

**Pictures and Poetry.**  
**Debunking the Bunk:**  
**An Examination of Picturesque Influence**

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## Abstract

### *Pictures and Poetry. Debunking the Bunk: An Examination of Picturesque Influence*

This thesis examines the history and development of the Picturesque, its definition, theoreticians, and practitioners; and its influence on romanticism. The focus is the correction of pejorative and negative assessments common in modern literary studies which provide a misleading interpretation of both the Picturesque and its influence. The goal is a broader understanding which suggests the necessity of a new evaluation of Wordsworth's "groundbreaking" contribution to literary development. Accordingly, an extensive introductory section examines pre-Picturesque and Picturesque painting, outlining the beginnings of a new and particularly English aesthetic. Also, an exploration of pre-Picturesque poetry and formative Picturesque poetry reveals the literary ramifications of this aesthetic. Finally, Wordsworth and Keats are canvassed within the Picturesque context: Wordsworth to demonstrate the origins and erroneousness of the modern critical bias and the way his poetry was often formulated according to Picturesque principles; Keats to demonstrate the longevity and continuing importance and influence of the Picturesque. Conclusions are conclusive.

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## Section One: The Canvas<sup>1</sup>

[The] theory and practice of the Picturesque constitute the major English contribution to European aesthetics. (Watkin, vii)

The romantics . . . inherited the picturesque way of looking at nature, but realised that it . . . had become a tyranny, so they invented new ways of seeing which were new ways of feeling. (Brownlow, 16)

### Argument

Major contribution or tyranny? When modern scholars of literature observe the Picturesque and its influence on romantic poetry, ideas become gods and facts their disciples. The extensive adoption, intrinsic importance and “capability” of the Picturesque—willingly acknowledged by art historians like Watkin—are expurgated, summarily sacrificed on the altar of entrenched literary dogma, and the service of academia becomes a self-serving exercise in blind faith.

This section will provide a prolegomenon to scepticism, describing the aesthetic context for the Picturesque movement, demonstrating the links between early continental landscape painting, neo-classicism, the Picturesque, later English landscape artists and romanticism. Besides offering essential background, outlining the artistic continuum which these links illustrate—revealing the inevitability of

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<sup>1</sup>As the title suggests, this is a cross disciplinary study. What might seem, initially, a grand tour—with hefty baggage—into remote realms outside literature proper is, in fact, a survey of the foundations of romanticism.

romanticisms and thus sanctioning a less venerational view of Wordsworth—the principle intent here is to provide a more useful definition of the Picturesque. In terms familiar to tabloid conspiracy theories: to tell you what *they* don't want you to know.

### **First Word**

In the beginning was the word, and the word was Picturesque. Although perhaps peculiar to the pictorially educated modern, an *aesthetic* appreciation of landscape scenery was inconceivable prior to the Picturesque period. It is, in simple terms, a skill that requires learning. According to Christopher Hussey in *The Picturesque*, numerous impediments initially existed, including general Christian doctrine; the early Christian transmutation of pagan nature spirits and gods into evil spirits, essentially rendering the natural realm dangerous and even sinful; and the humanistic bias of our classical inheritance. Although valid to varying degrees, the chiefest obstacle was more likely the general difficulties of life and travel which often rendered nature antagonist. Learning landscape then was an up-hill struggle. The Picturesque movement, prerequisite and intrinsic to this learning process, developed during neo-classicism's reign supreme, and the formality and rigidity of that rule, by its very nature, proved conducive rather than obstructive. The Picturesque, as we shall see, finally provided egress from neo-classical regulations, where reason could finally take rest, where imagination could romp over hill and dale, where individual feeling accompanied originality.

### **The Grand Tour**

Our journey into the Picturesque begins with the Grand Tour. Subsequent to England's isolation during much of the seventeenth century and made possible by the Treaty of Utrecht (1713), the Grand Tour was initially a diversion limited to the

monied aristocracy. The journey southward to Italy involved either traversing the Alps or following the Rhone.

In the accounts of grand tours made between 1640 and 1730 a pictorial view of landscape is exceptional. In each case it can be traced fairly exactly to the actual sojourn in Rome, where the works of Claude and Salvator were to be seen. (Hussey, 84)

Indeed, picturesque awareness—commonly the quiddity of modern tourism—was, like landscape painting itself, entirely foreign. Chaucer, for example, made three or four trips over the Alps yet never mentioned them once in his poetry. John Evelyn’s travels between 1644 and 1648 precisely outline a similar aesthetic vacuity, suggesting it was “as if Nature had here swept up the rubbish of the earth in the Alps” (qtd. Hussey, 85); remembering the “horrid mountains” as “troublesome” (qtd. Hussey, 86). Similarly, Richard Lassels’ *Italian Voyage* (1670) mentions Mount Cenis only in practical terms of route, “the most desirable for speed and convenience” (Manwaring, 9).

Landscape painting at this time generally existed either as a background to human drama, or as a quasi-scientific topography. Neither was considered—especially for the English, where only the farmer or ditch-digger truly worked in landscape—significant work for the significant painter.<sup>2</sup> When aristocratic travellers

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<sup>2</sup>Up until the 19th century, French Salon duries in state-run competitions adhered to a strict hierarchy of subjects determined in 18th century Rococo and Neo-Classical art: history and religious subjects, portraiture, still life and, lastly and leastly, landscape. Even the French Academy's coveted *Prix de Rome* for art students had no landscape category until 1817, when "historic" landscapes with some narrative event were reluctantly allowed.



finally arrived in Italy, they came upon an important exception to this rule. Claude Lorraine, Salvator Rosa and Gaspard Poussin<sup>3</sup> broke with the traditional subject hierarchy and raised the landscape to lofty heights of respectability.<sup>4</sup> The juxtaposition of the scenery aristocratic tourists had seen and the landscape paintings they confronted provided an early indication of this parochial aesthetic and even philosophical void. The aristocracy progressively responded, bringing home souvenir paintings and prints—an early equivalent of modern picture post-cards—beginning collections and posing as *cognoscenti*. Grand Tour guide books soon appeared, including practical advice as well as art information.<sup>5</sup>

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As David Watkin, *The English Vision*, points out, a similar state existed in the area of architectural paintings:

. . . the celebrated architectural competitions for the Grand Prix awarded by the French Academy and later by the Ecole des Beaux-Arts: from the first competition held in 1702 up until 1962 no site was ever specified. In England, however, the simple outline elevation in the form of a diagram on an otherwise blank background gradually gave way to drawings which show the building in its setting and eventually, as in the work of Blore for example, to fully developed water-colours of landscape in which the house appears as an incident. (x)

<sup>3</sup>When eighteenth century Britons referred to “Poussin” it was normally to Gaspard Duguet and not his now more famous brother-in-law, Nicolas Poussin.

<sup>4</sup>Other influential artists, though less important to Picturesque developments, were Tintoretto, Ruisdael and Hobbema.

<sup>5</sup>One such example, as E. L. Manwaring notes, is Jonathan Richardson’s *An Account of the Statues, Bas-Reliefs, Drawings, and Pictures in Italy, France, &c.* (1722)

Essentially, the status of landscape paintings in Italy compelled travellers to rethink traditional distaste for regions like the Alps, to over-look the associated dangers and discomforts of travel and exploration. The preparatory precepts of the Picturesque aesthetic were thus first introduced into England, and it was particularly the paintings of Claude and Salvator Rosa which stimulated the greatest interest.

### **The Less Grand Tour**

In addition to this, the Grand Tour played another important role. In what might be seen as an instance of cultural trickle-down theory, the less affluent middle-class, encouraged by fashionable discussions of Picturesque niceties, was soon occupied with more modest excursions into the English countryside. In search of landscape, landscape gardens and the galleries of mansions, tourists were aided by new guidebooks and much improved roads to get them there.

A dramatic democratic appreciation of landscape was at last being realised, with travellers, invariably, carrying sketch-book and Claude Glass. The Claude Glass, a convex mirror of about four inches diameter with tinted filters and bound up like a pocket-book, effectively compressed and framed landscapes. Analogous to the camera in these film-free days, the user was obviously obliged to turn his back on the scene to observe the framed and filtered view. Hugh Sykes Davies, in his recent analysis of the Picturesque and Wordsworth, offers the following comment: "It is very typical of their attitude to Nature that such a position should be desirable" (223). Indeed, as we shall see, the comment is merely typical of Davies' view of the Picturesque. Timothy Brownlow, in *John Clare and Picturesque Landscape*, offers a similar comment, all the more mockery for its parentheticality: "As an artist, he

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which became, for some time, a standard guide. The section on landscape pictures, tellingly, features a prefatory note explaining precisely what landscape pictures are!

[Clare] casts aside, as it were, the Claude Glass (whose user had to turn his back on the landscape)" (13). Malcolm Andrews, whose *In Search for the Picturesque* generally circumvents any romantic exploration, consequently offers a more useful note:

The imagination as an "intellectual lens" approximates it to the Claude Glass, which can modify and enhance a particular landscape. All the special properties of the Glass are present in Coleridge's well-known account of the origins of his poetic collaboration with Wordsworth and their agreement about the two cardinal points of poetry: "the power of exciting the sympathy of the reader by a faithful adherence to the truth of nature, and the power of giving the interest of novelty by the modifying colours of the imagination." (71)

Support for the Claude Glass as imaginative metaphor comes from Claude himself, who was as willing as able to composite the actual with the imaginary: *Pastoral Landscape with Ponte Molle* (1645), for example (see figure 1),

represents a view of the pope's summer residence. . . . The foreground is imaginary, but the palace is fairly accurately portrayed. The castle-like building bathed in sunlight is a forerunner of the highlighted castles in the middle ground so beloved of Gilpin. (Bicknell, 4)

The Picturesque tourists offer moving evidence that the Picturesque became as widespread as it was popular. Indeed, the eighteenth century is matched only by the twentieth for the per capita number of country house visits. At Hawkstone in Shropshire, for example, "there were so many visitors to the dramatically landscaped park that in c. 1790 an hotel was built to accommodate them" (Watkin, vii). David Watkin, who examines the Picturesque from the prospect of art historian, similarly provides an analysis inscribed by positivism, unequivocally stating that "theory and practice of the Picturesque constitute the major English contribution to European aesthetics" (vii); and that "the Picturesque became the leading building-type in post-

Reformation England and has long been recognised as the nation's principle contribution to the arts" (vii).

"In the intervening two hundred years since its discussion . . . the Picturesque has been altered and extended in many ways. Along the way it has acquired a pejorative tint" (Robinson, xii). Categorical and "pejorative" statements: "The cultural games of the picturesque" (Woodring, viii); "The vogue of the picturesque" (Nevius, 33); "Comic and faddish as much of the theory appears in retrospect" (Brownlow, 43); W.M. Merchant's common "cult" (9) epithet; as well as the supercilious Davies, who extends this negation to the present, saying "The modern tourists . . . pass through the country at a rate never dreamed of by Gray and West, seeing nothing, and apparently feeling even less" (226), all fail to recognise that this appetite to sample and develop a taste for landscape was redolent of a general change in aesthetic sense. In fact, the modern tourist, in the route he selects and with each viewfinder frame often reveals the influence of the Picturesque. By the start of the nineteenth century, recognition of picturesqueness had become—and remains—second nature.<sup>6</sup>

## Landscape Artists Abroad

### Salvator Rosa (1615-73)

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<sup>6</sup>Watkin essentially makes the same point, though contextualised within the standard literary bias:

The history of amateur sketching in the nineteenth century in the manner of De Wint and Cox affords another example of the way in which a particular mode of vision became established as a thing so "natural" that its artificiality and its debt to the theories of Sir Uvedale Price were generally forgotten. (xi)

As mentioned, Salvator Rosa, Neapolitan painter, etcher, satirical poet and actor, was crucial to the development of the Picturesque and also provides an early link with romantic poetry. In addition to his landscapes, which portrayed the feral and fierce of nature (see figure 3), Salvator displayed a penchant for appalling subjects—witches and monsters, meditations upon death and so on—inspiring such romantic painters as Barry, Fuseli and Mortimer, and finding poetic expression in the romantic inclination towards the gothic and graveyard melancholy.

Lady Morgan's *The Life and Times of Salvator Rosa*, published in 1824, depicted the artist as a legendary figure hobnobbing with bandits and joining a popular uprising in Naples, establishing him as the quintessential romantic artist: an outlaw encamped with darkness and despair, whose bravura with the brush was symptomatic of a burning artistic brilliance inimical to convention. Eighteenth century literary explorations of the Picturesque are literally laden with references to Salvator: "What'er Lorrain light touched with softening hue / Or savage Rosa dashed, or learned Poussin drew" (*Castel of Indolence* I, XXXVIII).

### **Claude Lorrain (1600-1682)**

Claude Lorrain, although French, spent his adult life in Rome. Claude was undoubtedly the greatest master of ideal-landscape painting, which seeks to present nature as surnature and concurring with the habitual "improvement" of the Picturesque vision. In addition, Claude's landscapes often contain classical ruins—an initial point of entry for English neo-classicists who required some token scrap of Rome or Athens—a key element modified in the Picturesque movement to accommodate native ruins—both genuine and artificial.<sup>7</sup> Besides his fundamental

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<sup>7</sup>Roundhay Park—its central stately mansion now a noble pub—in my own home town of Leeds, still features a mock ruin. Over-grown with bramble, nettles, grass

importance to the Picturesque movement, Claude, like Salvator, exhibited a less direct though nonetheless certain connection with romantic poetry, with his much acclaimed poetic rendering of light. As E. B. Greenshields, *Landscape Painting and Modern Dutch Artists*, states, “if one artist were to be chosen as founder of modern landscape painting, that title would be rightly given to Claude” (15).

Within the neo-classical/romantic context, John Ruskin offers the following:

The love of neatness and precision, as opposed to all disorder, maintains itself down to Raphael's childhood without the slightest interference of any other feeling; and it is not until Claude's time, and owing in great part to his influence, that the new feeling distinctly establishes itself.

([www.stg.brown.edu/projects/hypertext/landow/ruskin](http://www.stg.brown.edu/projects/hypertext/landow/ruskin))

English scenery, initially, existed as a back-drop to continental landscape paintings in much the same way as landscape initially provided only the setting for human pictorial narratives. In a comparison between Dovedale and Keswick, Dr. John Brown wrote:

Were I to analyse the two places in their constituent principles, I should tell you, that the full perfection of Keswick, consists of three circumstances, beauty, horror and immensity united; the second of which is alone found in Dovedale. . . . But to give you a complete idea of these three perfections, as they are joined in Keswick, would require the united powers of Claude, Salvator Rosa and Poussin. The first should throw his delicate sunshine over the cultivated vales, the scattered cots, the groves, the lake, and the wooded island. The second

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and dandelion, it is generally understood—by locals and visitors alike—to be as ancient as it is picturesque.

should dash out the horror of the rugged cliffs, the steep, the hanging woods, and foaming water-falls; while the grand pencil of Poussin should crown the whole with the majesty of the impending mountains. (qtd. Davies, 218)

The original works of this scanty collection of Italian painters only partly explain the extensive aesthetic transformation in remote England. Walpole mentions in his *Anecdotes* several foreign landscape painters living and working in England during the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries.<sup>8</sup> These included Henry Dankers, employed by Charles II as a topographical artist and Francesco Zuccarelli, who visited England twice, lived in London for five years and became a foundation member of the Royal Academy. Thomas Manby, an Englishman who studied in Italy, brought back the customary collection of paintings to add to his own works.

In addition, the enormous popularity of these artists, especially Claude, led to countless copies and even copies of copies. Less duplicitous was the invention of prints and the development of engraving to high art, making the landscapes of the masters as common as the furrowed tellurian landscapes of the peasants (see figures 1 and 2 ). Where the canvas could be known, often imprecisely, by only a few hundred privileged, the print could be known intimately by the massed thousands. Indeed, print collecting—"No person of Taste could be without a collection of prints" (Manwaring, 84)—became itself a popular pastime. Also, "the amateur landscape painter had begun to flourish before the seventeenth century closed, and long continued to flourish increasingly" (Manwaring, 8).

The stylistically idealised quality of Claude and Salvator's paintings provided the inspiration for the Picturesque movement and was then modified as the English Picturesque developed, essentially becoming an idealisation of a nature that was

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<sup>8</sup>See Manwaring, (8).

rapidly vanishing and celebrating a rural way of life that was being lost.

### **A Picturesque Definition**

Perhaps the earliest explicit statement on the Picturesque comes from William Kent in his 1709 Memorandum on the preservation of Woodstock Manor:

That part of the Park which is seen from the North Front of the new building has little variety of objects nor does the country beyond it afford any of value. It therefore stands in need of all the helps that can be given. . . . Buildings and Plantations. These rightly dispos'd will indeed supply all the wants of Nature in that place. And the most agreeable disposition is to mix them: in which this old Manour gives so happy an occasion for; that were the enclosures filled with Trees (principally fine Yews and Hollys) promiscuously set to grow up in a wild thicket, so that all the buildings left might appear in two risings amongst 'em, it would make one of the most agreeable objects that the best of Landskip painters can invent. (qtd. Watson, 17)

From this early beginning—remarkably loaded with what would eventually become the nitty-gritty of picturesque idiom: variety, wants of nature, mix, wild, thicket; and concepts: a harmony of architecture and natural surroundings and comparison with landscape paintings—the unfamiliar story of Picturesque development reads rather like the recorded exploits of an ancient relation discovered in a dusty chest, while categorical definitions have all the interest of his bleached bones. Unfortunately, ubiquitousness and over-familiarity has essentially starved the term of any useful sense and to flesh out that skeletal frame becomes a matter of Hobson's choice. So what does "picturesque" really mean? As late as 1794, Uvedale Price wrote: "There are few words whose meaning has been less accurately



determined than that of the word picturesque" (*On the Picturesque*, 77).<sup>9</sup>

Whether or not we accept J. R. Watson's hypothesis, in *Picturesque Landscape and English romantic Poetry*, that this period—despite being the most prolific in picturesque studies, picturesque tours and picturesque allusions—actually marks the decline of the movement (a somewhat strange notion considering Turner's Picturesque series is still decades away), it seems obvious that the time was indeed ripe for some clear definition. Unfortunately, the multi-disciplinary nature of the subject means that no nut-shell, no matter how perfectly nutty, can contain a definition fair and useful. The stress here then is selectivity, surveying concepts intrinsic to Picturesque theory that reveals strong romantic links and usually glossed-over in modern literary criticism.

### **William Gilpin (1724-1804)**

Perhaps the most succinct definition of *Picturesque* comes from Reverend William Gilpin's *Essay on Prints* (1768): " . . . a term expressive of that peculiar kind of beauty, which is agreeable in a picture"(xii). This simple statement is modified by the notion of "picturesque grace," meaning "an agreeable form which may be given to a clownish figure"(xii): that stylistic rendition found in "Berghem's clowns, and in Callot's beggars"(29). Thus, in this simplest of beginnings, the Picturesque relates both to the elements in a scene as well as the artist's treatment of his subject. *Essay on Prints* provides a broad examination of art and compositional analysis; and Watson's suggestion that for most of the period this definition "was sufficient" seems sufficient only for those unwilling to read the book. Gilpin himself, recognising the fribbish finish, offers some restoration in *Three Essays: On Picturesque Beauty, On Picturesque*

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<sup>9</sup>Johnson's dictionary, although avoiding the difficulty of defining *Picturesque*, actually employed it to define other words.

*Travel, and On Sketching Landscape* (1792). The accepted definition of beauty—most often marked by smoothness and unity—was established by Edmund Burke in *A Philosophical Inquiry into the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757). Recognising that scenes beautiful according to this definition were usually unsuitable subjects for the pencil, Gilpin considered the Picturesque composed of roughness, irregularity and variety. In addition, Gilpin disagrees with Burke's conclusions on the beautiful and sublime, where the effect of the former is pleasure, the latter astonishment and that the two, discovered in a single object, cause mutual destruction. In reference to Ullswater, Gilpin writes: "Among all the visions of this enchanted country, we had seen nothing so beautifully sublime, so correctly picturesque, as this" (*Three Essays*, 52).

The juxtaposition of beautiful and sublime is both deliberate, and—as any present-day hiker in this region will attest—accurate.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, the mix of beauty and sublimity, producing the Picturesque, seems to be the gist of Dr. John Brown's "beauty, horror and immensity united." As John Ruskin suggests, "this sublimity may be either in mere external ruggedness, and other visible character, or it may lie deeper, in an expression of sorrow and old age, attributes which are both sublime" ([www.stg.brown.edu/projects/hypertext/landow/ruskin](http://www.stg.brown.edu/projects/hypertext/landow/ruskin)).

By defining the principle characteristics of the Picturesque, besides underlining the main weakness of Burke's theory, *Three Essays* also achieved dubious honour of virtually codifying picturesque theory.<sup>11</sup> The Picturesque was finally composed of such illustrative elements as ruins—à la Claude—cottages, villages, twisting tracks; with roughness, intricacy, sudden variation, abruptness, foreground, middleground

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<sup>10</sup>Strange then that Burke's *Inquiry* is as familiar to academics as the Gospel, whereas Gilpin ideas have become the Apocryphia.

<sup>11</sup>The very success of this codification played a prominent role in making banal the very theory it sought to sanctify.

and background forming the more abstract and general Picturesque paradigm.

Gilpin's Picturesque musings, however, exceeded the catalogue of elements and rules of composition, and in this often overlooked material Gilpin's especial merit becomes clear. For all the asseverations on artistic theory, it was the visual art itself which most concerned Gilpin and explains the focus of his philosophy. Words,, Gilpin insists,

cannot mark the characteristic distinctions of each scene, the touches of nature—her living tints—her endless varieties, both in form and colour.—In a word, all the elegant *peculiarities* are beyond their reach.

The pencil, it is true, offers a more perfect mode of description.

(*Observations*, 10)

Indeed, the peculiar strength of language rests elsewhere, and the adoption of Picturesque sensibilities by the poet must—by the very nature of his medium—result in an *altered* expression and not, to foreshadow central critical dogma, a *transcending* expression. Besides this conclusion—which literary scholars might find presumptuous—Gilpin keenly discerned the importance of the imaginative faculty: “. . . we may be pleased with the description, and the picture. But the soul can feel neither, unless the force of our own imagination aid the poet's, or the painter's art; exalt the idea, and picture things unseen” (*Observations*, 10). Reading poetry, viewing painting, it is the imagination which provides fullest meaning; and it is imagination also which accompanies Gilpin through the Lake District:

The evening . . . grew more tempestuous . . . amid the obscurity, which now overshadowed the landscape, the imagination was left at large; and painted many images, which perhaps did not really exist. . . . Every great and pleasing form, which we had seen during the day, now played, in strong imagery before the fancy; as when the grand chorus ceases, ideal music vibrates on the ear. (*Observations*, 19)

Gilpin here describes the participation of active imagination both in reading poetry, viewing paintings, and exploring landscape. Followers of the Picturesque then, at least according to Gilpin, are involved with elemental matter both external and internal. Figure 4, for example, offers an unusual composition where the two figures “may be supposed to see the continuation of a landscape down the valley . . . and this gives a sort of clue to the imagination” (qtd. Bicknell, 38). Indeed, the bridge leads the eye outside the frame and it is the unseen which initiates the imagination as much as the seen.

In addition, Gilpin suggests picturesque tourists with an artistic drift should side-step exact copy and superinduce through the imagination and awareness of picturesque aesthetics: in a sense, the tableau should improve upon nature’s raw material. Hiking the lower lake of Buttermere, for example, Gilpin says: “Nothing is wanting but a little more wood, to make this lake, and the vale in which it lies, a very enchanting scene”<sup>12</sup>(*Observations*, 3).

Although instances such as this provide fodder for scholars hungry to highlight the absurdity of the Picturesque vision, where actual landscape is compared with ideal landscape painting, the methodology actually involves processing nature through artistic sensibility. Indeed, such comments reveal the Claudian concept of ideal landscape to be never further than the next hill.

Heading towards Ullswater, Gilpin writes: “Except the mountains, nothing in all this scenery is *great*; but every part is filled with the sweet engaging passages of

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<sup>12</sup>The importance of the imagination and subjective vision in landscape painting goes back at least as far as Claude. Samuel Palmer wrote: “When I was setting out for Italy I expected to see Claude’s magical combinations; miles apart I found the disjointed members, which he had “suited to the desires of his mind”; these were the beauties, but the beautiful ideal Helen was his own” (qtd. Greenshields, 16).

nature" (*Observations*, 8). Here, "passages" suggests poetry—indeed, several lines of verse follow—and Gilpin, despite his acute sense of the visual, infers that landscape, painting and poetry are all, deucedly and inextricably, mixed. Published in 1792, it pre-dates Wordsworth's *Lyrical Ballads* by six years and the poet's own *Guide to the Lakes* by eighteen.

Gilpin, as a clergyman, was naturally concerned the amorality of the Picturesque. Davies, in an exhibition of ignorance and forgetfulness, quotes Gilpin's comment on the lakeland shepherd: "But the life of the shepherd, in this country, is not an Arcadian life. His occupation subjects him to many difficulties . . ." (qtd. Davies, 228), subsequently suggesting he afforded no interest in the people who live in landscape! In fact, Gilpin, as we shall see, was personally concerned with the well-being of country people and openly acknowledged that the Picturesque stood outside ethical concerns:

In a moral light, cultivation, in all its parts, is pleasing; the hedge and furrow, the waving corn field, and rows of ripened Sheaves. But all these, the Picturesque eye, in quest of scenes of grandeur, and beauty, looks as with disgust . . . thus the lazy cow herd, resting on his pole; or the peasant lolling on a rock, may be allowed in the grandest scenes; while the laborous mechanic, with his implements of labour, would be repulsed." (*Observations, Cumberland*, 45)

This then is the Picturesque, not Gilpin himself. Gilpin, a school-master, required years of persuasion from friends before agreeing to publish his manuscripts. Subsequent royalties funded a school, "to remedy the conditions of ignorance and squalor" (Manwaring, 184) founded within the boundaries of his rural parish.

In contrasting urban and rural life, picturesque representations inadvertently suggested a conflict between the reality of children's lives and projected adult

attitudes. Many such pictures—including Thomas Gainsborough's cottage series<sup>13</sup>—share a romanticised notion of the countryside as an innocent, idyllic environment. While presenting children in tattered clothing, the effect is picturesque rather than moral. The very same, of course, can be said of much romantic poetry. Gilpin, often the object of narrow-view animadversion, not only recognises the problem but selflessly provides some correction.

Despite Gilpin's rule and dogma—measure for measure no more insidious than a modern “How-To” book—his Picturesque views display a diversity to which the satirists were forced to turn a blind eye; an acknowledgement that is as much in accord with romantic contemplation as Picturesque investigation.

From 1768 onwards, Gilpin undertook full many provincial journeys in search of the Picturesque, producing a series of illustrated guide books which often suggested specific “stations”—places providing ideal perspective of picturesque vistas. These guides, including Wye and South Wales (1782) and the Lake District (1789), were paramount in the popularisation of the Picturesque as a means of *viewing* nature and are, of themselves, indicative of the popularity of picturesque tourism.<sup>14</sup> As Watkin suggests, “Gilpin’s numerous topographical books were essentially a preparation for intelligent critical visiting, for the Picturesque presupposes a society which was interested in nature and in art and, above all, in travelling (vii).

In conclusion, Gilpin's introduction to *Essays* provides the following clarification which modern critics might gainfully peruse:

. . . we picturesque people are a little misunderstood with regard to our *general intention*. I have several times been surprised at finding us

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<sup>13</sup>Gainsborough’s rustic figures were influenced by those of Wynant. (1620-1684).

<sup>14</sup>Amongst the sagging shelves of picturesque guide-books were those by Thomas Gray, James Clark and Thomas West.

represented, as supposing *all beauty* to consist in *picturesque beauty*—and the face of nature to be examined only by the rules of painting. Whereas, in fact, we always speak a different language. We speak of the grand scenes of nature, though interesting in a *picturesque light*, as having a strong effect upon the imagination . . . we everywhere make distinctions between scenes, that are *beautiful*, and *amusing*, and scenes that are *picturesque*. (i-ii)

Followers of the Picturesque—and their numbers were legion—were concerned with a general appreciation of landscape and nature, though particularly those scenes formed of picturesque elements. The Picturesque scene was of more intense interest to painters, poets and travellers for the simple reason that the Picturesque scene is a scene more intense in its capacity to provoke and induce reflection. And finally, Gilpin offers a warning:

Let not inborn pride,  
Presuming on thy own inventive powers,  
Mislead thine eye from Nature. She must reign  
Great archetype in all. (*On Landscape Painting: A Poem*, 26-30)

### **Uvedale Price (1747-1829)**

This capacity to provoke is an essential element in the theories of Uvedale Price. Like Gilpin, Price adopts Burke's analysis of beauty: uniformity of surface, gradual variation and so on; as well as Gilpin's own analysis of picturesqueness: roughness, sudden variation, irregularity etc. Price, however, takes exception to pictorially-based definition, suggesting that the Picturesque is related to painting only accidentally:

That term, as we may judge from its etymology, is applied only to objects of sight; and, indeed, in so confined a manner as to be supposed

merely to have a reference to the art from which it is named. I am well convinced however, that the name and reference only are limited and uncertain, and that the qualities which make objects picturesque, are not only as distinct as those which make them beautiful or sublime, but are equally extended to all our sensations by whatever organs they are received; and that music—though it appears like a solecism—may be as truly picturesque, according to the general principles of picturesqueness, as it may be beautiful or sublime, according to those of beauty or sublimity. (*On the Picturesque*, 79-80)

Price also states: “Whoever studies art alone, will have a narrow pedantic manner of considering all objects” (3), stressing the importance also of “the mistress of all art” (4), Nature herself. Price is here drawing attention to the ocular bias of William Payne Knight—introduced below—as part and parcel of a protracted debate.

Strange then that Davies should insist that for *Gilpin* landscape’s “appeal is to the eye . . . only through the eye” (230). Heretically, in a topsy-turvy turn around and about Ullswater, Gilpin’s mentions the music of the winds and tempest, “the echoes excited . . . in different parts of [the] lake” (*Observations, Cumberland*, 59). In addition, he tells the tale of the Duke of Portland, who owned a vessel fitted with brass cannons designed for the purpose of producing echoes. “Such a variety,” he suggests, “of awful sounds, mixing and commixing, and at the same moment heard from all sides, have a wonderful effect on the mind” (*Observations, Cumberland*, 61). Another example of the auditory factor in the picturesque is Hagley, Lord Lyttelton’s estate, the locale in which Thomson revised and rewrote *The Seasons* which, besides the artificial ruins, featured a stream carefully designed for maximum gurgleability.

Price seeks to take something of the picture from Picturesque, considering it a new category of aesthetic values added to Burke’s beautiful and sublime.

. . . picturesqueness appears to hold a station between beauty and



sublimity; and, on that count, perhaps, is more frequently, and more happily blended with them both, than they are with each other. It is, however, perfectly distinct from either. Beauty and picturesqueness are indeed evidently founded on very opposite qualities; the one on smoothness, the other on roughness; the one on gradual, the other on sudden variation; the one on ideas of youth and freshness, the other on those of age, and even of decay. (*On the Picturesque*, 90)

Again, this is only a modification—an engradisement—of Gilpin.

Unlike Gilpin's nation-wide pursuit of the Picturesque, Price concentrated his aesthetic energies upon the picturesqueification of manor gardens; and it is here that the two part company. In fact, it was William Kent, painter, architect and factotum of the Earl of Burlington, who led the revolt against the artificial symmetry of gardens, (see figure 5 ), modifying, in 1734, the gardens at Chiswick House with a meandering stream and an irregular path. Price adopted Kent's early ideas and developed a more expansive theory of picturesque landscaping, arguing in *On the Picturesque* (1794), that gardens should imitate landscape paintings and that the gardener and painter each aspire to the improvement of nature—again, the familiar idea of Nature as archetype which might be improved through art. Though inspired by Claude and Salvator, Price also aspired, as suggested above, towards the guiding hand of raw nature and offered pragmatic suggestions of picturesque effects landowners might attempt. Unfortunately, Price's own effect over actual landscapes was severely limited by the very nature of his improvements, many of which required decades to reach full decay.

If the patrician Price failed to effect solid change in the English manor landscape, he nevertheless bequeathed a more ironic and widespread legacy: just as “the picturesque sketch promoted naturalism in landscape painting” (Bermingham, 67), Price's notions fostered a new naturalism in gardening—advocating the wild, the

dramatic, the “accident” of nature: a withered tree, a half-submerged branch breaking the surface of a pool—and continued the democratisation of the Picturesque aesthetic. Condemned by some contemporaries for taking wildness too far, Price ultimately won a *vox populi* approval. Indeed, the art of picturesque gardening was soon exported: “. . . the continent, about 1770, began to adopt widely the English . . . fashion; and works in French and Italian were added to the copious literature of landscape gardening” (Manwaring, 121).

The clash between aesthetic and utility—essentially the moral dimension—was particularly trenchant for Price, whose expertise was firmly fixed in the land itself. In reference to thatched cottages, for example, he suggests: “It is no less picturesque, when mossy, ragged, and sunk in among the rafters in decay; a species of that character, however, which the keenest lover of it would rather see on another's property than on his own” (*On the Picturesque*, 398). To this, the zealous and sometimes verbose editor of the 1842 edition interpolates:

I confess, that after considerable experience, I have been completely cured of my romantic attachment to thatch. If the roof of a cottage be well formed, and well projected, so as to throw a deep shadow over the wall beneath it, I do not conceive that it will be necessary to thatch it, in order to add to its picturesque effect, at the risk of diminishing the comfort of the poor inmates. (398)

Price the gentleman farmer, occupied with increased production and the maximisation of land use, appears, Ann Bermingham points out, as something of a contradiction to Price the promoter of picturesque aesthetics, biased towards the nostalgic, the antiquated, the rustic, the dilapidated and the inefficient. The contradiction though seems somewhat delusive and is perhaps suggestive of the transformation of the paternal landlord-tenant relationship, with the picturesque manor garden now forming a physical boundary between aesthetic and productive

nature.

### Richard Payne Knight (1750-1824)

Richard Payne Knight, who owned the most valuable collection of Claudes in Europe and whose interests were eclectic,<sup>15</sup> provides still another perspective. In, *The Landscape: a Didactic Poem in Three Books*, he refutes compositional analysis, instead seeing art as a “magic power”(8) which defies analysis and rule:

Curse on the pedant jargon, that defines  
 Beauty's unbounded forms to given lines!  
 With scorn eternal mark the cautious fool  
 Who dares not judge till he consults his rule!  
 .....  
 Or when, Salvator from thy daring hand  
 Appears, in burnished arms, some savage band,—  
 Each figure boldly pressing into life,  
 And breathing blood, calamity, and strife,  
 Should cold measure each component part  
 And judge thy genius by a surgeons art. (6-7)

Knight also disagrees with Price's multi-sensory theory, believing that the Picturesque “is merely that kind of beauty which belongs exclusively to the sense of vision; or to the imagination guided by that sense”<sup>16</sup>(*On the Picturesque*, 500).

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<sup>15</sup>Besides *Landscape and An Analytical Enquiry into the Principles of Taste*, Knight published books ranging in subject from sexual symbolism to Greek philology.

<sup>16</sup>This note by Knight is reprinted as a preface to Price's *The Landscape*. Importantly, the dominance of the ocular sense which, in reference to the Picturesque, so bothered Wordsworth and is often adopted in literary analysis in

Knight provides a curious blend of neo-classical—with his didactic poem festooned in rhyming couplets and his notions of “taste”—and romantic, a clear sign of the transition underway:

Such too the Sicyonian sculptor taught  
To model motion, and embody thought;  
Pure abstract beauty's fleeting shades to trace  
And fix the image of ideal grace:  
Combining what he felt with what he saw. (5-6)

Besides his emphasis upon “feeling” in the almost magical and almost irrational production of art, Knight points towards the dangers of fashion:

Straight lines were the fashion of the last century, and the curved ones are the fashion of this, and an indiscriminate adherence to the fashion of the day, what ever it happens to be, with a supercilious contempt for all who venture to dissent from it, is the never failing characteristic of the vanity, separated from the feeling, or discernment, of taste. The advocate for the curve lines would have been as much ridiculed in the last century as the advocate for straight ones in this; and with equal reason; for the indiscriminate use of either is equally bad. Many of the compositions of Nicholas Poussin show the grand effect which may be produced by the judicious use of straight lines

.....  
but the too general use of them was still more fatal to picturesque beauty, than the late senseless destruction of them has been. It belongs to the real improver to discriminate where the straight, and where the

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reference to Gilpin was most singular to Knight; and was, in fact, a cornerstone of the debate between Knight and Price.

curve line will best suit the composition; and it is this talent of discrimination which distinguishes the liberal artist from the mechanic.

(fn 11)

Here, “faddish” (Brownlow, 43) modern appraisals typified also by the “vogue of the picturesque” (Nevius, 33) are clearly drawn and quartered by Knight’s properly considered execution of Picturesque principles which supersede transient newfangledness and commemorate the sempiternal.

Knight’s fixation upon “taste,” and “discrimination,” are reminiscent of the superciliousness of a Pope or a Swift, though his distinction between the mechanic and liberal artist—one who follows no rules besides those which the magic spirit of art suggests—offers a place within the romantic arena. Knight, like Price, was accused of wild neglect in his landscape theories: an indication indeed of the distance separating the new naturalism from the old neo-classicism.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, Knight insists that the transplanting and mimicking of Italian landscape—both real or painted—should finally be abandoned in preference to compositions which adopt Picturesque principles and native scenes:

Nor, plac’d beneath our cool and wat’ry sky  
 Attempt the glowing tints of Italy:  
 For thus compell’d in mem’ry to confide,  
 Or blindly follow some preceding guide,  
 One common track it still pursues,  
 And crudely copies what it never views . . . . (309-314)

The work of Price and Knight, though perhaps less interesting a read than Gilpin, augmented the Picturesque phenomenon to a point where it was not only the talk of the town but of the estate and village. Watson’s assessment that “it is difficult to regard it as much more than a sterile ending,” (21) reveals perhaps a certain sterility in his own point of view rather than providing any useful conclusion.

### Lancelot Brown (1716-83)

Lancelot “Capability” Brown, though embroiled in the Picturesque debate, essentially helped define the Picturesque by negation: Brownian improvement replaced the artificiality of neo-classical landscape gardens with a new artificiality based either upon Burke’s principles of beauty or Brown’s singular notions born orphan and condemned to permanent infancy. Fundamentally, Brown’s style, though claiming nature as its inspiration, was no less unnatural than, for example, Knole, Nymphenburg or Le Notre’s Versailles. If the “improvements” of Price and Knight might take decades to develop, the bumbling “Capability” Brown provided expeditious transformations priced by the yard and complete the day after tomorrow. Gilpin himself comments upon this:

This is the first subject of the kind he [Brown] has attempted . . . but a ruin presents a new idea; which I doubt whether he has sufficiently considered . . . [His lake] is too magnificent, and too artificial an appendage, to be in unison with the ruins of an abbey. An abbey, it is true, may stand by the side of a lake; and it is possible that *this* lake may, in some future time, become its situation; when the marks of the spade and the pick-axe are removed,—when its osiers flourish; and its naked banks become fringed and covered with wood . . . the ruin stands now on a neat bowling-green like a house just built, and without any kind of *connection* with the ground it stands on. (qtd. Watkin, 48)

Brown designed his landscapes according to his own simple understanding of nature’s harmonies and gradients, featuring vast expanses of grass, irregularly shaped bodies of water, and clumpified tree groupings. As a consequence, Brown eventually became the object of general ridicule:

On one occasion Owen Cambridge remarked, “I wish I may die before you, Mr. Brown.” “Why so?” inquired the puzzled but flattered Brown.

“Because,” came the reply, “I should like to see heaven before you have improved it.” (qtd. Hussey, 139)

Brown clearly and entirely personified the halting and maladroit neo-classical Picturesque, an awkward attempt to plant a round tree in a square hole; and his importance stems partly from the middleground his improvements occupied, and partly from the antithetical virtue of something which is not providing a point of reference to something which is.

### The Philosophical Context

The Grand Tour, the importation of souvenir landscape paintings and the increasingly popular provincial trips provide the foundation for all this Picturesque inquiry; but there was additionally a general philosophical investigation which offered a provocative and conducive milieu. Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1762-1814) equated God with the natural order of the world; Wilhelm Wackenroder's *Effusions of an Art-Loving Friar* (1773-1798) proposed the existence of two Divine languages, the first reserved for solely for God, the second composed of two components: Nature and Art—a kind of bilingualism for the unilingual. Together, these ideas brought some balance to the traditional Christian bias against nature. Most important was Burke's (1729-1797) aforementioned theory of the sublime: the ultimate experience of divinity, composed of awe, fear and enlightenment, and produced by the contemplation of potent and alarming nature. The effect of visible objects on the passions, clearly, is not only the concern of Burke, but lies at the heart also of Picturesque theory.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup>For a detailed historical analysis of enquiries into the sublime and the beautiful, as well as the debt owed by Blake to Joseph Addison, see Walter John Hipple's *The Beautiful, the Sublime and the Picturesque*.

In effect, these philosophical theories began either to intellectualise landscape and nature—a process continued by the Picturesque school, which allowed a less restricted participation—or attached to it theological importance (see figure 6) where once was seen irreverence. Caspar David Friedrich (1774-1840), for example, exhibited *Cross in the Mountains* in 1808: a landscape intended as an altarpiece for a private chapel. Critics initially condemned this as sacrilegious. Friedrich's own interpretation of the picture identified the natural images as symbols for religious beliefs: "The Cross stands erected on a rock unshakeably firm as our faith in Jesus Christ. Evergreen, enduring through all ages, the firs stand round the cross, like the hope of mankind in Him" (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*). Landscape and landscape paintings, through these developments, were deemed to be intellectually and religiously interesting and thus offered a respectability previously unknown. Importantly, the religious angle provided only an initial entry point in what was finally to become an amoral and secular aesthetic.

Returning to the properly Picturesque, Thomas West's *Guide to the Lakes, in Cumberland, Westmorland, and Lancashire*, first published in 1778, displays the religious overtones of landscape within the context of the urban/rural dichotomy:

Such as spend their lives in cities, and their time in crouds will here meet with objects that will enlarge the mind, by contemplation, and raise it from nature to nature's first cause. Whoever takes a walk into these scenes must return penetrated with a sense of the creator's power in heaping mountains upon mountains, and enthroning rocks upon rocks. And such exhibitions of sublime and beautiful objects cannot but excite at once both rapture and reverence. (4)

Although religion, ultimately, would be banished from the Picturesque scene, initially such inclusion provided justification and absolution for the new focus on landscape. Within the larger context, the developing interest in landscape painting



and landscape itself comes as no surprise and the romantic school of poetry was essentially a natural progression as inevitable as the wooded shadows cast by a brilliant dawn.

### **Landscape Painters Autochthonous**

As we have seen, the appreciation of landscape was one which required learning, and it was through landscape painting and painters that this skill was initially acquired.

#### **Thomas Gainsborough (1727-88)**

Thomas Gainsborough, perhaps the earliest and certainly most highly regarded pioneer of picturesque English landscape painting, emerged as

the most significant landscape painter of the century. Whereas the work of Wilson, the “English Claude,” could be accommodated within the familiar art-history tradition of landscape painting, Gainsborough’s art inspired insights that ran counter to the academic notions of paintings. . . (Bermingham, 58)

Gainsborough “gave landscape the status of pure painting: private, personal” (Bermingham 43). Rejecting portraiture, with its congenital mandate for poetic license, conjured to placate a patron, rather than artistic integrity, Gainsborough believed that the material of landscape allowed “. . . the artist freely to exercise his imagination” (Bermingham 44).<sup>18</sup> In his later work, Gainsborough offered ever more subjective and sentimental subjects: the cottage, the sublimity of sea, of mountain, and the innocence of children, each finding a correspondence in such poems as

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<sup>18</sup>Somewhat ironically, Wordsworth once rebuked his friend Beaumont for painting-in an imaginary ruined castle in one of his favourite views.

Wordsworth's "The Ruined Cottage," "Ode: Intimations of Immortality," "Farewell though little Nook of mountain ground" and "We Are Seven." In the decades after his death in 1788, a veritable inversion of taste had occurred, with critics and sensible folk alike increasingly praising landscape over portraits.

Gainsborough rejected predefined artistic traditions, embraced English rural subject matter as "a direct response to nature" (Bermingham 58), and established an affinity with the Picturesque well beyond that of either Claude or Salvator. If, as Hussey suggests, Claude, Salvator and others caused a revolution in the appreciation of scenery and nature, then Gainsborough landed that rebellion on the home front, adopting English countryside and scenes with a subjective reconnaissance which sought to discover their innate truth.

### **J M W Turner (1775-1851)**

Joseph Mallord William Turner was principally influenced by Claude, and so, not surprisingly, painted a host of picturesque scenes whose mythological and historical subjects are guaranteed to warm even the coldest cockles of the neo-classicist: *Dido Building Carthage*, *The Bay of Baiae with Apollo and the Sibyl* and *Ulysses Deriding Polyphemus*, to name only a few. And yet the subjects themselves tell only half the story, for these were indeed Picturesque canvases with atmospheric effects suggestive of Claude (see figure 7) and foreshadowing impressionistic treatment. Turner then demonstrates the tenacity of neo-classical material in paintings; but also the movement towards a more individual and romantic approach: in place of mere factual recording, Turner translated scenes into a light-filled expression of his own romantic outlook. Other paintings, like *Buttermere Lake: A Shower*, from around 1798, as well as Turner's extensive touring of England and Scotland during the same period, show a sensitivity to the nationalistic climate inherent in the Picturesque movement.

Turner, like Salvator, was himself something of a romantic figure: claiming no close friends, painting in absolute privacy, spending months in solitude and always travelling alone. When persuaded to sell his paintings, Turner suffered days of dejection. Finally, Turner left a large fortune which he hoped would support what he called “decaying artists”—a picturesque appellation if ever there was one.

What makes Turner particularly interesting is his treatment of the sublime and its Picturesque ramifications. John Ruskin has a unique and convincing view of this which explains the strength of the Picturesque and *partly*—infinitesimally—accounts for the modern literary bias:

. . . if this outward sublimity be sought for by the painter, without any regard for the real nature of the thing, and without any comprehension of the pathos of character hidden beneath, it forms the low school of the surface-picturesque; that which fills ordinary drawing-books and scrap-books, and employs, perhaps, the most popular living landscape painters of France, England, and Germany. But if these same outward characters be sought for in subordination to the inner character of the object, every source of pleasurable being refused which is incompatible with that, while perfect sympathy is felt at the same time with the object as to all that it tells of itself in those sorrowful by-words, we have the school of true or noble picturesque.

([www.stg.brown.edu/projects/hypertext/landow/ruskin](http://www.stg.brown.edu/projects/hypertext/landow/ruskin))

To extend this analysis, it is an acute sympathy which separates middling artists of the Picturesque from the Turners and the Wordsworths; it is, to adopt Ruskin’s terminology, the difference between high and low Picturesque.

Although Turner—*unlike* Wordsworth—employed both sketches *and* memory, a similar temporal distancing from subject is common to their respective

methodologies:

The sketch which Turner used as the basis for his drawing of *Louth, Lincolnshire*, a drawing that dates from sometime in 1827-8, was made thirty years earlier, in 1797. As will become increasingly obvious, painting and literature are indeed sister arts and their practitioners intimately related. (Shanes, 20)

### **John Constable (1776-1837)**

John Constable was born and bred in rural England and his bond to the countryside was life long and reverential.<sup>19</sup> No other painter of the period imbued such a sense of self in his work, calling his sketchbooks “journals”—complete with their autobiographical annotations—and stating, surely with a nod of approval from Wordsworth: “I am fond of being an Egoist in whatever relates to painting” (qtd. Bermingham, 87). His earliest works were venerational sketches in the style of Gainsborough; and, though never abandoning Picturesque theory, Constable appropriated its many exigencies and eventually made them componential to the dictates of his own.

Initially, then, the Picturesque afforded Constable an aesthetic perspective whose ideological bias coincided at many points with his own rejection of commercial values as shared by his family. Furthermore, the Picturesque focus on the specific appearances of objects and the power of these appearances to evoke strong imaginative associations encouraged Constable’s own propensity to infuse particular views and objects with affective significance. (Bermingham,

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<sup>19</sup>Constable was born in Suffolk, and though he found the Lake District too solitary a place, it was there, in 1806, that he met Wordsworth and Coleridge.

113-114)

Perhaps the most striking aspect—at least to the literary minded—of Constable’s stylistic development involves his new conception of nature with its emphasis upon specific and individual elements which undermine traditional hierarchical landscape composition. Discussing *Dedham Vale: Morning*, Bermingham states:

. . . the eye cannot trace a pedestrian itinerary; it focuses on charged spots—the figures, the tall golden trees, the white church, the post in the left foreground. . . . [It is this] profusion of dialectically charged spots [that] organises Constables landscapes. (123)

Besides these spots of composition, Constable, in the frontispiece of *English Landscape Scenery*, supplies an archetype for his work in general:

This spot saw the day-spring of my life,  
Hours of Joy and years of Happiness;  
This place first tinged my boyish fancy with a love of the Art,  
This place was the origin of my fame. (qtd. Bermingham, 125)

The obvious and unavoidable correspondence with Wordsworth’s “spots in time” is further augmented by Constable’s use of recollection: *Flatford Mill from the Lock*, as a case in point, is a composite canvas composed of five prefatory and much studied sketches,<sup>20</sup> and features five charged spots—focal points of interest—copied from their respective points in the sketches. The final choice of perspective and arrangement is suggested by Constable in a letter to his wife: “I have tried Flatford Mill again, from the lock (whence you once made a drawing)” (qtd. Bermingham, 131). The lock and its view, as we see, are associated with his wife, and the final composition is imbued with the emotions stirred by his memories of that moment and of imaginings, of retrospection: “. . . what he experienced remembering with

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<sup>20</sup>See Bermingham for reproduced illustrations.

what she had experienced in the process of drawing” (Bermingham 132); a fusion of past and present.

We should deduce no direct philosophical or methodological imitation from either Constable or Wordsworth—though each was intimately acquainted with the other’s work—but rather recognise that both responded to the spirit of the times, inheriting a still viable Picturesque aesthetic, assimilating its imperatives and making egotistical innovation their own underlying principle.

### **End Word**

If we accept for the moment that the romantic movement came not as a miraculous gift from a prophetic Wordsworth tired of rhyming his couplets and poeticising his passages, but as a result of processes already under way; similarly, the Picturesque itself developed through gradual shifts in the philosophical mind and artistic mix.



Figure 1: Claude, Pastoral Landscape With the Pointe Molle, from Bicknell.

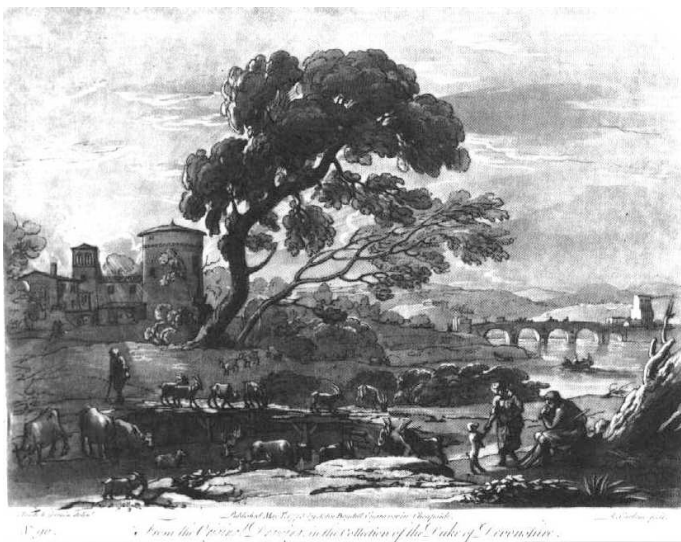


Figure 2: Earlom, from Bicknell

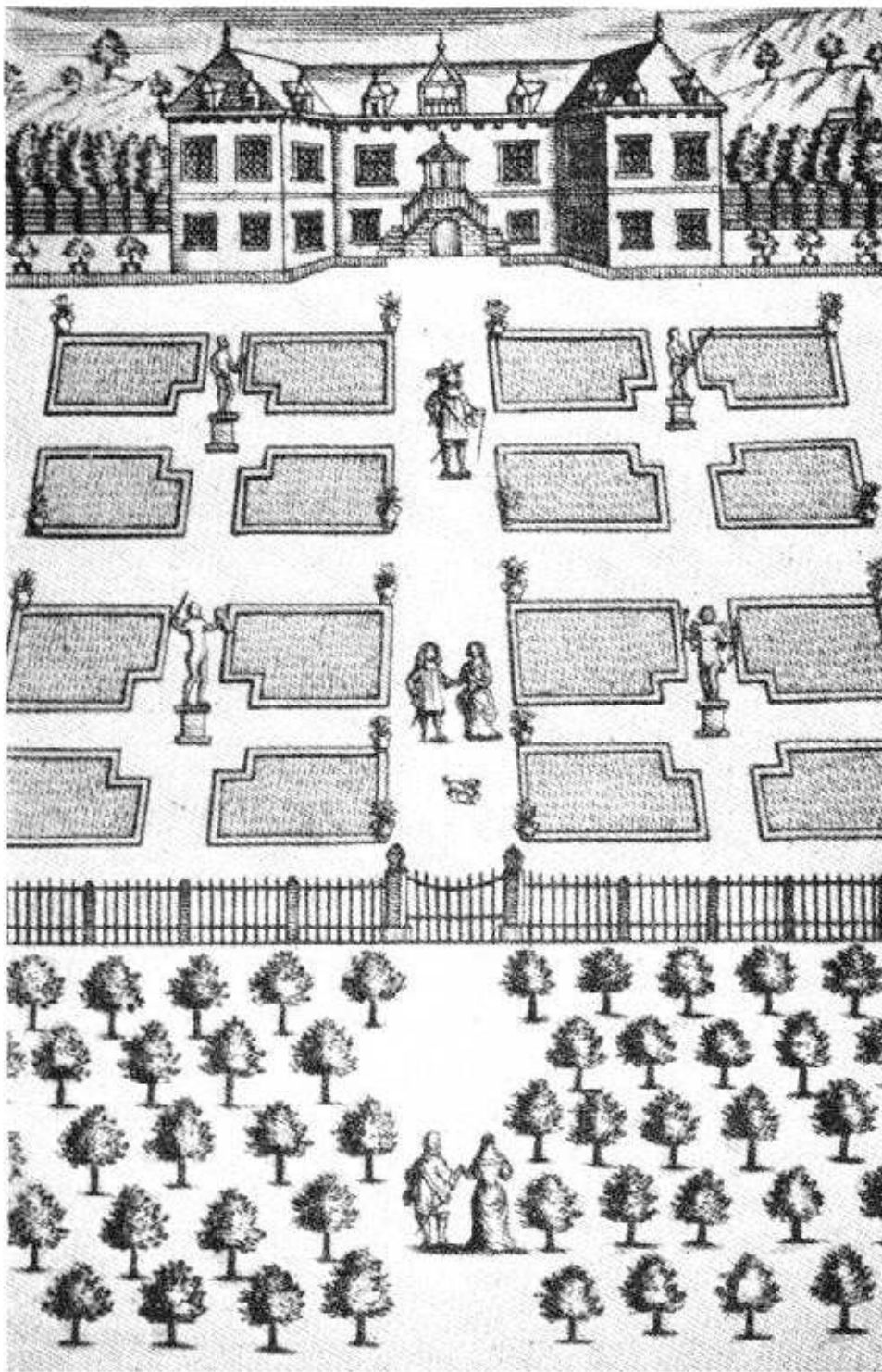


Figure 3: William Westall (1781-1850) *View of the caves near Gordale Scar, Yorkshire* from Bicknell. "Of all the scenes regularly visited by travellers in search of the Picturesque, Gordale Scar most vividly evoked Salvator" (Bicknell, 72).



Figure 4: Gilpin, Number 18, from Bicknell





PLAN FOR A GARDEN  
From *Systema Horti-Culturæ*, by J. Woolridge, 1688.

Figure 5: Garden Plan, from Manwaring



Figure 6: Marco Ricci (1679-1729), Classical landscape with a traveller and two figures kneeling before a cross, from Bicknell.

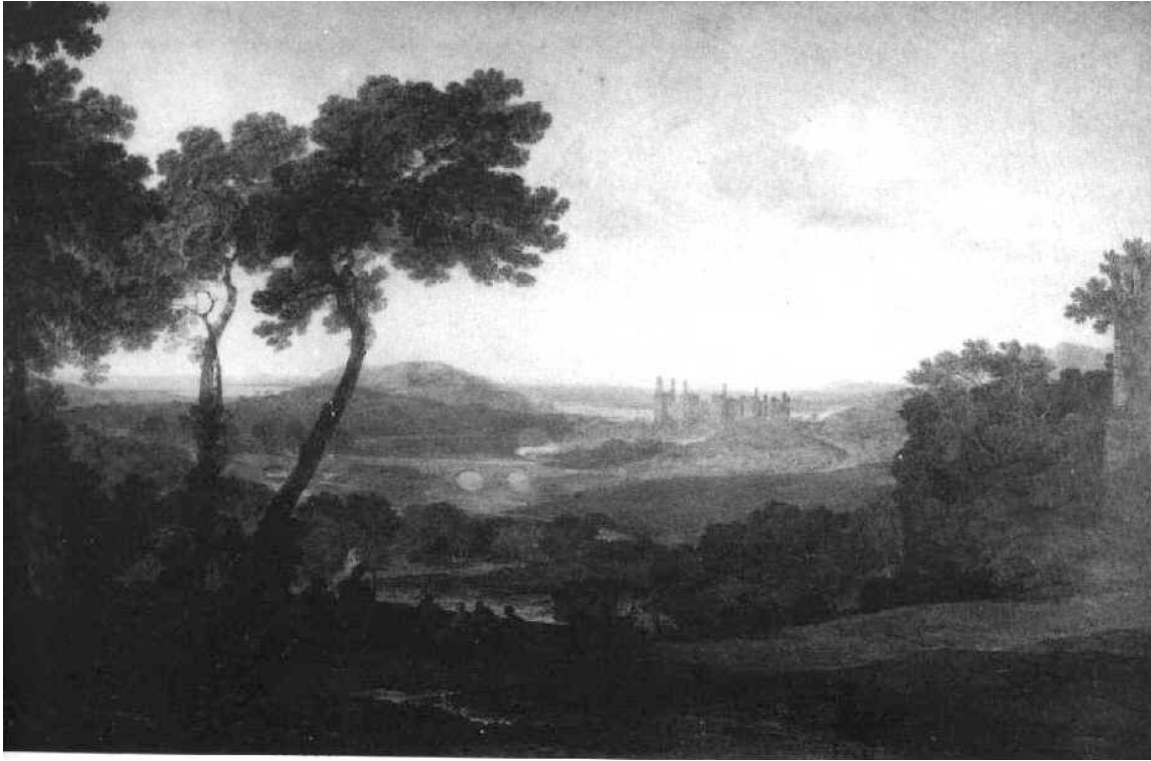


Figure 7: Turner, *Caernarvon Castle* (1799) Claudeian influence.

## Section Two: Background

### Argument

Moving from Picturesque affects to effects: as fundamental to literature as to the way we presently evaluate and relate to landscape scenes, the holidays and pictures we take, the rural dreams we dream. Continuing the supposition that the Picturesque was no mere fad, this section will detail the transition from literature's traditional view of landscape shortly before and during the Augustan reign to one which gradually accommodates Picturesque learning and issues in the sovereign Nature of the romantics.

### First Word

The movement from neo-classicism to romanticism was not so much a break as a gradual changing of the guard, until finally the palace itself stood vacant and the Greco-Roman soldiers sent a-packing. Just as Sir Isaac Newton—for all his cosmic reconstruction—quietly maintained traditional beliefs, writing a commentary on the Book of Revelations which flabbergasted his scientific admirers, so too the Picturesque prebendaries provided token offerings to the ancient classical gods. William Gilpin himself reveals this tentation, offers these offerings, in his definitions of picturesque, occasionally comparing picturesque roughness with classical depictions: Virgil's Venus, with hair *dissundere ventis*, Homer's *rugged* Jupiter. The strain of discovering the Picturesque in the classics is injurious both to Picturesque theory and to the authors themselves, though the omnipresence and potency of Augustan authority and prestige during the eighteenth century essentially made necessity of inanity.

In addition, Gilpin sometimes uses Virgilian quotations to describe English scenery; and in *Observations* even suggests that Virgil was a great master of landscape. From this, Hugh Sykes Davies—perhaps the most Boeotian of modern critics—understands the Picturesque to be a “revived Augustan attitude to Nature” (248)—a particularly unique and outlandish notion which defies both the evidence of art and literature. Indeed, David Watkin makes this absurdity clear:

Carroll Meeks showed in 1957<sup>21</sup> how each of the five principles of the Picturesque—variety, movement, irregularity, intricacy and roughness—is respectively echoed in the characteristics of Baroque as defined by Heinrich Wölfflin (1864-1945): painterly, recession, open, unity and unclearness. In Wölfflin’s *visual* system of analysis, which in itself could be seen as a legacy of the Picturesque, these characteristics were identified as the opposite of those of Classic Art: namely linear, plane, closed, multiplicity and clearness. (x)

Section one provided some hint of the amorality that marks the Picturesque school. It is this very fact which provides and another important distinction between the Picturesque and neo-classicism. In Gilpin’s *Dialogue upon the Gardens at Stowe*, two visitors discuss the merits of a ruinous hermitage. The first is puzzled “why we are more taken with a prospect of this ruinous kind, than with views of Plenty and Prosperity in their greatest Perfection.” (5) The second responds:

Yes: but cannot you make a distinction between natural and moral Beauties? Our social Affections undoubtedly find their Enjoyment the most complete when they contemplate, a Country smiling in the midst of Plenty, where Houses are well-built, Plantations regular, and everything the most commodious and useful. But such Regularity and

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<sup>21</sup>C. Meeks, *The Railroad Station, An Architectural History*.

Exactness excites no manner of Pleasure in the Imagination, unless they are made use of to contrast with something of an opposite kind. (5)

Malcolm Andrews contextualises such differentiations: “. . . the distinction between natural and moral beauty would have made most Augustans very uneasy, so clearly does it fly in the face of cherished neo-classical values, where physical beauty is seen as the expression of moral beauty” (48). In terms more specifically concerned with the development of the Picturesque and romantic poetry, Brownlow makes a similar point: “They [neo-classicists] took it as axiomatic that the training of the eye was a moral activity, in that a properly conceived, and perceived, landscape or garden was an emblem of order . . . in the state, the mind, the soul, and the emotions” (15).

The influence of the Picturesque in France stands as further testament: there the impact was particularly striking for “it conflicted with the rationalist trend of architectural theory which survived from the late seventeenth into the early twentieth century” (Watkin, 161).

Eighteenth century neo-classical and Picturesque correlations, like those of Gilpin, which are, at best, spurious, are further explained, firstly, by some degree of pedantry; secondly, intellectual name-dropping, offering assent through association; and thirdly, and most particularly, the tremendous difficulties involved in developing an aesthetic outside the ubiquitous and intrinsically disdainful neo-classical confines.

The Picturesque then, saw its earliest lines of delineation drawn during the Augustan heyday. Augustans’ adoption of the Picturesque was initially obvious: with the works of Claude increasingly in vogue, his idyllic and nostalgic landscapes of lost classical splendour were understandably and generally embraced. Indeed, the historical/classical narrative in Claude’s paintings was comfortably accommodating to neo-classicists and offered—as was the case with religious allusion—a license of interest in what was actually a novel, non-classical, non-traditional genre.

## The Picturesque Path<sup>22</sup>

The attendant problem in viewing pre-picturesque poets through the filter of this thesis is actually the point: landscape in literature, until the early eighteenth century, is conspicuous either by its absence, rarity, or treatment. As mentioned in Section One, just as landscape in painting initially existed largely as a backdrop to human drama, similarly, in literature, it functioned as a symbol of or allusion to grander to more “worthy” conceptions.

### Ben Jonson (1572/3-1637)

Ben Jonson’s “To Penshurst” (1616) is an interesting case in point: cutting the first turf in a sub-genre celebrating a specific locale, its treatment of landscape is exactly as we would expect, which is to say, exactly as this thesis anticipates. Penshurst, the country seat of the Sidney family (Sir Philip being the most familiar) is described by Jonson in a most particular manner: after a brief preamble describing the manor’s modest facade, the poem turns to the surrounding gardens, where “Thou hast thy walks for health, as well as sport” (9)—though notably not for any aesthetic value; where, not surprisingly, Pan and Bacchus drop in for a famous feast; and where every element of this topography reads like a catalogue of ownership, the ledger of a steward rather than a poetic eulogy or a laudation of landscape.

“That taller tree, which of a nut was set / At his great birth, where all the Muses met” (13-14), initially provides a symbolic marking of Sir Phillip’s birth, soon inscribed—“There in the writhed bark are cut the names / Of many a sylvan” (15-

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<sup>22</sup>Early pastoral romances—Sidney’s *Arcadia* (1580-1582), for example—were resplendent in romance, requiring their courtly readers to possess a familiarity not with nature but classical texts and the conventions of courtly behaviour and are thus excluded from this study.

16)—with the scrawl of lovers re-scrawled as the initials of fabled wood deities. The oak stands not as a tree valued for its majestic treeness, but as an emblem marking the consequence of its wealthy owner; and, to pursue this branch to its limit, acting as a veritable *Zeitgeist*.

“Thy copse, too, named of Gamage, thou hast there, / That never fails to serve thee seasoned deer” (19-20), strengthens the notion of ownership through nomenclature and introduces the main theme: nature not as *objet d’art* but as morsels of existentialistic meat, the ingredients of *art culinaire*. Accordingly, in this Edenic garden, with land-owner seated not as Adam but standing as God, “The painted partridge lies in every field, / And, for thy mess, is willing to be killed” (29-30); and “Fat, aged carps, that run into thy net, / Bright eels that emulate them, and leap on land / Before the fisher, or into his hand” (33-35). Of course, all this is very pragmatic and moral, supporting the pillars of establishment and legitimate dominion in a manner suggestive of Elizabethan hierarchy. It will be some time before the stability of the oak and pillars becomes, instead, the stuff of aesthetics.

### John Denham (1615-69)

Sir John Denham, in *Cooper’s Hill* (1642), composed one of the earliest and particularly influential topographical poems. Typically, it mixes natural descriptions with moral. Here, for example, the two are intercoured:

Though with those streams he no resemblance hold,  
Whose foam is amber and their gravel gold;  
His genuine and less guilty wealth t’ explore,  
Search not his bottom, but survey his shore. (165-168)

The incorporation of historical and political reflections, besides foreshadowing Pope—specifically *Windsor Forest*—highlight a landscape invisible without the filter of man’s works. Interestingly, ironically, use of the heroic couplet marks the



transition from metaphysicals to neo-classicism in much the same way that Thomson's *The Seasons* foreshadows romanticism.

### John Hughes 1677-?

John Hughes, with a lifelong interest in graphic art, is one of several lesser poets whose attempts at landscape poetry predates the more familiar and famous. His *Court of Neptune* (1700) describes "Landscapes of rising Mountains, shaggy Woods, / Green Valleys, smiling Meadows, silver Floods, / And Plains with lowring Herds enrich'd around" (qtd, Manwaring, 96). Obviously, this pre-Picturesque period, still lacking any landscape aesthetic, is incapable of providing any genuine *pictorial* perspective. Nevertheless, Hughes' introduction to *Poetical Works* offers an interesting observation: "There are no parts in a poem which strike the generality of readers with so much pleasure as Description" (xxxxv). Poems like "The Picture," features an original collecting of hues from nature:

Queen of fancy hither bring  
 .....  
 So from ev'ry flow'r and plant  
 Gather first the immortal paint  
 Fetch me lilies, fetch me roses. (7-14)

The poem is delightful not only for its originality, but for the genuine poetic sensibility. Finally, however, all this pigment is to paint a portrait of Venus.

"Greenwich Park," despite the hopefulness of its title, inevitably becomes nothing more than a background for parading and prancing nymphs, Cupid, Mira and various embodiments of beauty: a landscape reflecting classicism and finally fading into aesthetic oblivion while all the radiance that remains is human. Poems like "The triumph of peace occasioned by the peace of Ryswich 1697" and "The court of Neptune on King William's return from Holland 1699," surprisingly do contain

landscape elements, though again only as a history painting-like background.

Only the subject itself of *To Mr. Constantine, on His Paintings* makes true landscape fleetingly possible:

Here tufted Groves rise boldly to the Sky,  
 There Spacious Lawns more distant charms the Eye,  
 The Crystal Lakes, in Borrow'd Tinctures shine  
 And misty Hills the far Horizon join,  
 Lost in the azure of Borders of the Day,

Like Sounds remote that die in Air away. (qtd, Manwaring, 96)

Conventionally a cardinal artistic sin, this copy of copy surprisingly exhibits particular merit, not only for the avant-garde Picturesque elements—William Kent's 1709 Memorandum, after all, appears now on the horizon—but with the “borrowing” from one state of reality to another and the canvas' frame providing closure to the day. Nevertheless, any systematic rendition of landscape is, at this time, possible only by imitation not of nature—nor indeed Nature—but of a landscape canvas.

## The Picturesque Convergence

### Alexander Pope

Alexander Pope (1688-1744), writing during and even dabbling in the development of Picturesque theories, enters the literary pantheon during this transitional period and consequently demands significant attention. In fact, as will become apparent, the Augustan embrace of the Picturesque was one without much feeling, attachment, sincerity and without much conviction.

Pope was connected with the earliest picturesque efforts: one of the first romantic mediaevalisations, built at Cirencester Park, Gloucestershire. Known as Alfred's Hall,

it was begun in 1721 for the first Earl of Bathurst. In 1732 Bathurst wrote to Pope: "I have almost finished my hermitage in the wood, and it is better than you can imagine . . . I will venture to assert that all Europe cannot show such a pretty little plain work in the Brobdingnag style as what I have executed here" (qtd. Watkin, 45). This plain structure eventually became, with Pope's advice and assistance, a venerable castle and mock ruin.

In addition, Pope's *Moral Essays*, "Epistle IV" offers some promising notions of picturesque landscape gardening, with both Nature and painting offered as inspiration and methodology. This leads J. R. Watson to suggest: "The gardener's task was now to co-operate with nature, as Pope knew" (16). In fact, although Pope mocks the formality of a Versailles, supplanting it with, "Parts answ'ring parts shall slide into view / Spontaneous beauties all around advance, / Start ev'n from Difficulty, strike from Chance" (66-68), his own poetry regularly smacks of the formality of affected gardens. Indeed, Pope's own garden—mostly laid out in c. 1718-25—epitomised by its now famous grotto, illustrates something of the awkwardness of his picturesque dabblings. David Watkin—in what becomes a familiar motif of prevarication—succinctly describes this incongruity: "Pope enhanced his grotto with optical illusion, with mirrors and waterworks, with ores and minerals chosen for their beauty not their rarity, yet he still considered it natural in comparison with the formality and artificiality of mannerist and baroque grottoes" (4).

*A Plan of Mr. Pope's Garden*, penned by John Serle, Pope's gardener and manservant, reveals more details: the grotto was, in fact, a rock and sea-shell strewn tunnel leading beneath a road to the garden. Besides the opulence of the marble plaque inscribed in gold letters decorating the entrance, Italian marble, Plymouth marble, Cornish diamonds, Amethystine crystals—to scratch only the surface—form the grotto itself. Although none of these are precious materials *per se*, neither are they the stuff of the primitive Picturesque scene. *A Plan*, in its cartographic fold-out,

reveals the lay-out of the garden: formed mostly of radial and rectilinear pathways and a polished lawn, there are nevertheless a few hesitant serpentine walks. Watkin admits: "What Pope persisted in seeing as 'natural' seems to us as artificial as Rococo . . ." (5). Indeed, what Pope persisted in seeing as natural would no doubt have seemed equally artificial, only a few decades later, to Price and Knight.

What makes *A Plan* particularly interesting is its uninteresting inventory, which not only itemises the materials used in the grotto, but their source:

Several large Groups of *Cornish* Diamonds tinged with a blackish Water, from the Rev. Dr. *William Borlace* of *Ludgvan* in *Cornwall*. . . .  
Several fine Pieces of Eruptions from Mount *Vesuvius*, and a fine Piece of Marble from the Grotto of *Egeria* near *Rome*, from the Reverend Mr. *Spence*; with several fine Petrifications and *Plymouth* Marble, from Mr. *Cooper*. (6-7)

This brief extract, with its "fine" name dropping, reveals the familiar marks of ownership and prestige. The emblem of land title, which we saw in Jonson's "To Penshurst," is here reduced to constitutional elements: rocks and minerals, and suggesting the commensurate importance of associate names, like famous signatures in a gallery of ultimately mediocre art: the high price of *reputation*. Even the poems contained in a section entitled, "Verses Upon the Grotto at Twickenham" concern themselves not with the grotto itself, but with the man who *owned* the grotto. Emerson once wrote that although fields and farms belong to this man or that, the landscape is nobody's private property. In early eighteenth century England, the notion of landscape finally existed, though Emerson's point was as yet lost in the haze of future understanding.

The far flung opulence, the unnatural far flung assortment of items collected from various regions—how natural is a chunk of Vesuvius clinging to a lump of Plymouth Marble?—should, one would think, quickly and convincingly settle the question

which Morris R. Brownell rhetorically poses in his introduction to *A Plan*: “Pope’s acknowledgement to Sloan for his gift of joints of the Giant’s Causeway raises the question of his conception of the grotto—fossillary of rare minerals or imitation of nature?” (viii). Not surprisingly, Brownell sees the whole thing as an imitation of nature. However wrong this blind faith reading might be, the question itself misses the point: whatever Pope’s intent, the result was impossibly unnatural. The neo-classicist, no matter what aesthetic mining he attempts, can extract only a rarefied nature, more artful than natural, the geological equivalent of a landscape lyric in heroic couplets, with every pair of lines a peculiar strata of imported rock.<sup>23</sup>

In fairness to Pope, however, Twickenham garden and Lord Burlington’s in Chiswick vie as the first picturesque grounds. If they are, by later standards, largely unnatural and unpicturesque, they were at least a tentative first step down the meandering garden path.

Further, Pope’s definition of *nature* was usually *Nature*, duly capitalised and interrelated not with “the great out-doors,” nor nature in a Darwinian sense, but more particularly the illustrative, universal and intransmutable; common sense and perspicacity:

Yet if we look more closely, we shall find  
Most have the seeds of judgement in their mind:  
Nature affords at least a glimmer of light;  
The lines, though touched but faintly, are drawn right; (“An Essay on  
Criticism,” 19-22)

Here the drawing metaphor is emphatically concerned neither with landscape nor

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<sup>23</sup>Besides the forced confinement of the heroic couplet, Abraham Cowley in *Pindarique Odes* (1665) set the example for deliberate irregularity, breaking the chords of the standard Pindaric precedent in an effort to stimulate more intense feeling.

art, but with “good sense.”

Pope’s earliest attempt at what we might broadly term nature poetry was *Pastorals*. Reading like a declaration of love from an avaricious beggarly bachelor to a wealthy widow, any genuine feeling seems obliterated by a self-conscious pedantic exhibitionism: the Thames valley landscape, for example, is chock-a-block with “*Sicilian Muses*” (certainly not *my* italics) though singularly Spartan in sunny meadows.

The natural elements in *Pastorals* typically function in one of three ways: firstly, as a form of extended characterisation:

Oh deign to visit our forsaken seats,  
The mossy fountains, and the green retreats!  
Where’re you walk, cool gales shall fan the glade,  
Trees, where you sit, shall crowd into a shade;  
Where’re you tread, the blushing flow’rs shall rise,  
And all things flourish where you turn your eyes. (71-76)

In this instance, the chastity, morality, purity of Rosalinda is externalised in a venerational relationship with subdued Nature. Secondly, as a mere pretext for manifold classicisms:

Beneath the Shade a spreading Beech displays,  
*Hylas* and *Aegon* sung their Rural Lays;  
This mourn’d a faithless, that an absent Love  
And *Dekia’s* Name and *Doris* fill’d the Grove.  
Ye *Mantuan* Nymphs, your sacred Succour bring;  
*Hylas* and *Aegon’s* Rural Lays I sing. (*Pastorals: Autumn*, 1-6)

And, thirdly, as in traditional paintings, as a background or at best a setting for human activity.

*Windsor Forest* (1713) provides another example of Pope’s inability to create either

pictorial or picturesque scenes. Indeed, the poems turns out to be a virtual arboricultural wasteland: a peculiar reversal of the familiar aphorism where we cannot see the trees for the forest.

Here Hills and Vales, the Woodland and the Plain,

Here Earth and water seem to strive again

.....

There, interspers'd in Lawns and opening Glades,

Thin Trees arise that shun each others Shades.

Here in full light the russet Plains extend;

There wrapt in Clouds the bluish Hills ascend. (11-24)

Certainly there is some semblance of landscape here, but the lawns are never far away, and we imagine a scene, not surprisingly, more typical of Capability Brown than the Picturesque. The natural elements are correspondingly here, here, there, here, there: namely, nowhere, a collage of bits glued willy-nilly, denying spatial and relative reality;<sup>24</sup> the thin trees seemingly represent not a fecund forest but the sparsity of Pope's pictorial sense.

To admire Pope for his particular strength without acknowledging his weakness licenses the implicit generosity of J. R. Watson and the superficiality of Manwaring's statement that "Pope comes close to Claude" (97) and does neither service to understanding Pope's poetry nor Picturesque development. Indeed, Hussey convincingly argues that, "There is no analogy in his landscapes to those of Claude

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<sup>24</sup>This is typical Pope: compare, for example, *The Temple of Fame*:

Here naked Rocks, and empty Wastes were seen,

There Tow'ry Cities, and the Forests green:

Here sailing Ships delight the wond'ring Eyes

There trees . . . (15-18)

or Salvator” (30). Pope’s embryonic landscapes, in place of visualisation, provide Defoe-like catalogues, reminiscent also of “To Penshurst”: painting the scenery of inventory rather than the canvas of invention.

### **Pope’s Classical Roots**

Ever since Horace’s dictum in *Ars Poetica* (c. 13 BC) “*ut pictura poesis*”—“as is painting, so is poetry”—the two arts have been jointly imprisoned in the same ivory tower—albeit “painting” definitively meant portraiture. Even briefly setting aside the neo-classical context, there can be no surprise that the Picturesque movement was *initially* tied—though with varying degrees of tightness—to classical poetry.

Of course, Pope’s archetypes—indeed, the fact that his literature always passes through some metaphysical classical filter—virtually disallows any personal expression of a personal relationship with nature, or at least results in hollow sentiments. A brief quotation from Virgil’s *The Eclogues* (37 BC) will perhaps make this clear:

Happy old man, who ’mid familiar streams  
 And hallowed springs, will court the cooling shade!  
 Here, as of old, your neighbour's bordering hedge,  
 That feasts with willow-flower the Hybla bees,  
 Shall oft with gentle murmur lull to sleep,  
 While the leaf-dresser beneath some tall rock  
 Uplifts his song, nor cease their cooings hoarse  
 The wood-pigeons that are your heart's delight,  
 Nor doves their moaning in the elm-tree top. ( Eclogue I)

Though certainly broader than Pope’s catalogue of natural elements, the holistic perspective of landscape is obviously impossible where man and his activities form the principal focus. Interestingly, Virgil goes beyond simple nature eulogy and those country comforts provide a simple alternative to urban opulence: “Let Pallas keep



the towers her hand hath built, / Us before all things let the woods delight”(Eclogue II).

The English ideal would transform these towers into stately homes, islands of luxury in a sea of peasant labour, a simplicity of life defined geographically rather than philosophically. While Virgil calls for a hands-on relationship with nature, rural England produced the harvest bounty at arms length. In addition to this, the classical landscape, though never described in terms of landscape, is one distinctly exotic, inhabited by pipe-playing shepherds, wayward wolves and unfamiliar flora. Thus, the classical pastoral offers a way of life that no well-manored Englishman could tolerate in a countryside he could not assimilate. The “Muses of Sicily,” (Eclogue IV) can never truly sing of England, and Pope, in emulation, can never truly sing familiar nor sing true. When Pope adopts not only the dialogic structure of Virgil’s *Eclogues* but the characters themselves, “Fair *Thames*, flow gently from thy sacred Spring, / While on thy Banks *Sicilian* Muses sing” (“Spring. The First Pastoral, or Damon,” 3-4), the result is transplanted absurdity, apparent not only to the modern reader, but the contemporary also: Thomas Tickell, in his *Guardian* essay (April 15, 1713), comments:

. . . our countrymen have so good an opinion of the ancients, and think so modestly of themselves, that the generality of Pastoral Writers have either stolen all from the Greeks and Romans, or so servilely imitated their manners and customs, as makes them very ridiculous. (qtd. Andrews, 11)

Pope understood none of this,<sup>25</sup> saw no immediacy in the pastoral, no native

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<sup>25</sup>Only myopic—perhaps: Lines 79-80 of *Pastorals: Summer*: “Your praise the tuneful birds to heaven shall bear, / And list’ning wolves grow milder as they hear.” In a footnote, Pope explains:

narrative nor contemporaneity: only a perpetual backwards survey of a Golden Age forged in Vulcan's far away fires. Accordingly, in "A Discourse on Pastoral Poetry," Pope states:

If we would copy Nature, it may be useful to take this Idea along with us, that pastoral is an image of what they call the Golden age. So that we are not to describe our shepherds as shepherds at this day really are, but as they may be conceiv'd then to have been. (120)

The real requirement was something Pope could never provide: a kind of reverse alchemy, transforming the gold of the Golden Age into the Englishman's baser mettle. Pope's further insistence upon "exposing the best side only of a shepherd's life, and in concealing his miseries" (120) is again in opposition with picturesque trends which, though, as we have seen, generally avoiding the moral context of poverty, places emphasis upon the dilapidated, the coarse, the unkept, positing hardship as intrinsic to the scene as the gnarled wind-blasted tree. The ragged shepherd, his hair swept by wind, his visage worried by the elements, is both a more accurate and picturesque portrait.

Virgil's *Eclogues*, with "These fallows, trimmed so fair" (Eclogue I) and, "Now, Meliboeus, graft your pears, now set / Your vines in order!" (Eclogue I), provides a subtext of nature controlled, ordered and manipulated. In *Georgics*, of course, this

So the verses were originally written. But the author, young as he was, soon found the absurdity which *Spenser* himself overlooked, of introducing Wolves into England. (131)

Pope's modesty here, of course, is overshadowed by the impressive achievement of discovering something even Spenser missed. A fortunate discovery too, for the absurdity of the wolves was noticed by the "*Naiads*," "*Jove*," and "*Satyrs*" to name only a few native English characters included in the poem.

philosophy becomes an overtly expressed treatise on the cultivation of estates, making the incongruity between the neo-classical and the Picturesque as conspicuous as a dilemma between nature ordered and natural disorder.

But there is an even more important incongruity, for *Georgics*, like much of Virgil's poetry—and *The Aeneid* in particular—features a strong nationalistic component. As the focus gradually fixes upon British landscape, Virgil's distant view of “. . . Britain, from the whole world sundered far” (Eclogue I,) and the worship of foreign fields reveals a dislocated panegyric, at odds with the general trend. Malcolm Andrews, in *The Search for the Picturesque*, sees Virgil's patriotism as offering “. . . a kind of licence for cultural emancipation” (9), and moves in the next paragraph to an analysis of Thomson's *The Seasons*, as if Virgil's nationalistic vision directly correlated to an appreciation of English landscape. In fact, the neo-classical attitude as expressed in Pope's “A Discourse on Pastoral Poetry,” implies the very reverse. Infatuation and emulation of the Golden Age proved a barrier to home-spun nature and landscape literature—briefly recollect the shepherd not as he is but as he might once have been—and it was the Picturesque movement which gradually laboured in chipping away at that barrier. This can be seen even in Pope's pastoral verse, “Spring. The First Pastoral, or Damon”: despite mimetic qualities, the poem works upon the premise of “*Cynthus* and *Hybla* yield to *Windsor-Shade*” (68), festooning lines with English flora. The result is a hodge-podge of classical characters, ancient gods, and the English rose as an uncomfortable floral bed fellow.

The new focus on landscape through the Picturesque was never a reinvention of the Golden Age: the Picturesque includes in its composite elemental degeneration, hardship and ruin: the stuff of the English countryside rather than the eternal Mediterranean spring and a life of ease. Richard Payne Knight's comment that “a person conversant with the writings of Theocritus and Virgil will relish pastoral scenery more than one unacquainted with such poetry” (*Inquiry*, 150), demonstrates

the difficulties involved in adopting a new and provincial landscape still largely devoid of literary and artistic association and prestige. Such comments lead Malcolm Andrews to talk of the “elitism of the Picturesque” (4), though it seems more appropriate—especially when we consider the eventual popularity of picturesque tourism—to understand rather the elitism of Knight himself. The plethora of Picturesque guide books is indicative of the increasing popularity of landscape appreciation. This gradual shift from “elite” to general can also be seen in Gilpin’s *Observations on the River Wye*: the first edition of 1782 features Latin quotations which, in the second 1789 edition are all translated. If textbooks on landscape gardening exist for the narrow academic, this by no means suggests the humble fellow busy building his lily pond is similarly focused. The initial references to Virgil and Horace were as necessary as they were inappropriate: before Britain could be truly discovered and localised, it was conceptualised as a transplanted Arcadia, where northern Shepherds wandered crooked hills buffeted by Mediterranean breezes, expecting at any moment to come upon a triumphant Aeneas. With no traditional appreciation for landscape as a meaningful aesthetic experience, new understanding, occasioned by the novel introduction of landscape paintings, came not from a moment of revelation, but rather from a gradual modification and eventual weakening of what was already known.

Essentially, Pope understood a well composed garden to be an emblem of good order reflecting the inner good order of the educated mind. His treatment of nature is subjugated by the omnipresent and Elizabethan notion that “ORDER is Heav’n’s first law” (*Essay on Man*, Epistle IV, 50), though devoid of Shakespeare’s sense of nature’s power, of Godlike omnipotence; and botany, biology, anthropology, philosophy, painting, all become mere lessons in classical history. Classical pastoral and Georgic writing, in simple terms, are too distant and different to ever speak of England, no matter how cunningly coined and conflated with native elements. Like Windsor

Forest, Pope's Picturesque is one defined by omission, a Picturesque truly without the picture.

## The Picturesque Scene

### James Thomson

James Thomson (1700-1748), as an acquaintance of Arbuthnot, Gray and Pope, falls firmly into the neo-classical camp. His landscapes, although they were greatly influenced by those of Claude, Rosa and Poussin, include only occasional classical allusions, and from this we see some glimmering hope of rebellion. Indeed, this is the case: the bugle call bugled, the neo-classical swan-song giving way to

The Muses, still with freedom found,  
Shall to thy happy coast repair:  
Blest isle! with matchless beauty crown'd,  
And manly hearts to guard the fair.  
"Rule, Britannia, rule the waves;  
Britons never will be slaves." ("Rule Britannia", 1729)

Despite somewhat artificial diction, Thomson's *The Seasons*:<sup>26</sup>, first completed in 1730 and later expanded, offers a landmark in English poetry. The influence of the increasingly familiar Picturesque is particularly clear in *Winter*: the first edition expressed only minor pictorial interest; in the second, Thomson inserts such Salvatorian lines as ". . . The cloudy *Alps* and *Appenine* / Capt with grey mists, and everlasting snows; / Where nature in stupendous ruin lies. (243-5)

The remaining three books, composed subsequently to *Winter*, feature diverse

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<sup>26</sup>Notwithstanding Wordsworth's recognition of Thomson as the first poet since Milton to offer new images of "external nature."

landscape scenes. *Summer* (1727) illustrates Claudian sun play:

. . . yonder comes the powerful *king* of day,  
 Rejoicing in the east. The lessening cloud  
 The kindling azure, and the mountain's brim,  
 Illumed with fluid gold; (81-84)

In *Spring* both the poet and Nature play the part of painter:

Behold yon breathing prospect bids the Muse  
 Throw all her beauty forth. But who can paint  
 Like Nature? Can imagination boast,  
 Amid its gay creation, hues like hers?  
 Or can it mix them with that matchless skill  
 And lose them in each other, as appears  
 In every bud that blows. (467-73)

Manwaring explains: "In the edition of 1744—that is, after his visit to Italy and his collecting of prints—appears the most elaborately composed of all his landscapes, with real Claudian distances" (104). Although none of this is specifically Picturesque, the Claudian influence and the well defined conflation of poetry and landscape painting demonstrate the development underway.

Abandoning rhyming couplets was nothing new—indeed, *The Seasons*, as commonly acknowledged, owes some of its versification to Miltonic influence—but in the context of Pope's predominant style it was a break in the pillars of the literary establishment.

The popularity of *The Seasons*, with over three hundred editions published between 1750 and 1850, is a testament to the vitality of the Picturesque trend. Certainly, *The Seasons* is not solely a Picturesque poem, though the influence of painting is everywhere; and the title itself, suggestive of the temporal changes of nature, quotes the movement of Picturesque tenets in implicit opposition to the static

catalogues of Pope: a real landscape that generates and degenerates. Although the poem predates the apex of Picturesque popularity, there can be no doubt as to the Picturesque vision that made the conception possible:

. . . now the bowery walk  
 Of covert close, where scarce a speck of day  
 Falls on the lengthened gloom, protracted sweeps;  
 Now meets the bending sky, the river now  
 Dimpling along, the breezy ruffled lake  
 The forest darkening round, the glittering spire,  
 The ethereal mountain, and the distant main.  
 (*Spring*, 519-525)

Here we see not only metastasis, the chequered canvas of change, with the temporal “now” rather than Pope’s unplaceable “here” and “there,” but also key Picturesque elements: the dimpling river anticipates Knight’s original musing on smoothness :

Smoothness being properly a quality perceived only by the touch, and applied metaphorically to the objects of the other senses, we often apply it very improperly to those of vision; assigning smoothness, as a cause of visible beauty, to things, which, though smooth to the touch, cast the most sharp, harsh, and angular reflections of light upon the eye. . . . (*An Analytical Inquiry*, 65)

The ethereal mountains offering a suggestion of sublime grandeur; the depth of field, with the meandering river leading the eye towards a distant background. Unlike Pope, Thomson invites the reader to *view* the landscape with leading locutions: “see,” “prospect” and “yon,” and the frequent use of the present tense. As Watson points out, the description of George Lyttelton’s estate at Hagley “is carefully composed and presented as foreground (the Hall), middle distance (villages, fields, heathlands, a ‘broken landscape’) and background (the Welsh mountains)” (32), a method

identical to that employed later by Picturesque writers<sup>27</sup> and intrinsic to the landscape artist's craft.<sup>28</sup>

Andrews, however, refuses to see any influence of picturesque painting in Thomson's *The Seasons*, asserting instead the influence stems rather from literature. External evidence all suggests otherwise. The historical context: this is, after all, rapidly becoming the age of landscapes and influence seems virtually unavoidable; the geographical: the poem was actually revised and partly rewritten at Hagley, then newly laid out according to picturesque tenets; and, as mentioned above, Thomson travelled to Italy during the composition, making subsequent books markedly richer in landscape images. Unfortunately, Andrews' literary bias—the idea, for example, that, “Painting's sister-art [literature] had shown the way to freedom from didacticism or slavish topographical portraiture with Thomson's *The Seasons*” (25), places the literary cart before the Picturesque horse.

However, it is internal evidence itself which most clearly outlines the absurdity of Andrews horsing around:

Meantime you gain the hight, from whose fair brow  
 The bursting prospects spreads immense around;  
 And, snatched o'er hill and dale, and wood and lawn,  
 The verdant field, and darkening heath between,  
 And villages embosomed soft in trees,  
 And spiry towns by surging columns marked

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<sup>27</sup>Gilpin, in particular, was fond of quoting Thomson in his various tours.

<sup>28</sup>The quotation in Section One, from *The Castel of Indolence*, Canto I, XXXVIII, sufficiently demonstrates Thomson's familiarity with the great European painters of landscape which, as we have seen, played a crucial role in the development of the English Picturesque school.



Of household smoke, your eyes excursive roams—  
 Wide-stretching from the Hall in whose kind haunt  
 The hospitable genius lingers still,  
 To where the broken landscape, by degrees  
 Ascending, roughens into rigid hills  
 O'er which the Cambrian mountains, like far clouds  
 That skirt the blue horizon, dusky rise. (*Spring*, 950-62)

Selected almost at random, there can be no doubt even here of the analogy to landscape canvas: the scene is both designed and unified, with precisely placed detail within the larger picture framework; with foreground, middleground and background all respectively described. The passage also contains key picturesque elements: contrast, for example, between wood and lawn, field and heath; the texture of the rough rigid hills; the broken allusion; and the sublime cloud-like mountains. The influence of landscape paintings upon a burgeoning genre of landscape and nature literature seems beyond question and Andrews' cart is not only misplaced but surely wrecked by a broken axle. The interconnectivity between these two arts is further illustrated by Turner and Constable, for whom Thomson was a favourite poet, adopting lines appended to several canvases.<sup>29</sup> Indeed, Turner's *Aeolian Harp* (see figure 8) was exhibited in 1809 with a poem that begins:

On Thomson's tomb the dewy drops distil,  
 Soft tears for Pity shed for Pope's lost fame,  
 To worth and verse adhere sad memory still,  
 Scorning to wear ensnaring fashion's chain.  
 In silence go, fair Thames, for all is laid

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<sup>29</sup>Constable, for example, quoted several lines from "Summer" for his *Salisbury Cathedral from the Meadows*.

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While flows the stream, unheeded and unsung

Resplendent Seasons! chase oblivions shade. (qtd. Bicknell, 32)

The poem highlights each season in turn, though, as Bicknell explains, quoting various art scholars, it is based not so much on Thomson's work as William Collin's "Ode occasion'd by the death of Mr Thomson." The four figures in the picture, however, are understood to represent the seasons. Bicknell concludes: "Turner's picture pays homage both to Claude and to Thomson, and in doing so it enshrines the link between the 'picturesque poets' and the 'Italian' landscape painters(33).

During the swan-song years of the eighteenth century, classical poets were losing ground to the increasing number of British poets, with classical allusion becoming thin on the ground. Concomitantly,

. . . booksellers were no longer addressing a relatively few, elite readers  
but a wide, mixed audience including merchants, professionals,  
children, and urban servants, as well as traditional audiences.  
(Benedict, 158)

Thus, there existed a growing exigency for a new kind of literature, removed from the Grub Street Press, yet more in tune with more people, more accessible, reflecting more the changing social condition.

### **John Dyer**

John Dyer (1699-1757), of course, is best remembered for "Grongar Hill." Describing the scenery of the river Towy, there is a Wordsworthian quality of observation, personal reflection and picturesque features: "prospect," "Old castles," "ruins, moss and weeds," and so on; there is the occasional picturesque personification, as in "And ancient towers crown his brow, / That cast an awful look below" (71-72); though mostly we have only a topographical and irregular ode in rhyming couplets.

Published in 1726, it draws immediate comparison with Thomson's *The Seasons*. Besides taking landscape as its primary focus, "Grongar Hill" really sits in the shadow of *The Seasons*, offering only the occasional sign of life, such as:

And see the rivers how they run,  
Thro' woods and meads, in shade and sun!  
Sometimes swift and sometimes slow,  
Wave succeeding wave, they go  
A various journey to the deep,  
Like human life to Endless sleep. (93-98)

Dyer made several tours of England and Wales, travelled to Italy, studied to be a painter long before he became a parson-poet, and there is, certainly, a convincing affection for landscape in "Grongar Hill"—though this is more strongly expressed in *The Country Walk*, whose concluding lines draw a melancholy comparison between the utopia of landscape and the distopia of human existence. "Grongar Hill" is framed upon the summit prospect of Grongar Hill<sup>30</sup> and, compared to the rhyming couplets of Pope's "landscapes," the view is clear and convincing and the subject focused.

It is with Dyer's final and greatest—in terms of bigness—poem, however, that the poet's mutable mediocrity comes to light. "The Fleece," praised by Wordsworth—which is perhaps condemnation enough, a certain sign that the egotistical sublimian

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<sup>30</sup>Topographical poems from as early as John Denham's *Cooper's Hill*, published in 1642, which provides a very early example of a genre that was to win increasing popularity, invariably involve the poet ascending a peak, surveying the whole and then painting a word picture of interesting prospects.

felt no literary threat<sup>31</sup>—is an anachronistic georgic written thirty years after “Grongar Hill.” Dyer hoped “The Fleece” would provide necessary information allowing sheep farmers to improve their stock and the quality of wool; to improve the fortunes of combers, dyers and weavers; to improve Britain’s trade by advocating expansion abroad. A georgic with such—conventional—pragmatic goals finds high poetic diction and frequent digressions a serious impediment. It is difficult bordering on impossible to imagine one tenth of those concerned in the industry with the faculty and willingness, not to mention leisure time, to read such a long run-around poem. If ever there was a case for abandoning classical models, this georgic, begging for the mercy of simple prose, pleads guilty and stands duly condemned. Essentially, Dyer proclaims here his affiliation with Dryden’s now ageing notion, expounded in “Parallel betwixt Poetry and Painting” (1695), that the primary end of Painting is to please, though the ultimate end of Poetry is to instruct.

Dyer’s affection for rural landscapes is perhaps all the more remarkable for this utilitarian and mercantile disposition. Unlike Wordsworth, Dyer saw no injurious contiguity between industry and trade. Quite the contrary: “Trade,” he wrote, “is the daughter of peace” (qtd. Williams, 98). Williams, in his biography of Dyer, continues,

. . . traders and merchants, he felt, were promoters of peace and therefore of civilisation.. And by aiding them to bring natural resources and industries together, to develop new resources, new manufactures, and new means of transportation, Dyer felt that he too was promoting peace and civilisation. (98)

The same, in fact, is true of *The Seasons*, though Thomson’s approbation of mercantilism—as well as the didactic insertions—is less the business of the poem and

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<sup>31</sup>After Wordsworth’s death, a volume of Keat’s poems was discovered amongst his possession, a gift, the pages still uncut.

more an unfortunate by-product.

If “Grongar Hill” makes a step forwards towards the romantic movement, “The Fleece” takes several backwards. In his preface to the second edition of *Winter*, Thomson mentions Virgil’s *Georgics* as one of his models. He insists, however, that *Winter* bore a closer resemblance to the devotional literary tradition which included the Pentateuch, the Book of Job, and *Paradise Lost*. “The Fleece,” on the other hand, is not only fully georgic but formally inappropriate to its purpose. There is, then, in Dyer something of the neo-classical romantic dichotomy, the day-dreamer and the practical day-worker and it is in this context that he is best read and makes most sense.

### End Word

Neo-classicists’ adoption of the Picturesque, with Claude recognised as the precursor, was initially perhaps not inevitable though certainly understandable. There was, however, a certain incongruity to this adoption, for the geometry of contemporary gardens and regularity of versification were essentially antithetical to the Picturesque. Besides, the serenity and classical nostalgia of Claude was losing ground to the wildness of the more rugged Rosa (see figure 9) whose craggy cliffs and toothed trees and desolate domains were closer to both lakeland scenes and romantic sensibilities. Neo-classicism and formative Picturesque then were uneasy partners.

Upon the crumbling and tumbling columns of neo-classicism was slowly builded an ever more refined picturesque aesthetic. Tentative attempts at picturesque typified in *The Seasons* and “Grongar Hill” provides a background for an entirely new landscape of aesthetic appreciation and artistic expression that was quite simply blowing through the temporal winds and disturbing everything in its path.

For all the aesthetic developments taking place as the eighteenth century

progressed, neo-classicism was reluctant to give up the battle. Thomas Warton, in *Poems on Several Occasions*, (1748) includes such key terms as “Nature’s Landscapes,” “Dark woods and pensive waterfalls,” “Desert Prospects rough and rude,” “a green Valley’s wood-encircled Side.” However, translations and paraphrases of Horace rub shoulders with “Ode to Taste”:

Leave not Britannia’s Isle; since Pope is fled  
To meet his Homer in Elysian Bowers,  
What Bard shall dare resume  
His Various-sounding Harp?(180)

Warton then demonstrates the literary discord at this time, the veneration of Pope, and the staying power of neo-classicism. As late as 1775 and calling to mind Gilpin’s examination of natural and moral beauty in *Stowe*, Samuel Johnson, in *Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland* wrote:

An eye accustomed to flowery pastures and waving harvests is astonished and repelled by this wide extent of hopeless sterility. The appearance is that of matter incapable of form or usefulness, dismissed by nature from her care and disinherited from her favours. (qtd. Andrews, 197)

There was no extensive digging and chiselling, no blasting of hill and dale, no landscaping on a geographic scale, no remoulding or recasting of this northern nation, no topographical development. The only conceivable change was internal: aesthetic conception; and with this mightiest of change, the Scottish Highlands would soon become—and remain—one of the most picturesque areas in all Britain.

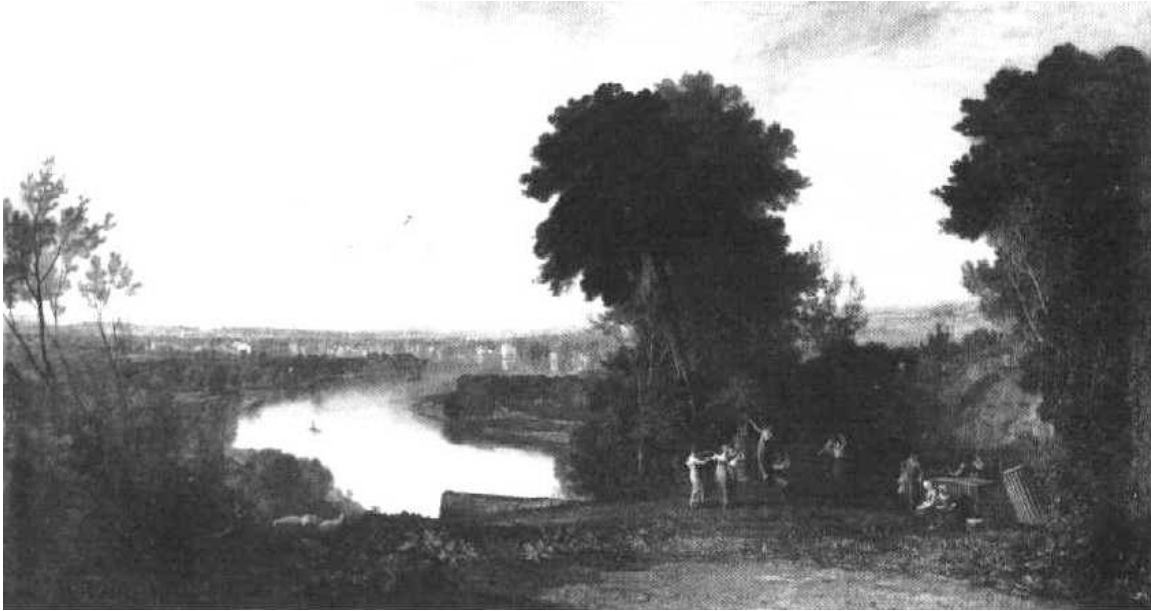


Figure 8: Turner, Thomson's Aeolian Harp, from Bicknell



Figure 9: Salvator Rosa, Mountain landscape, from Bicknell

"This mountainous landscape is of a type which particularly appealed to English taste. It could be a Salvatorian of a scene in the Lake District or North Wales" (Bicknell, 5)

## Section Three

### The Middle Ground: Wordsworth

#### Argument

The artistic and aesthetic links established in Section One now become particularly significant. This section will include an important aetiological component, identifying the articles of faith employed in establishing the standard—and erroneous—critical guiding conception of the Picturesque. Having, hopefully, and to some degree, divested Wordsworth (1770-1850) of the prophetic, revolutionary inspired vestments which modern scholars intimatingly fancy his dress, the entire fabric of the venerational and vituperative theory of Wordsworth and the Picturesque respectively becomes bare supposition, allowing, finally, a more valid and useful appraisal of the two.

#### First Word

The influence of the Grand Tour in fostering an intense and popular interest in scenic tourism—it was in the 1780s that the word ‘tourist’ entered the English language—the increasing familiarity of landscape paintings, philosophical enquiries which intellectualised landscape, the religious symbolism which *initially* justified landscape not only for the French but for the Hudson River Group in North America, the popularity of landscape gardening, all these were elements in a new cultural and aesthetic picture. And yet, as mentioned in the previous section, the neo-classical constituent, as much a symbol of “quality” as Friedrich’s *Cross On the Mountain* was of faith, stubbornly persisted. The prestige of the classical past essentially allowed the prestige of the present, and with nature already running wild in picturesque landscape gardens, neo-classicism endured like an old marble statue, certainly, its



arm's severed at the shoulder and missing a leg, yet still solid and strong. Romantic poetry would provide the final cutting edge, individuality and originality and subjectivity and emotional response would allow a cultural coming of age; and if the statue would always remain, at least now the head could be lopped off.

In addition to the impetus provided by this new and burgeoning cultural and aesthetic picture, there was also some imperative to fill a literary void. Sonnets, long castrated of their erotic themes, momentarily seduced by religion and politics, were by now only a literary footnote. Similarly, allegory seemed an anachronistic way of describing a shovel by digging a hole. The epic itself existed only as a mockery. Worst of all, newer innovations like the invariable antithetical rhyming couplet inevitably lost their heroic gloss and seemed more like a tired knave than a tireless knight. Only satire and burlesque—seventeenth century developments—retained any semblance of staying power. In simple terms, literary convention increasingly lacked invention. The cause and effect relationship between this void and the development of a new aesthetic is perhaps too metaphysical and certainly too immaterial for this examination, though the possibility at least suggests mandate for change.

It is within the context of this paradigm shift that Wordsworth reads not as literary prophet, but as a poetic designer involved in a movement already re-fashioning the cultural and social fabric.

By the time Wordsworth published *Lyrical Ballads* (1798), the appreciation of nature had reached the philosophical—if not numerical—levels prevalent in the present day. Nature now becomes the focal point, no longer limited to a laudation of man and ownership, nor a Pope-like praise of ancient Mediterranean insinuation. Clearly, such mimetic representations will no longer answer. Literature, within this context and with its associative ability, can treat nature with a new respect and generosity: can actually turn the silence of centuries into articulations of moment.

## Early Poetry

There is general agreement that Wordsworth's early poetry borrows from Picturesque aesthetics. A brief survey will therefore suffice.

"An Evening Walk," published in 1793 and written in heroic couplets, is essentially a conventional attempt at picturesque verse, replete with cascade scene, precipice, mountain farm, female beggar, rocky sheepwalks and tremulous cliffs: a topographical poem in which Wordsworth's authorial voice remains only a whisper. Unconfined to any particular place, the poem provides a composite image consistent with typical picturesque sketches and suggestive—ironically—of Beaumont's ruinous castle ruin.

As J. R. Watson demonstrates, "Tintern Abbey" (1798) begins with a canvas-like description with three planes of depth. The poem then moves on:

The day is come when I repose  
 Here, under this dark sycamore, and view  
 These plots of cottage-ground, these orchard-tufts,  
 Which, at this season, with their unripe fruits  
 Are clad in one green hue, and lose themselves  
 'Mid groves and copses. Once again I see  
 These hedge-rows, hardly hedge-rows, little lines  
 Of sportive wood run wild: these pastoral farms,  
 Green to the very door; and wreaths of smoke  
 Sent up, in silence, from among the trees!  
 With some uncertain notice, as might seem  
 Of vagrant dwellers in the houseless woods,  
 Or of some Hermit's cave, where by his fire  
 The Hermit sits alone. (9-22)

Here the sycamore serves as both frame and point of perspective to the scene; typical

picturesque elements appear: the wildness of the wood, pastoral farms offering contrast as well as an echo of Virgil's *Georgics*, an attention to foreground and background. But the scene is extra dimensionalised, beyond—at least for those with a literary bias—the possibilities of brush and colour: “Once again I see” underscores both memory and a personal reaction to the scene; whilst the bromidic picturesque figure—the hermit—appears not to the eye but to the imagination. And yet, although the poem, by virtue of the medium, achieves that extra-dimension, it remains within the Picturesque paradigm. Gilpin, for example, also recorded his impression of Tintern Abbey years before Wordsworth:

Every thing around breathes an air so calm, and tranquil; so sequestered from the commerce of life, that it is easy to conceive, a man of warm imagination, in monkish times, might have been allured by such a scene to become an inhabitant of it. (*Obs. Wye*, 32)

Watson admits that this might perhaps have provided the “forerunner”<sup>32</sup> of Wordsworth’s hermit; but also that Gilpin here is concerned with the “kind of relationship between man and the landscape” (81) that Wordsworth was later to develop.<sup>33</sup> Not surprisingly, “Tintern Abbey” soon moves away from Tintern Abbey and becomes the familiar Wordsworthian recollection filled in with the “moral and mystical” (Watson, 84) of landscape. And yet the poem’s structure can serve as an outline of Picturesque application in romantic poetry: the picturesque provides the subject—and initially the ability to see that subject—which then allows the expanded vista possible through literature. Memory, subjectivity and imagination—Wordsworth categorical—together act as an augmentative device which transforms

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<sup>32</sup>Read an unwillingness to use the word *source*.

<sup>33</sup>Of course, between the lines we discover the implication that Gilpin developed nothing.

flat canvas into romantic tapestry. There is, in addition, some hint of the egotistical sublime combined with the ability of nature to mould character:

... For I have learned  
 To look on nature, not as in the hour  
 Of thoughtless youth, but hearing oftentimes  
 The still sad music of humanity,  
 Not harsh nor grating, though of ample power  
 To chasten and subdue. (89-94)

"Michael" (1800), though not specifically a picturesque poem, nevertheless is based upon a nostalgic view of rural England intrinsic to the Picturesque school and offers a nationalised and temporalised form of the neo-classical Golden Age. The poem alludes to contemporary political and economical conditions turning peasants into the manufacturing poor, who, nomadic and landless, drift into London like the flotsam of some vast socio-economic flood. Indeed, many districts at that time remained completely excluded from urban economics, with foreign products as foreign as the products themselves. Even at the beginning of this century the Yorkshire yeoman was ignorant of sugar, potatoes, and cotton; the Cumberland dalesman, as he appears in Wordsworth's *Guide*, lived entirely on the produce of his farm.<sup>34</sup> The half finished sheep-pen of the poem, a heap of rocks that remain after the poem's closure, symbolises old Michael and his half finished ambitions for his son, now gone from the protective fold and corrupted by modernity. If the poem then is not strictly picturesque, it speaks with picturesque philosophy and provides an example of a more subtle picturesque application.

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<sup>34</sup>My own parents, as Yorkshire as Yorkshire Pudding, received, as children of the 1930s, the rare gift of a rare orange for Christmas, finding it to be the ultimate in exotic luxury!

Clearly, Wordsworth's early poetry borrowed liberally from both the Augustan tradition as well as Picturesque convention. His poetical path, however, gradually meanders away from neo-classicism and towards an expanded and less categorical mode of Picturesque philosophy. Hugh Sykes Davies' insistence upon "Wordsworth's subjection to the 'picturesque' fashion" (236) in these early days, culminating in the poet's decortication of the entire model, smacks of an obscurantist philosophy turned barrier to the imagination and denies the jagged foundation the Picturesque provided for the appreciation of countryside as a highly refined aesthetic. But more of that right now.

### **The Gospel According to Wordsworth**

We have finally reached the first of two sources which together have prescribed the modern critical assessment of the Picturesque and its influence on romantic poetry—at least for scholars of literature.

#### **Descriptive Sketches—the Footnote<sup>35</sup>**

Pope's *Dunciad* conclusively proved the potential of the humble footnote to subvert a text. In the case of *Descriptive Sketches*, a single footnote has subverted much of modern scholarship on the Picturesque. Here it is, in all its humble magnificence:

I had once given to these sketches the title of Picturesque; but the Alps are insulted in applying to them the term. Whoever, in attempting to describe their sublime features, should confine himself to the cold rules of painting would give his reader but a very imperfect idea of those emotions which they have the irresistible power of communicating to

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<sup>35</sup>Read "prescriptive."

the most impassioned imaginations. (Note to line 299)

Davies descends upon this “cold rules of painting” as if the very death of the Picturesque depended upon it. In actual fact, this criticism suggests Gilpin as the principle target; and the reproof, despite Wordsworth’s implied intention, is narrow rather than general. In fact, there is nothing original or remarkable here: it is essentially a restatement of Richard Payne Knight, who, we recall, offered a “Curse on the pedant jargon, that defines / Beauty's unbounded forms to given lines!” (*The Landscape: a Didactic Poem*, 6) Indeed, it was only Gilpin’s first publication, *Essay on Prints*, which placed particular stress on the “rules of painting” and for the simple reason that the volume was, essentially, a “How-To” manual on landscape painting rather than a treatise on the Picturesque. It seems strange too that Davies, here upholding the merits of the imagination compared to those “cold rules of painting,” mentions that Knight had “*meddled* extensively with the ‘Imagination’”<sup>36</sup> (my italics, 205); though assumedly anyone connected with the Picturesque and not poetry really can only “meddle”—even “extensively.”

Watson also picks up on this footnote; but, realising that there are nevertheless acres of the Picturesque in *Descriptive Sketches*, prevaricates hither and thither, jumping from one explanation to another like so many stepping stones where only the wetness of the river is certain. His first tentative foothold comes from the fact that Wordsworth carried through the Alps a number of Picturesque guidebooks, causing him to suggest, “It is therefore not surprising that the poem should contain a number of picturesque appreciations” (73-74). The stepping stone here sinks without further

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<sup>36</sup>Davies’ enclosing *imagination* within the confines of quotation marks subtly suggests that Knight meddles with something that was not, in actual fact, imagination, but some pale imitation, a phantasmagoric and fraudulent imagination, an imagined imagination.

comment. Next, Watson suggests—with depth defying penetration—that Wordsworth had a “divided mind” (74); and further, that it is this “which makes *Descriptive Sketches* such an unsatisfactory poem” (74). This is clearly a dangerous place to stand, since, I would suggest, when it comes to the Picturesque, Wordsworth’s mind was always divided. Watson jumps again: Wordsworth is

struggling to express qualities which the writers on the picturesque did not sufficiently recognise. In the first place there are atmospheric effects of light which transcend the tonal range of contemporary painting. (75)

This is on the same footing as the earlier: “Wordsworth was envisaging effects of light which were not to be mastered on Canvas until Turner” (72). In fact such “effects of light” had long since been mastered, by Claude. In fact, he was to some extent the originator: Andrew Wilton, in his introduction to *Turner’s Picturesque Views in England and Wales*, identifies Claude as the inventor of the “Sunset Harbour theme” (Shanes, 6). This then is clearly an example of a literature critic wiggling his fingers in the pool of the art historian; rather than catching a fish, he is bitten by a school of aesthetics. Watson must once again skip onward. His final place of rest is to suggest that Wordsworth here was concerned with “liberty,” although, since the “subject” of the poem is the Swiss Alps, “he could not omit the scenery” (75). This, in fact, is true, though most elements are undeniably Picturesque, like this blending of the beautiful and sublime:

How blest, delicious scene! the eye that greets  
Thy open beauties, or thy lone retreats;  
Beholds the unwearied sweep of wood that scales  
Thy cliffs;(107-110)

and the idiom:

Lo, where she sits beneath yon shaggy rock,  
A cowering shape half hid in curling smoke!(177-78)

Other examples of Picturesque idiom include: “water’s shaggy side”; “Thy lake, that, streaked or dappled, blue or grey”; “Hermit”; and “antique castles.” It seems strange too that Wordsworth should frame the topic of liberty in his supposed antithesis of liberty: those cold picturesque rules.

Watson clearly recognises the dichotomous anomaly at work,<sup>37</sup> and his stepping and side stepping is an attempt to bring resolution within the framework of standard literary theory on the relationship between Wordsworth’s poetry and the Picturesque. Clearly, Watson gets a good wetting and explains nothing. So what is the solution? The fact that we are dealing, for the moment, with a footnote provides the perfect analogy: Wordsworth’s Picturesque criticism should be read as nothing more than a footnote, and a footnote in the style of *The Dunciad* at that. When literary theory, even—and perhaps especially—from the original poet himself, is at odds with the literature itself, then the obvious conclusion is to abandon the theory; instead, Wordsworth’s musings are taken as gospel and an altar of theory is builded upon them. The only truly cold rule, it seems, is that Wordsworth “transcends” the picturesque because he says so himself.

Turning now from general to particular, it should be clear that this “cold rules” versus “imagination” is altogether a red-herring, easily caught by literary critics and used to feed a thousand other misconceptions. William Combe’s brilliant satire, *A*

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<sup>37</sup>Watson’s discomfort is palpable, etched in every repetition of the problem: “Yet the pugnacity of the note needs some explaining” (72); “Yet the poem also contains a direct attack on the picturesque in its footnote” (74); “Yet, as we have seen, the poem also contains an explicit rejection of the habits of picturesque viewing” (77). Turning to *The Prelude*, Watson offers the standard glib solution: another “yet”: “Yet the energy and power of the experience seen in the light of memory transforms the picturesque scene into something much more powerful” (76).



*Tour in Search of the Picturesque, by the Reverend Doctor Syntax* (see figure 10)—clearly derived from Gilpin—reveals his neo-classical bent by ridiculing the very idea of the imagination versus the true copy of Nature:

Upon the bank awhile I'll sit,  
 And let poor Grizzle graze a bit;  
 But, as my time shall not be lost,  
 I'll make a drawing of the post;  
 And, tho' a flimsy taste may flout it,  
 There's something *picturesque* about it:  
 'Tis rude and rough, without a gloss  
 And is well cover'd o'er with moss;  
 And I've a right—(who dares deny it?)  
 To place yon group of asses by it.  
 Aye! this will do: and now I'm thinking,  
 That self-same pond where Grizzle's drinking,  
 If hither brought 'twould better seem  
 And faith I'll turn it to a stream. (9)

Of course, the exaggeration is as sparkling as the pond that flows into the stepping-stone stream; but we should consider Constable's *Flatford Mill from the Lock*, which is exactly this kind of composite picture and deserves—indeed, receives—only approbation. There are indeed rules of composition, in painting as well as poetry, but to define the Picturesque according to these is to define poetry according to grammar and spelling. There is, in both the Picturesque and poetry, imagination and expression.

Returning to the original point. W. M. Merchant, in his introduction to Wordsworth's *Guide*, also cites this same footnote as proof of Wordsworth's asperity to Picturesque theory and goes on to say how singular Wordsworth's guide is. More

forthright still, Rhoda L. Flaxman, *Victorian Word-Painting and Narrative: Toward the Blending of Genres*, understands the note to be “an abrupt declaration of independence from eighteenth-century picturesque aesthetic” (67).

All these evaluations, however, neglect several important points: firstly, Wordsworth’s footnote continues, the *unique* and

. . . *peculiar* features of the Alps. . . . The fact is, that controlling influence, which distinguishes the Alps from all other scenery, is derived from images which disdain the pencil. Had I wished to make a picture of this scene I had thrown much less light into it. But I consulted nature and my feelings. The ideas excited by the stormy sunset I am here describing owed their sublimity to that deluge of light, or rather of fire, in which nature had wrapped the immense forms around me; any intrusion of shade, by destroying the unity of the impression, had necessarily diminished its grandeur. (Note to line 299)

So the Alps then are *not* like the mountains of Cumberland, Yorkshire, Wales and Scotland; and rather than offering an “abrupt declaration of independence,” Wordsworth actually points homeward for authentic picturesque scenes.

Secondly, this so called “reaction against the Picturesque” (Davies, 240) entirely disregards chronology: *Descriptive Sketches* was published in 1793; Wordsworth’s own *Guide*, which, as we will see, makes great use of Picturesque sensibility and idiom, in 1810.<sup>38</sup>

Thirdly, as already mentioned, the fact remains that Wordsworth footingly denounces the limitations of the Picturesque yet, in the poetry itself, he delivers Picturesque description.

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<sup>38</sup>Even Wordsworth’s initial premise, that the “jagged outline . . . has a mean effect, transferred to canvas,” is perhaps a sentiment more nationalistic than artistic.

## The Prelude

Book XII of *The Prelude*, tintilatingly entitled “Imagination and Taste, How Impaired and Restored,” provides most to the fodder for modern critical understanding of Wordsworth’s relationship to the Picturesque.<sup>39</sup> The offending lines begin:

What wonder, then, if, to a mind so far  
 Perverted, even the visible Universe  
 Fell under the dominion of a taste  
 Less spiritual, with microscopic view  
 Was scanned, as I had scanned the moral world?(88-92)  
 .....  
 Unworthy, disliking here, and there  
 Liking; by rules of mimic art transferred  
 To things above all art; but more,—for this,  
 Although a strong infection of the age,  
 Was never much my habit—giving way  
 To a comparison of scene with scene,  
 Bent overmuch on superficial things,  
 Pampering myself with *meagre* novelties

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<sup>39</sup>Indeed, the influence of this book extends beyond Wordsworth into other critical examinations of the Picturesque and literature, forming the general thesis, for example, of Brownlow’s study of Clare, who rides the contemporary critical aversion to the Picturesque like a hobby-horse in the Grand National to the point where either the beast dies a sudden death or the race is cancelled: “The Romantics . . . inherited the picturesque way of looking at nature, but realised that it, in turn, had become a tyranny, so they invented new ways of seeing which were new ways of feeling” (16).

Of colour and proportion; to the moods  
 Of time and season, to the moral power,  
 The affections and the spirit of the place,  
 Insensible. (110-120)

.....

I speak in recollection of a time  
 When the bodily eye, in every stage of life  
 The most despotic of our senses, gained  
 Such strength in 'me' as often held my mind  
 In absolute dominion. (127-130)

.....

There are in our existence spots of time,  
 That with distinct pre-eminence retain  
 A renovating virtue, whence—depressed  
 By false opinion and contentious thought,  
 Or aught of heavier or more deadly weight,  
 In trivial occupations, and the round  
 Of ordinary intercourse—our minds  
 Are nourished and invisibly repaired. (208-215)

This then is the stuff that contemporary critics have adopted without regard to the dangers of accepting the artist's views of his own work. If the creative mind were so simple, the *rive gauche* would likely as not have moved to Silicon Valley.

There can be no doubt that "taste" refers to the Picturesque. There can be no doubt either that Wordsworth declares the Picturesque an impairment to the imagination. Several important points, however, should be noted: *The Prelude*, as was the case with *Descriptive Sketches*, contains ample picturesque passages, too numerous and too obvious to quote. Here, nevertheless, for the benefit of the incredulous, are a

few:

In summer, making quest for works of art,  
 Or scenes renowned for beauty, I explored  
 That streamlet whose blue current works its way  
 Between romantic Dovedale's spiry rocks;  
 Pried into Yorkshire dales,<sup>40</sup> or hidden tracts  
 Of my own native region. (VI, 190-95)

In the final Book (XIV), fresh from the restoration of his imagination and taste, with hardly time to catch a breath between, Wordsworth recounts his gasping ascent of Snowdon, from whence he sees: "A fixed, abysmal, gloomy, breathing-place— / Mounted the roar of waters, torrents, streams / Innumerable, roaring with one voice!" (58-60). Topography ensues. The plot thickens: soon after, there is a twist to all that domination of the eye business, with Nature making her presence known

. . . by putting forth,  
 'Mid circumstances awful and sublime,  
 That mutual domination which she loves  
 To exert upon the face of outward things,  
 So moulded, joined, abstracted, so endowed  
 With interchangeable supremacy,  
 That men, least sensitive, see, hear, perceive,  
 And cannot choose but feel. (79-86)

That domination now shifts from subject to object: man is no longer dominated by the ocular sense; instead the outward forms of picturesque scenery, by their very nature, captivate man. In any case, the point is that even in *The Prelude* the

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<sup>40</sup>On a personal note, I would mention that the Yorkshire Dales are in fact much more picturesque than the Lake District—as are its native inhabitants.

Picturesque is pictured and admired:

The single sheep, and the one blasted tree,  
 And the bleak music from that old stone wall,  
 The noise of wood and water, and the mist  
 That on the line of each of those two roads  
 Advanced in such indisputable shapes;  
 All these were kindred spectacles and sounds  
 To which I oft repaired, and thence would drink,  
 As at a fountain. (XII, 319-26)

Here also is one of Wordsworth's well-cited spots of time, which often find their source in Picturesque moments inspired by the wildness of nature, where that idiomatic "sublime" is kindled. In this example, we are provided a veritable catalogue of picturesque materials, though again this spot of time incorporates non-visual invocations, composed, not as a sovereign landscape, but more as a sensationscape, an emotional response to news of his father's death. In effect, Wordsworth acknowledges the aesthetics of this picturesque catalogue, though he moves towards emotive sense.

Further, Wordsworth's understanding of the subject was undoubtedly clouded, a myopia based upon a narrow definition of the Picturesque—the meaning of which, after all, was always a point of debate and rarely of conclusion. Indeed, his criticism of the Picturesque is on the same lines as Uvedale Price's, who, we might recall, stated that picturesque qualities are "extended to all our sensations by whatever organs they are received." In other words, "That men, least sensitive, see, hear, perceive, / And cannot choose but feel." The thing which Wordsworth most condemns—this supposed ocular obsession in the Picturesque—is strangely absent in *A Tour in Search of the Picturesque, by the Reverend Doctor Syntax*. For example: ". . . while you chase the flying deer, I must fly off to *Windermere*. / 'Stead of hallooing to

a fox, I must catch echoes from the rocks" (50). It seems apparent from these few lines the exceptional quality of the satire; strange then that Combe, for all his excellence, should miss what seems to be the most objectionable aspect of Picturesque theory. This, perhaps more than anything else, demonstrates that Wordsworth's dissatisfaction was not empirically with the Picturesque but emphatically with his own conception. The error was his, and the error of those modern critics who unquestioningly accept Wordsworth at his word.

Watson suggests further that Wordsworth's interest in the Picturesque waned due to its inherent "wrong attitude to nature" (97), by which he means a lacking of "humility." To this, it is perhaps worth re-visiting Gilpin:

Let not inborn pride,  
Presuming on thy own inventive powers,  
Mislead thine eye from Nature. She must reign

Great archetype in all. (*On Landscape Painting: A Poem*, 26-30)

Also, Wordsworth's increasing spirituality offers an unstated though likely cause of further dissatisfaction, that "dominion of a taste / Less spiritual." Gilpin states in his preface to *Tours of the Lakes*: "The author hopes that no one will be so severe, as to think a work of this kind inconsistent with the profession of a clergyman" (xxx). J. R. Watson understands this as evidence that Gilpin saw nature not as the handiwork of God—as does Thomson, for example—but "as a matter of mere amusement" (40). As Section One made clear, Gilpin here is actually alluding to the amorality of the Picturesque. Nevertheless, from this supposed "mere amusement", Watson, no doubt now weary of those treacherous stepping stones, makes an astounding leap in logic and concludes:

With such an aim, sight alone becomes important, for there is rarely any attempt to ponder the significance of landscape, or the viewer's emotional relationship towards it. (40)

Entirely skipping over the “mere amusement” hypothesis, we might yet wonder at the kind of logic that allows a passage from “mere amusement” to “sight alone.” We might also recall, despite the evidence outlined in Section One demonstrating that Gilpin was not concerned *uniquely* with sight alone, that Gilpin indeed wrote *on the Picturesque* from a painterly point of view and so any stress that exists upon the visual is rather like the stress upon the aural in an analysis of music.

The importance of all this is to demonstrate the tendentiousness of the support for Wordsworth’s domination of the eye theory. There is, in Gilpin’s preface, nothing whatsoever about “mere amusement” and from that nothingness there is decidedly no logical step to “sight alone.” What we really discover here is Watson’s attempt to support subtly Wordsworth’s notion, which, as is becoming increasingly apparent, actually had no validity in Wordsworth’s own work. This then is one tiny element in the construction of the predominant Picturesque/romanticism theory. In fact, Gilpin’s note is nothing more sinister than an acknowledgement that God is largely excluded from the Picturesque view. Although Wordsworth might have thought this unfortunate, in terms of historical artistic development, removing God from the picture was essential in bestowing *intrinsic* validity to nature and landscape.

Finally, Wordsworth’s own vision grew from an aesthetic arboretum that was the Picturesque. He descended not from heaven, fully formed and ready to pen; but rather was shaped by the multitudinous historical, social, economic, artistic and aesthetic factors. Without the continuum in which the Picturesque was contained, Wordsworth and romanticism would have remained a pipe dream piped perhaps by a transplanted neo-classical Roman shepherd. Watson himself reluctantly admits that “in spite of his condemnations of the picturesque and his awareness of the despotic eye, Wordsworth remains interested in landscape as it is seen” (104); and yet the penny never drops and a change of view never takes place.

Davies similarly pays great attention to *The Prelude*, albeit with a more diction-



based argument. "In rejecting the 'picturesque,'" Wordsworth is "running counter to [the] predominant fashion" (249), and deliberately selects bare and naked scenes. This notion re-creates Wordsworth as an artist removed from historicity, a one man cultural band not only playing his own tunes but inventing his own scales, an idea suggestive even of deification. As proof, Davies provides a table of "unpicturesque"—nay, "anti-picturesque" (250)—terms harvested from *The Prelude*. Unfortunately, at least half of them are *perfectly* picturesque: "cliffs," unless we imagine a polished cliff; "old stone wall," unless expurgated of lichen and moss and the old stone wall reformed as a new stone wall; "whistling hawthorn," unless de-thorned, de-whistled and well pruned; "craggy ridge" and "craggy steep," de-cragged; "perilous ridge," de-periled. Even those terms which seem marked by a smooth unpicturesque character are often un-picturesque red-herrings: the "naked pool," is perhaps "water of which the surface is broken, and the motion abrupt and irregular" (*On the Picturesque*, 84); or perhaps reflecting the Picturesque scenery in which it resides. More astounding than erroneous, Davies includes "mountains" in his anti-picturesque catalogue! Davies' crowned prince of proofs then turns out to be a beggar boy in disguise, with all the airs and graces and robes of royalty, yet concealing a shallow mind and dirty underwear.

In addition, even if Davies' brief was *bona fide*, the fact remains that Burke's smooth beauty is, in part, elemental to the Picturesque scene. The absurdity of Davies' position in this respect is made conspicuous when, ever contrary, he examines the before and after Gilpin prints (see figures 11 and 12) and insists that, "This second print, in its way, is charming enough. But the first is impressive" (229)!<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>41</sup>It is typical of Davies' double-dealing study that these particular pictures are excluded from his pages.

It is this irony, this inconsistency, this disparity that suggests Wordsworth's professed aversion to the Picturesque should be taken not only with a grain of salt, but with a veritable variety of spices—grown, of course, in a garden suitably picturesque. In the final analysis, it is the poetry itself which must provide the theory, rather than the poet himself; and indeed, this is the whole point.

### **The Sublime and the Beautiful**

Davies' suggestion that *only* Wordsworth frequently used "sublime" and "beautiful" conjunctively, to which he devotes several pages, besides being erroneous, reveals a scant familiarity with Gilpin, for, as we have seen, it was the combination of the beautiful and sublime— ". . . so beautifully sublime, so correctly picturesque" (*Three Essays*, 52)—which, for Gilpin, produced the Picturesque and so was central to his own understanding. Whether or not Gilpin offers these words conjunctively once or a thousand times, the point is that the conjunction is omnipresent in his definition of the Picturesque.

Just as Brownlow suggests that John Clare transcends the Picturesque by discovering the microcosmos,<sup>42</sup> he also insists that Wordsworth "transcends" the Picturesque by experiencing the "Sublime." (25) Of course, he is also wrong, and for the same reasons. Since the Picturesque never evolved into a finalised coherent theory, remaining vast in scope, since its primary concern was with landscape and graphic art—Price notwithstanding—the very notion of poets' "transcending" the Picturesque is one which seems born of an intellectualised mule; and although modern critics seem intent to ride this mule for all it might be worth, the beast is clearly an ass of their own imagination.

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<sup>42</sup>Compare this to Wordsworth's complaint, quoted above, that the picturesque eye sees "Less spiritual, with microscopic view."

## Guide to the Lakes

Davies correctly points out that the vigorous and much-publicised Picturesque debate raged during the period when Wordsworth was most active as a writer. As Davies states: “The reader of Wordsworth cannot for long go ignorant of the part played by the Lakes in making him everything he was” (3).

Indeed, the popularity of the Lake District is inextricably tied with that of Wordsworth. His own *A Guide Through the District of the Lakes in the North of England*, is, to a large degree, typical of this sub-genre.<sup>43</sup> Not surprisingly, Davies thinks otherwise: Gilpin, he says, believes landscape significant “not for the sake of the people who live in it” (230) but “simply for the painter” (230)—and this despite the following quotation, from Gilpin, two pages earlier: “These smooth-coated mountains, tho of little estimation for the painter’s eye, are, however, great sources of plenty. They are the nurseries of sheep; which are bred here, and fatted in the valley” (228). Gilpin proceeds to describe the difficult life of the shepherds. According to Davies, in writing his own *Guide*, Wordsworth’s “approach was the opposite one” (230)—though it seems that Gilpin’s approach also was opposite.

In actual fact, Wordsworth’s guide, as suggested above, is pretty much par for the

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<sup>43</sup>Davies also draws attention to Wordsworth’s familiarity with other Picturesque guides, including those of Thomas Gray, Dr. John Brown, Thomas West and James Clark. In addition:

John Harris [“English Country House Guides, 1740-1840,” *Concerning Architecture*, ed. J. Summerson, 1968.] has catalogued as many as ninety guides . . . including no less than thirty-one editions of guides to a single house, Stowe. We can thus see how far the Picturesque had helped to foster a literary and intellectual approach to the appreciation of architecture, gardening and scenery. (vii)

Picturesque course. Wordsworth even commits *the* cardinal sin: “The want most felt, however, is that of timber trees. There are few *magnificent* ones to be found near any of the lakes” (79). Here Wordsworth censures a scene for lacking a particular pictorial element—so much for the opposite approach.

Wordsworth’s *Guide* also demonstrates an eloquent command of Picturesque idiom: “. . . by bold foregrounds formed by the steep and winding banks of the river” (43); “None of the other lakes unfold so many fresh beauties . . . ” (39); “. . . agreeably situated for water views” (40); “. . . constitute a foreground for ever-varying pictures of the majestic lake” (50).

Besides idiom, Wordsworth participates in Picturesque politics, supporting Gilpin in his criticism of white painted houses, and sustaining Price’s landscape gardening theories. Neither is Wordsworth’s inclusion of poetry in his *Guide* anything more than standard.<sup>44</sup> Even the prosaic *Handy Guide to the English Lakes*, now a rare and anonymous sixpenny edition likely destined for the more affluent working class tourist, features such verse as Wordsworth’s: “A straggle burgh of ancient charter proud / And dignified by battlements and towers / Of stern castle, mouldering on the brow / Of a green hill (17). Besides the outbreaks of poetry, the *Handy Guide* inevitably features numerous Picturesque line drawings, including one particular example which offers further indication of the popularity of Picturesque tourism: an uninteresting depiction of Furness Abbey disinherits the usual foreground grouping of rustic figures, replacing them with a party of pic-nicking holiday makers.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>44</sup>Wordsworth’s almost exclusive employment of his own poems, however, might be considered—by some—as egotistically sublime.

<sup>45</sup>Although the edition is undated, an advertisement section features a blurb from a Kendal photographer citing an award won at the Edinburgh International Photographic Exhibition in 1890-91. Such is the longevity of this “faddish cult.”

Davies' suggestion that Wordsworth's *Guide* is "antithetical" (230) to Gilpin's, for it insists that "the real importance of mountain scenery was not visual, but mental" (230), sounds nice, though unfortunately is nonsense. Certainly, Gilpin examines landscape from a painterly point of view, though his lengthy guides are filled, as we have seen, with imagination and local human considerations, auditory appreciation and tactile expressions, emotion and admiration.

In his *Guide*, Wordsworth provide a lengthy extract from Dr. John Brown's verse *Fragment*:

Now sunk the sun, now twilight sunk, and night  
 Rose in her zenith; not a passing breeze  
 Sigh'd to the grove, which in the midnight air  
 Stood motionless, and in the peacefull floods  
 Inverted hung: for now the billows slept  
 Along the shore, nor heav'd the deep; but spread  
 A shining mirror to the moon's pale orb,  
 Which, dim and waning, o'er the shadowy cliffs,  
 The solemn woods, and spiry mountain tops,  
 Her glimmering faintness threw: now every eye,  
 Oppress'd with toil, was drawn'd in deep repose  
 Save that the unseen Shepherd in his watch,  
 Propp'd on his crook, stood listening by the fold,  
 And gaz'd the starry vault, and pendant moon;  
 Nor voice, nor sound, broke on the deep serene;  
 But the soft murmur of swift-gushing rills,  
 Forth issuing from the mountain's distant steep,  
 (Unheard til now, and now scarce heard) proclaim'd  
 All things at rest, and imagin'd the still voice

Of quiet, whispering in the ear of night. (84)

Wordsworth honours Brown as “one of the first who led the way to a worthy admiration of this country” (84); though in a footnote adds:

Dr. Brown, the author of this fragment, was from his infancy brought up in Cumberland, and should have remembered that the practice of folding sheep by night is unknown among these mountains, and that the image of a shepherd upon the watch is out of place, and belongs only to countries, with a warmer climate, that are subject to the ravages from beasts of prey. It is pleasing to notice a dawn of imaginative feeling in these verses. Tickel, a man of no common genius, chose, for the subject of a Poem, Kensington Gardens, in preference to the Banks of the Derwent, within a mile or two of which he was born. But this was in the reign of Queen Anne, or George the First. Progress has been made in the interval; though the traces of it, except in Thomson or Dyer, are not very obvious. (84)

The mention of Tickel immediately invokes neo-classicism and its inability to adopt real landscape, and the shepherd of the fragment becomes an Arcadian figure. At this point we need only recollect Pope’s comment on shepherds “as they may be conceiv’d then to have been,” to realise the distance already travelled: what once was a rule of poetry is now a grave error.

Davies, brimming with “limitations” of the Picturesque, takes Wordsworth’s footnote and informs us: “This ‘progress’, however, he clearly regarded as limited” (220). Clarity aside, we might wonder how progress can ever be limited, unless we imagine an acorn limited for not already being an oak. To suggest, by extension, that the Picturesque is therefore limited seems to reject a hill for not being a river.

But there is more than a call for accurate realism in this note, for the “mile or two of which he was born” suggests a sentiment both regional—nationalistic in the larger

context—and also, applying Post-colonial hindsight, a conflict between the centre and margin. Treatment of real British landscape without reference to Virgil and Horace and Company insists upon a new centre. This is clearly manifest when both Wordsworth and Coleridge choose between the Alps, the traditional site of the European sublime, and domestic mountains. In *The Prelude*, for example, Wordsworth dismisses the Alps, shifting the focus to Snowdon, whilst Coleridge's Scafell experience becomes a celebration of Mont Blanc in the "Hymn before the Sunrise in the Vale of Chamouny." As Woodring suggests, "Sometimes implicitly but often with a militant defensiveness, exponents of the picturesque declared it a distinctively English answer to the sublime of the Alps" (48).

Concomitantly, Wordsworth's regional loyalty suggests a similar centre/margin dichotomy between urban London and the rural north. In another example of Picturesque nationalism, Wordsworth draws a comparison between the Alps and local scenes:

The forms of the mountains, though many of them in some points of view the noblest that can be conceived, are apt to run into spikes and needles, and present a jagged outline which has a mean effect, transferred to canvas. (74)

Wordsworth was a great explorer of the countryside, and, it seems, actually a *Picturesque* explorer. As Dorothy Wordsworth wrote in her journal of a Scottish tour:

When we were within about half a mile of Tarbet, at a sudden turning, looking the left, we saw a very craggy-topped mountain amongst other smooth ones; the rocks on the summit distinct in shape as if they were buildings raised up by man, or uncouth images of some strange creature. We called out with one voice, "That's what we wanted!" alluding to the frame-like uniformity of the side-screens of the lake for the last five or six miles. (qtd. Watson, 104)

Note the “craggy-topped mountain amongst other smooth ones,” the “frame” and “side screens.” Note also “in one voice,” or, “as three persons with one soul,”<sup>46</sup> as Coleridge wrote. They had then found “what they wanted,” and clearly they wanted the Picturesque.

In addition to this, a letter written by Dorothy to Coleridge in March 1804 includes mention of a beck discovered by Wordsworth: “It is a miniature of all that can be conceived of savage and grand about a river, with a great deal of the beautiful. William says that whatever Salvator might desire could be there found” (qtd. Watson, 104).<sup>47</sup> With all this travel and exploration it seems more than natural that Wordsworth would one day write his own Picturesque guide, if only he was not so absolutely clearly and undeniably in opposition to and transcendent of the whole thing. . . .

Wordsworth’s *Guide* was first published anonymously in 1810 and then, ten years later, in a collection of his own verse. According to W.M. Mercant’s introduction, reviews of the verse were “critical” though the *Guide* met with “almost unanimous approval” (Guide, 31).

### Post Apostolical Poetry

The notion that Wordsworth adopted his own critical assessment—dethroning

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<sup>46</sup>This picturesque apperception took place in 1803. *The Prelude* was begun in 1799, and completed in the summer of 1805. The conclusion is as obvious as it is unavoidable. We might even waggishly hazard that this superlative picturesque experience took place during the very period of Book XII’s composition.

<sup>47</sup>Although Watson provides the fairest literary based analysis of the Picturesque, it is nevertheless incredible that he includes such evidence yet still endorses conventional assumptions.



the monarchical sense of vision—has been seriously questioned from various angles. Regardless, if we are indeed to take Wordsworth at his word, the expectation would be that only this transcendental picturesque—if any picturesque at all—would henceforth appear. Wordsworth, after all, has accused, judged and condemned the Picturesque and we are told by a jury of modern critics that he will no longer be shackled to that blasted bastion of narrow thinking. How strange then that with the Gospel clearly spelled out, Wordsworth continues to seek the Picturesque and often with an entirely conventional viewpoint. For example:

And not a voice was idle: with the din  
Smitten, the precipices rang aloud;  
The leafless trees and every icy crag  
Tinkled like iron; while far-distant hills  
Into the tumult sent an alien sound  
Of melancholy, not unnoticed while the stars,  
Eastward, were sparkling clear, and in the west  
The orange sky of evening died away ("Influence of Natural Objects,"  
39-46).

Understanding the Picturesque in all its theoretical variety—which now, hopefully is the case—reveals this extract clearly and undeniably as picturesque in *sound* and not a transcending of the Picturesque.

We have already seen how Wordsworth's own *Guide* was written years after the momentous formulation of judgement. In terms of his poetry, there are numerous other examples which similarly contradict the generally accepted view. The sonnet "Between Namur and Liège," from *Memorials of a Tour on the Continent, 1820*, for example:

WHAT lovelier home could gentle Fancy choose?  
Is this the stream, whose cities, heights, and plains,

War's favourite playground, are with crimson stains  
 Familiar, as the Morn with pearly dew?  
 The Morn, that now, along the silver MEUSE,  
 Spreading her peaceful ensigns, calls the swains  
 To tend their silent boats and ringing wains,  
 Or strip the bough whose mellow fruit bestrews  
 The ripening corn beneath it. As mine eyes  
 Turn from the fortified and threatening hill,  
 How sweet the prospect of yon watery glade,  
 With its grey rocks clustering in pensive shade—  
 That, shaped like old monastic turrets, rise  
 From the smooth meadow-ground, serene and still!

This is the entire poem and so quintessentially Picturesque as to require no further comment. More frightening than this—at least for the jury who surely now must be out to lunch—is the attached footnote:

The scenery on the Meuse pleases me more, upon the whole, than that of the Rhine, though the river itself is much inferior in grandeur. The rocks both in form and colour, especially between Namur and Liege, surpass any upon the Rhine, though they are in several places disfigured by quarries, whence stones were taken for the new fortifications. This is much to be regretted, for they are useless, and the scars will remain perhaps for thousands of years. A like injury to a still greater degree has been inflicted, in my memory, upon the beautiful rocks of Clifton on the banks of the Avon. There is probably in existence a very long letter of mine to Sir Uvedale Price, in which was given a description of the landscapes on the Meuse as compared with those on the Rhine.

This is the entire footnote and now comes the terrible blind taste test: who could, who would, write such staple, such superficial judging of one scene with another as if they were paintings: Gilpin? Knight? Wordsworth.

“Epistle to Sir George Beaumont”—Beaumont, connoisseur, collector, painter, “befriended and encouraged many painters, notably Constable and Ibbetson” (Bicknell, 15) and was a conservative follower of Picturesque tenets (see figure 13)—offers an example where scenery is described for its own sake, where its very worth is sufficiently innate to need virtually no additional coinage:

Within the mirror’s depth, a world at rest—  
 Sky streaked with purple, grove and craggy *biel*d  
 And the smooth green of many a pendent field  
 And, quieted and soothed, a torrent small,  
 A little darling would-be waterfall.  
 One chimney smoking in its azure wreath,  
 Associate all in the calm pool beneath,  
 With here and there a faint imperfect gleam  
 Of water-lilies veiled in misty stream. (174-83)

Of course, the richness here is owed largely to the loveliness of the wordscape, a place opulent in picturesque elements: the craggy *biel*d, waterfall, chimney, the stream. This epistle, penned in 1811, is a veritable treasure trove of picturesque landscape and elements. Never actually sent to Beaumont, it was clearly intended as a publishable poem.

Another typically Picturesque poem is “The Pass of Kirkstone,” published in 1817:

Oft as I pass along the fork  
 Of these fraternal hills:  
 Where, save the rugged road, we find

No appanage of human kind;  
 Nor hint of man, if stone or rock  
 Seem not his handy-work to mock  
 By something cognizably shaped;  
 Mockery—or model—roughly hewn,  
 And left as if by earthquake strewn,  
 Or from the Flood escaped:—  
 Altars for Druid service fit;  
 (But where no fire was ever lit  
 Unless the glow-worm to the skies  
 Thence offer nightly sacrifice;)

Wrinkled Egyptian monument;  
 Green moss-grown tower; or hoary tent;  
 Tents of a camp that never shall be raised;  
 On which four thousand years have gazed! (3-20)

Gone then is the Pope-like catalogisation, the very antithesis of Wordsworth's methodology; instead, though the poetic eye might survey a scene, the poetic voice is selective of Constable-like charged spots: the fork in the road, one branch leading to reverie, the richly connotative fraternal hills, the rugged road, which by its very presence admits the absence of man, and finally the rock, whose shape suggests still another landscape: imagined and drawn of history.

There is, in "Composed Among the Ruins of a Castle in North Wales" (1824), a parallel to Price's theories of landscape gardening, where the patina of time is recommended to provide an unfinished roughness to stonework, to replace bunched bush with unexpected tree and shiny brick with sombre block. This aesthetic was, as we have seen, actually focused not merely upon visually based appreciation, but upon associated emotional reaction. The acute interest in ruins demonstrated by

artists during the Picturesque period was entirely germane with the general elegiac mood and graveyard melancholy. This interest in ruins, obviously, was shared by Wordsworth. "Composed Among the Ruins," after a conventionally ominous opening: "Through shattered galleries, 'mid roofless halls, / Wandering with timid footsteps oft betrayed (1-2), finally becomes a eulogium:

Relic of Kings! Wreck of forgotten Wars,  
 To winds abandoned and the prying Stars  
 Time *loves* Thee! at his call the Seasons twine  
 Luxuriant wreaths around thy forehead hoar;  
 And, though past pomp no changes can restore,  
 A soothing recompense, his gift is Thine! (9-14)

There can be no clearer example of poetic philosophical perspective—Father Time and Mother Nature, the benevolent patrons of Ruin—entirely born of picturesque aesthetic theory. Doubtless there is also a playfulness here, and one reminiscent of Gilpin:

What share of picturesque genius Cromwell might have, I know not. Certain however it is, that no man, since Henry the Eighth, has contributed more to adorn this country with picturesque ruins. The difference between these two masters lay chiefly in the style of ruins, in which they composed. Henry adorned his landscape with the ruins of abbeyes; Cromwell, with those of castles. I have seen many pieces by this master, executed in a very grand style. . . . (II, 122-3)

All this seems further indication of the longevity of the Picturesque. Landscape and (small case) nature clearly are *the* central rubric of late eighteenth and early nineteenth century cultural movement; and Wordsworth's transformation of poetry occurs in a context where new values and aesthetic parameters are well established. It is the colourful mixing of both palettes which is Wordsworth, and which defines

early romanticism. Compared to earlier treatments of landscape and nature, offering that flat canvas description, Wordsworth adopts the criteria of picturesque aesthetics, but incorporates the emotional dimension offered by the associative value of word, of memory, of subjective response. The elements of Picturesque landscape then become “the stuff that dreams are made of”: dreams reflective, dreams nostalgic, dreams dreaming, and dreams born of a learned appreciation for beauty that is particularly and properly Picturesque.

### **End Word**

There is a final plot twist: Watson cunningly has stacked the deck. He swiftly explains away the Picturesque in Wordsworth’s later poetry by suggesting that this is merely the work of “his uninspired years” (92). Of course, this is much too glib, especially when we remember the voracity with which critics inform us of Wordsworth’s rejection of the Picturesque, stressing and re-stressing its “limitations.” Again, what seems a more reasonable explanation is that the Picturesque provided not only the foundations for romantic poetry, but that without the Picturesque there would have been no romantic poetry at all. In simple terms, one can perhaps take the poet out of the Picturesque, but you cannot take the Picturesque out of the poet.



Figure 10: Kenneth Clark, Doctor Syntax sketching a lake, from Bicknell

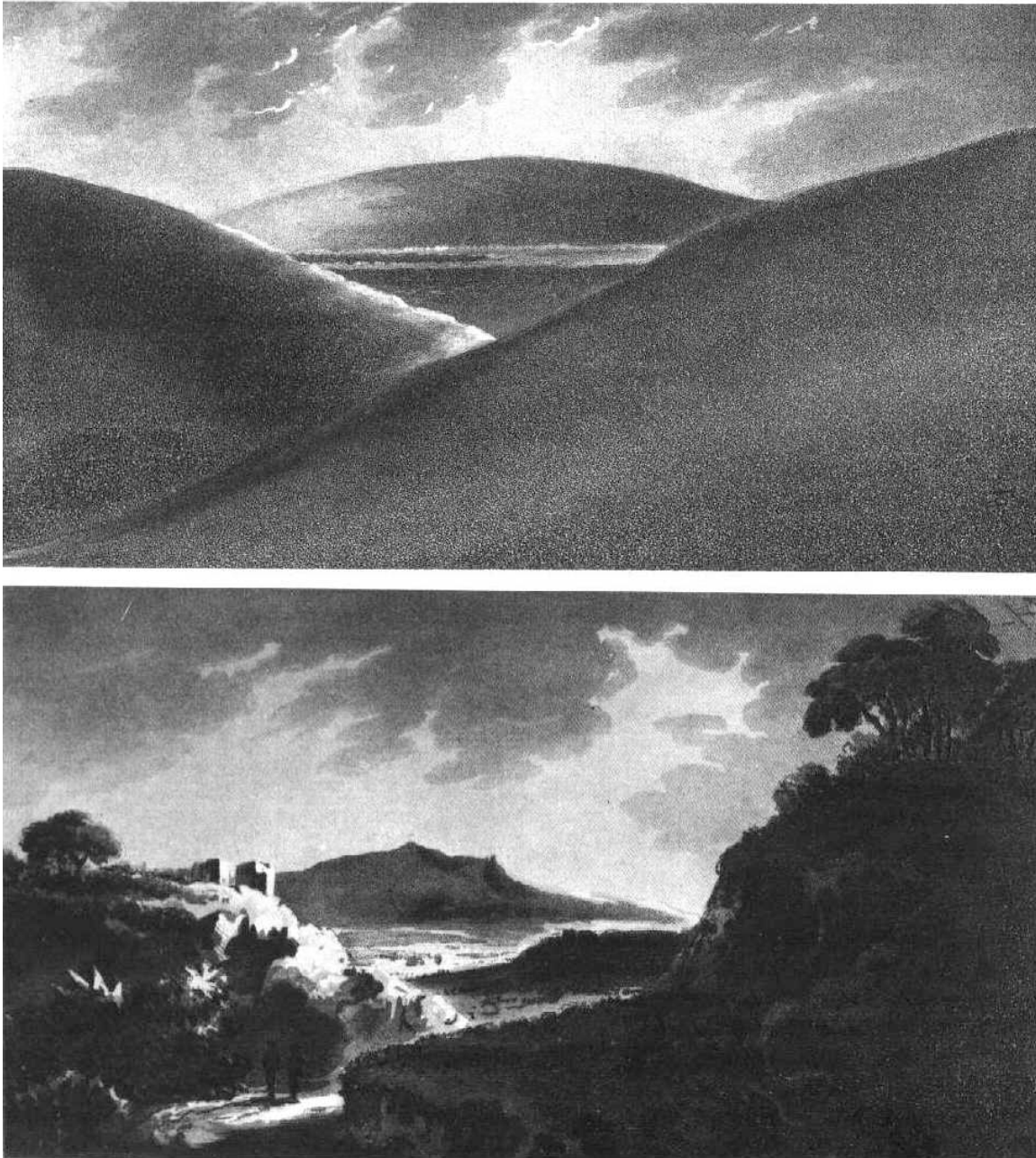


Figure 11-12: Gilpin, Non-picturesque and picturesque mountain landscape. From *Three Essays*





Figure 13: Sir George Beaumont, *Landscape*, from Bicknell

## Section Four

### The Foreground: Keats

#### Argument

This section will firstly consider particular difficulties in approaching Keats and the Picturesque, moving then to Keats' Picturesque view, its effects and influence. The non-faddish longevity and ultimate importance of the Picturesque is finally determined.

#### First Word

Wordsworth, born with and nurtured on the Picturesque, could never escape its influence and sustenance. Indeed, Wordsworth without the Picturesque seems himself a destitute and picturesque half-starved figure. Keats, although temporally distant from the eighteenth century Picturesque development, attempts to see with the Picturesque vision, to adopt the general philosophy, providing compelling evidence against the standard cultist and faddish judgements offered by faddish modern literary scholars and serves as testimony not only to the Picturesque's diuturnity, but also its fundamental value. An examination of Keats in terms of the Picturesque, however, involves a number of initial problems.

#### The Problem With Keats

Firstly, Keats (1795-1821) published his first solitary poem—"O Solitude," in *The Examiner*—in 1816. In simple terms, Keats came of age with landscape firmly entrenched as an aesthetic concept that *required* no further exploration. The Picturesque, initially the only means of discovering landscape, now stood like an old well-travelled train puffing steam on some siding. Landscape was omnipresent, on

main lines and branch lines, an aesthetic form no longer solely the stuff of agriculture and ownership. This is not to imply that exploration could no longer take place, only that the imperative was now only an implication.

Secondly, the title of Keats' first penned poem—"Imitations of Spenser" (1814)—suggests Keats' propensity to look backwards, not particularly to the neo-classicist's Golden Age—though his use of myth glances in that direction<sup>48</sup>—but most particularly to a Golden Age of English poetry: Spenser, Shakespeare, Milton. Not surprisingly, poetic drama and epic seemed the fairest genres.

Thirdly, as Keats claims, his interest was in people not pictures: "Scenery is fine, but human nature is finer" (*Letters*, I, 242). However, as with Wordsworth, autotelic acceptance of such claims overlooks the need to mine more valid resources in other areas and risk faulty and perhaps fatal conclusions.

Finally, Keat's interest in language itself, in imagery and metaphor—in addition to the "felicity and variety" (*Letters*, xxxi)—leads him towards the adoption of diction born of those same grand masters; as well as to the inevitable effect of the unexpected: his singular phraseology. Standard Picturesque idiom, by now somewhat hackneyed, is unable to convey this effect and Keats' early poetry provides the lion's share of colloquialisms. Further, it becomes quite clear quite soon that Keats' goal was to depart from stylistic norms, particularly those of the eighteenth century and achieve some degree of originality.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>48</sup>Keats, as a schoolboy, began a translation of the *Aeneid*. Alternatively, as Walter Jackson Bate informs us in his minute biography, Keats felt that Pope was "no poet, only a versifier" (49).

<sup>49</sup>The notion of originality is itself a legacy of the romantic ethos: originality becomes vital in art and in life; experimentation with new experiences, diction, systems of thought all become the hallmark of the true romantic genius. Indeed,

All this notwithstanding, the sustaining power of the Picturesque—and so its importance—can still be discovered in both the life and works of Keats.

### Keats' Apprenticeship

"O Solitude," reveals a vision of landscape which is particularly picturesque:

O SOLITUDE! if I must with thee dwell,  
 Let it not be among the jumbled heap  
 Of murky buildings; climb with me the steep,—  
 Nature's observatory—whence the dell,  
 Its flowery slopes, its river's crystal swell,  
 May seem a span; let me thy vigils keep  
 'Mongst boughs pavillion'd, where the deer's swift leap  
 Startles the wild bee from the fox-glove bell.  
 But though I'll gladly trace these scenes with thee,  
 Yet the sweet converse of an innocent mind,  
 Whose words are images of thoughts refin'd,  
 Is my soul's pleasure; and it sure must be  
 Almost the highest bliss of human-kind,  
 When to thy haunts two kindred spirits flee.

Here, Keats paints no landscape with his words; rather, he adopts an attitude to

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critics' unwillingness to give the Picturesque the importance it deserves as both the inaugurator of a new aesthetic vision and as a factor of lasting literary influence stems, perhaps, from the romantic desire to see originality rather than acknowledge the temporal continuity of artistic development. Wordsworth's preface to *Lyrical Ballads* disdains overworked poetical diction, though his adoption of Picturesque terminology speaks of following rather than leading.

nature which stems not from the southern regions close to home, but from the heartland of quintessential Picturesque scenery. It is here, amongst the steep windswept hills, the spilling streams, the dells and lonely haunts, that a true sense of sublime solitude is experienced. Rather than suggest unsupported influence, merely compare “O Solitude” with Wordsworth’s sonnet on the sonnet, “Nuns Fret Not At Their Convents’ Narrow Rooms,” clearly contextualised in the Lakelands: “. . . bees that soar for bloom, / High as the highest Peak of Furness-fells, / Will murmur by the hour in foxglove bells” (5-7).

In “Sleep and Poetry” (1816), Keats demonstrates a simple gratification in simple Nature descriptions, beginning his description of Poesy—the highest calling—entirely in naturalistic terms:

Should I rather kneel  
 Upon some mountain-top until I feel  
 A glowing splendour round about me hung,  
 And echo back the voice of thine own tongue? (49-52)

Here the mountain top serves as altar to the poet-priest: both the material manifestation and the token picturesque echo of poetry’s voice, the situation and inspiration. This soon progresses to a unclouded analogy between literature and landscape:

. . . a bowery nook  
 Will be elysium—an eternal book  
 Whence I may copy many a lovely saying  
 About the leaves, and flowers—about the playing  
 Of nymphs in woods, and fountains; and the shade  
 Keeping a silence round a sleeping maid. (63-68)

The opening, “What is more gentle than a wind in summer” (1), “More healthful than the leafiness of dales?” (7) sets the initial tone: composed of a sappy repetition

of feminine rhymes that describes entirely the sappy nature Keats first has in mind. The centre weight of "Sleep and Poetry" is sweetness (the word *sweet* occurs ten times) rather than picturesqueness.

Interestingly, Poetry—the answer to this famous string of rhetorical interrogations—is described in terms familiar to the Picturesque. There is the beautiful: "beautiful," "smooth," "wings of a swan"; intermixed with the sublime: "awful," "fearful claps of thunder," "low rumblings," and "sounds which will reach the Framer of all things." Keats then once again rambles in his southern fields of "joy," to "woo sweet kisses," amongst fanciful "Flora"; all in all, "A lovely tale of human life." Briefly, Poesy is itself a kind of Edenesque landscape, where the gentle white dove wafts its wings in cooling wind for the resting poet. And yet Keats knew such joys he must ". . . pass . . . for a nobler life," and there "find the agonies, the strife / Of human hearts. . . . (122-124).

This re-introduces Poetry, this time in terms of "calling," and again Keats offers images drawn from the picturesque landscape, eloquent as allegory for the solitude, agonies and transience of the human experience: "cragginess"; "winds with glorious fear"; the sky is no longer filled with fluffy white, but "a huge cloud's ridge"; there are now "mountains" filled with "Shapes of delight, of mystery, and fear." Keats, aspires to become the powerful "charioteer," understanding "the agonies, the strife" of "thousands" of different men. Clearly and undeniably—and here we can be thankful that the literary jury who generally overlook Keats and the Picturesque are not only out to lunch but almost completely out of the picture—Picturesque allusions best express those agonies, that strife.

The final verse paragraphs provide an extra dimension, an inventory of the art decoration in his friend Hunt's house situated within the larger context of poetic fancy. Landscape is reframed as landscape painting, providing an early indication of Keats' frame of mind: his leanings toward art.

It seems clear from all this that Keats already understands the symbolic value of the picturesque scene: its ability to conjure up the essence of man's existence: the beauty of youth coupled with the awful of age, that dialogue which utters mutual pity and ultimate evanescence. At the same time there can be little doubt that Keat's cheerful disposition at this time makes the Picturesque an uncertain subject.

"I Stood Tip-Toe" (1816) offers another early effort at landscape poetry. Almost at once the view from the "little hill" becomes an exercise

To peer about upon variety;  
 Far round the horizon's crystal air to skim,  
 And trace the dwindled edgings of its brim;  
 To picture out the quaint, and curious bending  
 Of a fresh woodland alley, never ending;  
 Or by the bowery clefts, and leafy shelves,  
 Guess where the jaunty streams refresh themselves. (16-22)

Unfortunately, there is no unity in Keats' picture—despite the superlative editorial annotation of "pure nature-painting"—only a variegated catalogue of nature confused by occasional legends of Hellas and compounded by relentless rhyming couplets. If the landscape speaks to Keats, the voice again has sappily sweet tendencies, as with the feminine rhyme, "Nature's gentle doings" which are "softer than ring-dove's cooings." Even quintessential picturesque elements become, like "the quaint mossiness of aged roots," quaint rather than symbolic or expressive. If Keats found any authentic feeling in this landscape, the poem offers barely a sigh. This becomes clear when we compare:

My spirit is too weak—mortality  
 Weighs heavily on me like unwilling sleep,  
 And each imagined pinnacle and steep  
 Of godlike hardship tells me I must die

Like a sick eagle looking at the sky. (1-5)

This contemplation comes not from the vision of landscape but “On First Seeing the Elgin Marbles,” written the following year. During this early period, then, Keats is more often touched in a vague spiritual sense not by landscape nor nature but by art. As Maureen B. Roberts explains in her somewhat chimerical *The Diamond Path: Individuation as Soul-Making in the Works of John Keats*:

Within these few lines are themes and symbols which come to feature prominently in Keats’ mature poetry: the eagle as the transcendent victory of beauty—the vision of unity—over the “dizzy pain” of the “undesirable feud” of opposites; the motif of heaviness representing the Gnostic “sleep” as imprisonment in the world, and sickness as the self-division which must be transcended in order to attain the ascent.  
(Roberts)

Whatever the extent of Gnostic influence, the fact remains that the Elgin Marbles lead Keats inwards, towards fundamentals, while the tip-toe view results in little more than a dance through the tulips; indeed by the end of the poem we can only imagine Keats tired of his tip-toe prance.

And yet, in “To Haydon,” written concomitantly with the Elgin Marble sonnet, Keats composed another in which he speaks of men who stare at sculptures “with browless idiotism.” The sonnet also includes:

. . . forgive me that I cannot speak  
Definitively of these mighty things;  
Forgive me that I have not eagle’s wings,  
That what I want I know not where to seek. (“To Haydon,” 3-6)

Keats then is still searching, rambling, as we shall see, between the vicarious and the actual. There is some certitude: the unbreakable link between landscape and poetry: “Some flowery spot, sequester’d, wild, romantic, / That often must have seen



a poet frantic" ("Epistle to George Felton Mathew," 37-8)<sup>50</sup>; and the particularly evocative effects of picturesque scenery which speak to Keats of Poetry as vocation. Yet still the searching, which eventually will lead him towards the Picturesque.

### People not Pictures

March 13, 1818, Keats writes to his friend Bailey: "Give me a barren mould so I may meet with some shadowing of Alfred in the shape of a Gipsy, a Huntsman or as Shepherd. Scenery is fine, but human nature is finer" (*Letters*, I, 242). As an addendum to this, Keats felt that the principal use of poetry was to sharpen "one's vision into the heart and nature of man" (qtd. Bate, 337). Although this *seems* to

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<sup>50</sup>Thomas Gray, in "The Progress of Poesy" (1754), expresses a similar bond between poetry and landscape:

Awake, Aeolian lyre, awake,  
And give to rapture all thy trembling strings.  
From Helicon's harmonious springs  
A thousand rills their mazy progress take:  
The laughing flowers, that round them blow,  
Drink life and fragrance as they flow.  
Now the rich stream of music winds along  
Deep, majestic, smooth, and strong.  
Thro' verdant vales, and Ceres' golden reign:  
Now rolling down the steep amain,  
Headlong, impetuous, see it pour;  
The rocks and nodding groves rebellow to the roar. (I.i.1-12)

The central image here is Poetry in general global expansion, finding echo in both the objects of nature and poets of various ages.

exclude any exploration of the Picturesque, Keats' catalogue of characters are, perhaps inadvertently, certainly importantly, all of the Picturesque scene. Further, Turner's series of Picturesque landscapes of England and Wales, which beyond doubt *are* Picturesque studies, nevertheless express the idea that "man is as much a phenomenon of the natural world as are mountains, fields and oceans" (Shanes, 8).

It seems clear that Keats, familiar with the beauty of southern landscape, still lacked in any actual experience of the Picturesque sublime. An exhibition of the American painter, Benjamin West, where ". . . Keats was altogether receptive to any effort to attain the 'sublime'" (Bate, 243), featured one particular painting, "Death on the Pale Horse," known for stirring such feelings. Keats was ultimately disappointed:

. . . there is nothing to be intense upon; no women one feels mad to kiss;  
no face swelling into reality. . . . The excellence of every Art is its  
intensity, capable of making all disagreeable evaporate, from their  
being in close relationship with Beauty and Truth—Examine King Lear  
& you will find this exemplified throughout. (qtd. Bate, 243)

Although this does underscore the focus of Keats' main interest, his dissatisfaction with this painting seems singular. A letter to Reynolds (25 March, 1818), for example, contains the following:

You know the Enchanted Castel, it doth stand  
Upon a rock, on the border of a Lake,  
Nested in trees,  
.....  
A mossy place, a Merlin's Hall, a dream.  
You know the clear lake, and the little Isles  
The Mounts blue,  
.....  
See what is coming from the distance dim!

A golden galley all in silken trim.

.....

O that our dreamings all, of sleep or wake,

Would all the colours from the sunset take. . . . (*Letters*, 260-261)

Keats explains in an endnote to this poem that his inspiration was Claude's "Enchanted Castle" in "*Sacrifice to Apollo*" (*Letters*, 263). Further, Manwaring suggests that the same canvas was transmuted into certain lines of "Ode on a Grecian Urn"—itself formed of pictures; and perhaps a sense of Claude is still heard in ". . . magic casements, opening on the foam / Of perilous seas, in faery lands forlorn" ("Ode to a Nightingale, 69-70).

Although Keats will discover a sense of sublimity in landscape during his 1818 Picturesque tour, art provided the source from which he would most often and most naturally drink. The sense of sublimity through the subjective contemplation of objects is common to the romantics, but Keats' "Ode on a Grecian Urn" demonstrates his variance with Wordsworth: for Keats it is the Urn rather than Nature which provides lessons of truth. And yet there is a striking similarity, for the main theme is not the figures on the Urn but the poet's own response.

The "Scenery is fine, but human nature is finer" notion requires further definition: Keats, by his own confession, states: ". . . my head is sometimes in such a whirl in considering the million likings and antipathies of our Moments" (*Letters*, 324); "I carry all matters to an extreme—so that when I have any little vexation it grows in five minutes into a theme for Sophocles" (*Letters*, 340). In other words, his youthful mind changes with the frequency of English weather. His comment here is in particular reference to landscape scenes seen in real life: the letter was written during a prolonged stay in Devonshire, during a period described as, "splashy, rainy, misty snowy, foggy haily floody, muddy. . . ." (*Letters*, 241).

Even if we willingly expand his scenery/human nature comment to all

landscapes and all sunny days—the effect, for example, of offering the quotation without the context in order to prove a point—as ridiculous as this might seem, there still remains, as suggested by the “Gipsy,” “Huntsman” and “Shepherd,” the Picturesque *character*.

### The Picturesque Tour<sup>51</sup>

We have so far seen reasons why a Picturesque Tour was long on the books, not least of which is the fact that literature cannot be writ from an exploration only of literature.<sup>52</sup> Keats’ keen literary vision and his initial rural blindness are unwittingly confessed in “To one who has been long in city pent”:

To one who has been long in city pent,  
 ’Tis very sweet to look into the fair  
 And open face of heaven,—to breathe a prayer  
 Full in the smile of the blue firmament.  
 Who is more happy, when, with heart’s content,  
 Fatigued he sinks into some pleasant lair  
 Of wavy grass, and reads a debonair  
 And gentle tale of love and languishment. (1-8)

Certainly there is pleasure in this dulcet southern domain, though finally, typically,

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<sup>51</sup>Interestingly, even though Keats himself occasionally uses the word *Picturesque* in his correspondence; even though his companion Brown, in *Walks in the North*, offers the clear sign-post: “Here are the beautiful and sublime in unison,” (*Letters*, 428), Bate, in his *tomeish* biography, avoids such *inkish* sully.

<sup>52</sup>Keats’ early literary life was marked by constant frustrations: “. . . I have not an Idea to put to paper—my hand feels like lead . . . I don’t know what to write” (qtd. Bate, 342).

Keats turns his full attention to a book. Sidney K. Robinson, *Inquiry into the Picturesque*, repudiating the absurdity of comparing landscapes with paintings, states:

For the Picturesque, of course, studying paintings and books was the clearest recognition that designing the landscape was a complex amalgam of raw sensory patterns supplied by nature with the patterns of arrangement and selection inherent in the operation of the human mind. (Robinson 103)

Although the connection might seem somewhat tenuous, designing poetry is equally “an amalgam of raw sensory patterns supplied by nature with the patterns of arrangement and selection inherent in the operation of the human mind.” Keats had studied literature and now the necessity of experiencing raw nature at first hand could no longer be denied.

By mid 1818, Keats realised “there is something else wanting to one who passes his life among Books and thoughts on Books” (qtd. Bate, 340). In April, Keats proposed

within a Month to put my knapsack at my back and make a pedestrian tour through the North of England, and part of Scotland—to make a sort of Prologue to the Life I intend to pursue. . . . (*Letters*, 264)

As a citizen of the romantic province, experiencing nature at length and up-close was a moral imperative, not only because other poets had trod that path, but because nature, especially the grander and awful, are essential for imaginative energy. Keats knew this and Keats went a-wandering. In late June, his travelling companion, Charles Brown, wrote in his journal:

The country was wild and romantic, the weather fine, though not sunny, while the fresh mountain air, and many larks about us, gave us unbounded delight. As we approached the lake, the scenery became

more grand and beautiful; and from time to time we stayed our steps, gazing intently on it. Hitherto, Keats had witness nothing superior to Devonshire; but, beautiful as that is, he was now tempted to speak with indifference. At the first turn from the road, before descending to the hamlet of Bowness, we both simultaneously came to a full stop. The lake [Windermere] lay before us. His bright eyes darted on a mountain-peak, beneath which was gently floating a silver cloud; thence to a very small island, adorned with the foliage of trees, that lay beneath us, and surrounded by water of a glorious hue, when he exclaimed: "How can I believe in that?—surely it cannot be!" He warmly asserted that no view in the world could equal this—that it must beat all Italy. (*Letters*, 425-426) (See figure 14. )

It is perhaps difficult for the sensorially saturated modern to imagine the provocativity and, yes, the sublimity, of such landscape; this lengthy extract, however, makes clear the power of the Picturesque, temporally contextualised, when such scenes were relatively unfamiliar.<sup>53</sup> In a sense, we have here the spectacular importance of the Picturesque, an indication of why a revolution it caused in aesthetics and art; and the comparison with Italy—the fountain-head from which swelled the Picturesque—is beyond doubt no chancy happening.

Keats' own record of the tour, his correspondence, is equally mottled with superlatives:

What astonishes me more than anything is the tone, the colouring, the slate, the stone, the moss, the rock-weed; or, if I may so say, the intellect, the countenance of such places. The space, the magnitude of mountains and waterfalls are well imagined before one sees them; but

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<sup>53</sup>Indeed, Keats shortly hereafter saw the first waterfall of his entire life.

this countenance or intellectual tone must surpass every imagination and defy any remembrance. (*Letters*, 301) (See figure 15.)<sup>54</sup>

Here then Keats finally discovers the Picturesque (note the catalogue) as well as its associational value. Paraphrasing Archibald Alison, Hipple states: "An object is picturesque if it is such as to awaken a train of associations additional to what the scene as a whole is calculated to excite" (164). Again, the picturesque then is a term whether in landscape, painting or literature which has everything to do with associationism; and we see that Price's attempt to divorce the term from its reference to pictorial representation is by no means peculiar.<sup>55</sup> Keats, clearly, has imagined such scenes, imagines them as he hikes, and yet the intellect seems suddenly insignificant once confronted with the actual. Keats goes on to tell Tom:

I shall learn poetry here and shall henceforth write more than ever, for the abstract endeavour of being able to add a mite to that mass of beauty which is harvested from these grand materials, by the finest spirits, and put into etherial existence for the relish of one's fellows. I cannot think with Hazlitt that these scenes make man appear little. I never forgot my stature so completely—I live in the eye; and my imagination, surpassed, is at rest. (301)

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<sup>54</sup>Perhaps suffering still from a mind "in such a whirl in considering the million likings and antipathies of our Moments," Keats, in a letter filled with similar portrayal, ironically concludes: ". . . descriptions are bad at all times" (*Letters*, 301). Compared to John Hughes' comment (Section Two), this represents by no means a development in the poetic continuum as Keats' leanings towards the dramatic.

<sup>55</sup>Supporting this, and in the context of the picturesque: "Turner undoubtedly had what John Gage has perceptively called 'an almost obsessive readiness to associate ideas'" (Shanes, 21).

There is too much for coincidence in these two passages: to “defy remembrance,” to “live in the eye,” to “forget my stature,” besides an echoing of negative capability, is clearly to defy Wordsworth—an assertion that though perhaps he follows in the old poet’s footsteps, he will find his own way in the Picturesque. Indeed, Keats himself admits this point:

As to the poetical Character itself, (I mean that sort of which, if I am anything, I am a Member; that sort distinguished from the wordsworthian or egotistical sublime; which is a thing per se and stands alone) it is not itself—it has no self—it is everything and nothing. (*Letters*, 386-7)

In a similar vein, Keats comments on Windermere, which makes

. . . one forget the divisions of life; age, youth, poverty and riches; and refine ones sensual vision into a sort of north star which can never cease to be open lidded and steadfast over the wonders of the great Power. (*Letters*, 299)<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>56</sup>Indeed, Keats’ “negative capability,” unless we suspect that he, like Coleridge, was—to quote Edgar Allen Poe—“buried in metaphysics” seems a direct challenge to Wordsworth. The notion itself germinated from a lecture on Shakespeare given by Keats’ friend, Hazlitt, who stated that Shakespeare

was the least of an egotist that it was possible to be. He was nothing in himself; but he was all that others were, or that they could become. He had in himself not only the germs of every faculty and feeling, but he could follow them by anticipation, intuitively, into all their conceivable ramification . . . He had only to think of anything in order to become that thing, with all the circumstances belonging to it. (qtd. Bate, 260)



At the end of June, Keats visits the “Druids’ Circle.” Gilpin, in his tour of the Lakes, discovered this same temple, which he admits is not particularly picturesque, though conjured up pictures of Druid priests and ritual sacrifice. A romantic fancy? Surely not!

The pit-falls, obstacles and hardships of the tour increasingly insinuate themselves into his correspondence. Brown was a veteran hiker. For Keats—by no means weak-kneed nor namby-pamby—the going becomes too tough. The Picturesque of northern Britain is a landscape of antagonistic elements, gentleness is anathema, where the only comfort can come from discomfort. All this, compounded with climactic and topographical alienness, becomes apparent in “On Visiting the Tomb of Burns,” written during the tour:

The town, the churchyard, and the setting sun,  
 The clouds, the trees, the rounded hills all seem,  
 Though beautiful, cold—strange—as in a dream,  
 I dreamed long ago, now new begun.  
 The short-liv’d, paly Summer is but won  
 From Winter’s ague, for one hour’s gleam;  
 Though sapphire-warm, their stars do never beam:  
 All is cold Beauty, pain is never done:  
 For who has mind to relish, Minos-wise,  
 The Real of Beauty, free from that dead hue  
 Sickly imagination and sick pride  
 Cast wan upon it? Burns! with honour due

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It is no surprise that Keats should whole-heartedly adopt the idea, not only since there is no superior poet to emulate, but because it was so oppositional to the crowned King of romantic poetry: Wordsworth.

I oft have honour'd thee. Great shadow, hide

Thy face; I sin against the native skies. (*Letters*, 308)

Although largely a fault finding mission, a remonstrance, penned by a southerner spoiled by languid southern summer sunshine and summer warmth, there is here, as there *is not* in “I Stood Tiptoe” and other early poems, an authentic sense of feeling, a sense of being touched by landscape and nature, a genuineness that foreshadows “Ode to Melancholy.” There is also an important associational element, translating to the problem of judging beauty when both our judgement and beauty itself are tinged with the omnipresence of brevity and death. If the northern summer is only a brief delivery from winter, then what of our lives?

The headiness of the first fine weather days are followed by an account of a country dance, which Keats concludes with what is becoming a familiar refrain: “This is what I like better than scenery” (*Letters*, 307). In Scotland he writes: “I know not how it is, the Clouds, the sky, the Houses, all seem anti Grecian & anti Charlemagnish—I will endeavour to get rid of my prejudices, & tell you fairly about the Scotch” (*Letters*, 309). At the same time, there is a clue to Keats’ understanding of picturesqueness: “The barefooted Girls look very much in keeping—I mean with the Scenery about them. . . . They are very pleasant because they are very primitive” (*Letters*, 318-19). Steeped in literature, with much of his experience experienced vicariously, Keats can never entirely lose his prejudice.

As hinted above, Keats takes great delight in picturesque characters:

Imagine the worst dog kennel you ever saw placed upon two poles from a mouldy fencing—In such a wretched thing sat a squalid old woman squat like an ape half starved from a scarcity of Biscuit in its passage from Madagascar to the cape,—with a pipe in her mouth and looking out with a round eyed skinny lidded, inanity—with a sort of horizontal idiotic movement of her head—squat and lean she sat and

puffed out the smoke while two ragged tattered Girls carried her along.

(*Letters*, 321-2)

Notice the skill with which Keats intensifies the picturesque effect: the mixed dog/ape metaphor, the alliteration and repetition. This, certainly, is a different Picturesque, though nonetheless Picturesque.

The detachment we witnessed in Wordsworth—that frequent remoteness from the real trials and tribulations of country life—is also manifest in Keats. John Clare, Keats' contemporary, similarly notes:

. . . his descriptions of scenery are often very fine but as it is the case with other inhabitants of great cities he often described nature as she appeared in his fancies & not as he would have described her had he witnessed the things he describes—Thus it is he has often undergone the stigma of Cockneyism & what appears as beautys in the eyes of a pent-up citizen are looked upon as conceits by those who live in the country—these are merely errors but even here they are merely the errors of poetry—he is often mystical but such poetical licences have been looked on as beauties in Wordsworth & Shelley and in Keats they may be forgiven. (qtd. Watson, 23)

The idea that such romanticisms are “merely errors of poetry” is indicative of the times, a kind of Claudian perspective where both the Picturesque and poetic vision could often turn a blind eye to social reality and see instead a dislocated ideal. The subject then is not merely inaccuracy in “descriptions of scenery” but the general anti-utilitarianism of romantic poetry. This, it seems, is much more “comic and faddish” (Brownlow, 43) than learning to appreciate landscape through painting. It is also entirely common to *all* the romantic poets. Again, to quote Clare:

And een the fallow fields appear so fair

The very weeds make sweetest gardens there

And summer there puts garments on so gay

I hate the plow that comes to dissaray

.....

And man the only object that disdains

Earth's garden into deserts for his grains

Leave him his schemes of gain—tis wealth to me

Wild heaths to trace—and not their broken tree

Which lightening shivered—and which nature tries

To keep alive for poesy to prize. (Clare, 80)

Interestingly, however, such romanticism of country life is often omitted during the tour, where Keats comes face to face with the squalor—and a foreign squalor to such a southerner—of poverty and often describes it in empathetic or political terms:

On our walk in Ireland we had too much opportunity to see the worse than nakedness, the rags, the dirt and misery of the poor common Irish—A Scotch cottage, though in that some times the Smoke has no exit but at the door, is a palace to an Irish one. (*Letters*, 321)

There is perhaps some implication that a philosophical shift occurs in moving from poetry to prose, as if the picturesque vanishes with the replacement of smock for Wellington boots and overalls, a justification for the might of “modern” prose. The subject of Keats’ complaint was also the subject of a Picturesque sub-category: the Gainsboroughesque “cottage Picturesque,” where sublimity is replaced by romantic rusticity, where such squalor is marked by its absence: in essence, a gentle Picturesque (see figure 16).

### **The Tour’s End**

In a gasping effort at brevity, much has been overlooked. In summary, Keats’ correspondence during the tour is overgrown with the Picturesque, from poems such

as “Ailsa Rock” (see figure 17) and “Ben Nevis,”—which, in its stumbling uncertainty, seem neither a Ben nor a Nevis—to comments such as “evey [sic] ten steps creating a new and beautiful picture—sometimes through little woods—there are two islands on the Lake each with a beautiful ruin—one of them rich in ivy (*Letters*, 338).<sup>57</sup>

In early August, after covering 642 horizontal and vertical miles in sometimes cold wet conditions with sometimes poor food and indifferent accommodation, after suffering a fortnight from a cold and sore throat, Keats abandoned the tour and left his friend to continue alone.<sup>58</sup>

## Post Tour

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<sup>57</sup>Perhaps in revolt against the popular, Keats, as in this instance, makes a studious, though far from successful, effort to avoid the word *picturesque*, even when the description itself spells out the word. Also, ruins are the single most common scenic feature of the tour.

<sup>58</sup>In 1739, on a tour of the Alps, Thomas Gray cunningly wrote:

Mont Cenis, I confess, carries the permission mountains have of being  
frightful rather too far; and its horrors were accompanied with too  
much danger to give one time to reflect upon their beauties. (qtd  
Woodring, 34)

In 1803, Coleridge, overwhelmed and over-tired, abandoned a tour with William and Dorothy Wordsworth. Proof, perhaps, that the sublime can get the better of the egotistical.

## Hyperion<sup>59</sup>

Watson—in his singular modern study of Keats and the Picturesque, which continues the standard criticism instituted with Wordsworth—provides a succinct panorama of the refracted light of influence the Picturesque tour radiates over *Hyperion*, and there is no need therefore to offer excessive focus.<sup>60</sup> In summary, Watson points out that the power of the poem stems from Keats’ “mythologising imagination” and the sublime “terrifying landscapes which form the background for the colossal figures” (155). But the picturesque, in addition to background, also serves as a form of characterisation, externalising the internal:

. . . where their own groans  
 They felt, but heard not, for the solid roar  
 Of thunderous waterfalls and torrents hoarse  
 Pouring a constant bulk, uncertain where.  
 Crag jutting forth to crag, and rocks that seem’d  
 Ever as if just rising from a sleep,  
 Forehead to forehead held their monstrous horns;  
 And thus in a thousand hugest phantasies  
 Made a fir roofing to this nest of woe. (II,6-14)

On similar lines, “The quiet sublime imbues the sorrow-worn face of Moneta within the temple of Western memory built by Keats in *The Fall of Hyperion*” (Woodring, 40).

There are, however, a few additional points which Watson fails to note. Firstly, the poem opens with Saturn and Thea postured “. . . motionless / Like natural

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<sup>59</sup>A continuation, perhaps, of the question, “How is it they did not [various picturesque and sublime scenes] beckon Burns to some grand attempt at Epic” (*Letters*, 331).

<sup>60</sup>The reappearance of the Druid Circle is taken as a given.

sculpture in cathedral cavern" (I.85-86). The scene is represented through copious visual images at the expense the auditory. Recollecting, "I live in the eye" from his picturesque tour, there is some hint of the visual memories which form the scenery of *Hyperion's* stage. The "fallen divinity" of Saturn exists in a mythico-historical landscape formed of the transcendental imagination and nature experienced during the tour: the "thousand hugest phantasies."

Watson's closing comment—"Ode to Autumn originated in the Hampshire harvest-time, not on a Lakeland mountain; and the nightingale, like Keats, sings only in the south of England" (157)—scores high marks for rhetorical tune and poetic twang; unfortunately, it is falsely based upon the premise that the Picturesque is heterogeneous to Hampshire as well as drawing attention to his ornithological dullness.

### Still Later

Following the Picturesque Tour, Watson states: ". . . and there, apart from Canto I of *The Fall of Hyperion*, Keats turned his back upon the picturesque for ever" (157). Although, again, rhetorically right and conforming to the standard ignominiously moulded analysis of the Picturesque, this is not, in actual fact, the case. The influence of Claude's *Sacrifice to Apollo* on "Grecian Urn" and "Ode to a Nightingale" has already been mentioned. In more general terms, and as Bate mentions: "It is interesting to note the number of spontaneous phrases and images in his letters now that are later echoed in the poetry, especially in the Odes" (358). Although instances are numerous, a couple will prove the point. In terms of diction, compare: "There is no great body of water, but the accompaniment is delightful; for it ooses out from a cleft in perpendicular Rocks, all *fledged* with Ash. . ." (*Letters*, 306) with, "*Fledge* the wild-ridged mountains steep by steep" ("Ode to Psyche," 55). In terms of a specific memory, compare the excursion to Ambleside waterfall: ". . . it is buried in trees, in

the bottom of the valley—the stream itself is interesting” (*Letters*, 300), with, “. . . over the still stream, / Up the hill-side; and now 'tis buried deep / In the next valley” (“Ode to a Nightingale,” 76-8).

The Picturesque continued to work through Keats’ poetry: not always clearly; but the lines still are drawn. Recalling Keats’ comments on first seeing Windermere, which included “refine ones sensual vision into a sort of north star,” we move easily to its later transmutation:

Bright star, would I were stedfast as thou art-  
 Not in lone splendour hung aloft the night,  
 And watching, with eternal lids apart,  
 Like nature’s patient, sleepless Eremite,  
 The moving waters at their priestlike task  
 Of pure ablution round earth’s human shores,  
 Or gazing on the new soft-fallen mask  
 Of snow upon the mountains and the moors;  
 No-yet still stedfast, still unchangeable,  
 Pillow’d upon my fair love’s ripening breast,  
 To feel for ever its soft fall and swell,  
 Awake for ever in a sweet unrest,  
 Still, still to hear her tender-taken breath,  
 And so live ever-or else swoon to death. (*Complete Poems*, 329)

One of the problems of looking at Keats in a Picturesque context, as mentioned above, is his unwillingness to adopt standard phraseologies, choosing instead to create fresh imagery. Although this is indeed a “problem,” it is also a solution. Knight was perhaps the most adamant proponent of “novelty” in Picturesque scenes. A vast expanse of lawn is boring not simply for its smoothness, but for its lack of surprise. Abrupt variation produces mixture through novelty. Richard Payne Knight



recognised the salutary effect of “irritation” as an interruption of sensations that had become “stale and vapid” through repetition. (Robinson, 7)

It seems fair therefore to suggest that poetic coinings—“large dome curtains,” (*Hyperion*) and “massy range” (*Fall of Hyperion*), for example—are a form of such abrupt variation producing mixture through novelty. In a sense, Keats’ poetical methodology stems directly from the lessons of the Picturesque, at least in terms of “the noble metaphor, when it is placed to Advantage, casts a kind of Glory round it, and darts a Lustre through the whole sentence” (qtd. Robinson, 9). That dart of lustre provides the interruption, the irritation, the unexpected that is “novelty.” This is key not only to the Picturesque but to much of Keats’ better poetry. Although perhaps out on stretchified limb, in danger of barking up the wrong tree, the suggestion merely provides some indication of the less obvious influence of the Picturesque. Hipple points out that the term “picturesque” can and is used solely as a literary term: “Blair,” he says as a case in point, “repeatedly praises epithets, figures and descriptions as ‘picturesque’ as conjuring up distinct and forcible images.” (186) Indeed, compared with Robinson’s analogy between the complexity and mixture of the Picturesque and identical constituents of the 18th century Whig party, (“Compositions of Politics and Money”)—the picturesque here seems more associated with the *wig* than the party—the claim seems modest enough.

### **The Liberty of the Picturesque**

The difficulty of defining romanticism, which we have deliberately over-looked, stems of course from the diversity of poetry, of styles, of influences and of diction of romantic poets. That variety is itself a product of the times and the liberty that the Picturesque supported—liberty both in the political and personal sense. Knight, in *Progress of a Civil Society*, points out the connection between the picturesque landscape garden—and by extension, the Picturesque in general—and the

composition of society:

As when in formal lines, exact and true,  
 The pruner's scissors shear the ductile yew,  
 Amused, its shape and symmetry we see,  
 But seek in vain the likeness of a tree;  
 And while the artist's pleasing skill we trace,  
 Lament the loss of every native grace:  
 So when too strictly social habits bind,  
 The native vigour of the roving mind,  
 Pleased, the well-ordered system we behold  
 Its justly regulated parts unfold,  
 But search in vain its complicated plan  
 To find the native semblance of a man,  
 And, 'midst the charms of equal rule, deplore  
 The loss of graces art can ne'er restore. (qtd. Robinson, 134)

In a sense, an examination of the Picturesque in the context of its influence on romanticism—even when fairness, as here, is the ultimate goal—does a certain injustice to the subject and filters out much of the important material. Thus, for example, the liberating effect seems somewhat arbitrary. Hipple, in *The Beautiful, the Sublime and the Picturesque*, occupies a unique position in modern Picturesque analysis, going beyond the positivism of art historians and suggesting that the Picturesque is consequential in and of itself. Although Hipple rarely ventures beyond summary and conflation of individual Picturesque theories, his treatise is comprehensive, detailed and offers an important concluding point:

The aestheticians of this period [eighteenth century] all found their subject to be psychological: the central problem for them was not some aspect of the cosmos or of particular substances, nor was it found

among the characteristics of human activity or of the modes of symbolic representation; one and all, they found their problem to be the specification and discrimination of certain kinds of feelings, the determination of the mental powers and susceptibilities which yielded those feelings, and of the impressions and ideas which excited them.

(305)

Although the Picturesque, despite Hipple's unqualified assertion, does indeed concern itself with particular substances: the elemental material of a scene; and with human activity: the hiking and picturesque tours, the picturesque guide books and plain and simple painting and poetry; and with modes of symbolic representation: the Picturesque itself is a mode of symbolic representation; Hipple's stress upon the psychological basis is nevertheless an important point, especially when we look forward to the psychological aspect of romantic poetry.

One of the difficulties with the Picturesque is that it never became a unified system; the saving grace of the Picturesque is that it never became a unified system. It is fundamentally concerned with the native vigour of the roving mind, allowing for nature and art to stroll arm in arm, allowing and even insisting upon the liberty of variety and change: the liberty then of Wordsworth and Keats.

### End Word

Keats, for all his youth and gentle disposition, found the Picturesque health threatening to walk through and almost anomalistic to incorporate in his verse; as a serious poet with ambitions of immortality,<sup>61</sup> he nevertheless realised its essentiality to his artistic development. As Robinson explains: "Picturesque colors are not fresh, delicate ones of spring, but those of autumn whose age and decay bespeak fullness

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<sup>61</sup>" . . . to one whom you understand intends to be immortal" (*Letters*, 305).

and repose tinged with memory and the sharpness of abrupt terminations" (101). Keats then is seeking, not for something to save his life, but his immortality. Keats never reached an age when these colours could clearly be seen and so we find glimpses here and there and the constant desire to "bid these joys farewell": those bright colours of youth.

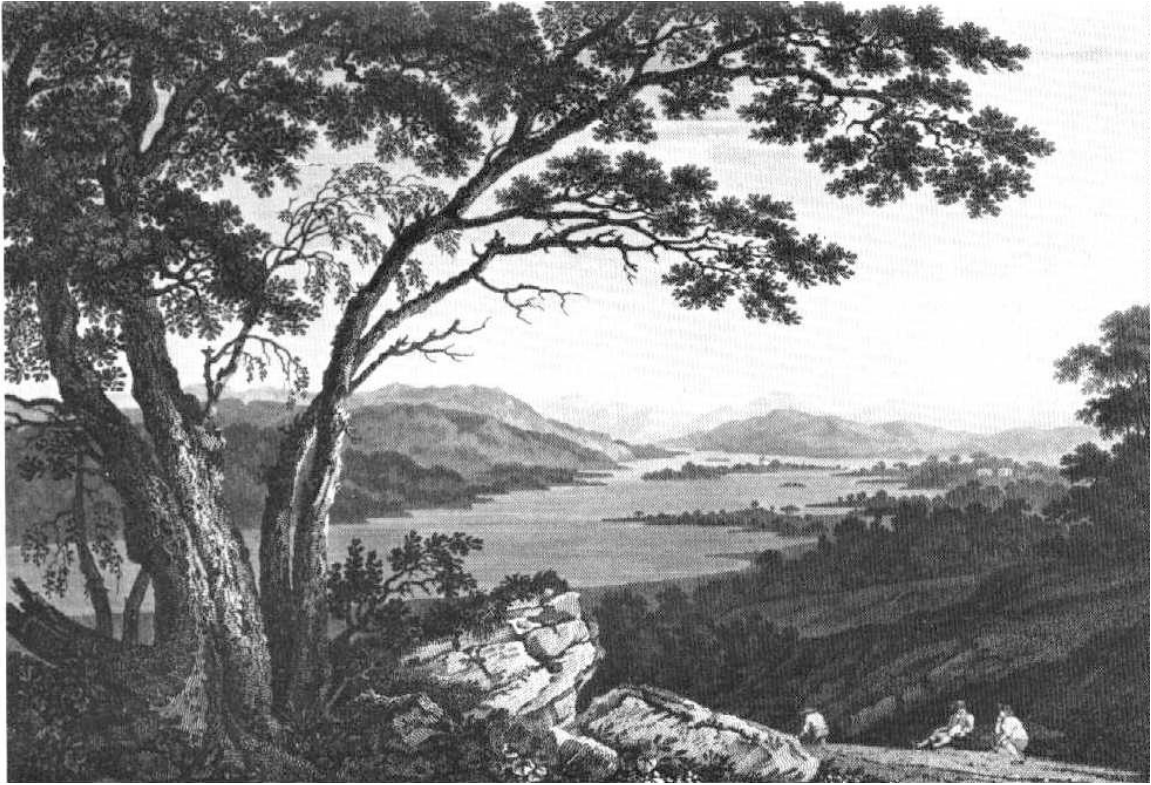


Figure 14: Joseph Farington, Windermere, from Watson



Figure 15: Joseph Farington, *The Waterfall at Rydal*, from *Watson* (visited by Keats)



Figure 16: Francis Wheatly (1747-1801), *Girls washing in a stream*, from Bicknell

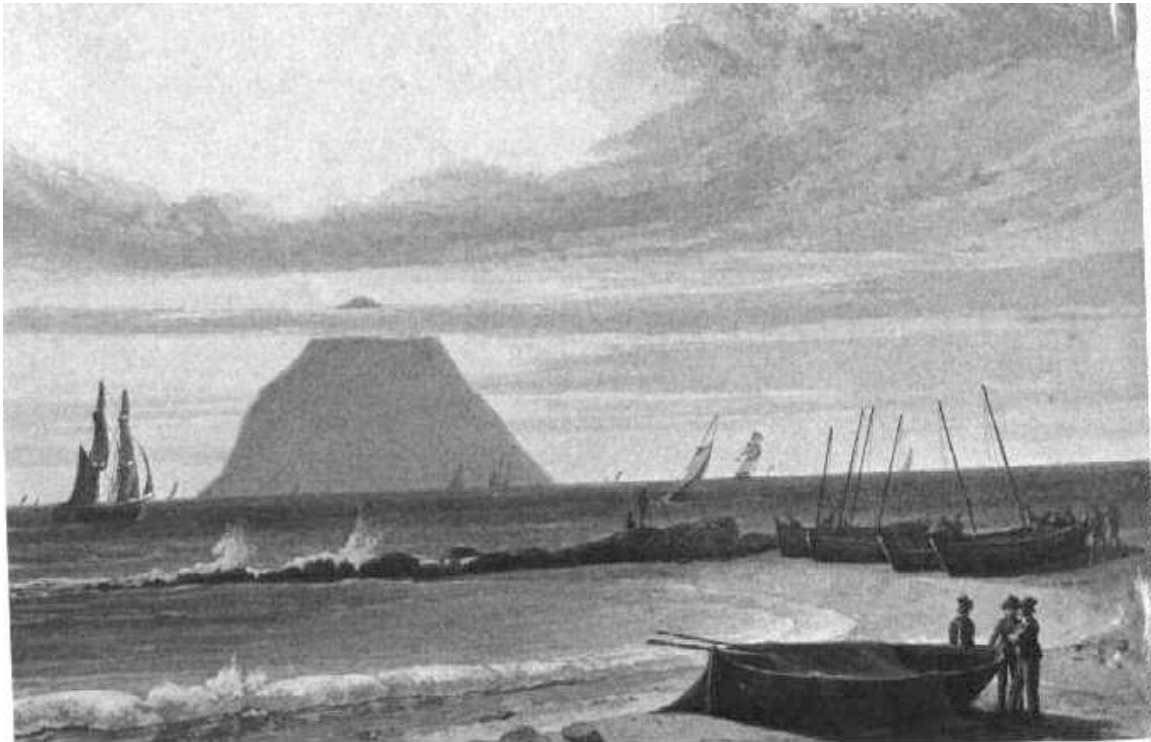


Figure 17: Ailsa rock, from Bate



## Conclusion

Four years after the death of Keats, engraver and publisher Charles Heath and Turner came “to an agreement that Turner would produce a large quantity of water-colours over a number of years, from which Charles Heath would choose 120 to be line-engraved and subsequently published under the title of “Picturesque Views in England and Wales.”(Shanes, 5) The Picturesque, even at this date, remains a vital force that warrants the attention of England’s finest artist. Indeed, “Turner was undoubtedly at the height of his mature creative powers during the years of this series”(Shanes, 17)

The implied perception of the romantic movement as a reaction against eighteenth century neo-classicism or, at the other extreme, as spontaneous literary combustion torched by Wordsworth’s egotistical sublime is *prescriptivism* unleashed, offering barely the bare bones of a story. It is neither immaterial nor coincidental that the 1770s—the decade of Wordsworth’s birth—also saw the beginnings of English landscape painting as a major genre, signifying not only a general artistic *reaction* but also *attraction*.

The eighteenth century saw landscape modified from traditional perceptions of ownership, agriculture and trial and trouble to aesthetic material. This then is the general Picturesque canvass. The Picturesque movement, in providing the initial way of seeing landscape actually *encouraged* the *viewing* of landscape, opening the scenery of England to enthusiastic travellers in search of the Picturesque and finally revealing what had always been there though never before seen. This suddenly seen landscape was no longer lit by the golden light of a fanciful Golden Age; no longer mottled with classical sylvan shadows, where Pope’s “Fair Thames, flow gently from thy sacred spring, / While on thy banks Sicilian Muses sing”; no longer a continuation of the *Works and Days* of Hesiod nor theories of Theocritus: now the Island’s landscape

might be seen in common light, casting its own shadow, peopled by common people born and bred, the works and days of a new age.

In addition to this aesthetic revolution, the heightened status of landscape provided an environment in which nature, the individual elements of landscape—already of increasing importance by virtue of developments in the natural sciences—might find its aesthetic value enlarged. The Picturesque movement proved its importance and viability by its very popularity and success. Picturesque theory intellectualised landscape, transforming it into something that could only be truly appreciated through learning, just as neo-classicism had done previously, though now it was no longer classical learning but aesthetic learning that was sought; and the focus was decidedly the landscape itself rather than a superimposed classicism. In this manner, it was increasingly intellectually acceptable to study landscape, in painting, in poetry, and in pastime. As Christopher Hussey suggests in *The Picturesque*:

The picturesque view of nature was the new, the only, way of deriving aesthetic satisfaction from landscape. Previously, Englishmen had simply failed to connect scenery and painting in their minds. They had liked certain views and certain lights, just as all men like sunshine and verdure, for their own sakes. But landscape as such gave them no aesthetic satisfaction. (2)

The notion of complete detachment from an aesthetic appreciation of scenery—essentially the unfamiliarity of the familiar—seems, at least at first glance, rooted in a certain outlandishness. Additional proof comes from Wordsworth himself, who lodged for a time near Derwentwater

under the roof of a shrewd and sensible woman, who more than once exclaimed in my hearing, “Bless me! folk [picturesque tourists] are always talking about prospects: when I was young there never was sic

a thing neamed.” (qtd. Andrews, 153-4)

On a hike through Wales, Uvedale Price came upon a series of natural cascades and expressed his delight to the landowner:

He was quite uneasy at the pleasure I felt, and seemed afraid I should waste my admiration. “Don’t stop at these things,” said he, “I will shew you by and by one worth seeing.” At last we came to a part where the brook was conducted down three long steps of hewn stone: “There,” said he, with great triumph, “that was made by Edwards, who built Pont y pridd, and it is reckoned as neat a piece of mason-work as any in the country.” (qtd. Robinson, 11)

Neither is this detachment merely a fact of by-gone days: During a recent journey to England, crossing the North Yorkshire Moors in the company of a local retired farmer, I was struck immediately by the picturesque landscape: a region of sudden chasms, blasted trees and weathered rocky outcrops, of stumbling uncertain stone cottages and barns and shaggy sheep. My companion was indifferent to its charms. Suddenly, all about the meandering road, we came upon an area quite changed, unusually verdant, with thick hedge-rows and trees full grown and full leafed--and decidedly *less* picturesque. The farmer suddenly came to life.

“I did all this,” he began, with an all embracing wave of his hand. “It used to be like all the rest, now’t bar rocks. Look at it now though.” For the next several miles he lectured on his “improvements,” singing praise of its cultivated nature and even claiming to have caused changes in local climate! Soon we re-entered the picturesque and protected national park.

“Now, just look at that,” he scoffed with a disdainful shake of his head. “It’s bloody awful.”

The Picturesque was, further, a ubiquitous movement which sought to understand the nature of aesthetic perception and to provide prescriptions which

essentially affected an entirely new appreciation for the wild wilderness of places such as the Cumbrian Lake District.

Finally, we should not discount the political and social overtones: the license it provided for liberalism, for variety, for change, for originality.

For all its seriousness, Picturesque musings were wont to wander into regions of absurdity, sometimes finding their way into the real world, as with Charles Hamilton's hiring of a hermit to sit in his back garden hermitage; or the estate village of Old Warden in Bedfordshire where, in the early nineteenth century, the residents were cajoled into wearing red cloaks and tall hats to harmonise with the red paint work and charming dormers of their cottages. In the fictional world, this absurdity was also made apparent:

A lecture on the picturesque immediately followed, in which his instruction were so clear the she soon began to see beauty admired by him, and her attention was so earnest, that he became perfectly satisfied of her having a great deal of natural taste. He talked of fore-grounds, distances, and second distances--side-screens and perspectives--lights and shades;--and Catherine was so hopeful a scholar that when they gained the top of Beechen Cliff, she voluntarily rejected the whole city of Bath, as unworthy to make part of a landscape. (Austen 138)

Indeed, the very pith of Picturesque theory might, to the cynical—and especially literary minded—modern, seems daubed with inanity, for it sought to mix landscape and painting, allowing the appreciation of a real scene for its likeness to art, rather than art for its likeness to a real scene—a notion which Hugh Sykes Davies, *Wordsworth and the Worth of Words*, finds particularly “unnatural.” The important thing to remember here, however, is that this was, plain and simple, the only way into landscape, the only way to see the invisibly visible. Such satire stemmed from the excesses of the Picturesque movement and the jocularity sometimes manifest in

the debate, and is not a suggestion of *ignis-fatuus*. Further, as Hussey explains, “the picturesque interregnum between classical and romantic art was necessary in order to enable the imagination to form the habit of feeling through the eyes” (4).

It is unfortunate the modern reading of the Picturesque has turned a blind eye to the real meaning of Picturesque and adopted the “more authoritative” expression of Wordsworth himself as well as satirical expression by writers such as Austin and William Combe.

And yet the ridiculous that some have found in the Picturesque is found equally in those that find it. J. R. Watson, for example, provides a fitting conclusion: after a quotation in which Coleridge writes of a rocky climbing episode, he writes: “In both Wordsworth and Coleridge there is an exhalation at the danger and excitement . . . the danger was there. . . . Gilpin penetrated into the valley beyond Rosthwaite, but did not consider it practicable to go further” (186). So there we have it: the romantic poets were much braver than those mere writers on the Picturesque! And this is good. Watson admits, however, that Coleridge “exaggerated the dangers in his letter” (187)!

Equally, the idea that the Picturesque had already run its course well before Wordsworth offered the final denouncing blow is patently absurd. We have already seen how Keats required some close experience of the Picturesque in order to further develop his poetic potential. We can remove further, both temporarily and geographically: Blake Nevius, in his slim volume, *Cooper's Landscapes*, argues convincingly that the Picturesque strongly influenced his pictorial sense and description subsequent to his 1826-1833 stay in Europe:

What Cooper as a visual artist learned from his travels on the continent is apparent in the later romances. His sharper awareness of pictorial values to be sought in the natural landscape and of the means by which these values could be introduced into imagined landscape is most

evident . . . in the forest romances written after his return. (89)

We move forward in time, we cross the Atlantic, we leap from poetry to prose, yet still the Picturesque remains, exerting its influence.

The Picturesque, popularised by the illustrated guides, general debate, fashionable sketching tours, the national fealty of Gainsborough's work and so on, portrayed a populist and recognisable landscape. Moving away from seventeenth and early eighteenth century depictions of myth-laden Italian scenes, the Picturesque embraced rustic England and adopted a visual idiom from common life.

Birmingham's suggestion that the concomitant ". . . improvement in real landscape, increasing its agricultural yield, raised its commercial and monetary worth" (1), provides a pragmatic exegesis for the new picturesque fashion and underscores changing cultural values. If agricultural developments—enclosure, consolidation of small holdings and so on—endowed land with new nummery worth, they also caused the physical transformation of large tracts of countryside, working at odds with the increasing sense of cultural and aesthetic worth. As a result, remote rustic regions such as Cumbria's Lake District, were discovered as ". . . the image of the homely, the stable, the ahistorical" (Birmingham 9).

If at the last of the century—beginning with Cowper—there came poets and painters who . . . found beauty in hedge-rows and corn-fields, and in Hampstead and Mousehold Heaths, it was because of a long training in seeing landscape pictorially,—a training which of necessity began with the most elaborate and heightened forms of landscape, with the richest and most obvious appeal, and on the most vast and impressive scale. (Manwaring, 232)

The importance of the Picturesque stems from the fostering of an intellectual approach to the appreciation of architecture, gardening and scenery which in turn opened up new vistas of artistic subjects. The emphasis upon feeling and

associational values which grew from analysis of the sublime and beautiful and blossomed in the Picturesque finally allowed those new vistas to be expressed in subjective and romantic terms. Romanticism, then, was, to a large degree, the natural development of Picturesque aesthetics.

Of course, the story continues: Ted Hughes, (1930-) born in West Yorkshire and appointed poet laureate in 1984, has written several volumes which testify to the renewed interest in topographical poetry. And all my holiday snapshots are Picturesque.

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