

**New Ways of Seeing [add subhead referring to landscape focus?] [how about  
‘Landscape Painting and Visual Culture in Early Modern Britain’?]**

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**Why ‘New Ways of Seeing’?**

*Q.* What does landscape (as a phenomenon) and landscape painting in particular, have to do with changing attitudes to vision?

*A.* Since the 1960s, Nelson Goodman and John Barrell have asserted that landscape as a phenomenon is a product of the way we see things: it has no independent existence.<sup>1</sup> This view has now become widespread and underpins most recent literature on landscape painting.<sup>2</sup> It therefore makes sense to address landscape painting by looking at the ways in which people saw things.

*Q.* So did ways of seeing that developed in the period 1570–1870 produce a particular way of seeing the landscape or a specific kind of landscape painting?

*A.* The same people who have said that landscape is a discursive phenomenon (that is to say a product of the way we see or talk about things rather than something with its own independent existence), have tended to say that such phenomena are complex and cannot be linked to any one specific cause.

*Q.* Then why look at new attitudes to vision at all?

*A.* Because they are a consistent presence in the discourse of landscape painting in Britain. The thesis of this chapter is that from the late seventeenth century, the whole discourse of landscape saw no distinction between questions about the visual organization and imagery of landscape painting, and the kind of viewer and nature of the viewing experience that such imagery implied. Stemming from this thesis, three main arguments will be made here.

Firstly, the chapter will try to show that specific attitudes to vision, often collectively referred to as natural philosophy or ‘Baconianism’ (explain), preoccupied artists in their practice, as well as theorists and critics. It provided the basis for the view that nature was superior to art because it led to the mind to God. This didn’t mean, however, that it provided an exclusive paradigm for theory and practice. We shall see that many artists cheerfully held to an ideal of Continental academic art at the same time as thinking of themselves as working within an empirical and specifically British tradition.

Secondly, the chapter will examine how landscape painting offered a precedent for representing social relations as part of the natural order. One important theme is the way that some people perceived a relationship between responses to nature and socially progressive ideas. This is implicit in strands of Baconian thinking from the mid-seventeenth century to the mid-nineteenth century, in a range of contexts, and lies behind many of the disagreements about what kind of imagery and what kind of response was appropriate for landscape painting, and indeed who was qualified to look at landscape and painting in the first place. In many cases these tensions are closely related to Christian theology and eschatology.

Finally, the chapter will argue that landscape painting in this period is deeply implicated in modern forms of life, whether through its imagery, its modes, or its implied viewing constituency. I will suggest that [recent? Or all?] popular characterizations of landscape painting, – especially of its more prominent practitioners such as John Constable and J.M.W. Turner as painters of national sentiment and rural retreat – are misplaced.

### **‘More Boundless in My Fancy than My Eye’**

In this first part of the chapter I will look at the introduction of landscape painting to Britain and the classical conventions of poetic landscape imagery, and also at the emergence of empirical philosophy and its associated practices. I will explore the ways in which different types of landscape imagery invited different kinds of viewing, and thereby inferred a different kind of viewer. The section will finish by looking at how ‘ways of seeing’ had become a central issue in defining gentlemanliness by 1700.

A good place to start would be a painting of a landscape reputedly by Nathaniel Bacon (1585–1627) (fig.IDb96), and a self-portrait by the same (1618-20, Coll. Earl of Verulam, Gorhambury, Herts.) [year and collection?]. The landscape painting is tiny, measuring only 7 by 10 centimetres. It depicts a rocky outcrop topped by trees, with a path cutting tangentially across it. A horseman climbs the path, and a figure on foot with a load is shown at the bottom of the hill. To the left are cottages with a church behind them; on the right are more substantial buildings, and another church in the distance. The subject is not clear but it does not appear to be a flight into Egypt, or Abraham and Isaac, so may well be a contemporary scene. It has been dated to the 1620s, when landscape painting was ‘an art soe new in England, and soe lately come ashore, as all the language within our fower Seas cannot find it a name, but a borrowed one from the Dutch, *landschap* [whose itals?].’<sup>3</sup> The composition, if not execution, suggests that Bacon was familiar with those landscapes ‘lately come ashore’ or else he had seen works by Joachim Patinir, Paul Bril, or Adam Elsheimer while travelling on the Continent.

Bacon's self-portrait is altogether different. Two metres high and painted with real flourish, Bacon is surrounded with objects that signify his gentlemanly status and also his commitment to the liberal arts: a sword, statues, a painting of Pallas Athene, a perspective diagram, pen and ink, brushes and palette, closed books, an open map. He solicits our gaze and in the centre of the picture holds up a sheet of paper that appears to have a platemark, but is blank: perhaps a pun on 'impression', as the visible world makes an impression on his senses.<sup>4</sup> It would be tempting to say that he is signalling his commitment to observation and that this manifests itself in the creation of a kind of proto-naturalistic landscape. This is clearly not the case as is demonstrated by the fact that there is only one landscape painting by Bacon; still, while there were precious few other landscape paintings in Britain at this time, the fact that Bacon did paint one suggests how readily available the concept was. The question we should therefore be asking is, what was the point of his doing so?

Painting the landscape could be an effective gesture because it signified a familiarity with a specific cultural ideal, that of *virtù* in a rural setting. A growing corpus of translation from Virgilian and (to a lesser extent) Horatian poetry during the seventeenth century marked a recognition of how the Roman ideal of philosophical retirement was appropriate for the English landed classes. Virgil's pastoral and heroic ideals were echoed in Philip Sidney's *Arcadia*, and his georgic poetry (with its practical rural focus) offered a model for how social concerns could be addressed through the imagery of the country estate [does Virgil address the country house explicitly?], a concept most famously taken up by Ben Jonson, in poems such as 'To Penshurst'. Masques at the Stuart court used depictions of the landscape as a setting for drama rich in political allegory, from *The Masque of Blackness* in 1605 to

*Salmacida Spolia* of 1640 (the latter a prospect ‘as might express a country in peace, rich and fruitful’).<sup>5</sup> It is in such a setting that Peter Paul Rubens depicted Charles and Henrietta Maria, in *St George and the Dragon in a Landscape* 1630 (fig.IDb97), which like the masques contained sufficient references for contemporaries to recognize it as a specifically English landscape. The idea that the landscape is a site of *virtù* also informs the imagery of Rubens’s famous *Chateau of Het Steen* c.1636 (National Gallery, London) and his other later studies of his estate, images that take their overall concept as much from Flemish print culture and chorographical surveys, as from Latin poetry.

*St George and the Dragon* is over 400 times the surface area of Bacon’s contemporary landscape, its size underlining not only Rubens’s technical brilliance but also the point that landscape could be scaled up so confidently because it could give voice to meanings that were widely shared and understood in early Stuart culture, and between England and the Continent [is this language was shared, why was Bacon’s was so much smaller?] [thanks for this question! I hope the insertion in the previous sentence answers your query. The extent to which this language was shared can be see in the example of the parliamentarian general Thomas Fairfax and the royalist general William Cavendish, Marquis of Newcastle, who fought each other at Adwalton Moor in June 1643 during the Civil War. Fairfax lost this battle but won the war, and retired victorious to his Yorkshire estates where he sponsored landscape poetry that reflected on the political turmoil of the previous decades. Cavendish fled abroad and spent his exile in Rubens’s house, similarly using his retirement to reflect on recent events. They were ideologically opposed but their gestures spoke the same language of classical retirement and its associated virtues.

If the poetry of Andrew Marvell and John Denham shows how landscape could act as a setting for courtly *virtù*, it also distinguishes between the viewer of the landscape and the landscape they were looking at. In doing so they demonstrate a good grasp of the technicalities of vision, because ideas about spectatorship were increasingly linked, in a rather generalized way, to a knowledge of optics. Hence Denham, standing on Cooper's Hill:

Nor wonder, if (advantag'd in my flight  
By taking wing from thy auspicious height)  
Through untrac't ways, and aery paths I fly,  
More boundless in my fancy than my eie;  
My eye, which swift as thought contracts the space  
That lies between

(*Cooper's Hill*, lines 9–14)

Johannes Kepler was the first to offer an explanation of the physiological basis of vision through the theory of light impressions on the retina [date?] in 1604. This theory became widely accepted in the seventeenth century, and was reiterated by Descartes in his *Optics* in 1637 [a specific one? date?]. As Svetlana Alpers has observed, Kepler conceived of the retina as a kind of canvas and the rays of light as similar to paint, a model that proved influential.<sup>6</sup> Equally significant for visual culture in Britain was the work of Francis Bacon, Nathaniel Bacon's uncle, in the years that his nephew was painting his *Self-Portrait*. The elder Bacon's significance was that he offered a model of investigative procedure that was based on observation. His work

considered epistemological rather than physiological issues: he was more interested in how we can know things by seeing them, than by the actual optical processes. Robert Boyle's *Proëmial Essay* (1661) (published 1661, composed 1657), reinforced the connection between observation and pictorial representation by stressing the importance of clarity and trustworthiness in both observing an object or event, and representing it in pictures.

It is difficult to pin down precise instances where the 'new philosophy' may have had a bearing on visual culture, although persuasive cases have been made for its influence in literature and theatre. Topographical surveys and natural histories stressed the accuracy of their plates and avoidance of dramatic effects, referred to as 'the distorting effects of rhetoric'. The scope of an artist's practice required work in a number of fields, and Francis Place (1647–1728), Wenceslaus Hollar (1607–77), William Lodge (1649–89) and Francis Barlow (?1626–1704) are all examples of artists working in the mid to late seventeenth century whose practice encompassed engraving, bodycolour, oil paint and pen and wash drawing of a range of subjects from insects to Windsor Castle, for patrons from the Royal Society to their immediate friends (who in some instances were one and the same). Place himself was closely involved with a group of *virtuosi*, [explain who they are?] men who collected and studied natural or antiquarian objects, in York, and was familiar with the latest scientific developments and literature; the same group also circulated treatises by artists such as Gian Paolo Lomazzo and Edward Norgate (1581–1650). Place's work shows his conception of drawing as a systematic procedure, but we also see him moving comfortably between different genres: studies of natural features in the landscape, minute topographical surveys, fantastic harbour-side compositions.

Gentlemen virtuosi such as Place became the butt of many jokes for their myopic attention to natural phenomena. Beneath the joking was a serious question about what modes and objects of looking were appropriate for a gentleman. In part this was due to the tensions between a poetic, idealist notion of beauty, and an empirical philosophy that stressed the importance of controlled and detailed observation. Place may not have seen a contradiction here, but two men who did were Anthony Ashley Cooper, 3rd Earl of Shaftesbury, and Joseph Addison. Shaftesbury rejected close observation altogether, calling for an art that pleased the mind, and inferring the viewer to be a man of independent means whose autonomy was the basis for his liberal intellect and therefore of his capacity to act in the public interest. Addison on the other hand tried to develop a theory of the imagination that recognized the moral supremacy of idealism but couched it in terms borrowed (and altered) from John Locke. He didn't talk about art, but discussed spectatorship at great length, proposing that social and economic progression was incipient in the way that a man's mind is designed for improvement through judicious use of the senses. His 'new model gentleman' is in social terms a broader phenomenon than Shaftesbury's philosopher.

Shaftesbury's and Addison's responses to empiricism may have been conditioned by its association with the Puritans' millenarian programs of social reform. But both were agreed that viewing was an attribute of a gentleman, a badge of cultural distinction to mark them from the 'vulgar', and that was why it mattered. How artists responded to this will be the subject of the next section.

**'A Fig for Prospects!'**



Having examined the mode of spectatorship deemed appropriate for a gentleman in the later seventeenth century, I will now consider how artists struggled to find a language of composition and imagery that complemented these notions of ‘polite’, or gentlemanly, spectatorship, and will suggest that after mid-century this way of seeing was being challenged by a new kind of imagery.

I would like to begin by comparing two paintings: *Nottingham from the East* (fig.IDb98), painted in 1700 by Jan Siberechts (1627–1703) and *Box Hill, Surrey* painted by George Lambert (1700–65) in 1733 (fig.IDb99). Landscape painting from the later seventeenth century is sometimes seen as an aspect of aristocratic leisurely conspicuous consumption. In fact a review of Siberechts’s oeuvre reveals that much of the imagery is strikingly contemporary, with barges, locks, enclosures, roads and other improvements recorded in painstaking detail. In *Nottingham from the East* we can see how Siberechts has drawn attention to the almost Biblical fertility of the plain: cattle graze, sheep are driven to market, the harvest is gathered in, and the Trent carries the produce to London. Lambert’s painting is similar in regard to its composition as well as its subject matter, being a wide prospect of a specific site with a harvest scene, an imagery of contemporary prosperity if not **industrious** [industrial?] [no, keep as ‘industrious’] progress.

One significant difference between the paintings is that Lambert uses the gentleman in the foreground gesturing to his companion who is sketching the view, to embody the viewer and give him a social identity, suggesting that the viewer is in fact another gentleman. This is in contrast to Siberechts, who like many Flemish painters depicts a

specific site but suggests the spectator is some distance above the ground (though *Nottingham from the East*, his last known painting, is as close as he ever gets to suggesting that the spectator is actually standing at a particular spot). The landscape imagery of Lambert and Siberechts's paintings surely has something to do with the perceived identity of the spectator. Rather than introducing a greater dose of contemporary life to counter an aristocratic vision of the idle pastoral life, as has been suggested, I think Lambert has toned down his image of labour and emphasized the poetic elements instead, above all the warm tones which give the painting such an air of repose, despite the harvest work. This is because [why fraught?] what seems to have mattered for Lambert's patrons is *who* was doing the looking in a way that it did not for Siberechts when painting *Nottingham from the East*, where there is an unsettling ambiguity about the viewer's identity. This point was also important for how the artists saw themselves. If Lambert wanted to suggest the poetry of his view, and that the spectator of his view is a gentleman who would appreciate such refinement, he could present himself (as the person who painted the view) as a man of similar social standing. This might explain why Siberechts was paid on the same scale as a highly skilled craftsman, £75 for up to two years' work between 1672–4, whereas Lambert was able to sell his works individually for over £15 per painting in 1732, over £100 for the year. Yet landscape was still a low genre: even Lambert's pay compares badly with a painter such as Sir Godfrey Kneller (1646-1723), who could command £50 for a single full-length portrait. [can you make the reason for your link between subject matter and higher wages clearer? Is it because landscape was now carrying more weight of meaning?]

Lambert's painting is of the Downs, and a contemporary discussion of the same subject from Henry Fielding's novel *Joseph Andrews* (1741) will highlight the issues at stake here:

'The chariot had not proceeded very far before Mr. Adams observed it was a very fine day. "Ay, and a very fine country too", answered Pounce. – "I should think so more", returned Adams, "If I had not lately travelled over the Downs, which I take to exceed this and all other prospects in the universe". – "A fig for prospects!" answered Pounce; "one acre here is worth ten there, and for my own part, I have no delight in the prospect of any land but my own" ... Adams answered, "That riches without charity were nothing worth; for that they were a blessing to him only that made them a blessing to others"'.<sup>7</sup>

Parson Adams's willingness to let the view of the land fire his social feelings would have been recognized by contemporaries as an echo of the natural and social harmony that was the theme of James Thomson's bestselling poem *The Seasons*. First published as a complete poem in 1730 *The Seasons* aimed to reveal social, cultural, natural, historical and cosmic harmony through its description of nature and the study of its design. Thomson based his survey of 'the various parts of nature, ascending from the lower to the higher'<sup>8</sup> on the notion that all nature was indissolubly linked by design. As Nigel Everett has explained, 'in the tradition of analogy developed by [Joseph] Butler [Bishop of Bristol 1738–50], it is argued that there are consistent patterns throughout nature, that its laws of organization may be the same as those of society, that the same methods of analysis and criticism may be appropriate throughout experience, and that patterns of organization found in individual systems

might reveal the pattern and regularity of the whole creation'.<sup>9</sup> [In the footnote, this doesn't seem to be a quote from Thomson, but it is implied that it is – can you confirm?][see amendment to previous sentence]

*The Seasons* was enlarged and republished in 1744 and 1746, when Thomson added set-piece descriptions of the view from Hagley Park and Richmond Hill, following seventeenth-century models such as Denham's *Cooper's Hill*. These 'prospect' views have become well known, but they only enhanced what was already a notable feature of the poem, the emphasis on the spectator and the role of the senses: in *The Seasons* the 'eye' is mentioned about once every fifty lines, over a hundred times in total. But unlike Bacon, Thomson's eye does not simply observe 'individuals'. Historians have noted that in *The Seasons*, the visual sense is transformed into an imaginary power, and we might suggest that Thomson's spectator is like Addison's, and indeed like the spectator that the viewer of Lambert's painting is invited to become.<sup>10</sup>

Fielding's point was that Thomson's spectator is a fiction: as Pounce's and Adams's names suggest, commerce and virtue exist in mutual tension. Historians have seen this tension at the heart of landscape painting in the early eighteenth century. John Barrell has argued that painters substituted a pastoral vision of landscape for one that increasingly admitted the realities of economic production, modeled on georgic poetry. This overlooks the innovations of later seventeenth-century landscape painting, but he is right to point to Lambert's search for new pictorial models to fit changing circumstances. For example, in four views of Westcombe House, Blackheath for Lord Pembroke, Lambert represents the grounds as a space of genteel amusement, much as Siberechts did, but sprinkled with labourers and beggars, the

latter receiving charity from the gentlefolk. In the distance he has represented shipping on the Thames passing Greenwich, a prospect both visual and temporal to be enjoyed in the viewer's imagination. The grounds as an arena of polite refinement and the distant prospect of London characterizes the viewer as a Thomsonian spectator, ruminating on material and moral improvement supposedly ordained in the very pattern of creation.

Pembroke's paintings were the luxury end of a rapidly expanding market in the years 1715–55: the topographical prospect view. Beginning in 1707 with *Nouveau Theatre de Grande Bretagne*, a printed survey of Britain's notable country estates often called *Britannia Illustrata*, topographical images flooded the print market: William Stukeley began publishing antiquarian surveys in the 1720s, Nathaniel and Samuel Buck issued their prospects of towns and cities from the same decade onwards, and Robert West and William Henry Toms began to publish similar work in the 1730s. Together they accounted for nearly two-thirds of the market for these images, which averaged nearly ten titles per year until the late 1750s. In them, the country estate and increasingly the city were represented as clean and orderly, an appropriate environment for inhabitants engaged in genteel leisure and imaginative pleasure. The figures that populate the foregrounds are well-dressed and engage one another in conversation while observing the view. They suggest that looking is not simply an activity but an integral part of their style, becoming 'fully internalized, unconscious behaviour', and was evidently of sufficiently widespread concern to keep a number of draughtsmen fully employed, whereas landscape painting *alone* could not even support one painter in the same period.

The 'prospect' view fell into sharp decline after about 1750. This was partly due to the age of those artists, but also due to the pressures of newer forms of formal and thematic innovation. Antonio Canal (Canaletto) arrived in England in 1746 in the wake of patronage by English 'milordi' on the Grand Tour in Venice. The paintings he produced and advertised in England are executed on a scale and with a technical assurance and flourish that utterly outshines even Lambert's work. Canaletto paints London as a polite, sanitized city. Perhaps most distinctively, his viewpoints are specifically identified as being from a particular site and his bold compositions have the function of embodying the experience of seeing the city: *Westminster Bridge* 1747 (Yale Center for British Art, New Haven) is perhaps the most well-known example. The outcome is a representation of how the viewer experiences the city as a spatially specific and socially encoded phenomenon, as they are admitted to take the prospect from Richmond House or the terrace of old Somerset House. It is important to note how the topographical specificity of the viewing experience is accompanied by technical virtuosity. Canaletto is able to offer an image of the city that is utterly refined: clean and coherent to a degree appropriate to the rank of the person viewing it. This is something that even Lambert was never really able to do, not least because he lacked a formal training. It is worth noting that even Hogarth and Reynolds fail to demonstrate a confident grasp of linear perspective.

The artist who perhaps best understood the needs that were met by Canaletto and not by the Bucks or by Lambert was Richard Wilson. The defining event of Wilson's forty-year career was his visit to Italy, 1750–7. This exposed him to a greater range of paintings and subjects, leading to subtle changes in his practice, which can be seen if we compare *Cock Tavern, Cheam Common, Surrey* 1745 (fig.IDb100) with *The*

*Thames near Marble Hill* 1762 (fig.IDb101). In terms of size and composition both are relatively similar: the horizon is in the centre, and nearer to us a white house peeps through the trees on the right, whilst an object in the left foreground brings our eyes to the picture plane. Both are of subjects near to the river Thames. But *Cock Tavern* is painted in a freer and more lively manner, with warmer colours, whereas cooler colours predominate in *Marble Hill*, and there is a more disciplined treatment of trees and a more calligraphic treatment of highlights in the clouds and elsewhere, in a manner recalling Canaletto. The house has acquired a pediment, the tavern and its rustics have disappeared and been replaced by youthful refugees from one of Wilson's paintings of Lake Nemi.

It might be easy to see the appeal that Wilson had for patrons such as Henry Herbert, 9th Earl of Pembroke, architect of Marble Hill. Wilson's painting, as David Solkin has shown, fuses contemporary life with the pastoral ideal. This can be compared to Lambert's paintings of Westcombe House, for the same patron. There, the artist struggled to suggest that the pleasures that a polite spectator may take in contemplating (in Thomson's words) 'the various parts of nature, ascending from the lower to the higher', sit comfortably with the reality of the social differences on which such pleasures are based. This is not to suggest that Lord Pembroke had a Damascene conversion to pastoral landscape, but it is clear that Wilson has a level of sophistication, enhanced by his use of palette and composition to bring a cool and rational air to contemporary subjects and specific sites, that other painters lacked.

Wilson was able to do this because, on his travels to Italy he acquired a greater knowledge of seventeenth-century French landscape painting, especially works by Nicolas Poussin, Claude Lorrain and Gaspar Poussin, as well as visiting specific sites. Paintings like *Rome: St Peter's* c.1753 (Tate, London) offer topographical accuracy, rich associations (it is taken from the site of one of Martial's epigrams) and more importantly, a form of composition based on Claude Lorrain's landscape painting. Claude was influential because his compositions offered, in John Barrell's words, 'a grammar, as it were, of landscape patterns and structures, established so thoroughly in [the connoisseur's] language and imagination that he became less and less able to separate any one landscape from any other, because he applied the same visual and linguistic procedures to them all'. Wilson takes up Claude's vocabulary and grammar, and in so doing he makes the landscape itself a polite subject, as well as the act of viewing it. The appeal of Italianate landscape is evident in the ubiquity of pastiches of Poussin that form part of classical fireplace arrangements everywhere from Blenheim Palace library to London terraces (architectural decoration was still the most common setting for landscape painting). But Wilson brought this image to bear on his representation of *British* landscape, and this explains why his patrons might pay double what they would for a painting by Lambert.

Wilson was working for an urban audience. He, Canaletto, and Lambert were all able to live and work in London, although there was fierce competition for patronage. The most successful landscape painting of the eighteenth century, both critically and commercially, was Wilson's *Destruction of the Children of Niobe*, exhibited in 1760.<sup>11</sup> *Niobe* is an attempt at heroic landscape in the highest academic traditions with a serious public function (it was the model for Turner's bid for Academy recognition),



but ultimately it was a phenomenon not of aristocratic retirement but of metropolitan culture. The painting was a success because it was exhibited publicly. It was engraved, and earned its publisher John Boydell a massive £2000 (a medium sized oil by Wilson was £30, which itself was twice a labourer's annual income). In his engraving of *Niobe*, William Woollett mixed line engraving and etching in order to achieve a range of effects, and this is what gained the print its reputation. The *Critical Review* noted how: 'the effects of the lightning appear by the city on fire; and the violent agitation of the water between the mountains is very finely represented ... the mountains seem to project out of the print, and the water is perfectly in motion; the distances are delicately softened away, and the sky nicely managed'.<sup>12</sup> The emergence of a critical discourse of effect, addressed to a discerning audience, demonstrates the appropriation of landscape imagery by an urban audience, along with a new set of concerns: high drama, intense emotion, and visual effect. It is to this audience and these concerns that we now turn.

### **'To Be a Person of Taste ...'**

*Niobe* preceded only by a few years a growing appreciation that the physical environment might have a visual appeal that was akin to the appeal of a picture: that is to say, that it might be considered pictorially, or as picturesque. William Gilpin (1724–1804) did more than anyone else to encourage this feeling through his *Picturesque Tours*, published between 1782 and 1809. Gilpin's work suggested that 'effect' was a key issue in addressing the visual worth of a painting, a print, or an actual piece of land. This section will explore how the idea of 'effect' had both physical and moral sides to it, and how this broadened the moral viewing constituency

of landscape imagery, and at the same time undermined the traditional hierarchy of genres within which artists such as Wilson had worked.

The context of Gilpin's development of a notion of 'picturesque beauty' was provided by Edmund Burke's *Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas on the Sublime and Beautiful*, published in 1757 and immediately successful. In the *Enquiry* Burke suggested that pleasurable excitement fell into one of two categories: the sublime, which was related to feelings of self-preservation, or the beautiful, whose objects aroused emotions of society and love. Although both sublimity and beauty had pedigrees stretching back to antiquity, Burke's initiative was to place them within the context of the senses. His thesis of 'efficient causality' held that a person's given response to something that was seen or heard was necessarily related to the object that touched their senses, because it had a physical cause.

Burke's *Enquiry* appeared two years after his *Vindication of Natural Society*, in which he poked fun at Tories who held that older states of society offered a better moral and social model than those currently extant.<sup>13</sup> Burke, on the contrary, suggested it was modern society that offered the conditions for moral improvement. His *Enquiry* offered a corollary by proposing that man's senses and mind, and by extension his morals, had been formed in a way that invited improvement through the incremental experience of beautiful and sublime things.

Burke did not discuss painting in his thesis, but the *Enquiry* was taken to offer appropriate terms for addressing the landscape in terms of its effects on the viewer. Gilpin's work implicitly acknowledged this, and while it suggested that not all

sublime or beautiful objects go well in pictures, it retained the principle that the key for judging the pictorial values of a landscape was its effect on the viewer.

Contemporary sources reveal the degree to which landscape effects occupied people's attention. Horace Walpole wrote an extensive review of painting in Britain, but his personal correspondence says little about painting, whilst frequently discussing the effects of an actual view as though it were a painting. Here is an example from 1763:

We walked to the belvedere on the summit of the hill [at Esher, Surrey], where a threatened storm only served to heighten the beauty of the landscape, a rainbow on a dark cloud falling precisely behind the tower of a neighbouring church, between another tower, and the building at Claremont.<sup>14</sup>

Walpole could be describing a seventeenth-century French or Dutch painting here; the important point is that he was anxious to demonstrate his own sensitivity to the effects of the view.

Being affected by the view of a landscape was by this time a prerequisite of demonstrating good taste. Many writers agreed with Burke that the cultivation of taste was a moral responsibility, and that insofar as it refined a person's feeling, it provided one of the foundations of social relations in modern society. The orthodox notion that sensibility consisted in a confluence of bodily sense and morals was unwittingly demonstrated by Katherine Plymley when she wrote in her diary:

to be a person of taste, it seems that one have 1<sup>st</sup>, a lively and correct imagination; which however, will avail but little if it is not regulated by the knowledge of nature,

both external or material, & internal or moral ... 2ly, the power of distinct apprehension ... 3ly, the capacity of being easily, strongly, & agreeably affected, with sublimity, beauty, harmony, exact imitation, &c ... 4ly, Sympathy, or that sensibility of the heart ... & 5ly, judgement, or good sense, which is the principal thing, & may not very improperly be said to comprehend all the rest'.<sup>15</sup>

The women in Paul Sandby's drawing *Roslin Castle, Midlothian* (fig.IDb102) demonstrate the same kind of taste, albeit with more assurance than Plymley. In their case a taste for the picturesque is displayed by drawing the scene, using William Storer's *Royal Delineator* (patented in 1778), which was a portable *camera obscura* that could work even with low levels of light. The picturesque qualities of Sandby's own drawing suggest that the women, Frances Scott and Anna Maria Elliott, are following the precepts provided by Gilpin, Alexander Cozens, and other drawing masters who stressed the use of masses of light and shade to draw out the pictorial harmonies of nature.

The women in Sandby's drawing are not drawing Roslin Castle itself, which could be considered a sublime topographical subject, and therefore appropriate only for the sensibilities and technical experience of a man. Instead they are drawing the wooden bridge with a poor woman and child crossing it. The viewer is asked to believe that their exposure to nature has moved them to what Katherine Plymley called 'sympathy'. The drawing itself is one of the largest of Sandby's works, and is meant to be the object of the same kind of sensitive pictorial attention that the female subjects give to their surroundings.

Picturesque beauty provided a model by which unfamiliar places could be assimilated into a viewer's visual repertoire by means of a pictorial vocabulary already in use.

The Wye Valley, North Wales, the Lakes, and the Scottish Highlands became the principal picturesque tours, all of them geographically peripheral to southern England, and relatively new in terms of pictorial subject-matter. In some cases the tour enjoyed associations with the sublime, as with the tour of the Scottish Highlands and its evocation of the supposedly ancient rediscovered poetry of Ossian. In other cases, such as Derbyshire, geological research was a pull. Southey poked fun at the craze, likening tourists to migrating birds, 'some to mineralogize, some to botanize, some to take views of the country, – all to study the picturesque, a new science for which a new language has been formed', but the underlying point was that appreciation of nature's pictorial qualities (be it in rocks, plants, people, or landscapes) carried with it implications of fashionable good taste and politeness.<sup>16</sup>

One means of reconciling unfamiliar places with a viewer's concept of 'landscape' was through sketching, which offered the chance to 'improve' the less attractive features of the terrain. A range of instruments also became available to enhance the enjoyment of viewing. One popular device was the Claude glass, a darkened mirror that could be taken out of the pocket and used (with the viewer standing with their back to the view) to see a framed and harmoniously toned image of the landscape in a form that recalled prints and paintings after Claude.

One of the most significant attempts to cash in on the vogue for nature's effects was Philippe Jacques de Louthembourg's work for David Garrick at Drury Lane Theatre, and later on his own. After a decade of successful innovation in lighting, sound effects

and stage design, De Louthembourg left Drury Lane in 1781 and opened his *Eidophusikon*, a stage six feet in width that allowed him to co-ordinate dramatic visual and aural productions based on scenes from battles, natural phenomena, and Milton's *Paradise Lost*. De Louthembourg's large oil paintings such as *Lake Scene*, *Evening* (Tate, 1792) (?date and collection) combine dramatic lighting and bold colour with a strong sense of planar gradation, drawing the viewer from the foreground into the central middle ground, so that there is plenty going on but no specific element overrides the general effect (see fig. IDb103). They give some idea of the technical mastery needed to stage such scenes, which would prove influential for Turner's generation.

The *Eidophusikon* was very popular. Sited on the edge of Leicester Square, it was at the heart of fashionable London but on the periphery of what could be considered acceptable showmanship. Although friendly with Louthembourg, Thomas Gainsborough did not approve of his *Eidophusikon* or his earlier work for David Garrick. Writing to Garrick about his employment of Louthembourg's 'lights' and 'new discoveries of transparent painting &c &c', Gainsborough suggested that Garrick 'maintain all [his] light, but spare the poor abused Colours, until the Eye rests & recovers'.<sup>17</sup> This charge was a familiar one in painting, but Gainsborough's specific point was that the eye rather than the mind is the feeling organ, and so runs the danger of becoming sated and insensitive through constant exposure to dramatic sensations. The designs that Gainsborough protested about were in strong contrast to his own interest in light displays. His showbox, a device for viewing scenes painted with oil on glass slides and illuminated by candles placed at the rear, offers a private view for the spectator, in the sense that it was only used in Gainsborough's drawing-room, but

also that the lens replicates the experience of seeing a view in a personal viewing device. Its use of gentle contrasts and warmer tones was meant to display the ‘modest truth’ of nature, which he characterized as ‘mild Evening gleam and quiet middle term’, meaning the centre of the stage, away from the footlights (see [fig.IDb104](#)).<sup>18</sup> Likewise, in his publicly exhibited oil paintings such as *The Watering Place* 1777, Gainsborough painted a landscape that was meant to touch the viewer’s feelings. Historians have seen in his handling of paint a ‘broken syntax and typographical exuberance’, developed through a process of experiment with different tools and media.<sup>19</sup>

Here, however, Gainsborough faced problems. He attempted to make landscape a vehicle for high art through large paintings (*The Watering Place* is the same size as *Niobe*), generalizing effects, and reference to the Old Masters (Rubens, in the case of *The Watering Place*). But the idea of using landscape to appeal to a viewer’s private sensibility threatened the pre-eminence of history painting as a vehicle for public moral improvement. As both Gainsborough and Reynolds recognized, the idea that there is a place for feeling [unclear – the private sensibility being equated with irrationality?] in the experience of viewing a painting on public display not only threatened the collapse of artistic distinctions but also broadened the viewing constituency, threatening the gentlemanly preserve of viewing the landscape. This male dilemma was humorously explored by Jane Austen in *Northanger Abbey*: when Henry Tilney teaches Catherine Morland about picturesque beauty, Catherine proves herself capable of learning but Henry, as a man, is careful to not weary her ‘with too much wisdom at once’.<sup>20</sup>

An artistic place for the irrational, and a suggestion that moral sense was not solely the preserve of the rational gentleman-citizen, was also found in evangelical discussions of pictorial effects. For the circle around the portraitist John Russell (1745–1806), ‘effect’ was a pictorial and moral quality. It moved the viewer and led the mind to the contemplation of God through an association with sin and salvation rather than through an analogy between the Creation and the Creator. The sculptor John Bacon the Elder (1740–99), a neighbour of Russell, suggested that ‘Contrast is the great thing in our being. Dark parts give the brilliancy and effect.’<sup>21</sup>

Doubtless this was a view shared with the nonconformist Russell, whose evangelical views at times drove relationships with patrons almost to breaking point. This was not a view that followed on from the tradition of analogy, where the regularity of the natural world was used to deduce evidence of God’s existence, and the order of society as a whole. Rather it was a view that suggested the compatibility of observation and revelation: how the observation of nature might lead to contemplation of the Creator as revealed in Scripture, and the need for personal salvation.

Russell was followed by a group of artists like Cornelius Varley (1781–1873), John Linnell (1792–1882), and Samuel Palmer (1805–81), who based their practice on a close observation of the natural world, suggesting both an artistic and evangelical sense of ‘witness’. ‘A Martin Luther in painting is called for, as in theology, to sweep away the abuses by which our divine pursuit is encumbered’, said David Wilkie, echoing the sentiments of Linnell’s circle in terms that recall Gainsborough’s language.<sup>22</sup> He meant that artistic and moral reform would mean a reform of artistic procedures, abandoning Louthembourg’s dramatic colouring and Gainsborough’s



poetic effects for a reliance on systematic observation. As Harry Mount has pointed out, the strongest proponents of observation and particularity in this period, such as Russell, Varley, and Wilkie, came from low-church backgrounds.<sup>23</sup>

In distinction to evangelical views we can also see the development of an antiquarian aesthetic, which used the visual appeal of Gothic architecture to outline a social and moral vision based on adherence to the Crown and the established church.

Abandoning prospect views and Claudean formats for the ‘visual appeal of the surfaces and textures of decaying stonework’, artists such as Thomas Hearne (1744–1806) used tinted drawings and engravings to review the historical progress (or decline) of the arts and liberty in Britain.<sup>24</sup> In this they found an energetic backer in a vigorous Society of Antiquaries, whose membership was largely aristocratic and which reasserted the ideal of the gentlemanly viewer as the only being fully capable of registering the moral tenor of Tintern Abbey or the site where Harold fell at Hastings.

### **‘And All This, My Countrymen, Our Own’**

In the previous section I attempted to explain the emergence of a picturesque aesthetic in the later eighteenth century and suggested how it presented challenges to established patterns of landscape imagery and to established ways of seeing. Here, I will address the development of ‘naturalism’ in landscape painting from roughly 1800 to 1830. This can be considered both a response to picturesque imagery and an intensification of the debates about what seeing meant, and what and who was implied

in its various modes. It will also consider intellectual and cultural developments that might help us to understand the thematic and formal innovations of these years, such as association aesthetics, and the situation of landscape painting within the Royal Academy. The section will finish by looking at the question of whether this style of painting is more 'true' than other styles, as the name implies, or whether no such claims can be made for it.

In 1815 J.M.W. Turner exhibited a large oil painting titled *Crossing the Brook* at the Royal Academy's annual show (fig.IDb105). It is a grand essay in the Claudean mode, its composition and upright format deriving from Sir George Beaumont's famous painting by Claude, *Hagar and the Angel* (1646, National Gallery, London). Painted after visits to Devon in 1811 and 1813, *Crossing the Brook* combines specific observations of a recognizable site with a breadth of handling and grandeur of composition that would lead contemporaries to recognize it as English in its subject, but dignified through its sheer size (it is substantially larger than Wilson's *Niobe*) and through its reference to the Old Masters. But the range of pictorial effects in *Crossing the Brook* has not been derived from a close study of Wilson or Claude. Turner's palette is broader, and the eye is drawn more to specific foreground details he wants the viewer to know he has spent time studying the appearance of this particular place.

*Crossing the Brook* follows a period in which Turner had started painting outside and had adopted a broader palette and a greater range of brushwork, and had also turned to agricultural themes in his large oil paintings. He exhibited seventeen oils of scenes on the Thames between 1808 and 1810, and other large paintings of agricultural landscapes in the years up to 1813. Turner prepared the ground for these latter

paintings with a campaign of outdoor sketching along the Thames from 1805 onwards, applying oil paint directly onto small mahogany board (which was portable and required no stretching or priming) to study local colour [expand – was it the speed with which oil dries on wood that allowed him to more effectively study local colour?] and the details and effects of specific sites. While the topographical detail and atmospheric effect of large native scenes such as *Windsor* 1809 are a direct outcome of these studies, reeds and detritus from the Thames also find their way into the foreground of ambitious historical paintings such as *The Goddess of Discord* 1806. So *Crossing the Brook* draws on the Old Masters but it also departs from them, and we may see its attention to the specificity of the site as a muted critique of picturesque beauty. This is especially the case with the more radical naturalism of his later *Thames* paintings.

Turner was one of a generation of artists who worked outdoors using pigments to sketch the motif, in both oils and watercolour. In this practice they differed from their predecessors such as Wilson and Gainsborough, who would generally use chalk to sketch from life, or Edward Dayes (1763–1804) and Thomas Hearne, whose watercolour method was to apply thin tints of colour over areas already shaded with grey and black wash. Turner and associates such as Thomas Girtin developed methods of working in colour in front of the subjects themselves (see fig.B140). As an example we can compare Gilbert White's 1776 account of Samuel Hieronymous Grimm's approach:

[Grimm] first of all sketches his scapes with a lead-pencil; then he pens them all over, as he calls it, with Indian ink, rubbing out the superfluous pencil-strokes;

then he gives a charming shading with a brush dipped in Indian ink; at last he throws a light tinge of water-colours over the whole.<sup>25</sup>

with William Collins's diary entry in 1814 where he discusses the methods of his friend John Linnell:

I think [Linnell] right in insisting upon the necessity of making studies – without much reference to form – of the way in which colours come up against each other. The sharpness and colour of the shades, as well as the local colour of the objects, may be got in this way.<sup>26</sup>

Linnell's watercolour sketches lack the 'charming' and unified appearance of Grimm's work, instead showing an unfinished quality, a level of observation and an equivalence of subject matter that is evidence of a rigidly systematic sketching procedure. In oils, Linnell developed a radical naturalism of 'tight surfaces and brightly-lit details' that is seen both in his sketches and in large finished pieces such as *Kensington Gravel Pits* from 1811-12.<sup>27</sup>

Linnell's methods were developed in Dr Thomas Monro's 'academy', where students were paid a small fee for copying the work of earlier artists in watercolour such as Girtin, who himself had copied the work of Dayes and others; as well as in John Varley's Sketching Club, where issues of composition, method, and the use of instruments such as the *camera lucida* (soon to be developed by Cornelius Varley into the Graphic Telescope) were discussed. The Royal Academy itself found no place for any tuition in relation to landscape painting, and indeed it did not teach painting at all.

Having said this, the confident treatment of the figures and forms in a work such as Constable's *Boat-building at Flatford Mill* 1814 (Victoria and Albert Museum, London) surely show the benefit of lectures on perspective and attendance at the life class for the generation of artists who were born after the Academy was founded in 1768.

The practice of sketching outdoors was recognized as a specifically British style, although it was taken partly from the work of Continental artists working in Rome, such as Philip Hackert and Pierre-Henri de Valenciennes. British artists who had earlier worked in Rome, such as Francis Towne (1739/40–1815) and Thomas Jones, developed similar patterns of sketching, but Jones's sketches were never exhibited, and Towne unsuccessfully staked his reputation on his oils. His proud remark 'I never in my life exhibited a drawing' demonstrates the prestige accorded to oil as a medium when compared with watercolour.<sup>28</sup>

A more practical consideration when looking at the working methods of artists at the end of the eighteenth century is that travel abroad was restricted with the onset of the Revolutionary wars with France in 1793. These restrictions, lifted only briefly in 1802–3, intensified the vogue for picturesque travel to sites such as Wales and the Lakes, and explain the proliferation of sketching tours within Britain. War, however, also provided a rationale for thematic innovation. Put simply, paintings of native scenery were regarded as patriotic and appropriate in a time of struggle against a foreign enemy. The patriotic note sounded by Turner's selection of subjects, for example, is unmistakable: at a time of naval blockade it is hardly surprising that the

catalogue entry to one painting proclaimed: 'And Britain, Britain, British canvas fill'.<sup>29</sup>

Subjects that elicited patriotic sentiment and allowed the viewer to draw the right kind of associations might not be very elevated in themselves, however. There is no avoiding the fact that a significant percentage of landscape paintings during the war years consisted of what one historian has described as 'agricultural landscape in the raw'. It is well known, for example, that Constable's *Stour Valley and Dedham Village*, exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1815 (see fig.00, p.00), featured a large pile of manure in the foreground. Dung was and is a central part of agricultural life, but not something that featured high up the academic hierarchy (see Bindman, p.00).

If Constable's painting is 'in a minor against Turner's major key', what made both *Stour Valley* and *Crossing the Brook* acceptable were the associations that their subjects elicited.<sup>30</sup> Through the latter part of the eighteenth century, a body of (mainly Scottish) writers developed the notion that a viewer's pleasure in an object lay not in the qualities of the object itself, but rather in the ideas that it excited in the viewer. This, broadly speaking, is what historians term 'philosophical criticism', because it was based on the natural philosophy of Locke. Such critics suggested there was no necessary relationship between an object and the pleasure that a viewer took in looking at it: an object's beauty, they argued, derived from its function as a sign. Whilst this view gave succour to socially progressive views by suggesting that tastes, like morals, were subject to improvement, it militated against established notions of beauty because it argued that there was no object that could be considered intrinsically pleasing to the eye.

There is no evidence that the key theorists of this aesthetics of association such as Archibald Alison and Richard Payne Knight approved of the new artistic practices that were developing in the years around 1800, but their work did ‘seem to be a license for some aspects of naturalistic landscape painting’, with its focus on local subjects.<sup>31</sup> There is more to suggest that artists such as Constable, Cornelius Varley and Richard Ramsay Reinagle (1775–1862) were able to regard philosophical criticism as offering support for the attention to local subjects in their work and that of their colleagues.

If association aesthetics underwrote the patriotic celebration of turnips, dung, and gravel pits, its broader significance lay in its suggestion that the contemplation of nature could lead the viewer to contemplate that to which nature pointed: its Creator. This idea, influentially if controversially expounded in William Paley’s *Natural Theology* (1805), is especially evident in Constable’s comments on the moral values of landscape painting. Moreover it lies behind visions of British art’s probity against the corruption of Continental painting, a point made when critics compared the British artist’s careful study of nature and use of local colour, with the foreigner’s confinement to his studio, and gaudy, ‘unchaste’ colouring.<sup>32</sup>

Taken in conjunction, new artistic practices and philosophical criticism raised a number of issues. Perhaps the most significant of these was the tension between naturalistic landscape painting and the principles of theory and practice upheld by the Royal Academy. The new practice of sketching *plein air* undermined the Academy’s insistence that drawing was the most important achievement for an artist.<sup>33</sup>

Furthermore, association aesthetics seemed to argue that beauty was not a quality inherent in an object such as the *Venus de Medici* or the *Apollo Belvedere*, casts of which stood in the entrance to Somerset House; instead it lay in the associations that the viewer was able to draw from the object. While Reynolds was President of the Royal Academy in the late eighteenth century, he had himself been prepared to make limited accommodation to new psychological models of taste, but the idea that any object could be considered beautiful – undermining notions that beauty was a universal and unchanging norm available only to those able to transcend their particular circumstances – proved to be too radical for the Royal Academy of the new nineteenth century.

One of the core issues at stake here is not only the question of beauty within the landscape, but the related question of virtue in the viewer. These issues might be seen more clearly if we compare the *amateur* and patron Sir George Beaumont with Walter Fawkes, another patron. Beaumont upheld the idea that landscape was an appropriate subject of political and moral reflection for a gentleman, which was why he sketched it in a Claudean vein, but also why he saw it as his duty to patronize serious antiquarian publications such as Thomas Hearne's *Antiquities of Great Britain*, and oil paintings by Constable and David Wilkie. His collections were eventually bequeathed to the fledgling National Gallery in London in 1826. Fawkes, on the other hand, sponsored watercolour painting – an altogether more private medium – and was a huge patron of Turner. When he did show his collection to the public in 1819, it was in his private apartments in St James's. Beaumont's activities were characterized as those of a serious and dutiful patron, Fawkes's as those of a private individual.



This perhaps explains why relations between artists and patrons could, in some cases, differ so widely. Turner was close to Fawkes and his family because, at one level, they were prepared to acknowledge that he exercised the same private and intellectual mode of consciousness that they did. The same has been said of John Sell Cotman (1782–1842), whose beautiful drawing of *Greta Bridge* 1810 (fig.IDb106), one of a number of the same subject, was done whilst he was staying with the Cholmeley and Morritt families in Yorkshire in 1803–5.<sup>34</sup> Cotman's work is fresh and vivid in its pigmentation, suggesting it was coloured on the spot, and demonstrates a clarity of form and balanced composition that, taken with the use of colour, distinguishes it from the Gilpin-influenced version of picturesque beauty. Andrew Hemingway has suggested that the drawing evokes local associations, and along with its site, suggests a personal pleasure that was shared by artist and patron. In a similar manner, as Dian Kriz has argued, artists such as Cotman, Turner, Girtin and Augustus Wall Callcott (1779–1844) could be fashioned as distinctively English artists, not only for the subjects they depicted or the technical virtuosity of their works, but also for the specifically private qualities of an independent imagination that was required to draw associations from local subjects to broader concepts such as patriotism.

When addressing the formal and thematic innovations in landscape painting from the first decades of the nineteenth century, it is important to recall Kriz's point that artists were searching for a form of art that was both commercially successful but seen to be aloof from commercial society.<sup>35</sup> Successive presidents of the Royal Academy called for a serious public art in the form of history painting, and required landscape painting, ideally, to display a unity of effect and avoid unnecessary detail in order to signify its poetic status as an object of contemplation. The British Institution, founded

in 1805 ‘for the encouragement of landscape’, countenanced a greater latitude in the handling of landscape scenery as well as encouraging respect for the old masters such as Wilson through retrospective shows of their work drawn from the governors’ collections. It was watercolour painting, banished from the BI and the Great Room at the RA, that was most identified with commerce. This was partly because so many artists associated with the medium practiced as drawing masters, teaching watercolour to their patrons. Moreover, the genre was deemed incapable of exercising a serious public function, although artists such as Turner, Girtin, Reinagle, and Joshua Cristall (1768–1847) worked in watercolour on an increasingly ambitious scale. When the Society of Painters in Water-colour was established in 1804, and its first public exhibition held in 1806, they exhibited the prices alongside the works displayed, thereby explicitly inserting themselves in a commercial framework.

A growth in the volume of printed criticism accompanied the increasing prominence of landscape painting in the early nineteenth century. Historians have noted that where landscape painting did generate comment, remarks about handling of paint and the subject, as well as the exhibition as a whole, the host institution, and the visitors, were often related to broader political positions, albeit in an inconsistent manner. The way people thought about landscape painting was evidently criss-crossed by other concerns [could we have a quote or example here to back up your point?] Thus, when *The Examiner*’s critic wrote in a review of Constable’s work in 1827 that:

‘All art is progressive. What is discovered and done in the early stage of society is advanced upon in the next, and thus continues gradually improving, till it reaches the summit of capability’, he was speaking against corruption and arguing the need to

reform the political establishment, seeing in Constable's 'progressive' painting a model for culture as a whole.<sup>36</sup>

This brings us to a much broader question that has faced historians in recent years: how much significance should we give to the culture of which painting was a part? In other words, is the 'natural' of 'naturalism' really natural, or is it cultural? Constable famously remarked that 'painting is a science, and the pictures experiments'. Ernst Gombrich used the comments to characterize Constable as an experimental painter in the Baconian mode, investigating nature by means of observation and record. His view of Constable was informed by his thesis that painting is like science in its methods, and its results may be verifiable and therefore just as 'true'. Gombrich was therefore able to place Constable within a positivist tradition from Leonardo da Vinci to Edouard Manet, which he identified as a 'consensus ... about the aims and functions of image making in our culture'.<sup>37</sup> However, Gombrich's claim has been subject to criticism, with historians suggesting that ideas about what is 'natural' change: some ideas emerge as formations of knowledge that are made possible at certain times and not at others. So it has been pointed out that Constable's idea of what was 'natural' was specific to a man who had read Paley, disagreed with Gilpin's model of picturesque beauty, was the son of a mill-owner, and so on. Some historians have taken this further, suggesting that 'landscape' itself is a discursive category, as we saw in my introduction.

In the wake of these debates the question then arises as to whether ideas about 'landscape' and what is 'natural' are relative, holding no fixed value at all. At bottom, this is a question of truth. In a careful and even moving analysis of Constable's *Chain*

*Pier, Brighton* 1827 (fig.IDb107), Andrew Hemingway has tried to show a way out of the ‘epistemological impasse’ reached by postmodern approaches to these issues.<sup>38</sup> He holds that ideas are socially produced but is keen to suggest that this does not in itself explain a painting, because ideas are not simply reproduced as images in a painting: they are internalized, reproduced as behaviour that is complex, individual, and may even be contradictory. Looking at Constable’s paintings of Brighton and Waterloo Bridge, he notes how the artist as a ‘whole, historically-formed social being’ encounters these tensions when he addresses his experience of modern life (in this case, the new pier and hotels at Brighton) through his ideologies (for example his preference for picturesque beauty, and consideration of whether the subject matter could lead the mind to God), ‘and work[s] through their implications for pictorial forms’. The outcome is ‘one of the most aesthetically significant landscape paintings of the early nineteenth century’, significant precisely because it is ‘true to his experience as he understood it’.

### **‘Emphatically an *English Painter*’**

It was suggested above that Constable’s painting is ‘art appropriate to its time’, but that this proved challenging for the artist, who struggled to reconcile picturesque composition with a modern subject. Constable’s example points to the heterogeneity of landscape imagery in the early nineteenth century, and the mode of consciousness it implied, and the same has been said for Turner’s paintings of the same period. How then have their paintings come to stand for a nostalgic image of the nation, and themselves as quintessentially English painters?

This question is thrown into sharp relief by a display in the Lady Lever Art Gallery, Port Sunlight, where Constable's *A Cottage at East Bergholt: The Gamekeeper's Cottage*, painted in 1833–4 [check date] (fig.IDb108), hangs beside Turner's *The Falls of the Clyde* (fig.IDb109), which dates from 1840–50, the decade before the artist died. Both are examples of the artists revisiting old subjects late in their career, and undoubtedly one function of the hang is to offer a chance to compare the late styles of two of Britain's most famous painters. Contemporaries might have been more ready to draw comparisons with Claude Lorrain, but critics, as well as the artists, did recognize a quality of 'Englishness' in their landscapes: 'Mr Constable is emphatically an *English* painter', said the *New Monthly Magazine* in 1831.

Contemporary comments such as these tended to focus on the appearance of the landscape, rather than the significance of the subject. Likewise, it is through the formal comparisons prompted in the display that we are invited to draw the conclusion that both painters, along with their paintings, are somehow national icons. Constable's heavily worked canvas, and Turner's surprisingly coherent but formally challenging surfaces preclude any easy identification with a specific place. Elizabeth Helsinger has noted that in Constable's late work, and we might say Turner's as well, we can observe a shift 'from place to a feeling for it'.<sup>39</sup> This suggests a change both in the subject – it is both a specific place but also representative of the nation – and the viewing consciousness, where the display invites the viewer to assume an identity as 'English', and thereby identify with the sentiments of the painting, just as the artist becomes an *English* painter. This may recall the dynamic that we saw between Cotman, his work and his patrons (see p.00), and clearly it is as problematic now as it was then. It serves as a reminder that the whole discourse of landscape, the imagery of

landscape painting and the mode of viewing consciousness it implies, is still with us today.

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<sup>1</sup> Goodman 1976; Barrell 1972.

<sup>2</sup> For example, Andrews 1999. The best review of the recent literature on landscape painting is Michael Rosenthal's introduction in Rosenthal, Payne and Wilcox 1997, pp.1–13.

<sup>3</sup> Edward Norgate, *Miniatura*, cited in Hearn 2005, p.13.

<sup>4</sup> I owe this suggestion to Charles Ford.

<sup>5</sup> Cited in Strong 2004, p.236.

<sup>6</sup> See Alpers 1983, pp.33-41.

<sup>7</sup> H. Fielding, *Joseph Andrews*, London, 1742, vol.2, p.163. I owe this reference to Jules Lubbock.

<sup>8</sup> J. Thomson, preface to 'Spring', in *The Seasons*, ed. J. Sambrook, Oxford 1972.

<sup>9</sup> Everett 1994, p.13. See also Jacob 1976.

<sup>10</sup> I've looked everywhere and I'm afraid I can't find this reference. I've amended the text, so do you think we can delete this footnote? I'm really sorry!

<sup>11</sup> For a discussion of this painting see Solkin 1982, pp.56–76.

<sup>12</sup> For a fuller discussion of Woollett's print, see Clayton 1997, pp.181–206.

<sup>13</sup> I would like to thank Jules Lubbock for bringing this to my attention.

<sup>14</sup> Horace Walpole to George Montagu, 17 May 1763, in *Horace Walpole's Correspondence*, X, ed. W.S. Lewis, New Haven 1970, p.73.

<sup>15</sup> Quoted in Gaiger, Harrison and Wood, 1999, pp.881-2.

<sup>16</sup> R. Southey, *Letters from England*, quoted in Fenwick 2004, p.22.

<sup>17</sup> T. Gainsborough, letter to D. Garrick, 1772, in Gainsborough 2000, p.108.

<sup>18</sup> See I. Mackintosh's note for John Hayes, in Gainsborough 2000, p.108.

<sup>19</sup> Rosenthal 2000, p.240.

<sup>20</sup> J. Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, edition? ch.14, p.??

<sup>21</sup> Quoted in Pratt 1978, p.76.

<sup>22</sup> Quoted in Katherine Crouan 1982, p.xv.

<sup>23</sup> In private correspondence.

<sup>24</sup> For Hearne, see Morris 1989.

<sup>25</sup> Cited in 'Grimm, Samuel Hieronymous', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. Date of publication? 2004.

<sup>26</sup> *Memoirs of the Life of William Collins, Esq., R.A.*, cited in Crouan 1982.

<sup>27</sup> Hemingway 1993, p.93.

<sup>28</sup> Wilcox 1997, p.10.

<sup>29</sup> Venning 2003, p.108.

<sup>30</sup> See Rosenthal 1983, chap.3. In the following discussion of association theory I have drawn especially on Hemingway 1993, Charlotte Klonk 1996, chap.1, and Kris 1997.

<sup>31</sup> Hemingway 1993, p.70.

<sup>32</sup> Points that were commonly made against artists as diverse as Boucher and Louthembourg. On comparisons of British and French art, see Kris, *Genius as Alibi*, chap.2; also Vaughan, pp.00–00 in the present volume.

<sup>33</sup> But cf. Hemingway's point that superiority of nature over art was 'a commonplace of the period'. [Why is this contrasting view footnoted?] [please delete it, it was just as a reminder to myself whilst writing.]

<sup>34</sup> These comments based on Hemingway 1993, and D. Blaney Brown, Hemingway and Lyles 1999, pp.??

<sup>35</sup> Phrase from Kris 1997, p.57. [should we put it in quote marks then – is it verbatim?] [please delete this note – I've amended the text].

<sup>36</sup> Leight Hunt, in *The Examiner*, 29 April, 1827, quoted in Hemingway 1993, p.125.

<sup>37</sup> 'Experiment and Experience in the Arts', in Gombrich 1982, p.239.

<sup>38</sup> Hemingway 1993, pp.191–2.

<sup>39</sup> Helsinger 1997, pp.41–59.