

Thomas Moran's West: Chromolithography, High Art, and Popular Taste, by Joni L. Kinsey. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas for Joslyn Art Museum, 2006. xi, 260 pp. Illustrations, appendix, notes, bibliography, index. \$45.00 cloth.

Reviewer Carol Clark is professor of fine arts and American studies at Amherst College. She is the author of *Thomas Moran: Watercolors of the American West* (1980).

Joni Kinsey's book, lavishly illustrated and well produced, revolves around a portfolio of 15 chromolithographs after watercolors of American western landscapes that Louis Prang commissioned from Thomas Moran and published in 1876. The portfolio includes 12 pages of text by Ferdinand V. Hayden, leader of one of the four so-called "Great Surveys" sponsored by the U.S. Congress to comprehensively study the West in the years following the Civil War. The price of the 20" x 18" portfolio, covered in leather and luxuriously boxed, was \$60 (about \$1,000 today), which reflected the high cost of Prang's ambitions to set a new standard in the industry of fine art reproduction that he had pioneered. He hoped that this combination of brilliantly colored prints of the West after the watercolors of a noted exploration artist, accompanied by an authenticating scientific text, would appeal to a wide cross-section of Americans. His hopes were not realized: not only did the portfolio fail to attract much attention or to sell well in the artistic or the scientific community, its price probably also kept it out of the hands of a wider public whose appetite for the West had been whetted by exploration reports in the popular press. Prang's failure was compounded in 1877 by a disastrous fire in his Boston plant: having sold or (mostly) given away only 100 of the 1,000 portfolios he produced, he was left with just 50. His marketing plan came to an abrupt halt.

Kinsey, a professor of art history at the University of Iowa and a leading Moran scholar, positions the portfolio in several fascinating contexts. She provides details of the technological process of chromolithography and notes the elitist criticism directed at the production of these colorful reproductions of original works of art. She follows Moran's trail through the West to clarify the sources of the watercolors he produced in his studio to fulfill the Prang commission, and then she proposes ways to understand their order and meaning within the portfolio. She also recounts Prang's negotiations to produce the portfolio and his strategy to market it.

Kinsey leaves no doubt that Prang succeeded in his efforts to attractively encapsulate and package the West as colorful encounters

with discrete episodes of extraordinary scenery. Exactly why and how the chromos were compelling images is harder to determine. If the portfolio was so important, why was it difficult to market? Were the chromos just victims of a developing attitude that devalued reproductions as worthy works of art, or was Moran's imagery losing its hold on a popular imagination? Perhaps there was another reason for the Yellowstone portfolio's lackluster sale and meager critical attention: Prang debuted the portfolio at the Philadelphia Centennial Exposition, where, Kinsey astutely points out, "immediately after the opening of the fair, news of the Battle of the Little Bighorn in Montana turned all eyes westward" (188). While it is difficult to know how this news affected the reception of the portfolio's images, the verbal image of a western landscape soaked with the blood of General George Armstrong Custer and all his men likely gave new meaning to these chromolithographs of western landscapes. One possible consequence I see is that the brilliant colors of the Moran/Prang chromos (brashly compelling to our eyes) conveyed an optimism that was challenged by lurid reports of "American" deaths at the hands of Indians. While Kinsey focuses on the production of western imagery, she also sets up questions for future debate about the history of its consumption.

An American Colony: Regionalism and the Roots of Midwestern Culture, by Edward Watts. Athens, Ohio: Swallow Press, University of Ohio Press, 2002. xxv, 328 pp. Map, notes, bibliography, index. \$55.00 cloth.

Reviewer Zachary Michael Jack is assistant professor of English at North Central College. An Iowa native, he is the editor of several agrarian and environmental anthologies, most recently *Love of the Land: Essential Farm and Conservation Readings from an American Golden Age* (2006) and *Letters to a Young Iowan* (2007).

Edward Watts's *An American Colony: Regionalism and the Roots of Midwestern Culture* presents a uniquely interdisciplinary treatment of the by now mythic midwestern inferiority complex. Drawing from post-colonial theory as set forth by Peter Hulme and others, Watts strongly posits, without insisting, a historical Midwest functioning as a de facto Third World entity – the *colony* of the book's title. Citing Hulme's claim that "a country can be both postcolonial and colonizing itself" (5), Watts examines the many ways the American heartland is, indeed, a colony of a colony. The colonizer is the "Yankee Nation" of New England and its defenders (Manasseh Cutler, James Fenimore Cooper, and their ilk); John Peter Altgeld, E. W. Howe, and especially Hamlin Garland represent the ambivalently colonized. In the book's introduction,