"A Land of Picture": Novelized Art and Visual Literature in Cole, Cooper, and Hawthorne, 1826-1860

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“A LAND OF PICTURE”: NOVELIZED ART AND VISUAL LITERATURE
IN COLE, COOPER, AND HAWTHORNE, 1826 - 1860

A Dissertation
Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies and Research
in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy

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August 2016
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Title: “A Land of Picture”: Novelized Art and Visual Literature in Cole, Cooper, and Hawthorne, 1826-1860

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In this study, I use a blended-genre approach to reading canonical literature and art in the United States during the antebellum period. Acknowledging that the mediums of art and literature are both narrative-driven and dependent upon techniques of visualization, I examine works that show marked hybridity of form, identifying artists and writers practiced in synthesizing media and genres to create hybridized texts. I suggest that reframing the aesthetic canon to include a blended-genre paradigm provides an alternative mode of analysis for understanding the cultural work of American Romanticism.

I focus my study on canonical American Romantic art and literature for its powerful narrative voice in the construction of national identity, locating convergent practices in three major works: *The Course of Empire* paintings by Thomas Cole, *The Crater* by James Fenimore Cooper, and *The Marble Faun* by Nathaniel Hawthorne. I also identify blended-genre practice in Cole’s poetry and prose, Cooper’s *The Last of the Mohicans*, and selected short stories by Hawthorne. I consider how convergences circulated from one text to another and recover a submerged discourse of the time period.

Connecting Cole, Cooper, and Hawthorne through *The Course of Empire*, I suggest their use of the cyclical theory of history as a foundation narrative for the establishment of American identity, and Cole’s paintings as an influence used to explore the projected fate of the United States. I also suggest that an unexpected outcome of antebellum American Romantic art and
literature was the suppression of a unique American national identity even as Cole, Cooper, and Hawthorne eagerly sought to provide a national art and literature for the emergent nation.

I consider the interdiscursivity of blended-genre practices and its production of discourses that challenged a “master narrative” of Manifest Destiny during the antebellum period. Reading beyond traditional genre boundaries, I re-envision the cultural work of writers and artists of American Romanticism, illuminate submerged discourses, and provide a new understanding of historical and cultural conditions within which art and text were created.