The year is 1825, and a young, ambitious Englishman has arrived in burgeoning New York City, at the auspicious moment of the opening of Erie Canal. Thomas Cole is an artist, with skills he spent years mastering. In a nation of immigrants and upstarts, his challenge is to navigate a complex, tight-knit community of emerging artists, hide-bound critics and wealthy patrons, searching for ways to support his dream. There are other obstacles, as well: a new nation still tied to Old World values; a dependent father’s failing business ventures; and his own recurring periods of faltering self-confidence, loneliness and melancholy.

In this work of historical fiction, the author reads ‘between the lines’ of Cole’s many journals, letters and essays, to reanimate the essence of the man, his motivation, inspiration and travels, given the harsh realities of city and country life in the early 19th century. In a more contemporary text, the author explores the same Hudson River valleys, towns and surrounding mountains that Cole would have known. The region’s timeless allure for both travelers—stories separated by nearly two centuries—offer new perspectives on the life and times of the “Father of the Hudson River School” of painting; and that of a fellow, modern sojourner, drawn as Cole was, to the splendor of America’s ‘first’ river.

“The Hudson, for natural magnificence is unsurpassed. What can be more beautiful than the lake-like expanses of Tapaan [sic] and Haverstraw as seen from the rich orchards of the surrounding hills? What can be more imposing than the precipitous Highlands, whose dark foundations have been rent to make a passage for the mighty river? The lofty Catskills stand afar off; [and] recede like steps by which we may ascent to a great temple. The Rhine has its castled crags [but] the Hudson has its wooded mountains and an unbounded capacity for improvement by art.”

~Thomas Cole, lecture published in Northern Light (1841)

“A delightful plunge into the currents of history and the life of painter, Thomas Cole.”

~C. Fernandez, Author

Hudson River Chronicles: In Search of the Splendid & Sublime on America’s ‘First’ River

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