New Mexico in the Nineteenth Century: The Creation of an Artistic Tradition

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IN 1926 Willa Cather wrote Death Comes for the Archbishop, a novel about the life of Jean Baptiste Lamy, the first archbishop of New Mexico. She gave him a new name—Father Latour—and set him down “somewhere in central New Mexico.” Then she gave him the power to create a landscape from the “monotonous red sandhills,” the “conical red hills,” the hills “so exactly like one another that he seemed to be wandering in some geometric nightmare.” She gave him, in fact, the power to verbalize his personal reaction to a land which was like no other he had ever seen—the power to create a landscape. “Mais, c’est fantastique,” he said, and closed his eyes to rest them from “the intrusive omnipresence of the triangle.”

From 1900 on, New Mexico was full of artists and writers like Willa Cather, perpetuating sublime and romantic images. They created such images by using the written history and geographical symbols around them. John Marin dealt with the New Mexican land by recognizing and extracting its basically geometric shapes and planes; D. H. Lawrence and Mary Austin drew upon a rich legacy of Spanish, Mexican, and Indian folk traditions to create a New Mexico that was wonderfully mysterious.

However, just as these twentieth-century figures drew on a contemporary milieu, so, perhaps only unconsciously, they partook of a rich and familiar tradition established by artists and writers who had preceded them. Just as they drew inspiration from the New Mexican landscape as it existed in 1920, so they used images and symbols which earlier travelers had created and used. They may
even have recognized that their predecessors had created a series of iconic statements about, or images of, New Mexico, together with a "bag" of techniques for depicting or evoking the southwestern scene and for recreating the American experience in New Mexico.

The background of three nineteenth-century writers—Richard Kern, James W. Abert, and Balduin Möllhausen—will show some of the numerous and complicated strands of practical experience and culture which determined, to a great extent, the visual and verbal expressions of artists in the Southwest in the mid-nineteenth century, and influenced much of the art and literature written in later years.

The milieu which nourished Kern, Möllhausen, and Abert was simultaneously simple and complicated. Practically speaking, the three men were interested in geology and highly trained as topographical engineers. Culturally speaking, the strands which came together to create the landscapes of Abert or the verbal imagery of Möllhausen were very complex and interesting. They involved many subtle relationships between science, art, and religion. Möllhausen and Abert, for example, cannot be understood unless one studies European literary and artistic traditions of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, as well as the American tradition of romantic evangelism.

These complicated strands of science and aesthetics are important, for when Ross Calvin spoke of the "timelessness" of the desert and the sensations of infinite time and space; or Joseph Wood Krutch thought of eternity when he saw the desert; or when Oliver LaFarge was dazzled by the Southwest's "aggressive silence," or felt that the qualities of loneliness and silence were perfectly beautiful, each man was echoing sentiments which other travelers had uttered many years before. Notice, for example, Möllhausen's strong attraction to the desert areas, where he experienced "aweful silence," where he luxuriated in the impressive space and intimations of infinity and loneliness. Or read Abert, who wrote of his excitement at the land's infinite vistas, where "the eye travels instantly to the farthest extreme, unimpeded by any abruptness."
In the same manner, the semi-religious and strongly mystical attitude with which Mary Austin or D. H. Lawrence approached New Mexico during the 1920's was preceded, during the nineteenth century, by the topographer's equation of God and nature. Looking at the San Francisco Peaks, Möllhausen felt that the contemplation of nature, in all its various forms, evoked feelings otherwise provoked only by the contemplation of God.

It is not necessary to know whether various twentieth-century writers read or knew of the Kerns or James Abert, but to be aware of the tradition, largely European, upon which the latter artists drew, which caused them to see certain qualities in the land. When Richard Kern was attracted to the geological shapes of Cañon de Chelly in 1849, it was not merely because he had been trained as a topographer—although that training had much to do with the way he drew the canyon. His interest, like that of Möllhausen and Abert, owed much to the contemporary English dispute between Abraham Gottlob Werner and James Hutton concerning the very creation of places like Cañon de Chelly. Similarly, when Möllhausen or Abert looked at the desert and thought it "sublime," or when they saw God in all of nature's forms, it was largely because James Thomson had thought the desert sublime a hundred years before, and God's presence in and identification with nature had been an accepted fact for two centuries.

Nineteenth-century travelers referred repeatedly to volcanoes in New Mexico. Volcanoes, as well as mountains, meteors, and earthquakes, were considered the physical manifestations of God in the universe. Indeed, in the science of geology, natural physical objects and God were inseparable.

The topographer's proclivity for seeing God and nature as one and the same dated from the time of Francis Bacon and his Novum Organum when scientists insisted on their rôle in uncovering a divinely ordained system of nature. Religion and God were seen as integral parts of science, and scientists such as Boyle, Newton, and Joseph Priestley considered themselves theologians as well as scientists.

Throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the man
of science and theology was concerned primarily with manifestations of God in the natural universe. The nature of that universe might change as scientists made discoveries, and the various roles which God could have played in its creation varied, but the fundamental presence of God in the schema was never doubted. Newton, for example, regarded God as the first cause of all phenomena of the physical universe.

The easy and clear relationship of natural history and theology was disturbed sometime near the end of the eighteenth century, when the word "science" began to displace the phrase "natural philosophy." The problem arose specifically over the new science of geology, for theology and natural philosophy were concerned with the state of things, but geology assumed a history (or change) of nature. Such a change presupposed a change in "God." The tension reached a climax in the dispute between Abraham Gottlob Werner, a Neptunist, and James Hutton, a Vulcanist. The long series of battles between the two camps had significance not only for the development of theoretical science, but also for the attention it drew to the new science, geology. Put simply, Werner believed that the natural system of things disclosed God's control and perpetual attention. Hutton believed that the natural system disclosed God's plans and original intentions. For Hutton the continual interference of God was unnecessary, although he never questioned His continual presence. Werner believed that the purpose of geology was to demonstrate the credibility of Genesis, the recent creation of man, the truth of the Flood. Hutton abhorred Werner's cosmological speculations, and preferred instead to look for dynamics in accordance with observable fact. Both systems, of course, testified to the skill and presence of God's hand in nature. The dispute arose from a difference in speculation over when and how often God's hand appeared.

The assumption of the presence of God in nature was made throughout the eighteenth century, and as late as 1850 a literal interpretation of Genesis was still acceptable. Natural history and science remained in the service of religious truth. Indeed, zoology, paleontology, and geology offered new and specific evidence of the
Modern photograph of same; Dr. David DeHarport, Harvard University.
Flood and recent creation of man. At times, natural phenomena, such as the Flood, or earthquakes, took on Godlike qualities, and it became a primary concern of scientists to demonstrate that nature itself was sometimes supernatural.

In the United States, such ideas were spread, with the encouragement of Alexander Agassiz, by the published works of Hugh Miller. Miller, whose books were immensely popular, believed in a divine God, and saw His hand writ large in the various miraculous phenomena of the natural world. Another popular writer, Baden Powell, accepted the findings of science, but insisted that one of its duties was to prove the existence of a deity.

The battle between those who believed that God was a primary instigator and those who believed Him to be a constant force raged on in Europe and the United States. His presence in the scheme, somewhere, was rarely disputed, and in America geology, natural geology, and the evangelical spirit all became mysteriously interwoven. From 1800 on “it was the function of natural theology to assimilate nature to Providence and necessity to the divine will.” Indeed, romantic revivalism even told the observer what was most Godlike, and it emphasized the weird and awe-inspiring, the emotional, the “sounding cataracts and tempestuous gorges.”

Other traditions taught the topographer to see God in violent nature, and to appreciate nature in all its geologic complexities. They were programmed self-consciously to anticipate and appreciate certain types of landscapes. In the nineteenth century, appropriate objects for admiration included mountains, deserts, oceans; phenomena of violent nature, such as volcanoes, thunderstorms, and earthquakes; and qualities in all of nature, such as space, mystery, infinity, and stillness.

Such objects and qualities had not always been admired. As Marjorie Hope Nicolson points out in her work on the development of the “aesthetics of the infinite,” early theologians had considered mountains to be unsightly blights. They saw beauty only in objects which were small: “They loved [nature] best when she was [small and] beautiful.”

It was Henry More who rescued mountains and the grander
aspects of nature by pointing out that mountains, if they were not exactly beautiful, at least were useful: "For these are Nature's Stillatories, in whose hollow Caverns the ascending Vapours are congealed to the universal Aqua Vitae, that good fresh-water, the Liquor of Life, that sustains all the living Creatures in the World."17

More made mountains respectable. He also was the first writer to express ideas of infinite time and space. He described God's universe as various, even as infinitely various, and he gave mountains and the grander aspects of nature a place in that variety. He conjectured that infinite space was God's vehicle by means of which man might attempt to understand God. Indeed, More almost identified space with God, for the effect of infinite space on man, like the effect of contemplating God, was one of elation.

God's universe was not only infinite in space; it was infinite in variety. As Nicolson points out: "The cosmos created to infinity and eternity by a God of Plenitude must be infinitely filled with every sort of variety and diversity."18 Mountains, of course, were part of that diversity.

The tradition which More established—that of seeing God and the sublime in all of Nature's greatest phenomena—continued. Thomas Burnet, for example, found himself far more attracted to the huge and sublime aspects of nature than to the merely beautiful. Before the "monstrosities of Nature" he felt emotions he had associated previously only with the contemplation of God. He also broadened the scope of phenomena included as sublime, and, fascinated by the idea of infinite and ancient time, wrote rapturously of ruins. Eventually, ruins became the most popular of his themes. As an anonymous poet wrote in 1743: "Hills pil'd on Hills, and rocks together hurl'd; Sure, Burnet, these the ruins of thy world."19

Other writers who helped to define the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century attitude towards nature, God, and the infinite were John Dennis, who believed the sublime to be irrevocably connected to man's ideas of God; Anthony Ashley Cooper, who defined the sublime by its relationship to God, space, vastness, silence, mysteries, and deserts; Joseph Addison, who saw the sublime in the
ocean, deserts, mountains, space, and God; James Thomson, who found the sublime in deserts; the neoclassic poets, who found the sublime in ruins, with their irregularities and promises of vast time past; and men like Richard Blackmore, who considered violent phenomena such as volcanoes, earthquakes, and thunderstorms sublime.

If the traditions connected with the development of geology and an aesthetic of the infinite affected the three southwestern topographers, so did the science of topography. Just as their cultural backgrounds had taught them what to look for in nature, and even told them in what terms they were to couch their appreciation of it, their topographical training taught them how to see and transmit their visions of natural forms.

The essential purpose of topographic drawing has always been to convey a mass of information with a minimum of effort. It is “the art of recording to scale, by means of conventional symbols, the topographic features found on that part of the earth’s surface which the map in question represents. . . . [The purpose of a topographical drawing] is to convey to the untrained eye a mass of information with the greatest possible speed.” The topographer deals in symbols which represent landscapes and their structure. Thus, he deals in the representative, or the general.

Just as the topographer acquires an eye for those parts of the landscape which best represent the landscape as a whole, so he also deals with minute and correct detail. Indeed, the “value of a drawing depends wholly upon its accuracy and its appearance.” Its measurements and characteristic representation of the terrain must be as nearly correct as possible. In a word, topographical drafting “is a language which uses lines, symbols, dimensions and notations to accurately describe the form, size, kind of material, finish and construction of an object.”

Such simultaneous concerns with the general and the particular are clearly present in the writings of the topographer James H. Simpson who viewed New Mexico in 1849. He noted the gen-
erally geometric quality of the land which manifested itself in the particular form of the triangle. He noted "conical mounds"23 and regularly symmetrical cones composed of horizontal lime and sandstone strata.24 United States Boundary Commissioner J. R. Bartlett would have liked to build a large pyramidal monument on one of the conical hills, perhaps in recognition of the omnipresent and representative shape.25

If topographic training made travelers aware of typical landscape shapes, it also gave them the tools to handle that landscape. Southwestern distances are immense and artistically challenging. Many modern painters have met their technical Waterloo because of their inability to capture the sense of space. Topography, however, is an essentially mathematical skill, a technology which has been extremely successful in ordering large spaces. John Marin, for example, after intensive experimentation, structured his New Mexican paintings around receding planes and geometric shapes.

Army topographers noticed New Mexican land forms because they were technically trained to do so. The emotional, personal way in which they reacted to the various natural shapes sprang from their cultural background. All of the traditions—technical, religious, aesthetic, and cultural—came together in the works of three topographers who lived and worked in the Southwest during the years from 1846 to 1857.

Richard Kern, topographer, artist, and adventurer, is an excellent example of nineteenth-century man as scientist, and it is in his work that the influences of topographic training are most visible. He was born in Philadelphia on April 11, 1821, one of several brothers, all of whom became famous for their topographic and artistic skills. He first exhibited in 1840 when he was nineteen years old, at the Artists' Fund Society. He continued to teach drawing there until the mid-1840's. Then, from 1848 to 1849 he and his brothers Edward and Benjamin joined Frémont on his fourth expedition to the Southwest. That trip ended tragically with Benjamin's death in Colorado. Later the same year Richard signed up
with another expedition, Simpson's reconnaissance of the Navajo country. He joined Lorenzo Sitgreaves in 1851, went East briefly in 1853, and returned west in May 1853 to join the Gunnison expedition. On October 26, 1853, Richard Kern, John Gunnison, and six companions were killed in the Sevier Valley near the Sevier River by Ute Indians.26

On all of his trips Richard Kern was first and foremost a topographer and scientist. Stephen Long summarized Kern's abilities and experiences:

Mr. Kern accompanied Col. Fremont on his unfortunate expedition to the Source of the Rio del Norte in 1848-9—Capt. Simpson on his examination of the Navajo country in 1848—Capt. Judd, on the Surveys of the Pecos River—Capt. Simpson on a reconnaissance in the Indian country and between El Paso and Santa Fe in 1850, and has subsequently served as compiler and draughtsman in the preparation of map & lastly accompanied Capt. Sitgreaves as assistant in his reconnaissance of the country drained by the Zuni, [?] and Big Colorado Rivers, westward of the Rocky Mountains.

In the compilation of my late report exhibiting a project of the passes & proper to be Surveyed with a view to the selection of the most favorable route for the contemplated rail road to the Pacific, I have been aided mainly by the items of geographical intelligence kindly imparted by Mr. Kern, and am thereby able to commend him to your notice with great assurance of his fitness for the Station herein suggested.27

Kern was hired to be a kind of "camera lucida,"28 and his chief goal was to work at recording the expedition as it happened. He could make notations for details to be added later, but his most important task was to capture immediately as much as he could. Thus, under Lt. John G. Parke he made a basic map of the region from Pike's Peak to Cook's wagon road in Sonora, and acted as topographer on Gunnison's Pacific Railroad Survey.

Kern's training for such duties had been excellent. It began in Philadelphia, probably within his own family. His older brother John was a drawing teacher, and Richard undoubtedly learned many of the basics from him. His best training must have occurred
in the field, particularly on his trips with Frémont, Simpson, and his brother, Edward Kern, for it was then that he learned to use all of the usual topographical instruments: refracting telescope, reflecting circle, sextant, chronometer, barometer, thermometer, compass, and mathematical tables of the *Ephemerides of the Heavens*

In Kern's "Cañon de Chelly" we see the results of all his pains-taking training. A comparison of Kern's drawing with a photograph of the same site demonstrates several interesting points. It shows that Kern, as a topographer and as a nineteenth-century scientist was interested in geology, in the shape and peculiarities of the land. In the painting, for example, the rock walls appear to be composed of a series of parallel horizontal lines. They are like James Simpson's description of several hills, which were "composed of . . . strata of lime and sandstone lying horizontally upon each other in thin plates like slate," or A. Wislizenus' description of hills made of "horizontal strata of rock," or W. W. H. Davis' description of the landscape as "dead level." The photograph proves, however, that the face of the land was not altogether regular. Rock strata generally lie in diagonal directions; there are irregularities in the face of the rock, curving lines, and many places where vertical lines intersect the horizontal. Kern, however, abstracted the generally horizontal appearance of the land. His topographer's eye saw the forms most generally typical of the Southwest, and, using conventional symbols, he became picture-maker and mathematician.

Kern was aware of the Southwest as a country which is "properly speaking, a tableland," and he made such land forms integral parts of his work. Indeed, despite the fact that he used water colors, a medium which does not always lend itself to exact or topographical work, he still exaggerated distinctive elements of the southwestern land which required topographical, linear treatment. He exaggerated the horizontal appearance of the canyon beyond its natural appearance in the photograph. Rocks lie in perfectly parallel strata, and thus seem, as J. R. Bartlett pointed out, "artificial."
Excerpts from his diary show that Kern was more than the objective man of science. He shared his generation’s enthusiasm for ruins. With James Simpson he explored and painted Pueblo Una Vida, Hungo Pavi, Chettro Kettle, Pueblo Bonito, Pueblo de Arroyo, and Pueblo de Peñasca Blanca. He copied hieroglyphs from Inscription Rock and made valuable diagrams and sketches of the Pueblo Pintado ruins near the Chaco River. Pintado, particularly, aroused his appreciation for the mysteries of ancient time and moved him to remark that “The wolf and lizard and hare are the only inhabitants and the bright wild flowers fill the open court and halls. Who built it no one knows.”

Although Kern was not immune to contemporary romantic interest in the sublime and mysterious in nature, James W. Abert was a far better spokesman for it. In Abert we see the perfect combination of romantic and explorer, and in his pictures we can see his vacillation between the two traditions. At times he recorded landscapes with mathematical precision. Elsewhere he drew pictures indicative of his vision of the Southwest as a mysterious and lonely place.

Abert, like Kern, was essentially a topographic artist. His father was chief of the Corps of Topographical Engineers from 1838 to 1861, and Abert himself graduated from West Point in 1842. He made several expeditions to the Southwest with the Corps and led his own expedition during the years 1846 and 1847. His stature as artist and topographer was such that in 1848 he was asked to return to West Point, where he remained as assistant in drawing until 1850. After the Civil War he became professor of mathematics and drawing at the University of Missouri.

Abert was more than a good technician. He had received an excellent education at Princeton before his admission to West Point. He had studied the classics and the best of the European humanists. Moreover, he was a religious young man, a fact which had great significance in the 1840’s when eastern America was only just recovering from its most recent bout with evangelical
awakenings. His essentially emotional nature bore fruit in 1846. His diary for that year speaks of a long illness as though it were a mystical experience: "At this time my disease had obtained such an influence over my senses, that days and nights were passed in a delirium, and a mental struggle to ascertain whether the impressions my mind received were true or false."36

Abert’s romanticism had overtones of religious evangelism. In every other particular, however, it resembled that of Kern and Möllhausen. Like them, he associated God with all of nature and maintained a consistently worshipful attitude towards nature. Like More, he appreciated nature’s “endless variety,” and not only the “great beauty [of] the mountains,” but the evidences of violent nature. He was similar to earlier writers, again, in his appreciation of the Spanish Peaks and volcanoes, both of which he mentioned several times. He, too, was fascinated by the ruins of past civilizations, and drew the “ancient ruin” near Santo Domingo because it “excites the speculations of the curious,” and the ruins at Tajique and Abo, which he said reminded him of Aztec architecture.37

Abert was attracted strongly to what he thought of as a vast and lonely landscape. The idea of the land’s infinite vistas excited him, for “the eye travels instantly to the farthest extreme, unimpeded by any abruptness.” Moreover, the scene was “increased in effect by the appearance of an ox that came slowly toward us, whose loneliness perfected the repose of the landscape.” The Llano Estacado which to Möllhausen was to seem a “vast slumbering Leviathan,” seemed to Abert, also, to be “quietly sleeping.” He paused to appreciate the “beautiful contrast” of “these broad masses of light and shade; this serenity of sleep with the liveliness of life.”38

Finally, as in the case of John Dennis, the contemplation of such an infinity of space and loneliness had a palpable effect on Abert, and as he looked upon the “boundless extent of prairie” his mind was filled with ideas of “grandeur.” For the man who dared to allow his imagination to roam still further “over successions of these boundless plains,” the mind became “seized with a feeling allied to pain, as the mind expands to comprehend such vastness.”39
LA CIUDAD DE SANTA FE
Abert's appreciation of sublime nature appeared throughout his diary of 1846-1847, while his topographical interest was evident in his artistic work. His picture of Santa Fe, for example, depicted well the phenomenon Möllhausen described when he wrote that "due north there stretched out a flat boundless desert,"40 or that John Hughes saw as a "dreary, sultry, desolate, boundless solitude."41 Throughout his painting Abert mathematically segmented his subjects into planes of contrasting light and shade, and geometric form, which balanced one another and created sensations of space appropriate to the New Mexican scene. His simple, clear execution of artistic forms also was appropriate to the sharply etched New Mexican natural forms.

"Santa Fe" demonstrates that Abert was sensitive not only to New Mexican distances, but also to its peculiar shapes. Like Kern, he appears to have used his topographical training to analyze the Southwest for its most common geometric shapes and his landscape is comprised of a series of geometric forms. These include the triangular foothills and mountains, and the squares which represent buildings. He organized his painting around a series of receding repeated planes, and the use of repeated forms and planes was his way of controlling the large panorama. Following the mechanical way he had been taught to draw at West Point, he divided the focus of the painting, the town, into rectangular forms which narrow as the eye follows them into the background and provide planes of physical mass which advance or recede depending on their distance from the foreground.

Just as "Santa Fe" demonstrates Abert's technical background, so two other paintings—"Acoma 2" and "Acoma 3"—illustrate his cultural heritage. They show the degree to which he was attracted to the Southwest as a mysterious and lonely place. Indeed, both landscapes are so mysterious as to be surreal. Human figures are dwarfed by nature as immense walls loom up on either side. The figures are small and vulnerable in the face of the huge masses around them. They seem, moreover, to be afflicted like Möllhausen's laborers on the Llano Estacado. They lack personal identity and move, if they move at all, in regular patterns. They seem
to be visual statements of the state of men in infinity; it is as if they were frozen in time and space.

The landscape, like the figures on it, is mysterious. Rocks loom up in exaggerated shapes and their enormous scale vis-a-vis the people near them emphasizes the mystery. Their spare, geometric verticality emphasizes the mechanical figures so that the mood which pervades both paintings is one of inanimacy and ghostliness. Anthony Ashley Cooper's reaction to another landscape is amazingly appropriate for describing this southwestern one: "Here space astonishes; silence itself seems pregnant, whilst an unknown force works on the mind, and dubious objects move the wakeful sense."^42

James Abert, and Richard Kern before him, represent the tradition of the technical topographer par excellence—that of the romantic scientist to a lesser degree. The third traveler, Frederich Balduin Möllhausen, reverses the emphasis. In all of his works he appears not so much the scientist, but the romantic in search of the sublime. His journals are not really diaries in the conventional sense of notebooks for making scientific notations. They are literary works with plots, themes, and distinct characters. In fact, Möllhausen was not simply enlightening his readers on the day-to-day progress of his march to the Pacific. He was telling in epic form the story of one nation's fulfillment of its manifest destiny. Möllhausen, then, appears not as a dispassionate scientist, but as a German Childe Harold.43

Möllhausen, born in Bonn, Germany, on January 27, 1825, was the son of a civil engineer. His involvement in the American West began early, and by 1852 he had spent three years in the Rocky Mountains with Prince Paul of Wurttemberg. From 1853 to 1854 he served as topographer and draftsman on Lieutenant A. W. Whipple's surveying expedition along the thirty-fifth parallel from Arkansas to California (an expedition on which he also worked for the Natural History Department of the Smithsonian Institu-
tion). His last trip was made during 1857-1858, when he was a member of Lieutenant J. C. Ives's expedition to explore the Colorado River.

The fruits of his travels in western America appeared in two forms: his sketches were lithographed for the official reports of the army expeditions, and his diary was published in two volumes in 1858. He drew on his western experiences until his death on May 28, 1905, eventually publishing forty-five large works in one hundred fifty-seven volumes, and eighty novelettes in twenty-one volumes.

Mollhausen's training for his essentially romantic approach to the Southwest was thorough. He was a great friend of Alexander von Humboldt and must have been aware of the discussions and concerns which so involved other geologists and scientists at mid-century. No doubt he was aware of the controversy waged between the Vulcanists and Neptunists, and it is not surprising to hear him conjecture repeatedly about the origin of the volcanic peaks he saw throughout the Southwest. In addition, he was readily impressed with the picturesque and romantic potential of the American West and he admitted a European enthusiasm for the "sense of the beautiful in nature." In the area of the Arkansas River he saw "really paradisaical valleys, over which Nature has poured out every kind of loveliness with inexhaustible profusion."45

Little scholarly work has been done on Möllhausen's technical or cultural background, but a reading of his Tagebuch demonstrates the extent to which he shared his generation's enthusiasms for the sublime and all things associated with it: for deserts, mountains, oceans, and ruins; for loneliness and solitude.

In the tradition of Burnet and the neoclassic poets, one of Möllhausen's favorite themes centered on ruins, which suggested infinite time past, as well as feelings of mystery and awe. He visited Inscription Rock and found himself taken not so much by the view, as with the nearby ruins of "two old towns, the dwellings of a people now passed away."46 Later, three days west of Zuñi, Möllhausen saw "indications of the population that had passed
"away" in bits of broken pottery, and the foundations of an ancient town, "all that was left after the walls had been washed away centuries ago."47

A second theme which appears in the Tagebuch is that of God's presence in nature, and the identification of nature with God. Like Addison who looked at the ocean and thought of God ("Such an object naturally raises in my thoughts the idea of an Almighty Being"),48 Möllhausen looked at American nature and saw "the Creator." "The marvellous combination of wood and mountain and valley must have tended to remind every one of their great Creator, and awaken feelings of devout gratitude."49 Indeed, like Athanasius Kircher in the late seventeenth century,50 Möllhausen saw God in a variety of natural phenomena: "We looked up at the sublime summits of the San Francisco Mountains, and needed no temple made with hands wherein to worship our Creator."51 Later, in the area between the Llano Estacado and Cuesta, New Mexico, Möllhausen was moved to comment that "amidst the wilderness of waters, in the dark primeval forest, among the giant mountains, Nature builds a temple that awakens feelings not easily to be expressed; but the pure joy we feel in the works of the Almighty Master may well be called worship."52

Like More before him, Möllhausen identified space with God. West of Albuquerque, where there is little besides space, Möllhausen "stands in silent awe to contemplate the sublime architecture of nature, and, it may be, devoutly raises his thoughts to its Almighty Creator, and bows in adoration before His all-embracing power."53

Space, infinity, God, and loneliness all became interwoven in Möllhausen's mind, and to him, that part of nature which best expressed all those sensations was the desert. He felt that deserts, the most lonely of all nature's parts, had the power to affect men in mysterious ways. It might even be said that deserts, to Möllhausen, had a kind of Godlike ability to affect men. On the Llano Estacado, that great dead desert, nature's "lifeless aspect has an influence even on the roughest of our labourers; they all seem to be moving along half asleep, or like so many machines."54
Closely associated with the vast and silent desert was the sublime idea of infinite space, and here, once again, Möllhausen echoed More. He also echoed the Romantics to whom vastness and nature’s silence were essential elements. In “Prometheus Unbound” Shelley referred to the howl of cataracts which “satiates the listening wind, continuous, vast, aweful as silence.” Möllhausen experienced such “aweful silence,” impressive space, and intimations of infinity and loneliness in the southwestern desert. Past the Cross Timbers area, he noted that “a Sublime repose, indeed, a deathlike stillness reigned about, even the noise of the wagons seemed to die away in the infinite space.” Such landscapes were essentially lonely (an appropriately romantic condition), and as Möllhausen pointed out in western New Mexico near Zuñi, “as far as the eye could reach there was nothing to enliven its utter loneliness.”

Möllhausen’s identification of loneliness, space, and the mysterious desert with God was surely one of the most fruitful of all the themes he dealt with. It was also the idea which found the greatest currency in the years which followed. Möllhausen, with Kern and Abert, had managed by mid-century to identify God with nature and to impose upon nature all of the emotions otherwise associated with God. Natural phenomena in the Southwest acquired Godlike qualities such as mystery and sublimity, until nature itself became supernatural.

In the twentieth century, God is not always essential, but old feelings and associations remain. Twentieth-century man still feels that the Southwest is best characterized by the adjectives “infinite,” “lonely,” “mysterious.” It is due in large part to the nineteenth-century topographical artist—and indirectly to men like Henry More and James Thomson—that the Southwest has acquired the mystique which is one of its distinguishing characteristics.
NOTES


7. Sublime here refers to the grand phenomena of nature, as opposed to the simply beautiful. The sublime object, by nineteenth-century standards, was that which tended to inspire awe and thoughts of God. Various objects and states were considered sublime: infinite space or time, mountains, deserts, oceans, volcanoes and other evidences of violent nature, ruins of ancient civilizations.


12. Hugh Miller, *Footprints of the Creator* (Boston, 1866); *The Old Red Sandstone* (Boston, 1852).


24. Ibid., p. 58.


29. This particular illustration, taken from Hine, is especially valuable because it is one of the very few original Kern water colors.

30. Simpson, p. 58.


33. Ibid.

34. Hine, p. 75.

35. In his diary, Abert remarked that he carried a copy of Horace and a Greek testament. He could speak as well as read Latin.

36. Abert, p. 7.

37. Ibid., pp. 31, 33, 61, 71, 77, 103.
38. Ibid., pp. 31, 34.
42. Anthony Ashley Cooper, third Earl of Shaftesbury, "The Moralists; a Philosophical Rhapsody," Characteristicks of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times (London, 1727), vol. 2, p. 122.
43. For elaboration on this theme, see Peter Fritzell's introduction to the 1969 edition of Möllhausen's diary. Tagebuch einer Reise vom Mississippi nach den Küsten der Südsee.
44. For more complete biographical details, see Preston A. Barba, Baldwin Möllhausen, the German Cooper (New York, 1914).
45. Möllhausen, vol. 1, p. 3.
46. Ibid., vol. 2, p. 74.
47. Ibid., vol. 2, p. 115.
50. See Athanasius Kircher, Mundus Subterraneus Amstelodami, 1665).
52. Ibid., vol. 1, p. 278.
53. Ibid., vol. 2, p. 52.
57. Ibid., vol. 2, p. 112.
58. The temptation is strong here to connect the spaciousness of the Southwest with the strong strains of mysticism which have pervaded southwestern art and literature since the nineteenth century.