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Romantic Poetry

26 4 96

**Word Painting, Picture Writing:
Wordsworth and 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. (Hussey 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*;¹ yet Christopher Hussey's view comes from a

¹During 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 seemed indifferent to its topographical

perspective both seminal and perceptive that highlights the watershed that is the picturesque.² It is within the context of this paradigm shift that Wordsworth reads not as the representative literary revolutionary, but as a poetic designer involved in a movement already modifying the cultural and social fabric.

The preparatory precepts of the picturesque aesthetic were first introduced into England during the middle years of the

charms. Suddenly, all about the meandering road, we came upon an area quite changed, unusually verdant, with thick hedges 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."

²Hussey suggests that blindness to nature's pictures might partly be explained by ". . . the conversion, by early Christian teachers, of the ancient gods of wood and spring into evil spirits, and of Pan into the Devil. . . . Thus the forests and mountains and rivers of Europe were not only considered vaguely sinful, but positively dangerous"(6-7).

18th century by the paintings of Claude, who composed scenes calm and idyllic, and Salvator Rosa, who portrayed the feral and fierce of Nature.³ The Grand Tour, subsequent to England's isolation during much of the 17th century, was initially a diversion limited to the moneyed aristocracy. Travelling through the Alps, where a requisite response to scenery was unavoidable, English travellers finally arrived in Italy where landscape painting was first encountered. The aristocracy, bringing home souvenir pictures, began collections and posed as cognoscenti. Simultaneously, James Thomson and John Dyer began to focus poetic interest upon landscape.

In emulation of the Grand Tour, and encouraged by fashionable discussions of picturesque niceties, the less affluent middle class soon occupied itself with more modest excursions into the English countryside. Aided by manifold guidebooks uncovering picturesque locales and much improved roads to get them there, clutching sketch-books and Claude Glasses,⁴ a dramatic democratic appreciation of landscape was at last being realised. By the start of the 19th century, recognition of *picturesqueness* had become--and remains--second nature.

³Other influential artists, though less important to picturesque developments, were Gaspar Poussin and Tintoretto.

⁴A convex mirror of about four inches diameter with tinted filters and bound up like a pocket book in which landscapes could be compressed and framed.

The picturesque then, saw its earliest lines of delineation drawn during the period of the Augustan poets. Neo-classicists' adoption of the picturesque was initially obvious: with the works of Claude increasingly in vogue, his idyllic and nostalgic landscapes of lost splendour were understandably embraced by Thomson and the more peripheral Dyer, who saw in them an expression of Virgilian pastoral. There was, however, a certain incongruity to this adoption, for the antithetical geometry of contemporary gardens were elementary to neo-classicism, and Pope's own interest in the picturesque was virtually limited to his rather rectangular grotto. Besides, the serenity and classical nostalgia of Claude was losing ground to the wildness of the more rugged Rosa, 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, perhaps sharing the same rose bed, though fundamentally living separate lives. Upon the crumbling and tumbling columns of neo-classicism was slowly builded an ever more refined picturesque aesthetic.

Rosa's association with the Romantic movement displays still stronger ties than thus far mentioned: in addition to his landscapes, Rosa 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.

Lady Morgan's *The Life and Times of Salvator Rosa*, published in 1824, depicted 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 that could not be contained by classical conventions. Literary explorations of the picturesque are literally laden with references to Rosa:

What'er Lorrain light touched with softening hue
Or savage Rosa dashed, or learned Poussin drew.

(Thomson, *Castel of Indolence* Canto I, XXXVIII)

The stylistically idealised quality of Claude and Rosa's painting was modified as the English picturesque developed, essentially becoming an idealisation of a nature that was rapidly vanishing and celebrating a rural way of life that was being lost. The picturesque was finally composed of such illustrative elements as "ruins, cottages, villages, and sandy lanes, shaggy donkeys" (Hussey 3), with "roughness," "intricacy," "sudden variation," "abruptness," "foreground and background" forming the more abstract and general picturesque paradigm. It was, further, a ubiquitous movement which sought to understand the nature of aesthetic perception and to provide prescriptions which essentially effected an entirely new appreciation for the wild wilderness of places such as the Cumbrian Lake District.

The primary and perhaps most influential picturesque theoretician was the Reverend William Gilpin (1724-1804). From 1768 onwards, Gilpin undertook numerous 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 included *Wye and South Wales* (1782), and *the Lake District* (1789) and were paramount in the popularisation of the picturesque as a means of viewing nature. By defining the principle characteristics of picturesque, his publication of *Three Essays: On Picturesque Beauty, On Picturesque Travel, and On Sketching Landscape* in 1792, achieved the rather dubious honour of virtually codifying picturesque theory.⁵

One fundamental element Gilpin's philosophy is nature as archetype. As landscape painting grew increasingly fashionable and respectable, taking this archetype as its exclusive subject and acquiring its importance from that subject, nature itself steadily grew in importance.

Another major proponent of picturesque theory was Uvedale Price (1747-1829). Unlike Gilpin's nation-wide pursuit of the picturesque, Price concentrated his aesthetic energies upon the *picturesqueification* of manor gardens. Though inspired by great landscape painters--notably Claude and Rosa--Price also aspired after the guiding hand of raw nature and offered

⁵The very success of this codification played a prominent role in making banal the very theory it sought to sanctify.

pragmatic suggestions of picturesque effects affected landowners might attempt. Adjudging the landscaped gardens of Lancelot "Capability" Brown--with his penchant for grouping trees of identical size and shape--as a virtual rape of nature, Price, not surprisingly, saw this amiable blob maker as his chief nemesis. Brown's innovations, once seen as expressions of a new naturalism, were recognised by Price as being entirely artificial, with Brown himself becoming 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. in 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.

Price's own effect over actual landscapes was severely limited by the very nature of his improvements, many of which required decades to reach fruition. The more bumbling Brown, alternatively, provided expeditious transformations priced by the yard.

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, whose bias is towards the nostalgic, the antiquated, the rustic, the dilapidated and the inefficient. The contradiction though is delusive and merely underscores the transformation of the paternal landlord tenant relationship to one analogous to factory boss and labourer, with the picturesque manor garden now forming a physical boundary and offering aegis from the outside world.

If the patrician Price failed to affect 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" (*Landscape* 67), Price's notions fostered a new naturalism in gardening, and continued the democratisation of the picturesque aesthetic.⁶

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. 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

⁶There were of course, *numerous* other picturesque theoreticians, though I have here limited mention to the two most salient.

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)⁷

Indeed, the very pith of picturesque theory might, to the cynical modern, seem 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

⁷In light of such contemporary satirical treatment, it is hardly surprising that the impact of Gilpin, Price, *et al.* upon the sensibilities and vocabulary of Wordsworth is more considerable than many modern scholars will willingly admit. Indeed, this bias has caused W. M. Merchant, in his introduction to Wordsworth's *Guide*, to impugn the picturesque as mere passing fad. Such satire, however, stemmed from the excesses of the picturesque movement and the jocularities sometimes manifest in the debate, and not a suggestion of *ignis-fatuus*.

"unnatural." Similarly, a good deal of modern analysis, particularly that associated with Wordsworth and the picturesque, stresses the limitations of an ocular aesthetic. Hussey, however, makes the important point that ". . . 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)

The appreciation of landscape was one which required learning, and it was through landscape painting and painters that this ability was acquired.

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. . . .

(*Landscape* 58)

Gainsborough "gave landscape the status of pure painting: private, personal" (Bermingham 43). Rejecting portraiture, with its congenital mandate for poetic license rather than artistic integrity conjured to placate effectively a patron,

Gainsborough conceived that the material of landscape allowed ". . . the artist freely to exercise his imagination" (Bermingham 44).⁸ In his later work, Gainsborough offered still more subjective and sentimental subjects: the cottage, the sublimity of sea, of mountain, and the innocence of children, each finding a correspondence in Wordsworth's "The Ruined Cottage," "Ode: Intimations of Immortality," "Farewell though little Nook of mountain ground" and "We Are Seven." Gainsborough held a great disdain for the urban environment; and, in the decades after his death in 1788, a veritable inversion of taste had occurred, with critics increasingly praising landscape over portraits.

Gainsborough, in conclusion, rejected predefined artistic traditions, embraced English rural subject matter as "a direct response to nature" (Bermingham 58), and established an affinity with picturesque well beyond that of either Claude or Rosa. If, as Hussey suggests, Claude, Rosa and others caused a revolution in the appreciation of scenery and nature, then Gainsborough entirely nationalises that new sentiment, adopting English countryside and scenes and exploring them in a subjective manner which sought to discover their innate truth.

⁸Somewhat ironically, Wordsworth once rebuked his friend Beaumont for painting in an imaginary ruined castle in one of his favourite scenes.

Notwithstanding certain analogies, Wordsworth as poetic innovator finds his fine art counterpart not so much in Gainsborough, but in the person of John Constable (1776-1837).

Like Wordsworth, Constable was born and bred in rural England and his bond to the countryside was life long and reverential.⁹ No other painter of the period imbued such sense of self in his work, calling his sketchbooks "journals"--complete with their autobiographical annotations--and stating: "I am fond of being an Egoist in whatever relates to painting" (qtd. in Bermingham 87). His earliest works were venerational sketches in the style of Gainsborough; and, though never entirely abandoning picturesque theory, Constable appropriated its many exigencies and eventually made them subservient to the dictates of his own style.

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

⁹Constable 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.

particular views and objects with affective significance. (*Landscape* 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* (see Figure 3), 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. in 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,¹⁰ 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 in 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 what she had experienced in the process of drawing" (Bermingham 132); a fusion of past and present (see Figure 4).

We should deduce no direct philosophical nor 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.

The picturesque, popularised by the illustrated guides of Gilpin, general debate, fashionable sketching tours, the national fealty of Gainsborough's work and so on, portrayed a populist and recognisable landscape. Moving away from 17th and early 18th century depictions of myth laden Italian scenes,

¹⁰See Bermingham for reproduced illustrations.

the picturesque embraced rustic England and adopted a visual idiom from common life.

Moving now more specifically to Wordsworth, Davies most correctly points out that the vigorous and much-publicised picturesque debate proceeded throughout the period when Wordsworth was most active as a writer. If *direct* connection between Wordsworth's work and the picturesque controversy is questionable, the *ubiquitousness* of picturesque aesthetic theory, and especially its locus in the Lake District, provides an initial indication that its influence was otherwise manifest.

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)

Figure 1

Figure 2

Figure 3

Figure 4

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 some degree, typical of this sub-genre¹¹ and 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 vary pictures of the majestic lake” (50).

Besides idiom, Wordsworth joins picturesque politics, supporting Gilpin in his criticism of white painted houses, and sustaining Price's landscape gardening theories. But there are noticeable differences, most particularly a greater emphasis upon the possibilities of mind over landscape and a liking for smoothness that was more beautiful than picturesque (see Figures 1 and 2). Neither is Wordsworth's inclusion of poetry in his *Guide* anything more than standard. Even the prosaic *Handy Guide to the English Lakes*, a rare and anonymous sixpenny edition of uncertain date and likely designed for the higher working class tourist, features such verse as Wordsworth's:

¹¹Davies also draws attention to Wordsworth's familiarity with other picturesque guides, including those of Thomas Gray, Dr. John Brown, Thomas West and James Clark.

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)

Wordsworth's exclusive employment of his own poems, however, might be considered--by some--as egotistically sublime.

The *Guide* notwithstanding, Wordsworth acknowledges, in a footnote to *Descriptive Sketches*, certain difficulties with the picturesque definition:

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 the most impassioned imaginations.

(Note to line 299)

In a similar tone, Wordsworth again mentions the Alps in his *Guide*:

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)

W. M. Merchant, in his introduction to Wordsworth's *Guide*, cites this same footnote as proof of Wordsworth's asperity to picturesque theory. 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). Such evaluations, however, neglect two important points: firstly, Wordsworth's footnote continues, stating 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.

(Note to line 299)

Secondly, this so called "reaction against the picturesque" (Davies 240) disregards entirely the chronological factor: *Descriptive Sketches* was published in 1793, Wordsworth's own *Guide*, which, as we have seen, makes great use of picturesque sensibility and idiom, in 1810. We should rather conclude Wordsworth's awareness of certain innate limitations to picturesque theory, rather than wholesale rejection.

Wordsworth, incorporating Constable's "keen sense of

artistic innovation,"¹² nationalises and popularises poetry, abandoning the Augustan imitations of neo-classicism, and adopting the land and the language of ordinary England, which, in terms of the larger picturesque context, suggests a parallel between ornate gardens and ornate Augustan poetry, and rugged barren picturesque with his own theories of poetic diction. With typically English somethings now the very subject of painting, Wordsworth's use of more mundane diction in his poetic palette seems almost expected.

Just as scenery might be modified by the brush or pencil to augment its picturesqueness, so too Wordsworth allows the passage of time or experience to change the elements of the remembered moment, producing description that displays an intimate and Constable-like involvement. In this sense, Wordsworth utilises the same methodology as picturesque painters: both ally their materiel to the modification of the imagination.

Wordsworth's belief in the supremacy of literature over painting stems from his belief in its ability to compose pictures which appeal to much more than the sense of sight:¹³

¹²A statement once said and oft plagiarised.

¹³Considering Constable's insistence that painting consisted of much more than sight perception, this notion speaks more of Wordsworth's own bias than of painting's inherent limitations.

The state to which I now allude
In which the eye was master of the heart
When that which is in every state of life
The most despotic of senses gain'd
Such strength in me as often held my mind
In absolute dominion.

(*The Prelude* 71-76)

Although Wordsworth, as we have seen, was not entirely at ease with picturesque dictum, there is nevertheless a close analogy between many aspects of their respective methodologies. Gilpin, for instance, writes:

In the meantime, with all this magnificence and beauty, it cannot be supposed that every scene, which these countries present, is *correctly picturesque*. In such immense bodies of rough hewn matter, many irregularities, and even many deformities, must exist, which the practised eye would wish to correct . . . In all these cases the imagination is apt to whisper, What glorious scenes might here be made, if these stubborn materials could yield to the judicious hand of art!----And, to say the truth, we are sometimes tempted to let the imagination loose among them.

(119)

Here we see not only the application of the imaginative faculty in viewing a scene, much like the painter and

landscape gardener's modification of material to provide a more picturesque composition, but also Wordsworth's use of imagination in his poetic compositions.

Imagination, which, in truth,
Is but another name for absolute strength
And clearest insight, amplitude of mind,
And reason in her most exalted form.

(*The Prelude* XIII 166-170)

Another manner in which the imagination guides composition--and one reminiscent of Constable's perspective change in *Flatford Mill from the Lock*--appears in "Lines Written at a Small Distance from My House":

There is a blessing in the air,
Which seems a sense of joy to yield
To the bare trees, and mountains bare,
And grass in the green field.

My Sister! ('tis a wish of mine)
Now that our morning meal is done,
Make haste, your morning task resign;
Come forth and feel the sun.

(5-12)

Wordsworth is here first moved by scenery, fashioning then an associational leap into the following stanza, where Dorothy, her absence, her anticipated arrival, becomes the contemplative subject. The remainder of the poem provides

reverie entirely filtered through feelings of consanguinity, with Dorothy soon draped in metaphorical nature: "Then come, my sister! come, I pray,/With speed put on your woodland dress" (37-38).

Central to memory and emotional response is of course 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:

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 . . .

(*The Prelude* 319-21)

Here we are provided a veritable catalogue of picturesque materials, though again this "spot in time" incorporates non-visual invocations and is 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 extending towards emotive sense. But for all Wordsworth's application of imagination, there are countless instances when scenery is described for its own sake, when its very worth is sufficiently innate to need virtually no additional coinage:

Within the mirror's depth, a world a rest--
Sky streaked with purple, grove and craggy *biold*
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.

("Epistle to Sir George Beaumont" 174-83)

Of course, the richness here is owed largely to the loveliness of the *wordscape*, a place opulent in picturesque elements: craggy bield, waterfall, chimney, the stream.

It is, however, Wordsworth's earliest poems that display the keenest concordance with picturesque theory. The preface material to "An Evening Walk," besides being reminiscent of neo-classical convention, forms an association with the popular catalogue of Guides.

"An Evening Walk," published in 1793 and written in heroic couplets, is essentially a conventional attempt at picturesque verse, with its cascade scene, precipice, mountain farm, female beggar, rocky sheepwalks and tremulous cliffs. A topographical poem, in which Wordsworth's true poetic voice remains only a whisper.¹⁴ His unwillingness to conform to a particular place, combining separate nature scenes into one composite image, is decidedly consonant with some picturesque sketches and paintings, and is even suggestive of Beaumont's ruinous castle ruin.

¹⁴Sentence fragment deliberate.

Similarly, in "Tintern Abbey" we see characteristic Wordsworthian treatment of the picturesque:

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 elements appear: the wildness of the wood, pastoral farms offering an echo of *Georgics*, an attention to foreground and background. But the scene is *extra-dimensionalised* beyond the possibilities of brush and colour: "Once again I see" underscores both memory and a personal reaction to the scene; whilst the almost compulsory picturesque figure--in this case the Hermit--appears not to the eye but to the imagination. Memory,

subjectivity and imagination--Wordsworth categorical--serve together as an augmentative device which transforms flat canvas into Romantic tapestry. In addition to this, there is also something 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 chasen and subdue.

(89-94)

Clearly, Wordsworth's early poetry borrowed a good deal from both Augustan tradition as well as picturesque convention. His poetical path though finally leads entirely away from neo-classicism and towards an expanded and less categorical mode of picturesque philosophy whose walls and ramparts lay in picturesque ruins. Davies' insistence upon "Wordsworth's subjection to the 'picturesque' fashion" (236), culminating in the poet's decortication of the entire model, smacks of a philosophy turned barrier to the imagination and denies the jagged foundation it provided for the appreciation of countryside as a highly refined aesthetic.

This aesthetic was, in good part, 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--suggested by Hussey as being the century between 1730 and 1830--was entirely germane with the general elegiac mood and graveyard melancholy--and laced with that emotional reaction. This interest in ruins, obviously, was shared by Wordsworth; though just as he offered the graveyard theme a certain ironic twist in such poems as, "Me Thought I Saw the Footsteps of a Throne," so too his treatment of architectural wreck is unexpectedly uplifting. "Composed Among the Ruins of a Castle in North Wales," 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 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 abbeys; Cromwell, with those of castles. I have seen many pieces by this master, executed in a very grand style.

(II, 122-3)

There is also, in "Composed Among the Ruins," a more serious parallel to Price's theories of landscape gardening where the finish of time is recommended to provide an unfinished roughness to stonework, to replace bunched bush with unexpected tree and shiny brick with sombre block.

The perception of the Romantic Movement as a reaction against eighteenth century Augustan neo-classicism 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*. Certainly, Wordsworth found limited value in the catalogues of scenic objects found in either Pope's *Windsor-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);

Thomson's *The Seasons*:¹⁵

. . . 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.
(519-525)

or in Dyer's later, and more properly picturesque, *Grongar Hill*:

Old castles on the cliffs arise,
Proudly tow'ring in the skies;
Rushing from the woods, the spires

¹⁵Notwithstanding Wordsworth's recognition of Thomson as the first poet since Milton to offer new images of "external nature."

Seem from hence ascending fires;
Half his beams Apollo sheds
On the yellow mountain-heads
Gilds the fleece of the flocks
And glitters on the broken rocks.
Below me trees unnumber'd rise,
Beautiful in various dyes;
The gloomy pine, the poplar blue,
The yellow beech, the sable yew,
The slender fir, that taper grows,
The sturdy oak with broad-spread boughs
(49-62)

But tentative attempts at picturesque typified here in *Grongar Hill*, for all its shortcomings, provides a foreground 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. One result of this climacteric season is offered in Wordsworth's "Ode The Pass of Kirkstone":

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:--
Alters 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 *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. Once again the initial scene is picturesque in its elements, but romantic in its inclination.

Bermingham'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" (Bermingham 9). The picturesque guidebooks of Gilpin--even Wordsworth--and others, further fuelled aesthetic appreciation of landscape, with nature and the natural becoming *the* central rubric of late 18th and 19th century cultural movement. Wordsworth's transformation of poetry then occurs not simply as a reaction to neo-classicism, but in a context where new values and aesthetic parameters are already being established. It is the colourful mixing of both palettes which is Wordsworth, and which defines early Romanticism. Compared to earlier treatments of nature and landscape, 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.

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