

Thomas Cole on Water

I will now speak of another component of scenery, without which every landscape is defective- water. Like the eye in the human anatomy, it is a most expressive feature: in the unrippled lake, which mirrors all surrounding objects, we have the expression of tranquillity and peace—in the rapid stream, turbulence and impetuosity.

Lakes

In this great element of scenery, what land is so rich? I would not speak of the Great Lakes, which are in fact inland seas—possessing some of the attributes of the ocean, though destitute of its sublimity; but of those smaller lakes, such as Lake George, Champlain, Seneca, and a hundred others, that stud like gems the bosom of this country. There is one delightful quality in nearly all these lakes—the purity and transparency of the water.



Waterfalls

And now I must turn to another of the beautifiers of the earth—the waterfall, which in the same object at once presents to the mind the beautiful, but apparently incongruous idea, of fixedness and motion—a single existence in which we perceive unceasing change and everlasting duration. The waterfall may be called the voice of the landscape for unlike the rocks and woods which utter sounds as the passive instruments played on by the elements, the waterfall strikes its own chords, and rocks and mountains re-echo in rich unison.

Rivers

The river scenery of the United States is rich and boundless. The Hudson for natural magnificence is unsurpassed. What can be more beautiful than its lake-like expanses as seen from the rich orchards of the surrounding hills? The Rhine has its castle-like crags, its vine-clad hills, and ancient villages. But the Hudson has its wooded mountains, its rugged precipices, its green undulating shores—a natural majesty. Its shores are not sprinkled with venerated ruins, or the palaces of princes. But there are flourishing towns, and neat villas, and the hand of taste has already been at work. Without any great stretch of the imagination we may anticipate the time when the ample waters shall reflect temple, tower, and dome, in every variety of picturesqueness and magnificence.