz Hugh Lane (1804-65), that he created a "celestial geometry" and "turned the world to glass."[9] And what could be more glassy to paint than water? Lane's art, Novak writes, "is perhaps the closest parallel to Emerson's Transcendentalism that America produced: of all the painters of the mid-century, he was the most 'transparent eyeball'."[10]

George Caleb Bingham moved the subject-matter of luminism west and his famous *Fur Traders Descending the Missouri* (1845) is cited by Novak as "one of the finest examples of luminist classicism"[11] and the painting now, in the twentieth century, comes close to being considered an American icon. It is frequently referred to, reproduced and used on book covers. Novak describes the elements, structure and composition of the picture as consisting of

> ... the ripples in the water extending parallel horizontal accents and stepping planar distinctions back in space. The boat is trapped, as it were, in a block of glass in which reflections serve as only slightly hazed bilateral anchors to maintain the image in time

7 Barbara Novak, *American Painting of the 19th Century* (New York: Praeger Publ., 1969), p. 97.

8 Emerson, *Nature,* Chapter III: "Beauty."

9 Emerson, *The Poet:* "As the eyes of Lyncaeus were said to see through the earth, so the poet turns the world to glass, and shows us all things in their right series and procession."

10 Novak, *American Painting of the 19th Century* (New York: Praeger Publ., 1969), p. 110.

11 *Ibid.,* p. 105.

George Caleb Bingham, *Fur Traders Descending the Missouri* (1845), oil on canvas, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

> and space. As in many luminist paintings, the light emanating from the core of the picture becomes palpable, uniting matter and spirit in a single image, and reaffirming a planar organization that is further fortified by the strong geometric angularities of the figures themselves.[12]

If one examines the picture from a practical point of view one may wonder whether the painter has not got the proportions wrong. Is not the bulky load of hides and furs too big in relation to the size of the dugout? In addition to its cargo the canoe also carries the two men and a chained animal in the prow. From a social point of view we may assume that the relationship between the two men is one of partners in the business of trapping and trading furs. Maurice Block notes that Bingham might have been inspired by Washington Irving's book, *Astoria* from 1836, which

12 *Ibid.*, p. 105-106

was based mainly on the records of the American Fur Company, made available to him by John Jacob Astor.[13]

There is also a psychological tension in the picture between the suspicious stare of the old fur trader and the reverie of his sprawling companion. The old man may be seeing something outside the picture which worries him. The tied animal (is it a bear cub, a fox or a lynx?) on board the canoe adds to the somewhat enigmatic psychological and social situation. Since one of the men is clearly much older than the other, we may have a family relationship of father (French fur trader?) and son. Still, the young man's physiognomy is quite different from that of the older man. His hair is also straight and black. Since trappers and mountain men often lived with Indian women one may suspect that the young man could be a half Indian whom the older fur trader could have fathered with an Indian squaw. This impression is strengthened by the objects which can be seen lying on the heap of furs in the canoe, namely an Indian-looking pouch, a belt, and a freshly killed duck. And our suspicions are confirmed by the fact that the picture was purchased by the American Art-Union in New York under the title "French Trader & Halfbreed Son" in 1845.[14]

Fur Traders has an interesting parallel in a work by Charles Deas (1818-67) called *The Voyageurs* or *The Trapper and His Family* [15] the former painted in the same year (1845) as Bingham's *Fur Traders. The Voyageurs* shows a family on board a canoe moving upstream on a river. Born in Philadelphia in 1818, Charles Deas went to New York in order to become an artist, and there he saw George Catlin's Indian Gallery, shown in 1837-39. The writings of James Fenimore Cooper and Washington Irving inspired him to go west. He settled in St. Louis in 1841 and in 1844 he traveled with Major Clifton Wharton's expedition to the Pawnee settlements on the Platte River. Deas left St. Louis in 1847. His picture clearly shows a family where the father is a white man (French voyageur)

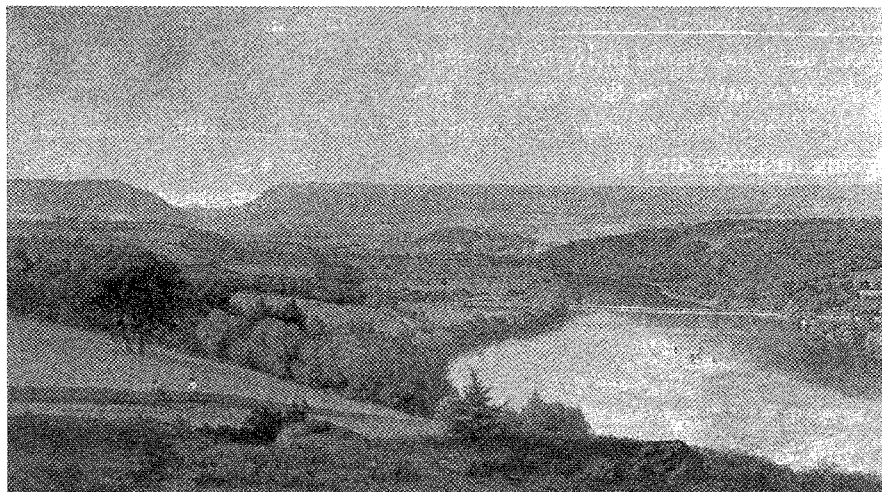
13 E. Maurice Block, *George Caleb Biizgham. The Evolution of an Artist* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of Califirnia Press, 1967), p. 80.

14 See John Francis McDermott, *George Caleb Bingham. River Portraitist,* (Norman: Univ. of Olclahoma Press,1959), p. 50.

15 There are at least two versions of the picture: *The Voyageurs* is oil on canvas (31 112 x 36), Rockeby Collection; on loan to the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. *The Trapper and His Family* is a watercolor on paper (13 318 x 19 112) at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

and his wife an Indian woman. The eldest son in the prow helps push the canoe upstream while the eldest daughter helps her father row in the stern. The mother looks after the two smaller children in the middle of the craft. The water reflects the harmony of the family situation while the wilderness appears menacing in the background. As in Bingham's *Fur Traders* two of the characters look apprehensively at the spectator in front of the picture.

From an iconological point of view these pictures come out of a particular cultural context like any other "text," and if meaning is to be found in a complex totality, an interpretation must necessarily also include the psychological, social, and cultural situation as well. Bingham can also be classified as a genre painter, i. e., portraying scenes from contemporary daily life, and many of his paintings depict social and political events like *The County Election.* However, he seems to have had a fondness for and interest in the small isolated social group, and, like Mark Twain, he found them on board the boats and rafts on the Mississippi. In his paintings of raftsmen on the Mississippi like *Raftsmen Playing Cards* (1847) and *The Jolly Flatboatmen* (1846-48) we have examples of small closed societies in which human virtues and vices can sometimes become magnified and condensed.



George Innes, *Delaware Water Gap* (1857), oil on canvas, James Maroney, New York.

From a formal point of view, *Fur Traders Descending the Missouri* shows Bingham as very conscious artist who uses color, lines, mass, symmetries and balance in a classical manner to achieve the harmony in a design. A painting which combines all the classical formal elements of luminism with rafting on the river and in addition accommodates the new intruder into the pastoral Eden, namely the Iron Horse, is George Innes' the *Delaware Water Gap* (1857). *Water Gap* is a landscape from the Delaware River just north of today's Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. The picture is a bird's-eye-view of the river landscape where, in the middle foreground there are two harvesters moving to the left in the picture while mowing the wheat with their scythes. Parallel in the background we can see a railroad bridge across the river and the smoke from the locomotive hauling a train along a railroad track placed in the golden section in the picture. Off center to the right, in the middle of the river, there is a timber raft with some tiny figures of men on it. The raft seems to be moving down the river toward the spectator, while the harvesters and the train are moving out of the picture. It is the raft more than any other element that captures the viewer's attention. The raft appears to be motionless, separated from the rest of the landscape and the human activity that goes on here, but still an integral part of it. Like the two trappers in Bingham's picture the people on board the raft are both observers and actors in the pastoral harmony, which also includes the pastoralized railroad.

The views and conventions of luminism-transcendentalism continued well into the 1870s, but by then new times after the Civil War marked by industrial expansion and new impulses from Europe, produced the literary and artistic program of realism. Thomas Eakins may be considered as the outstanding realist in American painting from the 1870s to the turn of the century. His studies of human locomotion and use of photographic shots to freeze the instant in a flow of motion show his scientific approach to capturing "reality." The image of the rower on the water, however, continued to haunt the artist, and Eakins did not escape its spell. One of his most famous pictures, commonly classified as "realist," is *Max Schmitt in a Single Scull* (1871).[16] The painting provides an illustration of the meeting between transcendentalist and realistic

16 The original title of the painting appears to have been *The Champion Single Sculls.* See Helen A. Cooper, ed., *Thomas Eakins The Rowing Pictures* (New Haven: Yale University Art Gallery, 1997), p. 22.

Thomas Eakins, **Max** Schmitt in *a* Single Scull (1871), oil on canvas, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

modes in that particular rowing scene. Barbara Novak describes the picture as continuing "luminism's attitude to time. Being has not yet given way to becoming, though luminist anonymity has been displaced by a more obvious painterly process that quietly establishes the artist as intermediary between the work of art and the spectator."[17]

Comparing Eakins' picture to Bingham's *Trappers* we observe the same luminosity of the water, the darker mass of foliage in the background, the rower resting on the oars and observing something or somebody outside the picture. The same parallel ripples divide up the surface of the water. However, Eakins' rower is not a hunter, not immersed in nature, but a sportsman and a competitor who is practicing for the next boat race. In the background, parallel to the boat, is again the railroad bridge suggesting speed, mechanism and power. The picture is a remarkable combination of the quietism of a luminist-transcendentalist

17 Barbara Novak, *American Painting of the 19th Century* (New York: Praeger Publ., 1969), p. 193

scene with the speed and competitiveness of a new mechanical age in which the fittest will prevail. The picture suggests a very temporary Eden, which soon will explode into energy and action and is therefore a perfect but precarious reconciliation between a timeless state of being and a period in which time was to become a precious commodity.

In America, rowing had very seldom been associated with upper-class leisure and pastime. It was linked to the wilderness, the thousand lakes and rivers that made the West accessible by canoe and boat for the hunter, the explorer and the trader. However, toward the end of the nineteenth century, people could start to treat fishing and hunting as holiday activities because now very few people depended on them for a living. In the words of Robert Hughes, "[This was] the cultural moment when the religious Wilderness of the nineteenth century, the church of nature, was shifting into the secular Outdoors, the theater of manly enjoyment. ... Thoreau's America [was] turning into Teddy Roosevelt's."[18] Fishing or shooting from a boat had become a very different situation from the one depicted in Bingham's *Fur Traders.* Arcadia was now being invaded by holiday makers with rods and guns.

The development in pictures showing fishing and hunting scenes from luminism to realism can best be observed in William Sidney Mount's *Eel Spearing at Setauket* from *1845. Eel Spearing* is executed in the manner of luminist painting with limpid surfaces, the perfect reflection of landscape in the lake and figures frozen in an instant of time. The two figures, a black woman and a white boy, stare intently into the water in order to see where the eels are. The woman is holding a spearing fork lifted up in her hand aiming for eels that we may assume are to be seen at the bottom of the lake. The boy is holding the boat steady to enable her to take accurate aim. They are evidently spotting something under the glassy surface which we, the spectators, do not see.

The same strong triangular composition of spear, oar and figures can also be observed in Thomas Eakins's *Will Schuster and Blackman Going Shooting for Rail* (1876).[19] In this picture a black man punts the boat with

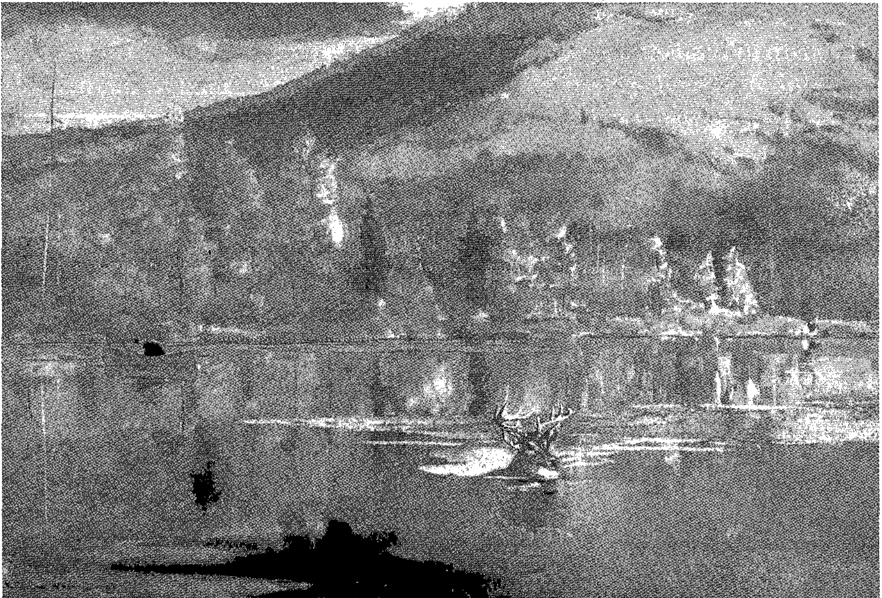
18 Robert Hughes, "Into Arcadia with Rod and Gun," *Time,* May 5, 1986, p. 58.

19 This title seems to originate from the 1930s. The original title appears to have been *Rail Shooting.* (See Helen A. Cooper, ed., *Thomas Eakins The Rowing Pictures* (New Haven: Yale University Art Gallery, 1997), footnote p. 132.

a pole and a white hunter takes aim with his gun at some birds that they have scared up. The picture is not one of quietude, but of intense mental concentration and anticipation. The black man's knees are slightly bent in his effort to hold the boat steady. The least twitch will throw the gun out of line. The hammer is back and all attention is focused on the unseen target to the left. The puff of green foliage behind the gun anticipates the blast of the gun.

The difference between Mount's *Eel Spearing* and Bingham's *Fur Traders* on the one hand and Eakins's picture on the other is basically one of action and drama. In the luminist paintings balance and complete harmony between landscape and figure is the keynote, whereas in the realist world of Eakins it is concentration and action, which also include potential killing and death.

Winslow Homer is probably the greatest American artist of portraying the outdoors in the era of realism. His watercolors reveal the blend of luminist celebration of natural beauty in, for example, *An October* Day



Winslow Homer, An *October* Day (1889), watercolor, Sterling and Francine Clark Institute, Williamstown, Mass.

(1889) which shows a kind of Walden Pond in the Adirondacks in blazing fall colors. There is the head of a stag swimming in the middle of the lake, and in the background one can see a boat rowed by a hunter homing in on its prey. In a companion picture, *Sketch for Hound and Hunter* (1892), the hunter, who is alone in his boat, has reached the animal, lulled it and is desperately trying to get a rope round the stag's antlers before the corpse sinks. The beauty of the scene has turned into death; to quote Emily Dickinson, it shows "the glee – glace – in Death's – stiff – stare."[20]

Homer's pictures of the outdoors have a strong affinity with Hemingway's stories from the Upper Michigan woods. The boy in *Sketch for Hound and Hunter* may be seen as a kind of Nick Adams whose experience becomes a part of his initiation and education as a man. Hemingway's "Indian Camp" has some of the overtones of luminist stillness, and in the concluding rowing scene the young boy tries to come to terms with the drama and tragedy that he has experienced during the night.

> They were seated in the boat, Nick in the stern, his father rowing. The sun was coming up over the hills. A bass jumped; making a circle in the water. Nick trailed his hand in the water. It felt warm in the sharp chill of the morning.
>
> In the early morning on the lake sitting in the stern of his boat with his father rowing, he felt quite sure that he would never die.

The scene is again reminiscent of Bingham's *Fur Trappers.* Father and son are hunters temporarily in a canoe or boat, but artistically experiencing a timeless golden moment. The beginning of Hemingway's story also has the mythological overtones of the fate of the dead crossing the River Styx into Hades. Appropriately, Nick and his father are "reborn" in returning from their individual experiences of Hades during the night: Dr. Adams with the immediate memory of the caesarean operation which he has just performed on the Indian woman whose husband committed suicide during her labor, and Nick with the feeling of the unreality of it all. Hemingway returns to rowing several times in his fiction, most powerfully in *The Old Man and the Sea* which again carries strong overtones of another famous Winslow Homer painting, *The Gulf Stream* (1899).

20 Emily Dickinson, Poem No. 338

Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* is also an interesting case in its use of boating and rowing: Jay Gatsby's motley past includes a period as a clam-digger and a salmon-fisher along the south shore of Lake Superior. From that position he quickly rises to the position as bodyguard for a Dan Cody on board his yacht, the *Tuolomee*. Like a true Horatio Alger hero, James Gatz's rise in society is also a transformation of identity into Jay Gatsby.

> It was James Gatz who had been loafing along the beach that afternoon in a torn jersey and a pair of canvas pants, but it was already Jay Gatsby who borrowed a rowboat, pulled out to the Tuolomee, and informed Cody that a wind might catch him and break him up in half an hour.[21]

In so far as the south shore of Lake Superior could be seen as an equivalent to Thoreau's Walden Pond, a state of regained innocence and beauty, or to Bingham's Edenic West, Dan Cody's yacht now represents corrupt civilization afloat on a western lake.

The metaphor of the watery Eden may also be extended to include Gatsby's swimming pool. It represents a retreat into a state of Edenic indolence on a pneumatic mattress where fate, in the shape of George Wilson – "that ashen, fantastic figure gliding . . . through the amorphous trees" – arrives to kill the wrong man. And the ending of the novel, with the famous lines "So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past," is the ironic image of trying to row back to Eden with the knowledge and certainty of the Fall.

21 F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby,* ch, VI, beginning.